

Opinion vs. Knowledge (and a Proposed Resolution)¹

An explanation as to how this article came into existence is in order. The difference between knowledge and opinion has dogged us, it seems, from the beginning of recorded history. The current political climate gave inspiration to follow through on this subject, the original incentive being the Senate confirmation hearings in the summer of 2018 of now Justice Brett Kavanaugh. During those contentious hearings various people expressed themselves, pro or con as to Kavanaugh's suitability for the office. In addition to this we had the media attempting to read into what each person was saying, one outlet trying to outdo the other as to who would get the upper hand. The winner would, of course, receive the highest ratings. In the midst of all this turmoil, it appeared that the truth had gotten lost in the shuffle even though everyone was clamoring for it. As for the rest of us attempting to make heads or tails of the proceedings, good luck. We came away more confused than when we tuned in.

Anyone familiar with ancient Athens couldn't help but draw a remarkably eerie parallel between then and now. Who couldn't but think of Socrates badgering everyone he met as to how opinion differs from the truth? To modify a popular saying relative to Jesus, "What would Socrates do?" That's the million dollar question.²

So the Kavanaugh hearings provided an impetus to examine the nature of opinion versus the truth. We learned one lesson (among many): no solid conclusion was reached. Each side took its own opinion as fact (truth) backed up with lots of hidden and not so hidden agendas at play behind the scenes. There was, however, a silver lining. We as witnesses beheld a real life drama where opinions were brought to bear on a supposed distant event as well as on the principle characters. It seems that most opinions, like our own, were geared toward achieving a particular end. All in all, we came away with a deep dissatisfaction at the entire process. Again, it was easy to imagine the ancient Athenians walking aware from the *agora* or public space after having witnessed a political debate. Chances are high that they came away more confused than informed.

1 The subtitle in parentheses is deliberate, indicative of where this article ends up. That turns out, surprisingly enough, to be an account of Satan's role in the first chapter of the Book of Job. He isn't the Satan we think of with horns, etc., but in the original sense as accuser or a prosecutor. In sum, we begin with Socrates as a midwife and end up with Satan as an accuser. Both share a parallel insofar as they are outsiders and essential to keep things interesting. Without them life would be quite boring.

2 As for WWSD, several passages pertaining to opinion and knowledge are presented with notations on the text. By no means is this complete or pretends to resolve what they're about. The notations accompanying them are intended simply to flesh out the passages and most likely lead to another article down the line.

We all know instinctively there's a distinction between opinion and knowledge even if we can't articulate it. If we allow this to gnaw at our conscience as we should, it's an incentive to cut through our innate wishy-washyness and get down to choosing the truth over opinion. While embarrassing to admit, we find it easier as pie to sway this way or that, and to do so at the slightest whim. Without realizing it, we cross from one opinion to the other and end up not realizing how we got to where we're at, where we might go from there, let alone comprehend what just happened. A certain impetuosity for resolving our uncertainty relative to an opinion versus knowledge is at play. The more we're aware of it the better off we are. Then there's the risk of being prone to tell a lie. If we don't go that route, another option is to exaggerate, a natural way of self-expression. All these variations hang around the border of truth but prefer to lean more toward the side of opinion. In the long run they run the risk of amounting to "fake news," to borrow a popular current expression.

So the Big Question is, can we avoid this state characterized by so much restlessness? Closely allied to it, does a place exist apart from opinion and knowledge, uncontaminated by the vagaries common to our human condition? What is it, where can we find it, and how can we access it once (or better, if) found? Our pursuit of this alternative may be a fanciful proposition, like chasing a phantom. At the same time we're fairly certain some alternative out there exists, but we lack the means to access it. Here is where Picasso's words act as a guide. When asked about the source of his creativity, he responded "When I paint, my object is to show what I have *found* and *not* what I am *looking for*" (italicized words are mine). Picasso is quoted because it's in line with this article, to discuss an alternative which tends toward finding, not seeking, a distinction rather subtle and overlooked easily. It'd be great to jump right in and come up with a correct alternative. The choice will turn out to be one most people wouldn't consider. However, that will come later. Right now we're concerned with checking out any possibilities of getting beyond the conundrum just described as pertinent to the Kavanaugh hearings. After all, they are symptomatic of that mental dualism or struggle which holds everyone tight in its grip.

In a desire to put forward an alternative to opinion and knowledge, a whole bunch of insights comes rushing in which requires sorting them out. This fact-finding process can clog our heads, not knowing where to begin. Furthermore, we can get all tightened up mentally, afraid to take the wrong step or any step at all. In other words, the natural flow of allowing insights to express themselves brings on paralysis. To get beyond this, we require a different kind of vetting process. It involves sitting quietly for a moment after we've pondered over something, resting in it. Sounds easy but quite another thing to put into practice. To actually do it is more difficult than

following a daily exercise routine. You don't want to bother but once you do and come out of it, you feel far better than when you started.

This withdrawal has the almost magical effect of opening shut doors. It's right before us but remains hidden; discreet may be more like it³. And so a good way to begin is to examine personal experience with regard to opinion and knowledge while avoiding the temptation to look elsewhere. The process can be awkward because we discover wherein lay our prejudices and how they color our perceptions. Then another temptation rears its head. It concerns being hesitant about our own lack of skill, in sum, a kind of inferiority complex. However, cultivation of those bouts of silent withdrawal primes us for what Socrates is fond of doing. That consists in *anamnesis* or recollection which is far more than recalling the past. Later on *anamnesis* may tie in with the option we're looking for that gets beyond opinion and knowledge though certainly it ties in with knowledge.

