In a fascinating passage in the Sixth Set of Replies to the *Meditations*, Descartes distinguishes three grades of sensory response:  

The first is limited to the immediate stimulation of the bodily organs by external objects; this can consist in nothing but the motion of the particles of the organs, and any change of shape and position resulting from this motion. The second grade comprises (*continent*) all the immediate effects produced in the mind as a result of its being united with a bodily organ which is affected in this way. Such effects include the perceptions (*perceptiones*) of pain, pleasure, thirst, hunger, colours, sound, taste, smell, heat, cold and the like, which arise from the union and as it were the intermingling of mind and body, as explained in the Sixth Meditation. The third grade includes (*comprehendit*) all the judgments (*judicia*) about things outside us which we have been accustomed to make from our earliest years – judgments which are occasioned by the movements of these bodily organs. … The movement in the brain, which is common to us and the brutes, is the first grade of sensory response. This leads to the second grade, which extends to the mere perception (*perceptionem*) of

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1 CSM II 294-5/AT VII 436-8. For a clear and helpful discussion of the three grades, see A. Simmons, ‘Descartes on the Cognitive Structure of Sensory Experience’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (2003), 549-79. While it’s clear that the first grade is just physiological, it’s less clear exactly how Descartes means to contrast the second and third grades. He says that the second grade comprises sensations, whereas the third grade includes judgments. But sensations and judgments are not exhaustive. For example, if it appears to me that an apple is red, that isn’t a sensation but neither does it involve my judging that it’s red: it’s a non-doxastic sensory appearance. I take it that such appearances are at the third grade since, even though they don’t involve judgments, they are conceptual and propositional. Hence judging that p is an example of the third grade, but it is not wholly constitutive of it. More generally, if perception involves any propositions or concepts, it is at the third grade. That this is Descartes’ view is suggested by his ensuing discussion of an appearance-statement. But whether or not that’s his view, it’s how I’ll understand the third grade. This way of distinguishing between the first and third grade leaves room for dispute about what exactly is involved in the second grade. But perhaps it will do for our purposes to say that it’s neither purely physiological nor conceptual or propositional. Different commentators can agree about that while having different views about how to characterize it more positively. See notes 3 and 5.
colour and light reflected from the stick; it arises from the fact that the mind is so intimately conjoined with the body that it is affected by the movements which occur in it. Nothing more than this should be referred to the sensory faculty (sensum), if we wish to distinguish it carefully from the intellect (intellectu). But suppose that, as a result of being affected by this sensation (sensu) of colour, I judge that a stick, located outside me, is coloured; and suppose that on the basis of the extension of the colour and its boundaries together with its position in relation to the parts of my brain, I make a rational calculation (ratiocener) about the size, shape and distance of the stick: although such reasoning is commonly assigned to the senses (sensui) (which is why I have here referred to it as the third grade of sensory response), it is clear that it depends solely on the intellect.

In this paper, I ask whether, in the Phaedo, Plato describes perception as being at the first, second, and/or third grade of sensory response. Commentators differ about this. J.T. Bedu-Addo, for example, says that, in the Phaedo, ‘Plato means by aisthêsis mere sensory awareness’;2 this places perception at the second grade.3 According to Michael Frede, the Phaedo restricts perception ‘to cases of awareness that somehow involve the body and that constitute an awareness of something corporeal’. But, he goes on to say, ‘it would be rash to assume that the verb [aisthanesthai] means “sense-perception”’. For, he thinks, ‘it is used almost interchangeably with “dokein” and “doxazein”, “to seem” and “to believe”’.4 If aisthanesthai is used almost interchangeably with dokein and doxazein, perception is at the third grade. Similarly, Myles Burnyeat says flatly that, in the Phaedo, ‘perception is intrinsically judgmental’. Indeed, he thinks Plato’s criticism of perception depends on this view: ‘The charge against perception is that it offers itself as a dangerously seductive rival

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2 ‘Sense-Experience and the Argument for Recollection in Plato’s “Phaedo”’, Phronesis 36 (1991), 27-60, at 44 n. 24. (Bedu-Addo thinks this is how Plato views perception not just in the Phaedo but also in Republic 523-5 (44 n. 24) and Theaetetus 184-6 (51). Echoing Descartes in the passage cited above, he says that ‘when [Plato] talks as if the senses themselves sometimes make judgements, as in the Republic passage, he is only making a concession to popular speech or ordinary language’ [44 n. 24].) Similarly, N. Gulley, in discussing the theory of recollection in the Phaedo, speaks of Plato’s ‘distinction between sensation and a conceptual level of apprehension’ (Plato’s Theory of Knowledge [London: Methuen, 1962], 28; cf. 31, 32, 91); he thinks Plato counts only the first as perception.

3 Or so I think. But not everyone thinks the second grade involves awareness. See notes 1 and 5.

4 M. Frede, ‘Observations on Perception in Plato’s Later Dialogues’ [‘Observations’], in G. Fine (ed.), Plato I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 377-383, at 378. He also says that whereas in Theaetetus 184-6 Plato argues that ‘to perceive is not the same as to believe’, ‘in the middle dialogues we had not paid much attention to the distinction’ (379).
judgement-maker to reason’. In favour of his view, he cites 65a-67b, 79c-d, 81b, and 82e-83e.5

According to David Gallop, in the *Phaedo* ‘Plato’s language for sense experience is often hard to interpret’.6 For, he says, the general word for ‘perception’ (*aisthésis*) can mean either ‘sense’ or ‘sensation’.7 (Plato also uses *aisthéseis* [in the plural] for the sense organs: for example, at 83a5 he mentions ‘the ears and the other senses (*aisthéseon*)’.) Gallop doesn’t elaborate on the distinction he has in mind, but I assume he is distinguishing sensory capacities (e.g. sight) from their actualizations on particular occasions of perceiving (e.g. particular acts of seeing). And he might take this to go along with a distinction between the first and second grade of perception. For he thinks that Plato suggests that the senses have ‘bodily location’.8 Whether or not he’s right about that, the sense organs certainly have bodily location. And one might then be tempted to think – with what justification we shall ask later – that if the sense organs (or sensory capacities if, as Gallop thinks, Plato takes them to have bodily location) do the perceiving, perception is at the first grade; that, at any rate, would be Descartes’ view. But in speaking of sensations, Gallop perhaps means to suggest that particular acts of perceiving are at the second grade; at least, ‘sensation’ is often used that way.

Later on the same page, in discussing Plato’s criticisms of perception, Gallop mentions ‘perceptual judgements’; these are at the third grade. So perhaps Gallop thinks Plato discusses all three grades. Were Plato to do so, he might, or might not, be confused about the

5 M.F. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1990), 60-1 [*Theaetetus*]. Interestingly, though he argues in ‘Plato on the Grammar of Perceiving’ [*‘Grammar’*] (*Classical Quarterly* N.S. 26 (76), 29-51) that *Tht*. 184-6 criticizes the *Republic* on perception (by, among other things, arguing that perception is at the second grade, whereas the *Rep*. places it at the third grade), he doesn’t say that it criticizes the *Phd*. on this score; and he occasionally offers a reading that would allow perception in the *Phd*. to be at the second grade: see ‘Grammar’, 34, n. 19; 41. It’s worth noting that whereas Bedu-Addo (see n. 2) thinks the second grade includes some sort of awareness, Burnyeat denies that it does so. In ‘Grammar’, for example, he links judgement not only to conceptualization but also to consciousness (36) and awareness (50).


7 He thinks the term is used in the first way at 65b2, 65e7, and 65e8; and in the second way in 65c6, 74d1, and 98d7 (*Plato: Phaedo*, 91 and n. 9).

8 He thinks this is suggested by 65b5 (*Plato: Phaedo*, 91). Interestingly, though, he suggests elsewhere that Plato views pleasure and pain ‘not merely as changes in the body, but as psychic states’ (89); he doesn’t ask whether this is also Plato’s view of perception. However, he thinks that in 96b1-8 Plato might be implying ‘that the stock scientific account of perception and thought is inadequate, as providing for no subject of consciousness’; he thinks this is indicated by its failure to mention the soul (171). Here Gallop seems to suggest that the soul is the subject in perception.
differences among them; and he might, or might not, think that, properly speaking, perception is at just one of the three grades – just as Descartes distinguishes three grades of sensory response but says that, if we want to distinguish perception from intellect, we should be careful, in describing perception, not to go beyond the second grade.

Which if any of these views is right? In attempting to answer this question, I hope to fill a somewhat surprising gap in the literature. For, though Plato’s views about perception in, for example, Republic 523-5, Theaetetus 184-6, and the Timaeus have been much discussed, his views about perception in the Phaedo have been relatively neglected – despite the fact that the dialogue says quite a lot about perception. So, for example, though some of the authors just mentioned take a stand on what grade or grades of sensory response Plato has in mind in the Phaedo, none of them discusses the issue in detail.

Nor do I have the space here to discuss every relevant passage. In particular, I’ll set the theory of recollection to one side: it deserves a detailed discussion in its own right. Instead, I’ll focus on the passages Burnyeat cites in favour of the view that the Phaedo takes perception to be, as he puts it, ‘a rival judgment-maker to reason’, and so at the third grade.

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9 I say ‘if any’ to avoid the implication that one of these answers must be right. One might argue that the three grades aren’t exhaustive and that Plato has some other grade in mind. Or one might argue that the Phaedo doesn’t take a stand on the issue, one way or another. This latter view seems to be favored by A. Silverman: ‘I shall not consider here what the middle dialogues have to say about aesthesis. In truth, I doubt that either the Phaedo or Republic tells us very much about perception. In neither dialogue is there much evidence that Plato had, or was interested in, any differentiated concept of aesthesis that would allow us to sort out precisely what he attributed to the senses in sensory experience and what he attributed to the mind’ (‘Plato on Perception and “Commons”’, The Classical Quarterly 40 (1990), 148-175, at 158).


11 I won’t ask here whether, as Frede says, the Phaedo uses aisthanesthai almost interchangeably with dokein and doxazein. But I challenge that view in ‘Knowledge and Belief in the Phaedo’ (forthcoming in a volume of Keeling lectures, edited by F. Leigh).
It will help if, before looking at the *Phaedo* in detail, we look briefly at *Theaetetus* 184-6, a famous passage in which Plato argues that perception isn’t knowledge (*epistêmê*). For not only does the passage draw a number of distinctions it will be helpful to have before us; but, also, commentators have held different views about whether the passage agrees with, or criticizes, the *Phaedo*.\(^{12}\) And one of my aims in what follows is to ask which, if either, of these views is right.\(^{13}\)

Socrates begins by saying that if Theaetetus were asked ‘With what does one see white and black things, and with what does one hear high and low <sounds>?’,\(^{14}\) he would reply ‘with eyes and ears’ (184b8-10); Theaetetus agrees that that’s what he’d say (184b11).

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\(^{12}\) Burnyeat, *Theaetetus*, and Frede, ‘Observations’, think *Tht*. 184-6 criticizes the *Phaedo* (or at any rate articulates a view that is incompatible with it). (Cooper, ‘Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge’, thinks 184-6 criticizes *Republic* 523-5, but he doesn’t discuss the *Phaedo*. I won’t ask here whether *Rep*. 523-5 and the *Phaedo* express the same view.) As I’ve noted (n. 2), Bedu-Addo thinks *Tht*. 184-6 has the same view as the *Phaedo*, though he also argues elsewhere that *Tht*. 184-6 can be read on two levels, such that, though it agrees with the *Phaedo* on one level, it disagrees with it on another level: see his ‘Plato on the Object of Knowledge: *Theaetetus* 185cff.’, in A. Gotthelf (ed.), *Aristotle on Nature and Living Things* (Bristol, UK: Bristol Classical Press, 1985), 301-11. Two-level readings are also favoured by F.M. Cornford, *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1935), 108; and Sedley, *Midwife*, 103-17.

\(^{13}\) I say ‘if either’ because the two views are not exhaustive: *Tht*. 184-6 and the *Phaedo* could have different but compatible views. In that case, they wouldn’t agree in the sense of holding the same views; but neither would they conflict. In ‘Plato on Perception’ I argue that that’s the case as between *Tht*. 184-6 and *Rep*. 523-5; but I don’t there discuss the *Phaedo*.

