Zeno on Knowledge or on Geometry?
The Evidence of anon. In Theaetetum

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Those who are reluctant to accept Jaap Mansfeld’s well-reasoned conclusion that Ps-Hero Definitions 137.4 (p. 156. 21ff Heiberg) preserves Zeno’s definition of geometry, albeit of geometry qua science,1 will take heart from the following parallel with anon. In Theaetetum 15.16-30, where the commentator is giving definitions of simple knowledge:

Ps-Hero

Ταύρον Σιδωνίων ἦστιν
ὑπόμυημα εἰς Πολυτείαν
Πλάτωνος, ἐν ὦ ἦστι
ταῦτα· ὄρεισατο ὁ
Πλάτων τὴν γεωμετρίαν
ἐν τῷ Μένωνι οὕτως
δύον ὁρθὴν διείσεαν2
αἰτίας λογομορφ. Ἀ-
ματοτέλης δ’ ὑπό-
ληψιν μετὰ ἀπο-
δείξεως, Ζήρων
δε ἔξω πρὸς δει-
ξων φαντασίων ἀ-
μετάπτωτων ὑπὸ λο-
γοῦ.5

anon. Thl.

Η Τ[ΟΙ]ΝΤΝ
ΑΠΛΑΗ ΠΡΟΤ[ΕΡΑ ΕΚΤ]ΙΝ
ΘΗΚ ΚΤΝΟΣ[ΗΤΘ. ΚΑΙ]
ΤΑΤΤΉΝ ΑΤΤΟ[ΘΗΘΘΕΝ]
ΦΙΚΑΤΟ ΕΝ [ΖΩΙ] ΜΕ-
ΝΩΝ ΔΩΣΑΝ ΟΡΘΗΝ
ΔΕΟΡΘΟΝ ΔΕΘ[ΕΙΟΝ]
ΑΙΤΙΑΙ ΛΟΓΙΚΗΜ[ΟΤ].3 Α-
ΠΙΚΟΤ[ΕΛΗ]|ΗΛΗ [ΔΕ Τ]ΙΠΟ-
ΛΗΜΠΣΙΝ[Θ] ΜΕΤΑ ΑΠΙΟ-
ΔΕΙΣΕΟΣ. ΖΗΝΩΝ4
ΔΕ ΕΞ Μ[ΕΝ ΠΡΟΘ]ΔΕ-
Σ[Θ]ΕΙ ΦΑΝΤΑΣΙΩΝ Α-
ΜΕΤΑΠΤΩΤΟΝ ΤΙΟΝ ΔΟ-
ΓΟΤ.6

Though the damaged papyrus only permits us to be sure that the alleged definitions of geometry attributed to Plato and to Aristotle were there being presented together as definitions of knowledge, it does seem that the remains of lines 26-30 contained an entry for Zeno and a definition very similar both to what Ps-Hero calls Zeno’s definition of geometry and to an attested Stoic definition of knowledge (SVF 1.68, cf. 1.411).

Furthermore the passage from anon. Thl. occurs in a geometrical context as a comment on Thl. 145c7-8 (μαθήματι . . . γεωμετρίας ἤττα); it therefore uses (a) geometry and (b) items of geometrical learning as examples of compound (or ‘systematic’)7 and simple knowledge respectively. It should be noted that the demonstrative pronoun at 15.19, though not easily read as referring back to γεωμετρίας in line 12, might be taken as referring to compound rather than simple knowledge; and, since geometry qua science is the particular type of compound knowledge under discussion, the inattentive reader might understand it as referring to geometry anyway.

This offers two possibilities: (i) Taurus may have mistaken the three definitions in
anon. Tht. for definitions of geometry, or (ii) Ps-Hero may not be presenting the exact words of Taurus after all, but was giving somebody's paraphrase of Taurus, while Taurus himself had presented the definitions as pertaining to knowledge (again in a geometrical context).

(i) It seems somewhat alarming that a commentator on the Republic should not have been aware that ὀρθή δύνα δεδεδεῖσαι αἰτίας λογισμῷ (Meno 98a) gave Plato's concept of knowledge, especially when anon. Tht. offers it twice in extant pages as Plato's definition of (simple) knowledge, and when it was a key element in Albinus' educational theory (Prologus 6 p. 150,27 Hermann). If Taurus is to be identified with L. Calvenus Taurus, the well-known Middle Platonist,6 I cannot believe that such a mistake was made. It might just have been possible for a mathematician writing a commentary on the Republic's mathematics to make this mistake, but I am not convinced.

(ii) It seems reasonable that a mathematician, reading parts of Taurus' Republic-commentary relevant to geometry,9 should have failed to understand what was being defined. If, for instance, he had read τόντον αὐτὸν ὀρίσατο ἐν τῷ Μένωα ὁίτωσ and then wanted to quote the passage, he would have to have supplied the supposed definiendum and named the subject. Thus he would write something like this: ὀρίσατο ὁ Πλάτων τὴν γεωμετρίαν. It is far easier, then, to suppose that the error had occurred by a misreading of Taurus' text. Hence his identity with the Middle Platonist need not be seriously questioned.

It is indeed perfectly reasonable that one Middle Platonist should have drawn on another. In particular a man with interests in ethics might have drawn on elements from a commentary on the Theaetetus when in need of epistemological comment. I argue elsewhere that anon. Tht. should be placed earlier than the floruit of Middle Platonism,10 and I suspect that the present parallel confirms that it preceded Taurus for the following reasons:

(i) It is natural that a collection of definitions of knowledge should have originated in a commentary on a work whose substance is knowledge.
(ii) The definitions of knowledge attributed by anon. to Plato and Aristotle agree with anon.'s view of knowledge as good judgment rendered permanent by the understanding of some reason why, as stated in cols. 2-3. They may have been selected to suit his immediate purposes. It is also possible that anon. considered the Stoic definition which he chose (= SVF 1.68) to be that best calculated to suggest an internal a priori knowledge (akin to Platonic recollected knowledge which he favours, cols. 47-48) which is brought into operation during one's receipt of presentations from outside.
(iii) It is likely that Taurus, or any Platonist of his time, should have been able to correct anon. Tht.'s reading of Meno 98a3-4 from αἰτίας λογισμῷ to αἰτίας λογισμῷ. I can think of no reason why anon. should have been keen to alter Taurus' correct reading, if their relationship had been reversed.
(iv) Finally we appear to have evidence of a scribal error in anon. Tht. 15.27 where one fully expects to read ἐκ, and this could explain the curious πῶς δεῖξιν in Ps-Hero if transmission via Taurus is assumed. Where one expects IN it seems that one must read either the editors' Ω or the improbable Μ. My reading of the photograph would favour the latter and suggests no third possibility. Perhaps then a scribe had mistaken IN for Μ Taurus would then have had enough knowledge to see that ΕΣΜΕΝ concealed ἐκ, but may have failed to see that it also concealed ἐκ. Consequently he may have altered πῶς δεῖξιν to πῶς δεῖξιν, so accounting for the text found in Ps-Hero at this point.

Thus I feel that all oddities of the passage of Ps-Hero may be accounted for adequately