While making the distinction between opinion and knowledge can be difficult to lay hold of, almost always we start off with the former which is marked by personal preferences. Sometimes there comes to mind the adjective "uninformed" prefaced to it, a sign that we just might be ignorant as well as lazy, allowing the two to build up and harden into prejudices. As for opinion pure and simple, the Greek noun is *doxa* alternately as notion or judgment as well as good repute, glory. It derives from the verb *dokeo*, to think, suppose, imagine, entertain an opinion. Another definition is to seem, the notion of which is worth pursuing when it rubs up against knowledge as a reflective or pseudo-knowledge. In this light opinion tends toward the appearance of truth but is prone to making a lot of detours. Also the fact that distractions aren't far off whereas the satisfaction we take in genuine knowledge precludes them to large extent.

As for knowledge, *episteme* is one of the terms Plato favors. Its meaning acquaintance with a matter, as well as skill which differs from *techne* (art, cunning, craft). It derives from *epistamai*, literally to stand-upon which connotes having a bird's eye view of things...not just looking from a high vantage point but of remaining, of standing (*histemi*) there permanently. Furthermore, *episteme* and *anamnesis* are related. To know (upon, *epi-*) is to have direct access to our essential nature, *anamnesis*. And this doesn't seem far removed from the Judaeo-Christian insight of being made in the divine image and likeness.

In order to clarify the difference between *doxa* and *episteme*, several excerpts from the **Dialogues** are presented as a representative sampling. The first three passages are

3 Again, refer to Picasso just above, his emphasis upon finding.

followed by a re-phrasing intended to get more into what's being said. In other words, they're glorified notations. The remaining ones simply have the inserted Greek words with definitions and some brief explanations. So let's start with the **Cratylus**.

Although this passage deals with the difference between *doxa* and *epistme*, it speaks of knowledge as *to eidenai* (*eido*: to perceive, behold):⁴

Doxa is either derived from *dioxis* [pursuit], and expresses the march of the soul in the pursuit of knowledge or from the shooting of a bow [*toxon*]; the latter is more likely and is confirmed by *oiesis* [thinking] which is only *oisis* [moving] and implies the movement of the soul to the essential nature of each thing—just as *boule* [counsel] has to do with shooting [*bole*]; and *boulesthai* [to wish] combines the notion of aiming and deliberating—all these words seem to follow *doxa*, and all involve the idea of shooting, just as *aboulia*, absence of counsel, on the other hand, is a mishap or missing or mistaking of the mark, or aim or proposal or object. 420 b-c ⁵

A rough outline of the above:

Here *doxa* comes [*eponomazo*: to apply as a name] in two guises: march of the soul pursuing [*dioko*] knowledge [*to eidenai*] or from the shooting of a bow. Socrates favors the latter because it conforms [*sumphoneo*: to sound together] to thinking [*oiesis*: opinion or notion, especially a vague or false one] which is movement [*oisis*] of the soul to the essential nature [*hoios*: such as & *ton onton* or of beings] of each thing [*pragma*: deed, act, transaction]. Such is the similarity to counsel [*boule*] which deals with shooting [*bole*]: to wish [*boulesthai*] contains [*ephiemi*: literally, to send upon] the notion [*semaino*: to give a sign] of aiming and deliberating [*boule & bouleuesthai*]. Such words seem [*phaino*: to bring to light, to appear] to follow *doxa* because they have the idea [*apeikasma*] of shooting. On the other hand, absence of counsel [*aboulia*] is a missing of the mark or target as when someone doesn't hit the target or doesn't get what he wants.

As for the essence of this passage, it contains a lot of movement which boils down to *doxa* resembling an arrow in motion. This means the shooter had tried his best to hit the target; his intention is good which is important. Nevertheless, there's the ever present danger that the arrow will go off course and not reach its intended goal. Such is the case with *doxa*. All this implies that a steady hand is required...another means of reaching the target instead of *doxa*. That steadiness of hand or of mind may be attributed to *episteme*.

4 Speaking of opinion, *doxa*...the excerpts chosen reveal a certain "opinion" as to their value which is personal. While true, it's good to avoid any hyper-critical self-evaluation, else paralysis would set in.

5 Translation by Benjamin Jowett.

Next is a passage from the **Meno** which gets right to the point:

For true [*alethes*] opinions, as long as they remain [*parameno*, to remain beside], are a fine [*kalos*: beautiful] thing and all they do is good [*ergazomai & agathos*], but they are not willing [*thelo*] to remain long, and they escape [*drapeteuo*: to run away from] from a man's mind [*psuche*: soul], so that they are not worth [*axios*: deserved] much until one ties them down [*deo*] by giving an account [*aitia*: cause] of the reason [*logismos*: reckoning, argument] why. 98 a

Here *doxa* is presented as true and are fine or *kalos* (often as beautiful) while remaining-beside [suggestive of lingering]. This adjective is suggestive of admiration as well as imitation as far as the person with such a *doxa* compared with a person with a *doxa*, plain and simple. i.e., *kalos* is a refinement of *doxa*. Instead of lingering-beside [*para-*] which they do on their own volition [*thelo*], they prefer to run away from one's *psuche* or soul/mind. This tendency of *doxa* not to be tied down by one's *psuche*, despite being true, makes them more or less undeserving [that is, not being *axios* or worth] until they are bound [*deo*]. Once so nailed down, an account [*logismos*] can be given.

