Epistemology and Religiosity in Plato's Theaetetus: Socrates, the *Daimonion*, and the Moral Horizon of the Divine

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Abstract: This study examines Plato's *Theaetetus* through the lens of philosophy and the phenomenology of religion, focusing on the interplay between epistemology, religiosity, and the life of the polis. The purpose is to analyze how Socrates situates the pursuit of knowledge within a religious-philosophical framework, especially through the notions of *daimonion* as personal religiosity, communal religiosity of the polis, myth as allegory, and the *theion* as a moral horizon. Using a qualitative design with hermeneutic and phenomenological approaches, the research employs close reading of Plato's texts (*Theaetetus* with *Euthyphro, Apology, Critias, Phaedo,* and *Laws*) to interpret key terms such as *daimonion, theion,* and *logos*. The findings show that knowledge in *Theaetetus* is never finalized but appears as a dialogical process of purification through *logos* and *dianoia*; myth is used critically as allegory; the *daimonion* functions as an ethical compass rather than epistemic mediator; and the *theion* is conceived as a non-anthropomorphic moral guide. Civic obedience remains, yet grounded in rationality rather than fear of the gods. The implications affirm *Theaetetus* as both epistemological and religious-philosophical, enriching discourse on knowledge, religiosity, and public life, and highlighting the relevance of Socratic epistemology for education, ethics, and democracy. The originality lies in positioning *Theaetetus* as a text that unifies knowledge, faith, and law in a reflective framework.

Keywords: *daimonion*; phenomenology of religion Plato; Socrates; *Theaetetus*.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji dialog *Theaetetus* karya Plato dari perspektif filsafat dan fenomenologi agama dengan menyoroti hubungan antara epistemologi, religiositas, dan kehidupan polis. Tujuannya adalah menganalisis bagaimana Sokrates menempatkan pencarian pengetahuan dalam kerangka religius-filosofis melalui konsep *daimonion* sebagai religiositas personal, religiositas komunal polis, mitos sebagai alegori, dan *theion* sebagai horizon moral. Metode penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan hermeneutika dan fenomenologi agama, melalui pembacaan dekat (*close reading*) teks Plato (*Theaetetus* yang dibaca intertekstual dengan *Euthyphro, Apology, Critias, Phaedo,* dan *Laws*). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengetahuan dalam *Theaetetus* tidak pernah mencapai definisi final, melainkan dipahami sebagai proses dialogis penyucian melalui *logos* dan *dianoia*; mitos berfungsi sebagai alegori kritis; *daimonion* sebagai kompas etis; dan *theion* sebagai horizon moral non-antropomorfis. Kepatuhan pada hukum polis tetap ditegakkan, namun berlandaskan rasionalitas, bukan ketakutan pada dewa. Implikasi penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa *Theaetetus* bukan hanya teks epistemologis, tetapi juga religius-filosofis, sehingga memperkaya wacana tentang pengetahuan, religiositas, dan kehidupan publik. Orisinalitas penelitian terletak pada upaya memposisikan *Theaetetus* sebagai teks yang memadukan pengetahuan, iman, dan hukum dalam satu kerangka reflektif.

Kata kunci: *daimonion*; fenomenologi agama Plato; Socrates; *Theaetetus*.

1. Introduction

Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus* occupies a pivotal position in the history of philosophy as a text that probes the nature of knowledge. Through the conversation among Socrates, *Theaetetus*, and *Theodorus*, what appears to be a purely epistemological discussion cannot be separated from the religious nuances that permeated ancient Greek society. In the Athenian *polis*, intellectual, political, and religious life were deeply intertwined (Arnason, Raaflaub, & Wagner, 2013). Myths about the gods, civil laws, and public rites were not merely formal rituals but also frameworks of thought that shaped the citizens' horizons (Mikalson, Petrovic, & Petrovic, 2021). Within this context, *Theaetetus* cannot be understood simply as a text of "pure" epistemology, but rather as a discursive space that reveals the interconnection of philosophy, religiosity, and the socio-political life of the *polis*.