\(^{14}\) I take it that these are the so-called proper or special sensibles – e.g. colours (not universals such as redness or particular shades of redness, but particular instances, such as a redness-token or what are sometimes called tropes; and not objects that have colours, such as red sunsets). Throughout, translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. But for the *Theaetetus* I rely heavily on McDowell and on Levett/Burnyeat. For the *Phaedo*, I rely heavily on Gallop; C.J. Rowe, *Plato: Phaedo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) [*Phaedo*] and his *Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) (though neither of these works is a translation, they both translate some individual passages); and D. Sedley and A. Long, *Plato: Meno and Phaedo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
Socrates proceeds to say that, though ‘it isn’t usually a sign of ill breeding to be easy-going with words’ (184c1-2), sometimes it’s necessary to be exact; and this is one of those times. Strictly speaking we should say, not that we see with the eyes (184c5-d5), or through the senses (184e8-185a2). The reason, Socrates explains, is that if we perceived with the senses, they would be in us as if in wooden horses; whereas, in fact, ‘they converge on some one kind of thing, a soul or whatever one ought to call it, something with which we perceive all the perceived things through the senses, as if through instruments’ (184d1-5).

As Burnyeat has well argued, Plato is suggesting that to say that we perceive with the soul indicates that the soul does the perceiving, whereas to say that we perceive through the senses indicates that they are just instruments that we use in perceiving. The senses don’t

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15Εἰ οὖν τίς σε ὧδ’ ἐρωτῶ· τῷ τὰ λευκὰ καὶ μέλανα ὁρᾷ ἄνθρωπος καὶ τῷ τὰ ὀξέα καὶ βαρέα ὁρᾷ; Εἴποις ἂν οἴμαι ὀμμάτια τε καὶ ὀσία. - Ἕγογε. - [184c] Τὸ δὲ εὐχερὲς τῶν ὄνοματων τε καὶ ῥημάτων καὶ μὴ δὴ ἀκριβείας ἐξετάζομεν τὰ μὲν πολλὰ οὐκ ἔγνενες, ἀλλὰ μάλλον τὸ τοῦτο ἐναντίον ἀνελεύθερον, ἐστι δὲ ὅτε ἀναγκαῖον, οἷον καὶ τὸν ἀνάγκη ἐπιλαβέσθαι τῆς ἀποκρίσεως ἡ ἀποκρίνη, ἦ οὐκ ὀρθῆ. Σκόπει γὰρ ἀπόκρισις ποτέρα ὀρθότερα, ὃ ὁρῶμεν τοῦτο εἶναι ὀφθαλμοῦς, ἦ δὴ οὐ ὀράμην, καὶ οὐ ἀκούομεν ὡς, ἦ δὴ οὐ ἀκούομεν: - Τὺ δὲ ἐκκατα αἰσθανόμεθα, ἐμοίγε δοκεῖ, ὃ Σόκρατες, μάλλον ἦ οἶς. - [184d]

Like Levett/Burnyeat, I use ‘with’ to render the dative and ‘through’ to render *dia*. McDowell uses ‘with’ and ‘by means of’, respectively. As Cooper, ‘Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge’, notes (359; cf. 360-1 and n. 9), Plato says both that we perceive through the sense organs (such as the eyes) and through sensory powers or capacities (*dunameis*, e.g. sight, which is the power or capacity to see); and, according to Cooper, at 185c7 Plato speaks of the latter as ‘capacities of the body’ (359). Yet, Cooper says, it’s awkward to say that the mind (or soul: *psychê*) perceives, while locating the sensory capacities in the body: for ‘if the mind sees and hears, and not any bodily part, then surely the mind and not any part of the body is the possessor of the power of sight’ (361). This, he suggests, makes it unclear what Plato means to refute when he argues that perception isn’t knowledge. Is it just that the bodily senses don’t by themselves yield knowledge? Or is it that we can’t attain knowledge even when we perceive with the mind through the senses? Cooper rightly argues that Plato rejects both views. There might be less awkwardness here than Cooper thinks. For it’s unclear exactly what Plato means in speaking of ‘capacities of the body’. Sight is a capacity of the body in that one can have sight only if one has suitable bodily organs. If that’s all he means, he could hold that sight is not only bodily (insofar as it involves bodily organs) but also psychic (insofar as we perceive with the mind). At 185c3, Theaetetus speaks of ‘the capacity <that operates> through the tongue (*dia tês glôttês dunamis’). That falls short of saying that the capacity is itself bodily; perhaps that’s also all 185c7 means. (However, 185c3 is part of an especially controversial passage; see in particular the dative at 185c1. See n. 33 below.) Cf. Burnyeat, ‘Grammar’, 41-2.

16 Δεινὸν γὰρ οὖ, ὃ παῖ, εἰ πολλαὶ τινὲς ἐν ἡμῖν ὁσσερ ἐν δουρείοις ὑπος αἰσθήρες ἐγκαθίσταται, ἀλλὰ μὴ εἰς μίαν τίνι ἰδέαν, εἶτε ψυγῆν εἶτε ὅτι δεί καλεῖν, πάντα ταῦτα συντείνει, ἦ διὰ τούτων οἷον ὄργανον αἰσθανόμεθα ὡς αἰσθητά. I discuss the wooden horse metaphor a bit in section 4.
themselves perceive any more than telescopes or eyeglasses do; rather, they enable us to perceive.\textsuperscript{17} Since the soul does the perceiving, perception is not at the first grade.

There’s dispute, however, about whether perception is at the second or third grade.\textsuperscript{18} Here’s an argument for thinking it’s at the second grade. At 186c7-e12,\textsuperscript{19} Plato argues as follows:

Well now, is it possible for someone to attain (\textit{tuchein}) truth if he doesn’t even attain being (\textit{ousia})? – No, it’s impossible. - And will someone ever have knowledge of something whose truth he doesn’t attain? – Of course not, Socrates. - So knowledge is located, not in our affections (\textit{pathêmata}), but in our reasoning (\textit{sullogismo(i)}) about them. For it’s in the latter, it seems, that it’s possible to grasp (\textit{hapsashthai}) being and truth, whereas it’s impossible in the former.

\textsuperscript{17} The dative and \textit{dia} don’t have to be so understood; but Plato is recommending this usage here. However, according to Burnyeat, ‘the grammarians’ ‘say that Plato uses the “with” idiom to express a view of eyes and ears as means by which we see and hear, and the “through” idiom to contrast with his own view that the sense-organs are intermediaries between us and the world we perceive’ (‘Grammar’, 29-30; cf. 37-9). That is, according to Burnyeat the grammarians take the ‘with’ idiom to indicate that through which we perceive, whereas he thinks that, in 184-6, it indicates what does the perceiving. As he notes, on their reading, ‘only a nuance, at best, will distinguish’ the dative from \textit{dia} (‘Grammar’, 38). Hence L. Campbell, for example, suggests that in 184-6 the dative expresses direct instrumentality, whereas \textit{dia} expresses indirect instrumentality (\textit{The Theaetetus of Plato} [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883], 158; cited by Burnyeat, n. 27).

Burnyeat distinguishes three ways of interpreting the ‘through’ idiom: (i) the senses are like apertures in the body through which the soul perceives; (iia) they are like subsidiary agents employed by the soul when it perceives; (iib) they are like equipment used by the soul as an aid in perceiving (e.g. eyeglasses). He argues that 184-6 favours (iib): see ‘Grammar’, 37-8; but cf. ‘Grammar’, 41.

\textsuperscript{18} Those who think 184-6 places perception at the second grade include Frede, ‘Observations’; Burnyeat, ‘Grammar’ and \textit{Theaetetus}; and Lorenz, \textit{Brute}. I also defend this view briefly in ‘Plato on perception’; here I provide a somewhat more detailed, though still brief, defense. Cooper, ‘Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge’, thinks it is at the third grade; see also D. Modrak, ‘Perception and Judgment in the “Theaetetus”’ [‘Perception and Judgment’], \textit{Phronesis} 26 (1981), 35-54.

\textsuperscript{19} Οἷόν τε οὖν ἄληθείας τυχεῖν, ὅ μηδὲ οὕσιας; - Ἀδύνατον. - Οὔ δὲ ἄληθείας τις ἀτυχήσει, ποτὲ τούτου ἐπιστήμων ἔσται; - [186d] Καὶ πῶς ἄν, Οὐκρατές; - Ἐν μὲν ἄρα τοῖς παθήμασιν οὐκ ἔνι ἐπιστήμη, ἐν δὲ τῷ περὶ ἐκείνων συλλογισμῷ οὕσιας γὰρ καὶ ἄληθείας ἑνεκάθια μὲν, ὡς ἔοικε, δυνατὸν ἄγασθαι, ἐκεῖ δὲ ἀδύνατον. - Φαίνεται. - Ἡ οὖν ταύτων ἑκεῖνῳ τε καὶ τότῳ καλεῖς, τοσάτῳ διαφοράς ἔχοντε; - Ὡκουν δὲ δικαίων γε. - Τί οὖν δὴ ἐκείνῳ ἀποδίδως ὄνομα, τῷ ὡς ἀκούειν ὁσφραίνεσθαι ψύχεσθαι θερμαίνεσθαι; - [186e] Αἰσθάνεσθαι ἔγονε: τί γὰρ ἄλλο; - Σύμπαν ἄρ’ αὐτὸ καλεῖς αἰσθήσθης; - Ἀνάγκη. - Ἡ γὰς γε, φαμέν, οὐ μέτεστιν ἄληθείας ἄψασθαι: οὐδὲ γὰρ οὕσιας; - Οὐ γὰρ οὖν. - Οὐδ’ ἄρ’ ἐπιστήμης. - Οὐ γὰρ. - Οὔκ ἄρ’ ὅν εἰπ δετε, Οὐδεῖς τε καὶ ἐπιστήμη ταύτων. - Οὐ φαίνεται, Οὐκρατές. Καὶ μάλιστα γε νῦν καταφανέστατον γέγονεν ἄλλο ὄν αἰσθήσεως ἐπιστήμη.
He goes on to say that the former – which, he says, includes seeing, hearing, and smelling – is perception; it ‘has no share in the grasping of truth, since it doesn’t even share in the grasping of being’ (186e4-5). Hence ‘it has no share of knowledge either’; and so ‘perception and knowledge could never be the same’ (186e9-10).

We can formulate this argument as follows:

T1. Knowledge implies attaining (tuchein) truth.
T2. One can’t attain truth unless one attains being (ousia).
T3. Perception can’t attain being.
T4. Therefore, perception can’t attain truth.
T5. Therefore, perception never amounts to knowledge.

I take T1 to mean that knowledge implies propositional truth: one can’t know that p unless p is true. T4 tells us that perception can’t attain truth; T5 infers that it isn’t knowledge. T2 tells us that the reason perception can’t attain truth is that it can’t attain being; yet doing so is necessary for attaining truth. In saying that perception can’t attain being, I take Plato to mean that we can’t perceive anything as being thus and so; perception doesn’t supply us with any concepts. Being is incomplete being: being F, for some F or other. If we can’t perceive anything as being thus and so, neither can we perceive that anything is thus and so: one can perceive that something is, say, red only if one has the concept of redness.20 Hence perception can’t attain truth. On this reading, perception is at the second grade: since the soul does the perceiving, perception isn’t at the first grade; but since concepts and propositions aren’t involved, neither is it at the third grade.21

There are alternative readings. Let me briefly describe two of them, on both of which perception is at the third grade.22 One is favoured by Cooper.23 On his view, ‘being’ isn’t incomplete being, but existence – in particular, objective, mind-independent external

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20 Which is not to say that one can perceive redness only if one has the concept of redness: it’s one thing to perceive that something is red, and another to perceive (an instance of) redness. I take it that, according to 184-6, one can’t do the former but can do the latter.
21 However, I think it is representational and so has non-conceptual content. For a helpful discussion of non-conceptual content, see J. Bermudez and A. Cahan, ‘Nonconceptual Mental Content’ in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, from spring (2015). In saying that perception has non-conceptual content, I mean, more precisely, that one might have perceptions with representational content, while lacking the concepts needed for articulating that content. For this conception of non-conceptual content, see R. Heck, ‘Non-Conceptual Content and the “Space of Reasons”, Philosophical Review 109 (2000), 483-523; and T. Crane, ‘Is Perception a Propositional Attitude?’, Philosophical Quarterly 59 (2009), 452-469.
22 In Theaetetus, Burnyeat also contrasts and evaluates these three interpretations. So too does L. Brown, ‘Plato’s Theaetetus and the Hunting of the Proposition’ (unpub.).
23 In ‘Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge’.
existence - and ‘truth’ isn’t all propositional truth, but just objective truth about what exists externally. The point isn’t that knowledge implies propositional truth which, in turn, requires concepts. Rather, the point is that knowledge implies objective truth about entities existing in the external world. Perception, on this view, can issue in minimal judgments such as ‘This is red’; and so it is at the third grade. But it can’t ascertain whether what it perceives as red is really, objectively red. Since knowledge requires grasping what is really, objectively the case, perception isn’t knowledge. 24 Though perception can grasp some propositional truths, it can’t grasp the subclass of such truths that one must grasp in order to have knowledge. 25