The next excerpt from the **Phaedo** sets opinion against reason which lacks insertion of transliterated Greek words but expanded upon by the running commentary afterwards:

This is how the soul of a philosopher would reason: it would not think that while philosophy must free it, it should while being freed surrender itself to pleasures and pains and imprison itself again, thus laboring in vain like Penelope at her web. The soul of the philosopher achieves a calm from such emotions; it follows reason and ever stays with it contemplating the true, the divine which is not the object of opinion. Nurtured by this, it believes that one should live in this manner as long as one is alive and, after death, arrive at what is akin and of the same kind and escape from human evils. 84 b

The activity of reasoning [*logizomai*: to count, calculate, reckon] proper to the *psuche* or soul of a *philosophos* is the topic of discussion, that is, one who loves [*phileo*: to show affection] wisdom [*sophia*, also as well as sound judgment, acquaintance with]. This type of soul wouldn't ask *philosophia* to release [*luo*: to loosen bounds or bands] her in order to again experience pleasure and pain. This resembles Penelope ⁶ or the

6 Wife of Odysseus who was beset by suitors during his extended absence. She promised to marry one of them after having completed a shroud for her father-in-law. So to ward off

philosopher's *psuche* which remains calm [*paraskeuazo*: to prepare for oneself & *galene*: stillness]. Furthermore, always it follows [*epo*: to stay on the track of] reason [*logismos*] and contemplates [*theaomai*: to view as a spectator] the true and the divine [*to alethes* & *to theion*] which aren't the object of passion [*adoxastos*: unexpected, not the object of opinion]. Being so nurtured [*trepho*: to bring up, to increase], it believes [*oiomai*: to think, suppose] one should live [*teleutao*: to complete, to finish with the preposition *eis* or into] like this. After death, this soul will attain [*aphikneomai*: to come into, to attain] that which is akin and of the same kind [*suggenes*: inborn, congenital & to *toiouton*: such as this] to itself. Such is the escape [*apallasso*: to set free, to deliver] from evil [*kakos*].

Next is the **Sophist** with inserted Greek words and notations:

Visitor: They cross-examine [*dieterao*: to ask constantly] someone when he thinks [*oiomai*: to suppose] he's saying something though he's saying nothing. Then, since his opinions will vary [*planao*: to wander] inconsistently [*rhadios*: lightly, readily], these people will easily scrutinize [*exetazo*: to examine well or from, *ex-*] them. They collect his opinions together [*sunago*] during the discussion, put them side by side [*para* & *allellos*], and show [*epideiknumai*: to display upon, *epi-*] that they conflict with each other [*enantios*: opposite] at the same time on the same subjects in relation to the same things and in the same respects. The people who are being examined see [*horao*: to have the capacity for sight] this, get angry [*chalepaino*: to be violent, savage] at themselves, and become calmer [*hemerao*: to tame, subdue, civilize] toward others. They lose [*apallasso*: to set free, deliver] their inflated and rigid beliefs [*doxa* modified by *megalos* & *skleros*: great and harsh] about themselves that way, and no loss is pleasanter [*hedus*: sweet] to hear or has a more lasting effect [*pascho*: to have something happen & *bebaios*: firm, steady] on them. Doctors who work on the body think [*nomizo*: to hold as a custom, usage] it can't benefit [*apolauo*: to have the benefit] from any food that's offered to it until what's interfering [*empodizo*: to put the feet in bonds] with it from inside is removed [*ekballo*: to cast out]. The people who cleanse the soul, my young friend, likewise think [*dianoeo*: to have in or through mind, *dia-*] the soul, too, won't get any advantage [*onesis*: advantage, luck] from any learning [*mathema*: that which is learned] that's offered to [*prosphero*: to bring forward] it until someone shames [*aischune*: shame with *eis* or into & *kathistemi*: to bring into a certain state] it by refuting [*elegcho*: to examine, question, accuse] it, removes [*exaireo*: to bring to naught, to bring out] the opinions that interfere with [*empodios*: literally, at one's feet] learning [*mathema*], and exhibits [*apophaino*: to make know, to declare] it cleansed [*katharos*: pure], believing [*hegeomai*: to be before,

these suitors, each day Penelope unraveled the shroud.

to think fit, to deem] that it knows [*eido*: to see, perceive, to behold] only those things that it does know, and nothing more.

Theaetetus: That's the best [*agathos*] and most healthy-minded [*sophron*: of sound mind, temperate] way to be.

Visitor: For all these reasons, Theaetetus, we have to say that refutation [*elegchos*: cross-examination, testing] is the principal and most important kind of cleansing [*kathasis*]. 230 b-d

As for the **Meno**, consider the following three passages:

#1 Socrates: If then, during the time [*chronos*: implies conventional time compared with pre-existence] he exists and is not a human being [*anthropos*] he will have true opinions which, when stirred by questioning [*epeyeiro*: to rouse, wake up or upon, *epi-* & *erotesis*], become knowledge [*episteme*: acquaintance, skill, understanding], will not his soul have learned [*manthano*: to understand] during all time [*chronos*]? For it is clear that during all time he exists, either as a man or not.—So it seems.

Socrates: Then if the truth about reality [*aletheia* & *ton onton*: of beings] is always in our soul, the soul would be immortal [*athanatos*] so that you should always confidently [*tharaso*: to be of good courage] try [*epicheireo*: to put one's hand upon] to seek out and recollect [*zeteo* & *anamimnesko*: to remind, to mention] what you do not know [*ephistemi*: to set, to put upon, to call attention to] at present—that is, what you do not recollect [*mimnesko*: without *ana-*, generally as upon]? 86 b

#2 Socrates: What if someone had had a correct opinion [*doxazo*: verb of *doxa* & *orthos* or rightly] as to which was the way but had not gone there nor indeed had knowledge [*epistemi*: literally, to stand upon; cf. reference earlier] of it, would he not also lead correctly [*hegeomai*: to conduct, to be first & *orthos*]?—Certainly.