The historical context shows that the religious life of ancient Greek society pulsed through a dense calendar of rituals (Carbon, 2015). Citizens of the *polis*, especially Athens, observed various public ceremonies that reinforced loyalty to the gods while simultaneously strengthening political legitimacy. The Panathenaia festival, for instance, was not merely a cultural celebration but also an official homage to Athena, the city's patron deity (Neils, 2012). Likewise, the Eleusinian Mysteries, associated with the myth of Demeter and Persephone, became the most influential religious initiation rites in the Greek world (Gitana, 2005). Animal sacrifices at the altars of the gods during each public festival symbolized collective obedience, while religious oaths binding both citizens and magistrates revealed the close relationship between faith, law, and social life (Carbon, 2017; Wrenhaven, 2021). These traditions demonstrate that the religiosity of the *polis* did not remain confined to the private sphere but was institutionalized as a public force that demanded collective compliance.

Within this framework, Socratic philosophy emerged: Socrates challenged ritual piety of a communal nature by introducing the dimension of personal religiosity through the *daimonion*, while also testing the limits of rationality within the framework of law and myth in the *polis*. This makes the present research important, because it opens a new perspective: Socratic epistemology in *Theaetetus* cannot be detached from the tension between the public religiosity of the *polis* and the pursuit of a more rational personal religiosity.

Previous scholarship on Socrates and Plato has provided important foundations but still leaves critical gaps. First, research on the Socratic method highlights dialectical practice in the form of critical questioning to uncover truth. This method profoundly influenced the development of Western philosophy, particularly in ethics and morality (Bussanich & Smith, 2013; Harter, 2013; Martínez Hernández, 2024). However, such studies usually stop at the ethical dimension, while the religious aspects—such as the role of the *daimonion* or myth—receive little attention.

Second, scholarship on Plato's contribution largely emphasizes his effort to construct a comprehensive philosophical system: metaphysics, the theory of Forms, and political philosophy (Bobonich, 2009; Press, Gonzalez, Nails, & Tarrant, 2015; Young, 2013). This emphasis affirms Plato's status as a principal architect of systematic philosophy. Yet the strong focus on rationality and abstraction often sidelines the religious dimension and spiritual experiences that surface in several of his dialogues, including *Theaetetus*, treating them as mere ornamentation rather than integral components of the pursuit of truth.

Third, research on the relationship between Socrates and Plato generally concentrates on the interpretive problem: whether the ideas in Plato's dialogues truly represent Socrates' thought or are Plato's own elaborations (Nichols, 2011; Warnek, 2005; Zilioli, 2015). While such scholarship enriches the historical understanding of their differences, it still leaves a void in exploring *Theaetetus* as a text saturated with religious-philosophical dimensions. In particular, the roles of myth, the *daimonion*, and the *theion* have not been adequately examined as integral to the definition of knowledge presented in the dialogue.

Building on this gap, the present research proceeds from the awareness that *Theaetetus* is not merely an epistemological text but also a religious-philosophical one. Socrates never fully detached himself from the mythological horizon of the *polis*, yet he did not accept it uncritically. He positioned the *daimonion* as a personal voice of conscience, employed myth as allegory, and referred to the *theion*

as a non-anthropomorphic moral horizon. Thus, the discussion of knowledge in *Theaetetus* is deeply interwoven with issues of religiosity, law, and personal integrity.

The purpose of this study is to examine the religious dimension of *Theaetetus* through the phenomenology of religion, focusing on how Socrates' *daimonion* interacts with the communal religiosity of the *polis*, how myth and the concept of the *theion* appear in the search for the definition of knowledge, and how dialogue and dialectical *katharsis* function as both epistemic and ethical processes. The study also seeks to explain the relationship between knowledge and civic obedience to the laws of the *polis*, as well as to draw its philosophical implications for education and the contemporary public sphere.

The author argues that although *Theaetetus* never arrives at a final definition of knowledge, precisely from this "failure" emerges a deeper meaning. Knowledge is understood not as an ultimate result but as a dialogical process that is both rational and religious-philosophical. The *daimonion* signifies Socrates' personal religiosity, myth functions as an allegorical medium for testing reason, and the *theion* is positioned as a non-anthropomorphic moral horizon guiding integrity. In this way, Socratic epistemology is not merely a theory of knowledge but a practice of wisdom that binds faith, rationality, and the life of the *polis* into a unified reflective whole.