Cornford defends a second version of the view that perception is at the third grade. On his view, being and truth are even more restricted than Cooper takes them to be. He suggests that ‘being’ is used – not for incomplete being, and not for everything that objectively exists in the external world, where that includes e.g. this bit of redness or a particular table or chair, but – for what’s real, that is, the forms. It’s less clear how he understands truth. Sometimes he seems to think that it too indicates reality, that is, the forms. He says, for example, that ‘[t]here is a certain ambiguity about the words ’existence’ (ousia) and ’truth’ (alêtheia): both are commonly used by Plato to mean that true reality which he ascribes to Forms and denies to sensible objects’. 26 Certainly Plato often uses ‘truth’ terminology to mean ‘real’ or ‘genuine’, as we also do in English, as when we say that Joe is a true friend. But if we

24 At one point (‘Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge’, 365) Cooper says that perception can know that something is red; but I assume this is a slip.
25 Cooper seems to think that, for Plato, there are truths only about what objectively exists in an external world; since perception is ‘altogether subjective and unguided by standards’, it can’t attain truth (or falsehood) (‘Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge’, 373). At this stage Cooper says that ‘in perception one notices only the colour (etc.) a thing appears to have and says nothing about what its real colour is’ (373); but earlier he says that ‘in order to decide whether something is red one does not need to reflect, but to use the mind at the perceptual level only’ (363) (emphasis added). (Lorenz, Brute, 77 n. 17, also notices this seeming shift in what Cooper says.) If there are truths only about what’s objectively the case in an external world, then all propositional truth is at issue after all, but there are fewer truths than one might think. If this is Cooper’s view, he anticipates Burnyeat’s ‘Idealism in Greek Philosophy’, Philosophical Review 91 (1982), 3-40. For criticism of the general view, see my ‘Subjectivity, Ancient and Modern: The Cyrenaics, Sextus, and Descartes’, in J. Miller and B. Inwood (eds.), Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), 192-231.
26 Plato’s Theory of Knowledge, 108. On 106, in discussing the first stage of Plato’s argument, Cornford clearly thinks propositional truth is at issue. 108 also mentions propositional truth, but here it isn’t clearly distinguished from ‘true reality’. On 109 he says that ‘a certain ambiguity is allowed to remain about the meaning of “reaching truth (reality) and existence”’, though I’m not sure that the ambiguity he has in mind is between propositional truth and the ‘true reality’ the forms possess.
understand truth that way here, the claim that perception can’t attain truth just restates in other terms that it can’t attain being, whereas the latter seems to be a reason on behalf of the former. But perhaps Cornford means that knowledge requires a grasp of true definitions, and that one has this grasp only if one grasps the real entities, that is, the forms.27 If so, Cornford thinks that T1 concerns propositional truth – not all such truths, but just definitional ones. The point, on this reading, isn’t that knowledge is propositional or requires a grasp of objective standards, but that it requires a grasp of true definitions, which one can have only if one grasps the forms.28

I’ve sketched three views, and said that I favour the first of them. But why should we favour it over its rivals? This isn’t the place for a detailed answer: my main concern is the Phaedo, not the Theaetetus. But a few brief remarks are in order.

One reason to favour the first view is that being, as it’s understood in this part of the Theaetetus, doesn’t seem to indicate (objective) existence or to be restricted to forms. For example, Plato says that being and not-being apply to everything (185c4-7). Presumably he doesn’t mean that everything (objectively) both exists and doesn’t exist, or that everything both is and isn’t a form, or is and isn’t real. It’s more reasonable to think he means that everything both is and is not in the sense that, for example, this object is red but is not blue. If so, being is incomplete being.29 Since perception can’t grasp incomplete being, it can’t apply concepts; and so it is at the second grade (given that it’s not at the first grade, since the soul does the perceiving).

There are, however, various objections to the view that 184-6 places perception at the second grade. I’ll consider two of them. First, at 185e6-7 Plato says that ‘there are some things the soul itself considers (episkopein) through itself, and some things it considers through the capacities of the body’.30 Cooper takes this to mean that ‘[i]n order to decide whether something exists, is similar to something else, etc., one has to reflect; in order to decide whether something is red, one does not need to reflect, but to use the mind at the perceptual level only’.31 If, as Cooper thinks, perception can episkopein some things, where that involves deciding whether e.g. something is red, it is at the third grade.

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27 However, if to grasp a form just is to grasp its definition, this formulation is uninformative at best.
28 Cf. Burnyeat, Theaetetus, 60.
29 For this argument, see Burnyeat, ‘Grammar’, 44.
30 ... εἰ φαίνεται σοι τα μὲν αὐτῇ ὑπ' αὐτῆς ἡ ψυχή ἐπισκοπεῖν, τὰ δὲ διὰ τῶν τοῦ σώματος δυνάμεων.
31 ‘Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge’, 362.
However, 185e6-7 doesn’t say that perception can *episkepein* anything; it says that the soul considers some things through the capacities of the body, where this need not mean anything more than that, in some cases, considering something requires relying on the senses.\(^{32}\) As Frede among others argues, Plato distinguishes two kinds of features of things, and so ‘two kinds of questions the mind considers and tries to settle (cf. 185e6ff.). If F-ness is a perceptual feature, then, when the mind considers the question whether something is F, it draws on the testimony of the senses (cf. 185b10-12)’. But that doesn’t imply that the senses do the considering.\(^{33}\) Hence Plato’s discussion of considering doesn’t show that perception is at the third grade.

Here’s the second objection I’ll consider. At 186b11-c5, Socrates says that infants and animals are able to perceive some things straightaway from birth, whereas ‘calculations (*analogismata*) about these things, with respect to being and usefulness, [are] acquired, by those who do acquire them, with difficulty and over a long time, by means of a great deal of troublesome education’.\(^{34}\) It might be thought that perception, on the one hand, and calculations about them with respect to being and usefulness, on the other hand, are exhaustive. According to Cornford, the calculating Plato mentions as being difficult requires grasping forms.\(^{35}\) If everything short of that is perception, perception is at the third grade.\(^{36}\)

\(^{32}\) Contrast Modrak, ‘Perception and Judgment’, 42-3.

\(^{33}\) ‘Observations’, 381. Similarly, Burnyeat says that ‘no question is so simple that perception alone can answer it’, though ‘perception remains a necessary part of the procedure for settling many questions’; it ‘will often be serving as an indispensable aid to some inquiry initiated by the soul’. Both quotations are from ‘Grammar’, 43. For a detailed defence of the view that Plato doesn’t say that perception can consider or investigate anything, see Y. Kanayama, ‘Perceiving, Considering, and Attaining Being’, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 5 (1987), 29-81. It may seem to count against this view that, at 185b9-c2, Socrates suggests that if one could ask whether a colour and a sound were both salty, one would do so *with* the tongue which, given the distinction that’s been drawn between the with and the through idioms, would seem to imply that the tongue does the considering. D. Bostock thinks Socrates ‘slips’ up here (*Plato’s Theaetetus* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988], 121, n. 35). For more sympathetic accounts, see Kanayama, 33-42; Sedley, *Midwife*, 106, n. 29; and Lorenz, *Brute*, 78-94.

\(^{34}\) οὐκόν τὰ μὲν εὐθὺς γενομένοις πάρεστι φύσει [186c] αἰσθάνεσθαι ἀνθρώποις καὶ θηρίοις, διὰ διὰ τοῦ σώματος παθήματα ἐπὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τείνει· τὰ δὲ περὶ τῶν ἀναλογίσματα πρὸς τὰ οὐσίαν καὶ ὁφέλειαν μόνης καὶ ἐν χρόνῳ διὰ πολλῶν πραγμάτων καὶ παιδείας παραγίγνεται οἷς ἂν καὶ παραγίγνηται;

Strictly speaking, Socrates here asks a question, but he clearly expects a ‘yes’ answer. I retain a familiar translation of *analogismata* as ‘calculations’ but nothing specifically mathematical is at issue.

\(^{35}\) *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge*, 108.

\(^{36}\) Or at least some perception is. But Plato shows no signs, in *Tht*. 184-6, of wanting to distinguish among levels or grades of perception.
Cooper thinks the calculating at issue is at a lower level than Cornford supposes: in his view, Plato means that expert opinions about what is objectively the case are difficult to acquire, though not so difficult as to require a grasp of forms. Still, if everything short of calculating about being and usefulness, as Cooper understands it, counts as perception, perception – including infant and animal perception - is at the third grade.

However, I don’t think the contrast between perceiving, on the one hand, and calculating about being and usefulness, on the other hand, is meant to be exhaustive. Rather, Plato is contrasting perception, which is at the second grade, with knowledge, where these are not exhaustive. Then, in (T1)-(T5), he argues that knowledge implies truth, and that perception can’t get as far as truth. 186c mentions a further necessary condition for knowledge: calculating in such a way as to grasp being and usefulness. That leaves room for intermediate cognitive conditions that go beyond perception but don’t involve calculations about being and usefulness.

3.

37 ‘Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge’, 372-5.
38 See also Modrak, ‘Perception and Judgment’, n. 22, though cf. her p. 43.
39 For similar suggestions, see McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus*, 191-2; and Sedley, *Midwife*, 111 with n. 36. Frede, ‘Observations’, 382, by contrast, argues that Plato, like the Stoics, thinks that having even rudimentary beliefs takes a long time and is difficult to do. For a similar view, see Lorenz, *Brute*, 90-1. On this view, the contrast between perception and the sorts of calculations at issue here is exhaustive, but perception remains at the second grade.
40 One might wonder why, if this is so, Theaetetus goes on to suggest that knowledge is true belief. For doesn’t 186c, as I interpret it, already imply that knowledge is not mere true belief (since not all true beliefs require calculations about usefulness)? Yes; but the passage is very brief, and it doesn’t spell out exactly what is involved in calculating being and usefulness. Having made this brief remark, Socrates drops this line of thought and offers the argument we’ve explored (T1-T5). In suggesting that knowledge is (not perception, but) true belief, Theaetetus focuses just on T1-T5; only when the view that knowledge is true belief is also refuted do they return to (something like) the suggestion briefly mentioned in 186c, although, as Sedley notes, at this point they talk instead about *logismos*.