Socrates: And as long as he has the right [*orthos*: straight] opinion about that of which the other has knowledge [*episteme*], he will not be a worse guide [*hegmon*: one who shows the way] than the one who knows [*oiomai*: to think, to suppose], as he has a true opinion, though not knowledge [*phroneo*: to have understanding, to be prudent]. —In no way worse.

Socrates: So true opinion [*alethes*] is in no way a worse guide [*hegemon*] to correct action [*orthotes*: upright & *praxis*: transaction, business] than knowledge [*phronesis*: purpose, intention]. It is this that we omitted [*paraleipo*: to leave beside] in our investigation [*skepsis*: viewing, perception] of the nature of virtue [*arete*: the best of anything], when we said that only knowledge [*phronesis*] can lead to correct action [*prasso*: to effect & *orthos*], for true [*alethes*] opinion can do so also.—So it seems.

Socrates: So correct [*alethes*: true] opinion is no less useful [*ophelimos*: beneficial] than knowledge [*episteme*]?

Meno: Yes, to this extent, Socrates. But the man who has knowledge [*episteme*] will always succeed [*epitugchano*: to hit the mark, to fall upon], whereas he who has true [*orthos*] opinion will only succeed [*tugchano*: without the *epi*- or upon] at times. 97 b-c

#3 For true opinions [*alethes*], as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all they do is good [*ergazomai* & *agathos*], but they are not willing to remain long [*parameno* or to remain beside & *chronos*], and they escape from a man's mind [*drapeteuo*: to run away & *psuche*], so that they are not worth [*axios*] much until one ties them down by [giving] an account [*aitia*: cause] of the reason why [*logismos*]. And that, Meno, my friend, is recollection [*anamnesis*: the preposition *ana*- suggests upon-ness], as we previously agreed [*homologeoo*: to speak together, to grant]. After they are tied down [*deo*: to bind], in the first place they become knowledge [*episteme*], and then they remain in place [*monimos*: stable]. That is why knowledge [*episteme*] is prized higher [*timios*: held in honor, worthy] than correct [*orthos*] opinion, and knowledge differs from [*diaphero*: to carry from one to another] correct opinion in being tied down [*desmos*: bound]. 98 a

Two excerpts from **Phaedrus**, the first mentioning opinion after a long, climactic passage:

#1 Now that is the life [*bios*: a course or manner of living] of the gods. As for the other souls [*psuche*], one that follows [*epo*: to follow in the company of] a god most closely [*ariostos*: best, often in the moral sense], making itself [*eikazo*: to represent by a likeness] most like that god, raises the head of its charioteer up to the place outside [*eis ton exo*: literally, into the outside] and is carried around [*sumperiphero*: *sum*- as with and *peri*- as around] in the circular motion [*periphora*: circuit, revolution] with the others. Although distracted [*thorubeo*: to make a noise or uproar, to be thrown into confusion] by the horses, this soul does have a view [*kathorao*: to look down, *kata*-] of Reality [*ta onta*: that which is], just barely [*mogis*: with toil and pain, hardly]. Another soul rises at one time and falls at another, and because its horses pull it violently [*biazo*: to overpower by force] in different directions, it sees [*eido*: to see, perceive, behold] some real things and misses others. The remaining souls are all eagerly straining to keep up [*glixomai*: to cling to, to long for & *epo*: to follow in the company of], but are unable to rise; they are carried around [*sumperiphero*] below the surface, trampling and striking one another as each tries [*peirao*: to make trial of, to attempt] to get ahead of the others. The result is terribly noisy, very sweaty, and disorderly. Many souls are crippled by [*choleuo*: to become lame, to limp] the incompetence [*kakia*: evil, wickedness] of the drivers, and many wings break much of their plumage. After so much trouble [*ponos*: toil, distress], they all leave [*aperchomai*] without having seen reality [*theaomai*: to gaze, to behold & *tou ontos*], uninitiated

[*ateles*: not brought to an end, unaccomplished], and when they have gone they will depend on what they think [*chrao*: to proclaim, to declare] is nourishment—their own opinions [*doxastes*: one who forms opinions]. 248 a-b

#2 Therefore, my friend, the art [*techne*: cunning, skill, craft, trade] of a speaker who doesn't know [*eido*: to see, to perceive] the truth [*aletheia*] and chases [*thereuo*: to hunt after] opinions instead is likely to be a ridiculous thing [*geloios*: causing laughter]—not an art at all [*atechnos*: lacking *techne* & *parecho*: to supply, to furnish, to yield]! 262 c

All excerpts are wonderful in and by themselves. However, #1 of the **Phaedrus** stands out in a singular way as a summary showing the result of holding an opinion. However, its counterpart *episteme* (knowledge) isn't mentioned but nonetheless present by reason of a conspicuous absence. Keeping in mind its definition as derived from *epistamai* (*histemi* prefaced with *epi-*, literally to stand-upon), it connotes a bird's eye view of things. On the other hand, *doxa* lacks this ability despite occasions when it expresses one's best intention. Thus taking *epi-istemi* in the literal sense means it partakes of a different order, one broader and more comprehensive...as you'd get from a bird's eye view of things just mentioned.

