WITTGENSTEIN'S CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE

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The scope of this discussion is much more restricted than what its title might imply.¹ I shall be dealing only with the concept of knowledge as in Wittgenstein's Über Gewißheit. In fact, it will be even more specific than that. I shall try to bring out Wittgenstein's concept of knowledge by re-examining the contention, expressed recently by several authors (like Ayer, Künne) that the Über Gewißheit reveals a commitment to the so-called Three Condition Theory, sometimes also called "the standard analysis of the concept of knowledge". Should such a commitment be found reasonably documented, it would have to affect our appraisal of Wittgenstein's attitude to the philosophical past, especially the ancient Greek philosophy. So much so, since the Three Condition Theory is almost as old as philosophy itself. It, most probably, had adherents among Socrates' friends and followers other than Plato.² That Plato had been intrigued by it is obvious. In the Meno the theory has been endorsed as a correct definition of the concept of knowledge. In the Theaetetus the approach became critical. Yet, Plato made it the focus of this highly

1. An earlier version of this paper was read at the colloquium "Beiträge zur Österreichischen Philosophie" held in Graz, on October 28, 1985. I am indebted to the participants in the discussion on my paper for their critical comments, which enabled me to improve my exposition.

2. For the conjecture that Antisthenes had held the view that knowledge is "true belief (doxa) with an account (logos)" see Friedrich Überweg, Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie, Vol. I, par. 37. According to Überweg, in Theaetetus, 201, where the dictum in question is mentioned, Antisthenes, although not named, is "probably being referred to". No justification for this conjecture, however, has been given. Cf. G.C. Field, Plato and His Contemporaries (London, 1930), p. 160 ff. and W.K.C. Guthrie, A History of Greek Philsophy, Vol. III (Cambridge, 1969), p. 304 ff.
dramatic inquiry, in which the explication of the concept of knowledge is sought by investigating a series of questions appealing to the dialectical mind: Is knowledge none but sense-perception? If it is not, will it be the same as belief? If this is not enough, will perhaps belief plus truth, i.e., true belief, do? And if even this were not satisfactory, should we not say that knowledge is true belief plus justification? Disappointingly, Plato finds this last link in the dialectical chain inadequate as well. Down the ages it was taken for granted that Plato had rejected the whole structure of the Three Condition Theory. However, impressive objections were raised recently against such an assessment of Plato’s position as shown in the *Theaetetus*. But this was only the first sign of a significant change in a traditional exegetic stereotype...

Such sway in the exegetic pendulum apart, on reading the *Über Gewißheit* with Plato in mind, the impression is that, with the Three Condition Theory as its focus, *Über Gewißheit* may count as the *Theaetetus* of our days, in what it asserts and in what it denies, no less than in what it leaves unanswered.

Nor should we forget in this context the unstable lot of the Three Condition Theory in our “analytic” era. Even though the theory was apparently put to sleep after the shock administered by the *Theaetetus*, and seems to have remained inactive for many generations it came vigorously to life in our century. It is not easy to find out when exactly and by whom this revival was affected. In any case, the main theses of the theory may be found in an article published as far back as the early thirties by Braithwaite. In the forties it is detectable in Russell and in C.I. Lewis; while in the fifties and sixties you can hardly come across a piece of (analytic) epistemology without the theory being dealt with in one context or another. Admittedly, in the early seventies it experienced a setback. Gettier had provided examples in which what the theory claims as the sufficient condition for knowledge appeared to be satisfied, but hardly anybody would consider the result as knowledge. Some authors counterattacked, wanting to rescue the theory from Gettier’s