Lorenz (Brute, 91, n. 51) notes that the passage suggests that not all perceivers engage in reasoning about being and usefulness; he suggests that the exceptions are non-human animals. But in *Rep.* 441, when Plato is distinguishing the rational from the spirited part of the soul, he says that ‘as for *logismos*, some never seem to acquire it, while most do so late on’ (441a8-b1); here only humans are at issue. Of course, Plato could be making different points in the two contexts: among other things, the *logismos* at issue in the *Rep.* passage might be different from the calculations about being and usefulness in *Tht.* 184-6. But the similarity is suggestive.
What about the very acquisition of wisdom (phronēsis)? Is the body a hindrance or not, if one enlists it as a partner in one’s inquiry? This is the sort of thing I mean: do sight and hearing contain (echei) any truth (alētheian) for human beings, or aren’t even the poets always harping on such things, telling us that we neither hear nor see anything accurately (akribes)? And yet, if these among the senses to do with (peri) the body are neither accurate nor clear (sapheis), the others will hardly be so; for, I suppose, the others are all inferior to these. Or don’t they seem so to you? – Certainly. - So when does the soul grasp the truth (haptetai tēs alētheias)? Because whenever it tries to consider (skopein) something along with (meta) the body, it’s clear that it is then thoroughly deceived by it. – That’s true. – So isn’t it in reasoning (logizesthai), if anywhere at all, that any of the things that are (τὶ τοῦ οὖν) become manifest

41 Τὶ δὲ δὴ περὶ αὐτὴν τὴν τῆς φρονήσεως κτῆσιν; Πότερον ἐμπόδιον τὸ σῶμα ἢ οὐ, ἐὰν τις αὐτὸ ἐν τῇ ζητήσῃ [65b] κοινονὸν συμπαραλαμβάνῃ; Οἶον τὸ τοιοῦτο λέγω· ἀφαὶ ἔχει ἀληθείαν τινα υγίης τε καὶ ἀκούει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἢ τὰ γε τοιαῦτα καὶ οἱ ποιηταὶ ἦμιν ἀεὶ θρυλοῦσιν, ὅτι οὕτ᾽ ἀκούομεν ἀκρίβες οὐδέν οὔτε ὅρομεν; Καὶ τοιούτου οὐκ ἄρα τὸ σῶμα αἰσθήσεων μὴ ἀκρίβες εἰσιν μηδὲ σαφεῖς, σχολὴ ἂν γε ἄλλα πάσα γὰρ ποῦ τούτων φαντάται εἰσιν. Ἡ σοὶ οὖν δοκοῦσιν; - - Πάνω μὲν οὖν, ἔφη. - - Πότε οὖν, ἢ δ᾽ ὡς, ἢ ψυχή τῆς ἀληθείας ἠπτεται; Ὡς τοῖς μὲν γὰρ μετὰ τοῦ σώματος ἐπεξεργάζεται τι σκοπεῖν, δῆλον ὅτι τοῦτο ἐξαπατᾶται ἢπι αὐτοῦ. - - [65c] Ἀληθή λέγεις. - - Ἄρ᾽ οὖν οὐκ ἐν τῷ λογιζόμεθα εἴπερ ποὺ ἀλλοθεῖ καταδόθην ἄρλη γιγνεται τί τῶν ὅρων; - - Ναί. - - Λογιζόμεθα δὲ γε πότε τότε κάλλιστα, ὅταν τοῖς ὑπὸ τῶν μηδὲν παραλυθή, μήτε ἀκούει μήτε ψυχή μήτε ἀληθήνιον μηδὲ τὰ ἱθονία, ἀλλ᾽ ὅτι μάλιστα αὐτὴ καθ᾽ αὐτὴν γίγνεται ἔνδει ταΐς καὶ καθ᾽ ὅσον ὑπάρχειν τῇ κοινονοσκεῖν αὐτῷ μηδὲ ἀπομείνῃ ὑπέργεια τοῦ ὅρους. - - Ἐστι τάστα. - - Οὐκοῦν καὶ ἔντασθα ἢ τοῦ φιλοσόφου ψυχή μάλιστα [65d] ἀπαίσχεται τὸ σῶμα καὶ διέγειρεν ἢπι αὐτοῦ, ζητεὶ δὲ αὐτῇ καθ᾽ αὐτῇ γίγνεσθαι; - - Φαίνεται. - - Τὶ δὲ δὴ τὰ τοιοῦτα, ὦ Σιμμία; Φαίμεν τί εἶναι δίκαιον αὐτῷ ἢ οὐδὲν; - - Φαίμεν μέντοι νῦν Δια. - - Καὶ αὐτὸν γε τὶ καὶ ἀκαθόν; - - Πῶς δ᾽ ὡς; - - Ἡθά οὖν πάποτε τί τῶν τοιούτων τοῖς ὑπόθαλμοις εἰδες; - - Οὐδαμῶς, ἢ δ᾽ ὡς. - - Ἀλλ᾽ ἀλλή λέγει ἀισθῆσαι τόν διὰ τοῦ σώματος ἔρπομεν αὐτῶν; Ἀληθές δὲ περὶ πάντων, οἷον μεγεθοῦς περί, ὡς οἷον, ἵππος, καὶ τῶν ἀλλῶν ἐνὶ λόγῳ ἀπαντῶν τῆς οὐσίας δὲ [65e] τυγχάνει ἐκαστὸν ἄρα διὰ τοῦ σώματος αὐτῶν τὸ ἀληθέστατον θεωρεῖται, ἢ ὡθε ἐχεῖ ὅσον ἀληθεία ημῶν καὶ ἀκριβέστατα παρασκευάζεται ἐκατό ἐκαστὸν διανοήθησαν περὶ οὐκ εἰς μάτην οὐτὸς ἢ ἐγγύτατα ήτοι τὸν γνώναι ἐκαστὸν; - - Πάνω μὲν οὖν. - - Ἄρ᾽ οὖν εἰκείον ἄν τοῦτο ποιήσεις καθαρότατα ὅστις ὅτι μάλιστα αὐτῇ τῇ διανοιᾳ ἢπι ἐκαστὸν, μήτε τίνι ὡς παρατίθεμεν ἐν τῷ διανοεῖσθαι μήτε [tīn] ἄλλην [66a] ἀποθείη πρὸς ἐφελκόν μεμεῖαν μετὰ τὸν λογισμοῦ, ἀλλ᾽ αὐτῆ καθ᾽ αὐτὴν ἐλεήμονες τῇ διανοιᾳ χρόμενος αὐτῷ καθ᾽ αὐτῷ ἐλεήμονες ἐκαστὸν ἐπιεχεῖρου θηρεύουν τῶν ὅρων, ἀπαλλαγεῖς ὅτι μάλιστα ὀφθαλμὸν τε καὶ ὅρον καὶ ως ἐπειτὰν σώματος τοῦ σώματος ὡς ταράττοντος καὶ οὐκ ἐνόστις τῆς ψυχῆς κτῆσασθαι ἀληθείαν τε καὶ φρονήσεν ὅταν κοινονή; Ἄρ᾽ οὖν οὕτως ἐστίν, ὦ Σιμμία, εἴπερ τὶς [καὶ] ἄλλος ὁ τευχόμενος τοῦ ὅρους; - - Ὑπερφυώς, ἔφη ὦ Σιμμίας, ὡς ἀληθῆ λέγεις, ὦ Σώκρατες.
(katadélōn) to it? – Yes. – And it reasons best (kallista), I suppose, whenever none of these things bothers (paralupēi) it, neither hearing nor sight nor pain nor any pleasure, but whenever it comes to be itself by itself as far as possible, dismissing the body and, to the extent that it can, having neither association nor contact with it, it strives for what is (tou ontos). – That’s so. – So here too, doesn’t the soul of the philosopher especially disvalue the body and flee from it, seeking (zêtei) to become itself by itself? – It seems so. – And what about things like the following, Simmias: Do we say that there is a just itself, or not? – We certainly do. – And again, a beautiful and a good? – Of course. – Now did you ever see any among such things with your eyes? – Not at all, he said. – Did you grasp (ephêpsô) them with one of the other senses <that operates> through (dia) the body? I’m talking about all such things: for example, largeness, health, and strength, and, to sum it up, about the being of all the rest, what each of them really is. Is it through the body that what’s truest about them is viewed (dia tou sômatos autôn to alêthestaton theôreitai)? Or is the following rather the case: whichever of us especially trains himself with the greatest accuracy to think about each thing itself that he considers will come closest to knowing each of them? – Certainly. – So wouldn’t the one who does this the most purely be the one who, so far as is possible, used his thought in its own right to access each thing, neither adducing sight in his thinking nor dragging in any other sense along with his reasoning, but using his thought itself by itself purely, and so trying to hunt each of the things that is, itself by itself and purely, separated as far as possible from his eyes and ears and, one might say, his whole body, because it confuses the soul and, whenever the soul associates with it, it doesn’t allow it to acquire truth and wisdom. Is this, Simmias, the person who will attain what is, if anyone will? – What you say is eminently true, Socrates, said Simmias. (65a9-66a10)

This first part of this passage (65a9-c4) can be formulated as follows:

P1. The senses to do with the body are neither accurate nor clear.42
P2. Therefore, we can’t perceive anything accurately or clearly.
P3. Therefore, perception doesn’t contain any truth.
P4. Therefore, whenever the soul inquires into (zêtein, 65a10) or considers (skopein, 65b10) something along with the body, it is deceived by the body.

42 65b4 just has ‘accurate’; 65b5 has both ‘accurate’ and ‘clear’. I assume that either no difference is intended between accuracy and clarity, or else the latter is a necessary condition for the former.
P5. Therefore, the soul can’t attain truth when it inquires into, or considers, something along
with the body.

P6. If one can’t attain truth, one can’t attain wisdom.

P7. Therefore, perception can’t attain wisdom; nor can the soul attain wisdom if it inquires
into or considers something along with the body.

P8. Therefore, it’s in reasoning, if anywhere, that any of the things that are become manifest
to the soul.

P9. Therefore, if the soul can attain wisdom at all, it can do so only by reasoning.

This argument sounds like T1-5. But are the arguments the same? Or do they use
similar language to make different points? What grade or grades does P1-9 suggest
perception is at?

Gallop thinks P1 may accord the senses bodily location. If they are bodily, yet do
the perceiving, we might infer that perception is at the first grade. At least, that’s what
Descartes would infer. In favour of thinking that the senses, or sense organs, do the
perceiving, we can note that at 65d9 Plato implies that we see with the eyes (tois ophalmois);
and then, at 65d11-12, he says that we perceive with the various senses that operate through
the body (tini aisthêsei tôn dia tou sômatos). In Tht. 184-6, as we’ve seen, saying that we
perceive with x is taken to imply that x does the perceiving: the dative is used to indicate
subjecthood.

But the dative doesn’t have to be used that way. Perhaps, in 65d9 and 11-12, it
functions instead as what Smyth calls an instrumental dative of instrument or means: that is,
perhaps it indicates the means by which we perceive, that through which we perceive. If so,

43 According to Sedley, the passage is ‘very reminiscent’ of Tht. 184-6 (Midwife, 112 n. 38).
44 ‘At 65b the phrase translated “the bodily senses” means, literally, “the senses around the
body”, suggesting that they are thought of as having bodily location’ (Plato: Phaedo, 91).
45 Strictly speaking, he only implies this, for he is asking a question rather than making a
statement. In 65d11-12 he asks whether one ‘grasps (ephêpsô) them [the forms] with any of
the senses that operate through the body’. I take ‘grasps’ to indicate perception as such: in
65d9 Plato implies that we don’t see forms with our eyes; he then generalizes so as to imply
that we don’t perceive them with any of our other senses either. For the dative, see also 79a1-
2, 81b8, 99e3.
Instrumental Dative. According to Burnyeat, in order to understand Tht. 184-6 we need ‘to
get free of the grammarians’ notion that the “with” idiom expresses the view that the sense-
organs are means the perceiver uses to perceive with; for this is part of what the “through”
idiom conveys. It is only by coming to see that the “with” idiom expresses not the idea of
means, but rather that of subjecthood or even agency, that we open up a genuine contrast
between the two idioms. As long as the dative involved in the “with” idiom is classified as an
it functions more or less as *dia* functions in *Tht.* 184-6. In that case, we shouldn’t infer from the claim that we perceive with the senses, that the senses do the perceiving. Rather, the claim would be that we perceive, using the senses as instruments. Here it’s worth noting that, though Plato says that we perceive with the senses, he never explicitly says that they perceive; he says that *we* perceive.47 Perhaps that’s because he thinks that we are the subjects in perception.48

Nor is it clear that Plato accords the senses (conceived as capacities, e.g. the capacity to see) bodily location. Though the phrase Gallop takes that way - *tôn peri to sôma aisthéseôn* (65b4-5) – can be so understood, it doesn’t have to be so understood.49 In 65d11-

“instrumental dative”, where this is something more than a conventional grammarians’ label, with the result that the idea of means or instrument is already present in the rejected idiom, then only a nuance, at best, will distinguish it from the “‘through” idiom, given that this too is associated with instrumentality’ (‘Grammar’, 38). I’ve agreed with Burnyeat about the use of the dative and *dia* in *Tht.* 184-6. My suggestion here is that we needn’t understand the *Phd.*’s use of the ‘with’ idiom for perception in the same way; here, what Burnyeat calls the grammarians’ notion may well be right. See above, n. 17.

47 Nor does he explicitly say that the soul perceives or that the body (or a part of the body, such as the eyes) perceives. His saying that *we* perceive doesn’t allow us to know whether he thinks it’s the soul, the body, or the compound that perceives. For he says that we are part body, part soul (79b1-2). It’s true that he sometimes suggests that we are just our souls (e.g. 115); and one might think that that view, coupled with his saying that we perceive, implies that he thinks that the soul perceives. But I would be reluctant to argue in this way.