All this is well and good. Still, a reading of these passages, let alone many others, leaves a desire to insert a further insight, the nature of which hopefully becomes clearer shortly. So where can we look for the as yet to be identified candidate after we've examined opinion and knowledge? A passage from the **Theaetetus** ⁷ comes to mind. Although it doesn't pertain to *doxa* and *episteme*, it contains what the sub-title to this essay hopes to get at, namely, a resolution for stepping beyond all that has been said while at the same time including it. And now for the **Theaetetus** quote which is a bit extended but very necessary:⁸

Socrates: They say it was Artemis who was responsible [*aitia*: cause] for this custom; it was because she who undertook the patronage of childbirth [*loxeia*] was herself childless [*alochos*]. She didn't, it's true, entrust [*didomai*: to give] the duties of midwifery [*maieuomai*] to barren women [*steriphos*: also as firm solid] because human nature [*phusis*] is too weak [*asthenes*: alpha privative; *sthenos*: strength, might] to acquire [*lambano*: to take, receive] skill [*techne*: also as craft] where it has no

7 References from this book pertain to a midwife and found in an article posted on this homepage entitled *Speech of Diotima, Myth or Er and Midwife*.

8 Here as with other excerpts that are posted, it's helpful to be attentive to the prepositions either in/by themselves or prefixed to nouns and verbs. They give a special insight into what's going on which otherwise would go unnoticed.

experience [*apeiros*: alpha privative; without trial or *peira*, unacquainted]. But she assigned [*prostasso*: the preposition *pros-* or direction towards-which prefaced to *tasso*, to arrange, put in order] the task to those who have become incapable of child-bearing [*atokos*: alpha privative; without *tokos* or bringing forth] through age [*helikia*: time of life, prime of life]—honoring [*timao*] their likeness [*homoiotos*: resemblance] to herself. 149 c

Socrates: So the work [*tosoutos*: so large, great, far] of the midwives [*maia*] is a highly important one; but it is not so important as my own performance [*drama*: deed, act]. And for this reason, that there is [*proseimi*: the preposition *pros-* or direction towards-which prefaced to *eimi*] not in midwifery the further complication, that the patients are sometimes [*eniote*: at times] delivered of [*tikto*] phantoms and sometimes of realities [*eidolon* and *alethinos*: a phantom or something insubstantial plus that which is true], and that the two are hard [*rhadios*: easy] to distinguish [*diagignosko*: the preposition *dia-* or through prefaced to the verbal root to know; literally as to know-through]. If there were, then the midwife's greatest and noblest [*kallos*: fundamentally, as beautiful] function [*ergon*: occupation, the result of work] would be to distinguish [*krino*: to judge] the true from the false [*alethos* and *me*, the latter as not] offspring—don't you agree [*oiomai*]?

Theaetetus: Yes, I do.

Socrates: Now my art [*techne*] of midwifery is [*huparcho*] just like theirs in most respects. The difference [*diaphero*] is that I attend [*maieuomai*] men and not women, and that I watch over [*episkopeo*] the labor [*tikto*] of their souls [*psuche*], not of their bodies. And the most important thing [*dunatos*] about my art [*techne*] is the ability to apply all possible tests [*biazo*] to the offspring, to determine whether the young mind [*dianoia*] is being delivered of [*apotikto*: cf. *tikto* just above] a phantom [*eidolon*], that is, an error, or a fertile truth [*gonimos* & *aletheia*]. For one thing which I have in common with [*huparcho*] the ordinary midwives is that I myself am barren of wisdom [*agonos* & *sophia*]. The common reproach [*oneidizo*] against me is that I am always asking questions of other people but never express [*apophaino*] my own views about anything, because there is no wisdom [*sophos*] in me; and that is true enough. And the reason [*aitios*] of it is this, that God compels [*anagkazo*] me to attend [*maieuomai*] the travail of others, but has forbidden [*apokoluo*] me to procreate. So that I am not in any sense a wise man [*sophos*]; I cannot claim as the child of my own soul [*psuche*] any discovery [*heurema*] worth the name of wisdom. But with those who associate with [*suggignomai*] me it is different. At first some of them may give the impression [*phaino*] of being ignorant and stupid [*panu amathes*]; but as time goes on and our association [*sunousia*] continues, all whom God permits [*pareiko*] are seen to make progress [*epidido*]—a progress which is amazing [*thaumastos*] both to other people and

to themselves. And yet it is clear [*enarges*] that this is not due to anything they have learned [*manthano*] from me; it is that they discover [*heurisko*] within [*para*] themselves a multitude of beautiful things [*kalos*] which they bring forth into the light. But it is I, with God's help, who deliver [*maieia*] them of this offspring. And a proof [*delos*] of this may be seen in the many cases where people who did not realize [*agnoeo*] this fact took all the credit [*aitiaomai*] to themselves and thought [*kataphroneo*] that I was no good. They have then proceeded [*peitho*] to leave [*aperchomai*] me sooner than they should, either of their own accord or through the influence of others. 150 a-e

We can outline Socrates' task of *maieuomai* in the second part of the **Theaetetus** quote by abstracting the key Greek from the text ⁹. Despite the importance of such midwifing, we're concerned more with what happens to a person...a midwife...after he has performed his delivery and must get on with his own life. That comes closer to what we're seeking once he has assisted in the birth from opinion into knowledge. The text starts off with its definition as a *techne* which can be defined variously as art, skill, cunning of hand, method of making, handiwork:

- techne* posited as *huparcho*, literally as to begin under, *hupo*- here suggestive of support
- diaphero* or to differ (literally, to carry through, *dia*-) with regard to midwifery by Socrates who deals with men instead of women. A profession associated with women is transferred to men, if you will.
- maieuomai*: to attend or to cause delivery of a baby to take place
- epipiskopeo*: to watch over the birth of souls (*psuche*), *epi*- (upon) indicative of a close, intensive watch
- psuche*: soul, the conscious self or personality
- dunatos*: having the capacity to effect something, strong, mighty
- biazo* as applied to the newly born, this verb implying considerable force or vehemence and used with *techne*
- dianoia*: thought, intention, purpose; *noos* or mind prefaced with *dia*- or through...through-the-mind
- apotikto*: to be delivered of (*apo*-, from)
- eidolon*: an image or insubstantial form
- gonimos*: productive, genuine with *aletheia*: truth, reality
- huparcho*: as above
- agonos*: literally, not yet born with *sophia*, skill, sound judgment
- oneidizo*: to impute

9 This approach differs from the passages above where notations are inserted within the text itself. Consider it simply as a variation, nothing more.

-*apophaino*: to make known, to declare, *apo-* or from
 -*sophos*: adjective of *sophia*, wise
 -*aitios*: worthy, culpable
 -*anagkazo*: to force, to compel
 -*maieuomai*: as above
 -*apokoluo*: to hinder, to prevent
 -*sophos*: as above
 -*psuche*: as above
 -*heurema*: an invention
 -*suggignomai*: to hold converse with, *sug-*
 -*phaino*: to appear; cf. *apophaino* above
 -*panu amathes*: wholly without learning
 -*punousia*: a being with, *sun-*
 -*pareiko*: to permit, to allow, to give way
 -*epidido*: to give besides, to increase
 -*thaumasto*: *amazing*
 -*enarges*: visible, palpable
 -*manthano*: to learn
 -*heurisko*: to discover, to find with *para* as within; also as beside, in company with
kalos: beautiful, genuine, of fine quality
 -*maieia*: business of a midwife
 -*delos*: clear
 -*agnoeo*: not to perceive
 -*aitiaomai*: to charge, to accuse
 -*kataphroneo*: to think down upon
 -*peitho*: to persuade
 -*aperchomai*: to leave, *apo-* or from

So it appears that when speaking of a midwife and her ability to *maieuomai*¹⁰, Socrates is a kind of in between character: neither the mother, the father nor the child coming into the world. That makes him...well...odd, not fully part of society yet without him, they'd be significantly less persons endowed with *episteme* populating society. As for those he had assisted in bringing to birth, shortly after the passage above Socrates laments that many "have proceeded to leave me sooner than they should...after they have gone away from me they have resorted to harmful company" (150 e). This, of course, is what Israel's prophets complain about though being in a different tradition. In other words, human nature is universal.

10 Interestingly the Icelandic word for midwife is *ljósmóður*, literally "mother of light" ...one who brings into light.

At first you'd think this high mortality rate would be discouraging, yet it doesn't seem to phase the way Socrates comports himself. He more or less hangs around waiting for the opportunity to act as a midwife and does so by engaging passers-by in conversation. People recognize this detachment from results in Socrates, something that is left unsaid than explained. It's what distinguishes him from the Sophists and makes him attractive even though interlocutors can't nail it down. It simply is part of Socrates' character and is beyond explanation.

So getting back to being a midwife, the Greek term is *maia* which interestingly is the proper name Maia, mother of Hermes, a god associated with crossroads and even thievery. We could say that Hermes inherited from his mother the ability to be fluid in life and not be nailed down, preferring to move in the shadows. This shiftiness makes us uncomfortable, for being in the presence of someone like Hermes reveals our inability to be agile in mind. It has nothing to do with being smart as commonly understood. Clever may be more like it, another word with occasional shady implications. To counter this disreputable side we have Artemis whom Socrates says is responsible for having instituted women as midwives or those past the age of child bearing. And so these women aren't barren but have gone through the experience of childbirth.

So if you're a midwife—and by Socrates' own admission the track record of success is one step above abysmal—certainly you're not in it for the money, let alone fame. However, this doesn't deter Socrates in the least bit. Not only is he genuinely unfazed; he was constantly on the look out to perform his midwife duties wherever and whenever they're needed. An important distinction between the environment in which he operated and ours must be kept in mind. His was an essentially polytheistic one and contained a certain agnostic attitude toward the gods which has a modern echo. And so it turns out that society of that time isn't as far removed as ours as far as essentials goes.

Traditionally ours is a monotheistic environment and has been for some two thousand years. Although it arose from a polytheistic one, some people are pulled in that direction as through an almost built-in memory of it never faded from consciousness. The polytheistic one had more fluid boundaries with regard to religious worship and practice which makes it attractive. The monotheistic one tightened up these boundaries: worship of one God, yet it managed to squeeze in the Virgin Mary, saints and angels, devotion to which was popular. Such practices tended to diffuse emphasis upon one God up there with us down here. This tendency toward religious diffusiveness seems inevitable; there's something in the human spirit that can't take

monotheism for long, the Bible being filled with examples where prophets excoriated Israel constantly for worshipping alien gods. These prophets felt at home with one God yet lacked a certain sensitivity towards others who didn't. At least God himself sympathized, for despite constant backsliding, he's always there ready to forgive. The people knew this albeit in an indirect, imperfect way.

As we know, things have changed dramatically. Nevertheless, we can't get rid of such a long history overnight, for its influence will linger for a while. Given the way things change so quickly, this lingering may not be as long as we anticipate ¹¹. It may vanish in a generation or two and show signs of that even now. A secular environment simply isn't interested in the distinction between opinion and knowledge as already outlined. Even if the truth of a matter is presented clearly, it's taken as one thing alongside another thing, irrelevant and drowned out by an incessant flow of competing words. Such is relativism at work. What's truth for you isn't necessarily truth for me. It's a drill with which we're all familiar.

This new situation makes it so that the midwife's job is more difficult simply because boundaries between opinion and truth aren't as clear. If Socrates struggled mightily with sorting them out in his day, the thought of what we're up against now appears overwhelming. The so-called digital revolution contributes to this near paralysis of not knowing where to go and what to do. Mobile devices play a big role here, are ubiquitous and have the capacity to give us instantaneously information about anything, anywhere, anytime. In other words, they flood us with incessant information which in the long run amounts to distractions.

While a midwife might be overwhelmed and fearful of losing a job, an option does exist. Although things have gotten far more complex, discerning the difference between opinion and knowledge remains. That seems pretty much unchanging as things stand now, but who knows. The mere threat of it dissolving gives not so much to abandoning the project but of looking for a different approach. This new role is more in demand today because we've become so serious about everything under the sun. A way to undo this mental contraction would be especially welcome. That means looking in places where a substitute may arise. One parallel to the midwife's in between state—in between in the sense of not being a parent nor child—is a jokester who doesn't take boundaries that seriously.

More properly speaking, a jokester doesn't assist in giving birth like a midwife; in fact, he isn't the slightest concerned as to who holds an opinion compared to knowledge

¹¹The current environment is described often as post-modern. It's easy to modify this as being post-monotheistic.

and visa-versa. It's simply irrelevant to him. People know this, albeit partially because he's more or less a shady character whereas a midwife is someone who's hired and put to work largely by reason of good repute. So while a midwife assists in giving birth, a jokester simply may be on hand and watches ¹². He's there to abort the birthing process, always on the lookout to tripe up and sway the new-born from *episteme* into *doxa*. In other words, he's attentive to that difficult-to-discern fraction of a second when the newborn is in a kind of abeyance. When he sees that the occasion is right, he slips in, trips up the person, and before the new born (and midwife) know it, is well on the way to foster opinion and shun the more arduous task of seeking true knowledge. The jokester can live with an opinion-oriented person, not one who's knowledge-oriented. If he has tricked someone, he can sit back and watch the show, pure entertainment at our expense.

It could be said that we're well on the way into a post-monotheistic society, not just a secular one which now is pretty much in place. The very uncertainty over this experienced by most people is reason to be alarmed, but for a jokester it provides an idea state of affairs in which to flourish. Just about every other archetype cannot because they've been formed in a different environment that has passed so quickly we've hardly been aware of it. And so the jokester's preference for instability initially casts him in a more sinister tone, but that reveals how little we've adapted and need to adapt in order not just to survive but to flourish.

If this radical change is true, and if a jokester makes his home in it, where can we find a precedent? It pop out of thin air but must have some basis rooted in earlier traditions. One notable example is Satan in the Book of Job who makes his appearance along with the sons of God. We shouldn't be freaked out when hearing the name Satan which means adversary or prosecutor, an idea difficult to shake for many reasons. As for these sons, one gets the impression that all are pretty much innocent and towed the line. In a word, they were bland and lack-luster. One day God decided to summon them, giving no explicit reason for this assembly. As for the participants, where did they come from and what were they doing? Also the sons of God don't have a clear idea why the meeting was held, for it seems rather unusual. All we know is that they are presenting themselves, the verb being *yatsav*, to stand, be present, with the preposition *hal-* or literally "upon the Lord."

Note that the text is a bit fuzzy as to whether Satan was among the sons of God, for it reads "and Satan also came among them." *Betok* itself as "among" also means in

12 The image of a Cheshire cat comes to mind as its sits on a tree limb, fading in and out of view while leaving behind that wide grin which is both humorous and threatening. It's saying something like "catch me if you can."

the midst of. Satan's presence presented in this manner suggests he might be an outsider or even an outcast of sorts. Chances are that Satan came in late—deliberately so—in order to be noticed by all his confreres after they had presented themselves¹³. Such dubiousness reveals a lot about Satan's character as well as where this second part of the article is headed. It started off with Socrates as a midwife and jumped to talking about a jokester putting Satan in that role. It may not jibe with the biblical idea—in fact, it may be way off—but the two are juxtaposed as a way of finding a new archetype to guide us in this post-monotheistic world. Who knows. It may or may not work, but striving to delineate some ideas in this regard is exciting.

As for Satan's uniqueness, God chooses him to go after Job who has gotten his attention lately, perhaps being recommended by one of his sons. So he wants to find out more about Job and poses a rather sly rhetorical question, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil?" One part of this question is rendered literally as: "Have you placed your heard upon my servant?" The Lord builds up Job into a super-hero of sorts, that no one equals him. The sons of God concurred, nodding their heads in unison. No so with Satan even before the Lord spoke about him. Already Satan had observed this supposedly outstanding man and knew that the assembly of sons of God was convened to deal with him. It so happened that their purity and uprightness mirrored that of Job whereas it didn't with regard to Satan.

In response to the rhetorical question God had posed, Satan responds immediately not with one but two of his own. "Does Job fear God for naught? Have you not put a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side?" God, along with his sons, felt they were being put on the spot, not expecting this in the least. Then Satan continues with the challenge to "touch all that he has," the verb *nagah* also as to strike and from which is derived a noun meaning a plague, stroke or mark. When God's sons heard this, they were shocked, for Satan just might try to touch...*nagah*...one of them. During this daring challenge some subdued though clearly audible murmuring must have filled the assembly hall, indicative that they were quite disturbed. Satan, of course, was able to read their minds, so evident by the confusion on their faces. As for God, he knew, of course, what was going on but decided to let them hash it out among themselves. Later they would discuss the matter once both God and Satan were out of ear-shot.