48 Though the *Phd.* doesn’t regiment terminology in the way recommended in *Tht.* 184-6, it does display some sensitivity to the use of the dative, though in a different context. In 101a, Plato says that we shouldn’t say that one thing is larger than another by a head. The reason is that doing so would imply that ‘a head’ explains that state of affairs but, in Plato’s view it doesn’t; we should say instead that one thing is larger than another because of its participation in the form of largeness. Perhaps ‘we see with the eyes’ is acceptable, not because the eyes do the seeing, but because we have to mention them in explaining how it is that we see. Smyth calls the dative in 101a the dative of manner (sect. 1513).

49 Rowe, *Phaedo*, translates *tôn peri to sôma aisthéseôn* at 65b4-5 as ‘the sensations that relate to the body’, which doesn’t so clearly imply that the senses have bodily location. (Rowe’s translation differs from Gallop’s not only in its translation of *peri* but also in its translation of *aisthēsis*. Perhaps Gallop thinks sensory capacities are at issue, whereas Rowe thinks particular uses of them are at issue. As Gallop says, it’s difficult to be sure which Plato has in mind where. But I’m not sure it matters: presumably the senses, considered as mere capacities, don’t perceive; perception requires actualizing a sensory capacity on a given occasion.) Certainly *peri*, about, doesn’t have to mean being physically about; it can indicate
12, Plato says that we can’t perceive some range of things with the senses that operate through (dia) the body. He doesn’t say that the senses are bodily; he says that they operate through the body, which doesn’t imply that they are bodily. Perhaps that’s all 65b4-5 means in speaking of the senses peri the body.

Admittedly, Plato speaks not only of our perceiving with the senses that operate through the body, but also of our seeing with the eyes. Even if the senses aren’t bodily (except insofar as they operate through the body), plainly the eyes are bodily. But if Plato uses the dative in the way I’ve suggested, he doesn’t mean to imply that either the senses (or their actualizations) or the sense organs do the perceiving. We perceive, using them as instruments. If this is right, then, though Plato speaks in a way he criticizes in Tht. 184-6, it’s not clear that he means to express the view that he there rejects. Rather, he just uses the dative differently in the two contexts. Perhaps, then, though Tht. 184-6 in effect criticizes the Phd.’s mode of expression, it doesn’t criticize its view. Rather, in both places, we perceive, using the senses as instruments.

being about something in the sense of having to do with it, as when we say that his idea is about thus and so.

Cf. Gallop’s textual note 9 and his comments on 65b1-7. In the latter, he suggests that 65d11 concerns sensations, which, he says, Plato speaks of as ‘those that come by way of the body’. Though Gallop doesn’t say so, this way of describing perceptions doesn’t require them to be bodily, as opposed to just operating through the body. Cf. tois kata to sôma pathesin, 94b7; tois kata to sôma, 94c1. For discussion of these two passages, see J. Beere. ‘Philosophy, Virtue, and Immortality in Plato’s Phaedo’, ed. G. Gurtler and W. Wians, Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy 26 (2010), 253-288, at 261-4; and J. Bailly, ‘Commentary on Beere’, 289-300, at 290-6. Beere argues that Plato means just affections that are in accordance with, or that concern, the body, though they themselves are psychic, not bodily; Bailly argues that Plato takes the affections to be bodily. Neither Beere nor Bailly discusses 65b4-5. Cf. 65a7, which speaks of the pleasures dia tou sômatos: those that come through the body.

We’ve seen (n. 15) that Cooper thinks that in Tht. 184-6 Plato takes the senses to be bodily, but also makes it clear that we perceive with the soul. If Cooper is right, then, even if, in the Phaedo, Plato thinks the senses are bodily in a way that’s stronger than merely operating through the body, we should hesitate before inferring that the body, or some part of the body, does the perceiving.

50 I say ‘in effect’ so as to avoid the implication that Tht. 184-6 has the Phd. specifically in mind.

51 Further, as Burnyeat says, ‘[o]ne would not build a theory of independent perceiving subjects on the instrumental dative in passing phrases like “He looked at me with his eyes” [citing Charmides 155cd] … Nor, again, is it inevitable that trouble arise from the syntactic transformation, available in English as well as Greek, which promotes an instrumental position to the subject of the verb (“He looked at me with his eyes” → “His eyes looked at me”)’ (‘Grammar’, 34.) Here he cites Phd. 79a. However, though this passage uses the
But even if Plato thinks the senses are bodily and do the perceiving, or that the sense organs do the perceiving, or that the body does the perceiving, it’s not clear that we should infer that perception is at the first grade. For, in the *Phaedo*, he may well think that the body is the proper subject of some cognitive states; he might also think that parts of the body are the proper subjects of some cognitive states.\(^{52}\) For example, at 83de he discusses certain souls taking over and sharing the beliefs (*homodoxeine*) of the body. If the body literally has beliefs, it has cognitive powers. If so, we shouldn’t infer from the mere fact (if it is a fact) that the body, or some part of the body, perceives that perception is at the first grade.\(^{53}\) However, the body also has non-cognitive powers, such as the power of digestion. If the body has both cognitive and non-cognitive powers, then, if Plato thinks the body perceives (or that some parts of the body perceive), we can’t tell, from that fact alone, what grade he takes perception to be at.

All in all, then, P1 doesn’t imply that perception is at the first grade. First, it doesn’t clearly imply that the body is the subject in perception (or that various parts of the body are subjects in perception). Secondly, even if this were implied, it wouldn’t clearly follow that instrumental dative, it doesn’t explicitly mention an example of the transformation Burnyeat mentions.

\(^{52}\) By ‘cognitive states’, I mean states we would intuitively classify as mental. (If perception is at the second or third grade, it is cognitive; if it’s at the first grade, it isn’t.) Whether all such states belong to the *psuchê* as Plato conceives of it in the *Phaedo* is disputed. Those who think that, in the *Phaedo*, Plato takes the body to be the proper subject of some cognitive states include A. Price, *Mental Conflict* (London: Routledge, 1995); Lorenz, *Brute*; and R. Kamtekar, ‘Speaking with the Same Voice as Reason: Personification in Plato’s Psychology’, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 31 (2006), 167-202. For the view that Plato doesn’t do so, see J. Beere, ‘Philosophy, Virtue, and Immortality in Plato’s *Phaedo*’, against which, see the reply by Bailly. I suspect that those who deny that the *Phaedo* takes the body (or any part of the body) to be the proper subject of some cognitive states would say that, if Plato says that the body (or a part of the body) perceives, that shouldn’t be taken literally. That is, they wouldn’t infer from his saying that the body (or a part of the body) perceives that perception is at the first grade; they would infer that Plato means something weaker or different – e.g. that we couldn’t perceive if we didn’t have bodies of a certain sort, or that the body is essentially involved in perception even though it doesn’t strictly speaking do the perceiving.

\(^{53}\) It’s one thing to say that (e.g.) the eyes see, another to say that the body perceives. As I’ve said, Plato doesn’t explicitly say either of these things; but it’s important to note that if he is committed to the latter, he isn’t thereby committed to the former. However, we’ve seen that 83d ascribes *doxai* to the body. Yet at 94b-d, Socrates speaks of the soul opposing the *pathê* of the body, quoting Homer, who describes Odysseus rebuking his heart (cf. *Rep.* 441b). Similarly, at 99a he seems to imagine his sinews and bones having *doxai*. If one takes these passages to be literal and not elliptical, it would seem that Plato ascribes cognitive powers both to the body and to parts of the body. But that doesn’t settle the question of whether Plato thinks the body and/or some part of the body perceives, or of what grade he takes perception to be at.
perception is at the first grade; for in the *Phaedo*, the body, and parts of the body, might have cognitive powers, and perception might be among them. But neither does P1 imply that perception is at the second or third grade: we might say that a window is clear, or that a thermometer is accurate. ‘Clarity’ and ‘accuracy’ can be used of perception no matter what grade it’s at.

Let’s now turn to P3. It sounds like T4. On the reading I favour, T4 means that perception can’t grasp any propositional truths. Is that also what P3 means? If it is, then it takes perception to be at the first or second grade. However, the reasons given on behalf of T4, in T1-3, sound rather different from the reasons given on behalf of P3, in P1-2. T1-3 argue that perception can’t attain truth because it can’t attain being, where that means that perception is non-conceptual and so can’t even identify anything as being something or other; hence it can’t grasp that anything is thus and so. The reason given on behalf of P3, by contrast, is that we don’t hear or see anything accurately or clearly. But what does that mean, and why does Plato believe it?

On one interpretation, he means that perception issues in judgments, though ones that aren’t accurate or clear, indeed, in ones that are false. Gallop, for example, asks: ‘Can Socrates be thinking of misjudgements of size due to distance, or of refraction or other sources of visual error? His talk of the soul being “taken in by the body” (65b1, cf. 83a4-5) might suggest this’. If this is what P1-3 mean, perception is at the third grade: it issues in judgments, albeit false ones.

However, that this isn’t what P1-3 means is suggested by P8, which says that it’s in reasoning, if anywhere, that ‘any of the things that are’ (*ti tôn ontôn*) become manifest to the

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54 This inference is too quick. First, one might argue that even if perception can’t grasp any *true* propositions, it can issue in *false* ones. (I ask shortly whether that’s what P3 means.) Secondly, I said in n. 1 that perception would be at the third grade if it can grasp any propositions or concepts. It’s sometimes thought that there are some concepts one can grasp without grasping any propositions: see e.g. J. Fodor, *Concepts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). So one might argue that even if P3 says, or implies, that perception can’t grasp any true propositions, or indeed any propositions at all, it can nonetheless grasp some concepts. While it’s worth considering whether the *Phaedo* might allow one to grasp some concepts without grasping any propositions, I don’t myself think this will help us understand how Plato conceives of perception here, so I shall generally leave this possibility to one side.

55 *Plato: Phaedo*, 91. However, Gallop goes on to reject this interpretation in favour of the view that ‘Socrates’ quarrel with the senses appears more radical. It is not merely that they misrepresent the physical world, but that they never present anything else. They hamper the soul’s access to the real objects of its understanding, the “Forms”, that will be introduced at 65d4-5 below. They give no indication that there are any such objects, and strongly suggest that there are not’ (91). If the senses ‘strongly suggest’ that there are no forms, perception would seem to be at the third grade.
soul. Since perception can’t reason, it follows that it can’t grasp any of the things that are. This actually gives us a further verbal similarity with *Thet.* 184-6: both passages say, or imply, that perception can’t grasp what is. We’ve seen what *Thet.* 184-6 means in saying this. But what does P8 mean? And exactly how is P8 related to P1-3?

Plato explains P8 in 65d4-e2, where he makes it clear that ‘the things that are’ are forms, which aren’t perceptible. Being, in P8, therefore isn’t incomplete being; rather, it indicates the forms, which are the ‘real’, ‘genuine’, or fundamental beings. In implying that perception can’t grasp what is, P8 implies – not that perception can’t grasp that anything whatever is thus and so, but – that we can’t perceive forms. P8 is therefore quite different from T3.

I think P8 is meant to explain, and thereby to restrict, the scope of P1-3. It makes it clear that the point in P1-3 is that, since we can’t perceive forms, we can’t perceive them accurately or clearly; nor, therefore, does perception contain any truths about forms. If this

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56 However, they aren’t the only things that exist: 79a says that there are two kinds of beings, those that are visible and those that are unseen (i.e. those that are perceptible and those that aren’t).

57 That’s one thing P8 means. As I go on to explain, it also means that what I shall call perception-dependent inquiry can’t grasp forms.

58 As we’ve seen, however, there are other readings of T3; and on some of them, it is closer to P8 than I take it to be. I should make it clear that I don’t think *ti tôn ontôn* in 65c3, or *tou ontos* in 65c9 mean or even clearly refer just to forms. Rather, Plato begins by sketching a view that even the poets maintain (65b3), and they presumably don’t countenance forms. I take it that initially, the general view is indeterminate and can be filled in in different ways. The thought is that many people think something like the view he sketches. His particular version of the indeterminate claim becomes clear only when we turn to 65d, where he mentions forms. As Gallop notes (93), Plato uses ‘the things that are’ in different ways in the dialogue: sometimes for forms (as at 78d4 and 83b2), sometimes more generally (as at 79a6, and 99d5), and sometimes in a way that is indefinite, as in 65c. But though the usage in 65c is indefinite, Plato goes on to make it clear that his version of the general claim in which it is embedded has to do with forms.