13 If Socrates were part of the assembly, he'd come in late as well perhaps explaining his delay for having just performed his role of midwife. He stood out an apparently bland assemblage but not as much as Satan with his flair for the dramatic.

God gave Satan general instructions: “all that he has (literally, ‘all which is to him’) is in your power (literally, ‘hand’).” Then ironically God continues with “do not put forth your hand.” So Satan was left to do what he wanted, of how to interpret the use of his hand, if you will. He wasted no time and rushed out to track down Job’s entire family once they had gathered. Then he’d wipe them out. One hand of Satan did this while the other spared Job, all in accord with God’s command.

Chapter Two begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as “again” and shows the close connection between what Satan had wrought and his challenge to God for afflicting Job. As for the “day” (the second was in vs. 6) when the sons of God came before the Lord, Satan showed up and as before, must have arrived late so as to create an impression before everyone. The sons of God knew the damage he had done and wanted an account. Although the Lord knew of his doings, he asked “Whence have you come?” The response is telling of Satan’s character: “from going to and fro on the earth and from walking up and down on it.” The verb *shut* for “going to and fro” is interesting. As the text says, it connotes a restless movement of one with a plan hastening to put it into effect...surreptitiously. On a positive note, see Zech 4.10: “These seven are the eyes of the Lord which range through the whole earth.” Coupled with *shut* is the common verb *halak* (to go, to come). In other words, Satan had been racing around the earth looking for people comparable to Job in order to inflict them with the same sufferings. Part of his *shut/halak* stemmed from the fact that he was partially restrained: “He (Job) is in your power (hand)” and “Do not put forth your hand.”

Following this initial question before the full heavenly assembly the Lord doesn’t ask Satan to elaborate but whether or not he had considered Job whom he lauds as a blameless servant, etc. The verb “considered” is rendered literally as “have you placed your heart” with regard to Job, a pointed question intended to put Satan on the spot. Without showing a trace of remorse for what he had done thus far, he responds “Skin for skin!” Then he adds that if anyone touches Job, he will curse God to his face. This is a second use of the verb *nagah*, the first being found in 1.11: “touch all that he has.” So making direct contact with either possessions or Job’s body will bring about the desired result.

To this the Lord couldn’t respond adequately. He dispatches Satan, allowing Job to be in his power (again, in his hand) but to spare his life, *shamar* fundamentally as to watch, to keep guard over Job’s *nephesh* or soul. With that, Satan leaves the Lord and his sons a second time, now with a determined look on his face. No more *shut* or *halak*, of roaming and walking upon the earth, but he went directly to Job and begin his

dirty work¹⁴. So he did and passed off the scene abruptly. We don't hear from Satan again, let alone the divine assembly of the Lord and his sons.

These details concerning Job and especially Satan (as accuser, prosecutor) parallel in some way the office of midwife as applied to Socrates. The two, of course, are radically different. Satan may be taken as a development—not necessarily improvement—over Socrates-as-midwife insofar as he's instrumental in bringing to birth the true nature of Job. Job undergoes an extended period of suffering made worse by his friends offering pious but in the end, useless advice. We could file them under the label of opinions. It's easy to see in their discourses rhetoric at work backing up their opinions instead of contributing to knowledge, *doxa* instead of *episteme*. So while Satan has long disappeared from the scene, his “allies” or Job's friends provide a fine substitute. This becomes clear when God finally breaks in to dispel Satan's grip through these friends. He does so by manifesting himself in a whirlwind, vs. 1 of Chapter Thirty-Eight beginning with the conjunctive *v-* translated as “and” to show that the Lord has had enough and wants to bring Job's sufferings to a close. *Seharah* is the noun which means strong wind, the same which took Elijah into heaven on a chariot (cf. 2Kg 2.1 and 11). It also contains the throne chariot of Ezekiel's vision (cf. Ezk 1.4).

We can see by Satan's cocky attitude that he didn't respect boundaries, was fond of blurring them, something that can be done more freely in a not quite fully monotheistic world view. That's why his *shut/halak*—going to and fro as well as walking on the earth—is all the more upsetting. At the same time his restless activity throws into confusion the placid nature of the sons while God himself is the one who gave Satan authority to deal with Job and can rescind it at any time. As we know, Job ends up far better than he had been though retained painful memories of his experience. To him, memory of his friends well meaning but empty words of encouragement parallel what the sons of God may have offered to Job in his sufferings. All very good but in the end, useless. Throughout it all one can just imagine the assembled sons of God watching. Chances are that some, if not most, wished they could imitate their confrere Satan. As for divine beings, Socrates was favored by the gods yet he too was loose with them.

As for all the talk about opinion and knowledge, midwifing from one to the other, the example of Satan-as-accuser and more than that, as a kind of jokester, may be worth some consideration to implement. It's especially handy in a serious, litigious and politically correct society as we have now. At the same time, following this example of

14 2.9 contains one of the most memorable lines in the Bible by Job's wife when she saw him hanging onto his integrity: “Curse God and die.”

not taking things seriously, even flippantly, could land you quickly in hot water. However, the slipperiness of one trained in midwifery and the slipperiness of Satan before God offer a refreshing alternative. The best way to see if either one pans out is to try how it might work in real life.

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