59 In 4.6, Olympiodorus may favour a similar interpretation. For he suggests that in saying that perception can’t grasp being, Plato means that it can’t grasp forms. He also thinks Plato allows that, though we can’t perceive forms accurately (since we can’t perceive them at all), we can perceive other things accurately. (In 4.7 he says that perception always deceives us. But he makes it clear that he means that it does so just insofar as it isn’t the highest-level sort of cognition; and he adds that perception can also be said to be always true and accurate, if it is compared instead to *eikasia.*) Similarly, Damascius suggests that Plato thinks the senses are accurate in one way, though not in another (1.80); to explain this, he says that Plato acknowledges degrees (or levels or grades) of truth (or reality: *alētheia*). In ‘Socratic Anti-Empiricism in the *Phaedo*, *Apeiron* 29 (1996), 121-142, D. Baltzly agrees that this is one line of interpretation suggested by Olympiodorus and Damascius, but he argues that they also defend a different and more radical interpretation, according to which perception is always deceptive; and he thinks this more radical interpretation is more accurate. Similarly, Guilley
is right, then P3, like T4, concerns propositional truth. But whereas T4 says that perception can’t grasp any such truths at all, P3 says only that perception can’t grasp any truths about forms. P3 doesn’t take a stand, one way or another, as to whether there are other truths perception can grasp. Hence it doesn’t preclude perception’s being at the third grade – though neither does it imply that it is at that grade.

Let’s now turn to P4-5. Here Plato turns from perception to what I shall call perception-dependent inquiry. He makes it clear that the soul engages in it. But that doesn’t imply that the soul perceives: for perception and perception-dependent inquiry are not the same. So, for example, at 65a10-b1 he speaks of someone inquiring (Ζητεῖν) in common with the body as a partner. At 65b10, he speaks of the soul considering something (Σκοπεῖν τί) along with (μετὰ) the body. (I take it that Σκοπεῖν is here the same as Ζητεῖν.) Plato makes it clear that the relevant use of the body involves using the senses, and so perceiving. But in saying that in this sort of inquiry the person, or soul, uses the body as a partner, Plato makes it clear that more than perception is at issue. Though perception-dependent inquiry is constrained by perception, it goes beyond it. This sort of inquiry contrasts with intellectual inquiry (as I shall call it), which is inquiry the soul engages in itself by itself; it involves reasoning that is, in the relevant respects, independent of perception and of the body more generally.

This distinction between two ways of inquiring or considering something should remind us of the distinction in Tht. 184-6 between the soul considering something itself through itself and the soul considering something through the senses. In both dialogues, Plato contrasts two sorts of considering, both of which go beyond perception, though one of them

thinks the passage condemns the senses ‘in a tone of fierce moral disparagement as unreliable, inaccurate, and devoid of all truth’ (Plato’s Theory of Knowledge, 36). J.C.B. Gosling also thinks the passage denies that there are any truths about sensibles; but he thinks Plato is operating with ‘some special strict notion of truth’ (Plato [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973], 159. Cf. with Cooper’s view that Tht. 184-6 restricts truths to what is objectively the case in the external world (though this is a different restriction from the one Gosling has in mind); see n. 25 above.

60 As we’ve seen, Cornford, Plato’s Theory of Knowledge, may think T4 makes this point.

61 65a10-11 seems to have a person inquiring, but 65b10 has the soul doing so. See also 79c, which I discuss in section 4. In my formulization of the argument, perception-dependent inquiry isn’t mentioned until P4. However, in the passage itself, it’s mentioned at the very beginning, in 65a9-b1.

62 sumparalambanëi, 65b1.

63 On using the senses, see also 75c3 and 83a7.

64 This isn’t to say that the body does the perceiving. It’s just to say that perceiving requires having a body.
uses perception. However, the two sorts of considering at issue in *Thet.* 184-6 are not the same as perception-dependent and intellectual inquiry. For example, when one considers something through the senses in the way at issue in *Thet.* 184-6, one doesn’t necessarily think that only sensibles are real. But as Plato makes clear in *Phdl.* 82e-83e, in perception-dependent inquiry that is what one thinks. Someone who considers something through the senses in the way at issue in *Thet.* 184-6 might think this; but she doesn’t need to do so. Considering something through the senses in *Thet.* 184-6 is considering something about a sensible (e.g. whether it’s red); but, in contrast to perception-dependent inquiry, perception doesn’t constrain the manner in which one considers it. Here as elsewhere, similar language masks significant differences.

Unfortunately, *Phaedo* 65 doesn’t make it clear exactly how we use perception in perception-dependent inquiry. On the one hand, Plato uses *dia* which, in *Thet.* 184-6, suggests instrumentality. If the same is true here, then, in perception-dependent inquiry, I use perception like an instrument that does no inquiring of its own. But Plato also says that, in perception-dependent inquiry, we use perception as a partner. One (though not clearly the only) way in which I could enlist someone as a partner in my inquiry is by getting them to do some inquiring of their own. The first model suggests that perception is at the second grade; the second one suggests that it is at the third grade.

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65 I discuss this passage in section 4.

66 65e1-2 (cf. 79c2-5). I take it that *theôreitai* indicates perception-dependent inquiry. (That this is so is suggested by what follows: Plato says that we will come closest to knowing each thing if we train ourselves to think most accurately about each object of our inquiry (*skopein*) as being something in itself. That is, we can consider things either in a way that is constrained by the senses or by engaging in intellectual inquiry.) However, *ephêpsô(i)*, in 65d11, seems to be perception. So first Plato says that we don’t perceive any of these things (i.e. the forms) with the senses that operate through the body. Then he says that therefore perception-dependent inquiry can’t view – grasp, understand – what’s truest about forms *dia* the body. Hence he seems to say that we perceive *with* the senses but engage in perception-dependent inquiry *through* the body. Perhaps this is just terminological variance: in both cases we use the senses as instruments. (This may be Baltzly’s view; at any rate, he seems to think Plato uses the dative and *dia* interchangeably in speaking of inquiry, though I’m not sure he thinks Plato distinguishes perception from perception-dependent inquiry. See ‘Socratic Anti-Empiricism in the *Phaedo*’, 124, pt S1.) But perhaps he means to suggest that perception is more closely related to the senses than perception-dependent inquiry is. As we’ve seen (n. 17), this is how Campbell understands the difference between the dative and *dia* in *Thet.* 184-6. Though I think he’s wrong about that passage, his distinction might explain the present passage.

67 In n. 17 I noted that Burnyeat suggests three (not necessarily exclusive) ways of understanding the ‘through’ idiom. In his terms, the first model suggests (iib), the second (iia). Both models are compatible with the view that, in perception-dependent inquiry,
I take it that perception-dependent inquiry is propositional: inquiry by its nature involves considering various propositions. So if perception just were perception-dependent inquiry, perception would be at the third grade. However, since they are not the same, we shouldn’t follow this route to the conclusion that perception is at the third grade. Nor, similarly, should we infer from the fact that the soul engages in perception-dependent inquiry that the soul perceives; for, again, perception and perception-dependent inquiry are not the same.

One might think that Plato’s distinction between perception and perception-dependent inquiry shows that perception is at the first or second grade. At least, in *Tht.* 184-6 the distinction between considering things, on the one hand, and perceiving them, on the other, goes hand in hand with arguing that perception is at the second grade: there is no question so simple that perception can answer it; even identifying something as red goes beyond (though it might involve) perception. However, it’s not clear that the same is true here. For, as we’ve seen, Plato doesn’t tell us exactly how we use perception in perception-dependent inquiry: whether it’s just an instrument or whether it does some inquiring of its own. Plato’s distinction between perception and perception-dependent inquiry therefore doesn’t settle the question of what grade perception is at.  

P6 may remind us of T1. But there is a crucial difference. T1 says that knowledge is truth entailing: one can’t know that p unless p is true. P6, by contrast, means that we can’t attain wisdom unless we grasp truths about forms. Wisdom isn’t co-extensive with knowledge. Rather, it’s high-level knowledge; there are also other, lower levels of perception is in some sense in control: both instruments and partners can determine how we view things.  

Further, it may be that the inquiring and considering at issue here are higher level, or more restricted in scope, than they are in *Tht.* 184-6. In *Tht.* 184-6, considering includes attempting to answer any question whatever, however simple. In the *Phaedo*, the inquiry is one that aims at wisdom, or at grasping what’s real. Perhaps not all attempts to answer any question whatever have that aim; in that case, they don’t all fall within the scope of inquiring and considering as they are conceived of here. 66d3-7 might support this interpretation. It’s worth noting that *Phd.* 65 uses zétein, whereas *Tht.* 184-6 doesn’t do so. However, the latter uses forms of skepsasthai (e.g. 185b5, b10, c1). Both passages use forms of skopein; and, in both places, skopein is the same as inquiry (zétein; skepsasthai).

Even if perception doesn’t do any inquiring, it doesn’t follow that it’s not at the third grade: perhaps there are some propositions we can grasp without inquiry. That might be so if the inquiring at issue here is narrower in scope, or higher level, than the considering at issue in *Tht.* 184-6.
knowledge. To say that perception can’t attain *wisdom* isn’t to say that it can’t attain any
*knowledge*. P6 also differs from T1 in that P6 requires a grasp of forms for having wisdom;
that’s not said or implied (or denied) in *Tht*. 184-6. To say that all wisdom requires grasping
forms isn’t to say that all knowledge requires grasping forms. If perception can acquire some
knowledge, not all knowledge requires grasping forms. Further, perception would be at the
third grade, since if it can acquire knowledge it can grasp some truths, since knowledge is
truth entailing. The present passage doesn’t say that all knowledge requires grasping forms; it
leaves open the possibility that perception can attain a low level of knowledge that doesn’t
require grasping forms. But though this possibility is left open, it isn’t endorsed.

One might think that the contrast Plato draws, in P1-9, between reason and perception
implies that perception is at the first or second grade. For one might take reason and
perception to be exhaustive, and argue that reason is co-extensive with thought, where the
latter is quite broadly conceived. If perception doesn’t involve any thought at all, it would
seem to be at the first or second grade. However, reasoning, in 65, isn’t the whole of
thinking. Rather, it’s restricted to thinking that is, in the relevant way or to the relevant
extent, independent of perception. Nor are reason and perception exhaustive: as we’ve seen,
there is also perception-dependent inquiry. Perception-dependent inquiry involves
reasoning, or thinking, broadly conceived; but it is reasoning, or thinking, that is constrained
by its perceptual basis. Hence the distinction between reason and perception doesn’t imply
that perception is at the first or second grade; nor yet does it preclude its being at one of those
grades.

On the reading I’ve suggested, P1-9 are quite different from T1-5. T1-5 argue that
perception can’t grasp being, i.e. it can’t even identify anything as being thus and so; hence it
can’t grasp any truths, and so it isn’t knowledge, since knowledge is truth entailing. Since
perception is non-conceptual and non-propositional, it isn’t at the third grade. Since it’s also
the case that the soul perceives, perception is at the second grade. By contrast, P1-9 argue

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69 I defend this view in ‘Perception, Reason, and Wisdom in the *Phaedo*’ (forthcoming in the
*British Journal for the History of Philosophy*) and in ‘Knowledge and Belief in the *Phaedo*’.
70 Similarly, we’ve seen that it’s sometimes thought that the contrast between perception and
calculations about being and usefulness, in *Tht*. 186c, is the contrast between all propositions
(and conceptualization) and second-grade perception.
71 In this respect, then, *Phd*. 65-6 is like *Tht*. 186c: neither takes there to be an exhaustive
distinction between a particular sort of reasoning, on the one hand, and perception, on the
other hand, though the two sorts of reasoning are different in the two contexts. In the present
case, in addition to reasoning, perception, and perception-dependent inquiry, there is also
wisdom, which is not identical to reasoning. Reasoning is a process and, if all goes well, it
issues in wisdom; but not all reasoning does so.
that neither perception nor perception-dependent inquiry can grasp any truths about forms, and so they can’t attain wisdom, which is an especially high-level sort of knowledge. To say only so much doesn’t imply that perception can’t grasp any truths at all; and so it doesn’t imply that perception isn’t at the third grade – though neither does it imply that it is.

All in all, the present passage is inconclusive. Its main aim is to argue that neither perception nor perception-dependent inquiry can issue in wisdom, since they can’t grasp forms. That’s compatible with perception’s being at any of the three grades. And, so far as I can tell, nothing definitively rules out its being at any of these grades. However, though nothing strictly speaking rules out perception’s being at the first grade, that doesn’t seem to be Plato’s concern. He seems concerned to argue, not that perception is purely physiological, but that, though it’s cognitive, its level of cognition can’t issue in wisdom, since it can’t access forms. To say only so much is compatible with perception’s being at the second or third grade.

4.
Let’s now consider some other relevant passages.

At 79a, Plato reiterates that forms can’t be perceived; they can be grasped (epilaboio, 79a3) ‘only by the reasoning of the intellect’ (tôi tês dianoias logismô(i)). The fact that he contrasts perception just with ‘the reasoning of the intellect’, and doesn’t mention perception-dependent inquiry, might seem to cast doubt on my suggestion that Plato distinguishes perception-dependent inquiry from perception. However, I don’t think we should infer from 79a that Plato takes perception and reasoning to be exhaustive. His concern in 79a is to emphasize the difference between the visible and the invisible or, more generally, the perceptible and the imperceptible; to do that, he doesn’t need to mention perception-dependent inquiry. But he mentions it in his fuller account in 79c, where he refers back to 65, saying:72

Now weren’t we also saying a while ago that whenever the soul additionally uses (proschristai) the body to consider something (skopein ti), whether through (dia) seeing or hearing or some other sense (aisthêseôs) – for to consider something through the body is to consider it through a sense (aisthêseôs) – it is then dragged by

72 Οὖκοὖν καὶ τόδε πάλαι ἔλεγομεν, ὅτι ἡ ψυχή, ὅταν μὲν τῷ σώματι προσχρῆται εἰς τὸ skopēîn ti ἢ διὰ τοῦ ὁρῶν ἢ διὰ τοῦ ἀκούον ἢ ὅτι ἄλλης τινὸς aisthêseôs - τότε γὰρ ἔστιν τὸ διὰ τοῦ σώματος, τὸ δ’ aisthêseôs skopēîn ti - τότε μὲν ἔλκεται ὑπὸ τοῦ σώματος εἰς τὰ οὐδέποτε κατὰ ταύτα ἐχοντα, καὶ αὐτὴ ἐπανάπες καὶ ταράττεται καὶ εἰκιγγά ὅσπερ μεθύουσα, ὅτε τοιούτων ἐφαινομένη;
the body to the things that are never the same; and it wanders about and is confused and dizzy, as if drunk, because the things it is grasping are of the same sort? (79c2-8)

According to Lesley Brown, Plato says here that the soul perceives. If the soul perceives, perception is not at the first grade. However, as in 65, Plato discusses both perception and perception-dependent inquiry; and though he says that the soul engages in perception-dependent inquiry, he doesn’t say that it perceives. He does say that the soul sometimes uses the body in order to consider something; and the use of the body involves perception. But he doesn’t say that perception does the considering. Rather, as in 65 (to which the present passage plainly alludes) the soul considers something along with the body, using it as a partner. Since the soul is only said to do the considering, and not also the perceiving, we can’t use this passage as evidence that the soul perceives (and so is at least at the second grade). Nor can we use it as evidence that perception is at the third grade (on the ground that it’s identical to perception-dependent inquiry, since it isn’t).74

But exactly how does the soul use the senses in perception-dependent inquiry? Does it get the senses to do some inquiring of their own? Or does it use the senses as an instrument? In the first case, perception is at the third grade. In the second case, that isn’t implied. Unfortunately, as in 65, Plato doesn’t say enough to allow us to answer these questions.

In 82e, Plato explains what happens when philosophy takes a soul in hand. Until that happens, the soul is forced to consider (skopeisthai, 82e3) things as if through a prison. Then, at 83a, he says that investigation (skepsis, 83a4) through (dia, 83a4-5; cf. b2) the eyes and the other senses is full of deceit (apatês); hence the way in which we consider things through a prison is full of deceit.

It’s fascinating to compare the prison metaphor with the wooden horse metaphor discussed in Thet. 184. As we’ve seen, according to the latter metaphor, the senses, or sense organs (aisthêseis, 184d2), are autonomous agents housed in a wooden horse, which is itself

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73 See her ‘Innovation and Continuity’ in J. Gentzler (ed.), Method in Ancient Philosophy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 181-207, at 195 n. 23. Kanayama, by contrast, says that 79c, along with 82e and 83a-b, ‘make it clear’ that, in Thet. 185c1-3, perception doesn’t itself consider anything (‘Perceiving, Considering, and Attaining Being’, 40). Also seemingly in contrast to Brown, Burnyeat says that the Phaedo treats perception ‘as something essentially alien to the soul’. However, he adds: ‘or to the soul’s true nature’ (‘Grammar’, 49), which leaves open the possibility that the soul perceives, though it’s not its true nature to do so but, presumably, something it can do while embodied though doing so isn’t essential to its existence or nature. However, Burnyeat doesn’t pursue the point.

74 If Campbell’s account of the difference between the dative and dia is in play here, then the fact that Plato says that we consider dia the senses is further evidence that the considering differs from the perceiving.
insensate. Plato rejects that view in favour of the view that a single mind or soul does the perceiving through the senses and sense organs. One might be tempted to think that the prison metaphor expresses the same view as the wooden horse metaphor; and one might then infer that, in rejecting the latter, Plato is rejecting a view he accepts in the *Phaedo*. However, it’s the *soul* that’s in the prison, not the senses or sense organs. One might then wish to argue that, according to both metaphors, the soul perceives through the senses or sense organs, which, in the prison metaphor, would presumably be apertures in the prison.\(^{75}\)

However, just as it may be too quick to say that the prison metaphor expresses the same view as the wooden horse metaphor, so it may be too quick to say that it expresses the view Plato favours in rejecting the wooden horse metaphor. For Plato uses the prison metaphor, not to explain *perception*, but to explain *perception-dependent inquiry*: it’s the latter that the soul engages in as if through a prison. Plato doesn’t explicitly say what does the perceiving. For all he says here, the soul might perceive as though through apertures in the prison; and if that’s Plato’s view, the prison metaphor accords with Plato’s preferred way of conceiving of perception in *Tht.* 184-6 insofar as, in both places, the soul perceives through the senses or sense organs. However, it’s also true that, for all he says here, the prison might do the perceiving and convey the results to the soul. After all, he speaks of the cunning (*deinotêta*, 82e5) of the prison; and then, at 83d, he mentions beliefs the body has, which the soul in some cases endorses and adopts. Perhaps, then, the body also does the perceiving. However, Plato doesn’t say that the body, or some part of the body, perceives, any more than he says that the soul does so.

*If* the soul does the perceiving, perception isn’t at the first grade. However, merely saying that the soul perceives is compatible with perception’s being at either the second or third grade. It’s true that Plato says that, when we are housed in and dependent on the body, we will inevitably acquire some false beliefs, such as the belief that the corporeal is most real

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\(^{75}\) However, this isn’t explicitly said. Beere thinks the prison metaphor provides ‘[d]ecisive evidence’ ‘against the view that the body is a source of motivation independent of the soul’ (264). For he thinks that, according to the metaphor, ‘[t]he prisoner contributes to his own imprisonment the soul contributes to its own bodily imprisonment by desiring, but surely not by desiring wisdom; rather, by desiring food and drink and so on’ (sic.; 264). However, as Bailly notes in his reply to Beere, in saying that the soul collaborates in its imprisonment, Plato implies that it has a collaborator, viz. the body (292); and that leaves room for the body to have desires, which it can cause the soul to endorse. But even if the body isn’t ‘a source of motivation independent of the soul’, it might perceive; for it’s not clear that perception (as opposed to desire) is in itself a source of motivation. (This doesn’t count against Beere: his focus is on desire; he doesn’t discuss perception.)
(83c). But he doesn’t say that perception has, or by itself issues in, these beliefs; perhaps we acquire them as a result of engaging in perception-dependent inquiry.

If, on the other hand, the body (or some part of the body) does the perceiving, it’s still unclear what grade perception is at. Prisons and their apertures lack cognition; so we might infer that perception also does so, in which case it is at the first grade. However, as we’ve seen, Plato speaks of the cunning of the prison and of beliefs the body has, which suggests that he accords the body cognitive powers. Perhaps, then, even if the body perceives, perception is at the second or third grade. One might infer that if the body perceives, and is cunning and has beliefs, perception is at the third grade. But that would be a rash inference: for, again, Plato doesn’t say that perception is or includes belief. For all he says, the body might perceive, where perception is at the first or second grade, and that, in turn, causes the body to acquire certain beliefs. Perception is one thing, belief another.

So far as I can tell, then, the prison metaphor doesn’t allow us to know what grade Plato takes perception to be at. Like other passages we’ve looked at, it’s indeterminate on that point.76

At 99d4-100a3, Plato writes:77

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76 Burnyeat notes that in addition to using the prison metaphor, Plato also speaks of using (chrêsthai, 83a7) the senses; the first, he says, suggests a spatial sense, whereas the second suggests instrumentality. Evidently, he says, ‘Plato feels no tension between the spatial and the instrumental language. Nor indeed is there any reason why he should, since an aperture can perfectly well be used as a means by anything that can use means at all’ (‘Grammar’, 41). While I agree that Plato speaks both of using the senses and of doing something through a prison, and that Plato rightly feels no tension between these two ways of speaking, he does so to illustrate perception-dependent inquiry, not, as Burnyeat seems to think, perception. Though Burnyeat rightly emphasizes that Tht. 184-6 distinguishes between considering through the senses and perceiving through them, he doesn’t seem to think that the Phaedo also draws this distinction. Perhaps that’s why, or one reason that, he thinks the dialogue takes perception to be a rival judgment-maker to reason. On the other hand, he suggests that in the prison metaphor the apertures are the senses, which we perceive through. That seems to align it with the view he takes Plato to hold in Tht. 184-6, on which perception makes no judgments at all since it is at the second grade.

77 Ἐδοξεὶ τοῖνυν μοι, ἣ δ᾽ ὡς, μετὰ ταῦτα, ἐπειδή ἀπειρήκη τὰ ὄντα σκοπῶν, δεῖν εὐλαβηθῆναι μὴ πάθοιμι ἔπερ οimore τὸν ἥλιον ἐκλείποντα θεωροῦντες καὶ σκοπούμενοι πάσχουσιν· διαφθείρονται γὰρ που ἔνιοι τὰ ὄμματα, ἐὰν μὴ ἔν ὑδάτι ἢ [99e] τινὶ τοιούτῳ σκοπῶνται τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ. Τοιούτων τι καὶ ἐγὼ δενοῆθην, καὶ ἐδείσα μὴ παντάπασι τὴν ψυχὴν τυφλωθῆναι βλέπων πρὸς τὰ πάραμα τοῖς ὄμμασι καὶ ἐκάστη τῶν αἰσθήσεων ἐπιχεὶρον ἀπειρήθη οὖν αὐτῶν. Ἐδοξεὶ δ᾽ ἦν ὁ δὲ χρῆναι εἰς τοὺς λόγους καταφιγόντας ἐν ἐκάιόις σκοπεῖν τῶν ὄντων τὴν ἀλήθειαν. Ἐδοξεὶ δὴ μὲν οὖν ὁ εἰκάζω τρόπον [100a] τινα ὡκ ἔοικεν· οὐ γὰρ πάντα συγχωρόν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις σκοπούμενον τὰ ὄντα ἐν εἰκόσι μᾶλλον σκοπεῖν ἢ τὸν ἐν [τοῖς] ἔργοις.
Well, then, he said, after these things it seemed to me that, since I’d wearied of considering the things that are (ta onta skopôn), I must be careful lest what happens to those who view and consider (theôrountes kai skopoumenoi) the sun during an eclipse should happen to me. For some of them, I take it, ruin their eyes unless they consider its image in water or something of that sort. And I had a similar thought, and I was afraid I might be completely blinded in my soul if I looked at things with my eyes and tried to get hold of them with each of my senses. So I thought I should take refuge in logoi and consider the truth about the things that are in them. Now perhaps my comparison is inaccurate in some respect. For I don’t altogether accept that someone who considers the things that are in logoi is considering them in images any more than is the one who considers them en ergois.

Socrates says he’d gotten tired of his initial way of inquiring into the things that are (ta onta skopôn). But he then found a new way of inquiring into them, which he proceeds to lay out. He initially uses an analogy to explain the contrast between the abandoned way of inquiry and the new and more satisfactory way. There are, he says, two ways in which one might view (theôrountes, 99d6) and consider (skopoumenoi, 99d6) the sun in an eclipse: one involves looking at it directly; the other involves considering (skopôntai, 99e1) an image of it in water (99d7-e1). If one does the first, one is likely to ruin one’s eyes; doing the second is safer. Similarly, he suggests, he might be completely blinded in his soul if he looked at things with his eyes and tried to get hold of them with each of his senses (blepôn pros ta pragmata tois ommasi kai hekêtêi tôn aisthéseôn epicheirón hapteshai autôn, 99e3-4).

The old, abandoned method of inquiry is analogous to one that involves looking at the sun directly during an eclipse; the new and more satisfactory method is analogous to one that involves considering its image in water. Having laid out this analogy, however, he immediately qualifies it, saying that, contrary to what it suggests, someone who considers (skopein) things en logos (100a1) doesn’t consider them in images more than does someone who considers (skopein) them en ergois (100a2-3; in facts or in concrete).

78 As we’ve seen, Plato uses skopein and zêtein interchangeably. ta onta, here, are the things that are quite generally, not forms in particular.
79 Similarly, we’ve seen that in 79c Socrates says that engaging in perception-dependent inquiry makes him ‘confused and dizzy, as if drunk’.
80 There’s considerable dispute about how logoi is used here: for e.g. propositions, arguments, and/or theories. There’s also dispute about what propositions, arguments, and/or theories are at issue. For some discussion, see Gallop, Plato: Phaedo, note ad loc; and Y. Kanayama, ‘The Methodology of the Second Voyage and the Proof of the Soul’s Immortality in Plato’s Phaedo’, Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy 18 (2000), 41-100.
One might think that the rejected route is just perception and that the new route is any route that considers any old proposition in any old way; and one might then infer that perception is non-propositional and so is at the first or second grade. However, Plato makes it clear that both routes involve considering. He is contrasting two ways of investigating the truth about the things that are (skopein tôn ontón alêtheian, 99e5-6): one that’s constrained by perception, and one that isn’t. Nor does the second route include all propositions; it includes just propositions that mention forms (though these propositions might, in addition, also mention other things: the propositions need not mention only forms, though they do need to mention forms). For, to illustrate what he means in speaking of considering things en logois, Socrates says that he proceeded by ‘hypothesizing on each occasion the logos I judge strongest’ (100a3-4). He then hypothesizes that there are forms (100b5-7). He then goes on to propose two aitiae, the so-called safe and clever aitiae; both of them, as well as the ensuing final argument for immortality, mention forms.

[‘Methodology’]. I’ll speak of propositions, though for my purposes I don’t think anything hangs on that. Another dispute is whether Plato means to suggest that studying things en logois involves studying them in images. For the view that he does mean to suggest this, see Gallop, Plato: Phaedo, 178; Bostock, Plato’s Phaedo, 158. For the view that he doesn’t mean to do so, see Kanayama, ‘Methodology’, 47. I incline to the latter view, but I don’t think anything I say here hangs on this.

81 This interpretation seems to be suggested by V. Politis, who says that Plato is here warning against ‘seeking knowledge by relying simply on sense perception and the kind of direct acquaintance associated with sense perception; it is such knowledge that is set against knowledge in and through logos. Plato is assuming that sense perception as such does not involve logos; it is not, as we might say, propositional’ (The Structure of Enquiry in Plato’s Early Dialogues [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015], 72). He goes on to say that if Plato anywhere defends the view that perception is not propositional, it’s in Tht. 184-7 and 189e-190a. (As we’ve seen (n. 50), even if perception isn’t propositional, it would still be at the third grade if it is conceptual and if Plato thinks one can grasp some concepts without grasping any propositions.) Politis’ interpretation might also be favoured by H. Benson, who says that the route Plato here rejects is ‘roughly, simple, unmediated sense perception’ (Clitophon’s Challenge: Dialectic in Plato’s Meno, Phaedo, and Republic [New York: Oxford University Press, 2015][Clitophon’s Challenge], 109); but he doesn’t elaborate on what ‘simple, unmediated sense perception’ is.

82 This leaves open the possibility that both methods use both perception and logos, but do so in different ways. For this view, see Kanayama, ‘Methodology’, esp. 43-51. He emphasizes that Socrates says he took refuge (kataphugonta, 99e5) in logos; and he takes the point to be that in the new method, logos reached by intellect have priority over the senses, whereas in the rejected route, perception is the standard. Both routes use logos as well as perception (the old failed route always does so; the new route sometimes but not always does so), but they accord different priorities to the two.

83 There’s dispute about whether the logos at issue is just that there are forms, or also that forms are aitiae. For my purposes, the crucial point is just that the relevant logos are about forms, and so not all propositions. Though I think that all the relevant logos are about forms,
Should we infer that perception is at the third grade? For isn’t Plato’s point that perception does the considering or inquiring and thereby issues in some propositions? However, I think Plato is again contrasting perception-dependent and intellectual inquiry. He opens the passage by mentioning ways of considering, or inquiring into, things; and he says that one will be blinded in one’s soul if one does so in a way that involves looking at things with one’s eyes or trying to get hold of them with one’s other senses. ‘Looking at things with one’s eyes’ seems to indicate perception; but ‘trying to get hold of things with one’s senses’ seems to indicate perception-dependent inquiry. We perceive things, and then at least some of them might be about more than forms. That would be so if the relevant logoi include instances of the so-called safe and clever aitiai. For example, the latter takes snow to be part of the explanation of why some things are cold; but snow is a physical stuff. Kanayama doubts that the relevant logoi must all centrally involve forms. In his view, ‘[t]he only requirement for the logoi method is to take refuge in logoi, whatever logoi are, in order to guard oneself against the dreadful power of the sense and to rely on intellect as the final arbiter’ (‘Methodology’, 51). Though I’m not inclined to agree with this interpretation, it is compatible with one of my main points, which is that the rejected route doesn’t consist just of non-propositional perception.

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84 R. Hackforth agrees, saying that ‘[w]hat Socrates is talking about is not the mere looking at things, but the investigation of or inquiry into things by the method of looking at them. The error of the phusikoi lay not in their observation of phenomena but in their assumption that sense-perception is the right basis for science’ (Plato’s Phaedo [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955], 136-7). Similarly, Gallop asks: ‘Why did Socrates fear that by using his senses to examine [things] he might altogether “blind his soul”? Is he harking back to his earlier, ironical suggestion that scientific studies had “blinded” him (96c5)? Or is he hinting that such studies, if continued, would have unfitted him for conceptual thought?’ (Plato: Phaedo, 177). He doesn’t suggest that the senses themselves do the studying; rather, we use the senses to examine and study things, where that goes beyond just perceiving. According to Rowe, Socrates’ ‘problems were not, of course, caused by trying to “grasp” things by looking at them (as the metaphor of “blinding” could suggest) but by the use of sensory observation in general’ (Phaedo, 239-240) - though I’m not sure whether he means just that the sense of sight isn’t the only sense that’s at issue, or that observation in a sense that goes beyond just perceiving is at issue. Bostock says that the old method relies on the senses (Plato’s Phaedo, 158), which falls short of saying that they do the inquiring.

Benson seems to disagree with my suggestion that Plato is contrasting two methods of inquiry, for he says that we need to distinguish methods of inquiry from sorts of aitiai, and that Plato is here concerned just with the latter (Clitophon’s Challenge, 193 n. 21). I agree that this is an important distinction, but I think both methods of inquiry and sorts of aitiai are at issue here: different sorts of inquiry lead one to favor different aitiai. However, Benson is right to say that Plato doesn’t spell out exactly how the failed method of inquiry works.

85 See also Hackforth, Plato’s Phaedo, 136. At 99d6, Plato talks about what happens to those who theôrountes kai skopoumenoi the sun during an eclipse. I’m not sure whether theôrein indicates perceiving, and skopein perception-dependent inquiry; or whether they both indicate perception-dependent inquiry. I took theorein in 65e2 to indicate inquiry, which might incline one to think it’s used that way here too; but that need not be the case. Of course, even if Plato
try to figure out what they are like on that basis. Socrates does say that one looks at things with one’s eyes; and the use of the dative might lead one to infer that the eyes do the seeing. However, we’ve seen that we don’t need to interpret Plato’s use of the dative that way. Nor does Socrates explicitly say that the eyes do the seeing; he says that we look at things with the eyes. But even if the eyes do the seeing, it doesn’t follow that perception is at the first grade. Nor does it follow that they issue in propositions. We grasp, or formulate, propositions when, having perceived things, we try to get hold of them with the senses: that is, we try to understand them by using the senses. It’s true that Plato uses the dative here, but, as before, we need not infer that the senses themselves attempt to understand things. We attempt to do so. Plato’s point is that to the extent that perception constrains one’s inquiry, one will be blinded in one’s soul: one won’t understand how things are; one won’t acquire wisdom. For one can’t grasp any truths about forms through either perception or perception-dependent inquiry, yet doing so is necessary for achieving wisdom. However, even if perception can’t formulate the truths we need for wisdom, it doesn’t follow that it can’t issue in other truths. Nor does it follow that it can do so. Once again, a crucial passage is indeterminate about what grade perception is at.

5.

We’ve considered a variety of arguments for placing perception at one or another grade, and found them wanting. But perhaps that’s not surprising. For, in contrast to Tht. 184-6, the Phaedo doesn’t aim to provide a precise analysis of perception. Nonetheless, we can draw two tentative conclusions.

First, though there’s no knock-down argument for this, in discussing perception in the important epistemological contexts, Plato doesn’t seem to be concerned with the first grade of

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86 Hence if I’m right to say that perception-dependent inquiry is at issue here, Plato doesn’t always indicate that fact by using dia rather than the dative.

87 Cf. 96c5, where he says that his earlier way of inquiring ‘blinded’ him (this possible back reference is noted by Gallop, Plato: Phaedo, 177): that is, it blinded him in his soul, as he puts it at 99e2-3; it prevented him from ‘seeing’, i.e. grasping, the truth. Similarly, at 99b he speaks of those who failed to discover teleological causes as ‘groping about as if in the dark’, leading them to label as causes things that are not causes. As Gallop (citing Verdenius) notes (in textual note 61), Plato here uses the language of blind man’s buff, where one is blindfolded, then touches something but is liable to mislabel it: the fact that these people engage in perception-dependent inquiry led them to take mere necessary conditions to be true causes.
sensory response. But it’s more difficult to decide whether, in these contexts, he has the second or third grade in mind. That’s partly because, in addition to discussing perception, he also discusses perception-dependent inquiry, without making it clear exactly what each of them can do. In particular, it’s not clear whether perception does, or doesn’t, make judgments; Plato doesn’t seem committed either way. I noted at the outset that, according to Burnyeat, Tht. 184-6 denies that perception is a judgment-maker at all, whereas the Phaedo makes perception a rival-judgment maker to reason. On the view I’ve suggested, it’s not clear whether the Phaedo makes perception a judgment maker at all. It does, however, make perception-dependent inquiry a rival judgment-maker to reason. But that doesn’t clearly indicate a difference with Tht. 184-6.

Secondly, even if it’s not clear whether the Phaedo places perception at the second or third grade, it doesn’t follow that Plato is confused. For, again, in contrast to Tht. 184-6, the Phaedo doesn’t aim to isolate the purely perceptual. Plato’s main concern is to argue that neither perception nor perception-dependent inquiry can attain wisdom. For that purpose, he doesn’t need to say what belongs to perception, what to perception-dependent inquiry. As we’ve seen, in Tht. 184c Socrates says that ‘it isn’t usually a sign of ill breeding to be easy-going with words’ - though he adds that sometimes it is necessary, as it is in that context. But it’s not necessary in the Phaedo, given its different concern. It’s true that Tht. 184-6 recommends a way of speaking about perception that the Phaedo doesn’t adhere to. So Tht. 184-6 in effect makes a terminological criticism of the Phaedo; but it doesn’t follow that it also makes a substantive criticism. Even if it doesn’t do so, however, we should hesitate to say that the two contexts agree. It would be better to say that the Phaedo is uncommitted either way and that its main concerns lie elsewhere.

88 At least, that seems true of the passages I’ve explored here; but I haven’t discussed the theory of recollection. However, for the record, I believe the same is true of it.
89 However, the Phaedo is well aware that it’s often important to speak accurately: see e.g. 115e.
90 Thanks to Lesley Brown and Terry Irwin for many rewarding discussions of the questions considered here.