2. Method

The unit of analysis in this study is Plato's dialogues, with *Theaetetus* as the primary text for examining the nature of knowledge. This dialogue was chosen because it presents the intersection between epistemological inquiry and the religious nuances embedded in the context of the Athenian *polis*. The analysis does not stop at the definition of knowledge but also uncovers the dimensions of Socratic religiosity through references to myth, the concept of the *theion*, and the implications of civic law in the *polis*. To enrich the comparative perspective, the study also draws on other dialogues, such as *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Critias*, *Phaedo*, and *Laws*, each of which highlights the interrelation between religious faith, civic responsibility, and philosophical reflection.

This research employs a qualitative design with hermeneutic (Hovey, Vigouroux, Noushi, Pavate, & Amja, 2022) and phenomenological approaches to religion (Heidegger, 2021). The hermeneutic approach is applied to interpret the texts through *close reading*, while the phenomenology of religion is employed to understand how religious experience—both in the form of Socrates' personal religiosity and the communal religiosity of the *polis*—shaped the horizon of the pursuit of truth. Thus, the study focuses more on philosophical and religious interpretation than on empirical measurement, making the qualitative approach most appropriate.

The data sources consist of two categories. First, the primary sources are Plato's texts, with *Theaetetus* as the main focus, complemented by *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Critias*, *Phaedo*, and *Laws*. These texts are examined to identify consistencies and differences in Socrates' views regarding knowledge, myth, the *daimonion*, and obedience to the laws of the *polis*. Second, the secondary sources are modern academic works in philosophy, theology, and religious studies, which are used to reinterpret the meaning of religiosity and Socratic epistemology within a contemporary framework. By balancing classical sources with modern scholarship, this study seeks to produce a reading that is both historically grounded and philosophically relevant.

The data collection techniques involve *close reading* (Ohrvik, 2024) of the relevant passages in Plato's texts, such as Socrates' references to the *daimonion*, the discussion of piety in *Euthyphro*, and the explanation of the *theion* in *Theaetetus*. The study then conducts intertextual comparisons with other dialogues to reveal the development of Socratic ideas concerning the relationship between knowledge, religiosity, and life in the *polis*. Secondary sources, including articles and books, provide interpretive context so that the readings avoid anachronism while remaining open to contemporary philosophical relevance.

The data analysis is carried out in three layers. First, textual analysis emphasizes the interpretation of key terms such as *daimonion*, *theion*, and *logos* as they appear in the texts. Second, philosophical analysis maps Socrates' arguments concerning epistemology, the religiosity of the *polis*, and personal

integrity. Third, phenomenological analysis uncovers the dimension of religious experience, which is not mystical but manifests in the voice of conscience, civic obedience, and the moral horizon. All stages of analysis follow the interactive model of Miles and Huberman—data reduction, data display, and verification—so that the resulting interpretation is systematic, reflective, and accountable.

3. Results

The Religious Belief of Socrates

Socrates redirected ancient Greek theological thought in a new and radical direction. In his time, philosophy remained closely tied to questions concerning the *arche*, the fundamental principle of nature, the world, or Being. The pre-Socratic philosophers such as Thales, Anaximander, and Heraclitus emphasized the search for the nature of reality in material or cosmological terms. The mythological images of the gods and the transcendent world, inherited from epic tradition and the religion of the *polis*, began to be critically questioned. Many philosophers contemporary with Socrates no longer believed in the existence of the gods or were indifferent to such debates. They were more interested in the empirical world accessible to human perception and sought the ultimate causes of the universe's existence, distancing themselves from inherited mythological narratives (Žitinski, 2011).

Interestingly, however, Socrates did not take an extreme position by completely rejecting myth and the traditional religion of the *polis*. In the *Theaetetus*, for example, Socrates showed no interest in directly criticizing the mythological beliefs of the Athenians. Instead, he introduced something distinctive and unique: his belief in the existence of the *daimonion*, a divine presence that spoke to his conscience in a special way. This uniqueness lay in the way Socrates brought individuality into the general understanding of religious faith. While the religiosity of the *polis* was collective, centered on ritual, law, and public norms, Socrates emphasized the personal dimension, namely the inner experience and the voice of conscience guided by the *daimonion*.

The socio-political context of the time is also crucial for understanding Socrates' position. The Greeks were not a homogeneous nation united by a single religion; they were divided into many *poleis* often in conflict with one another. Mythological beliefs were never a single *credo* embraced by all communities but rather diverse traditions embedded in the social structures of each *polis*. Therefore, Socratic religiosity cannot be understood as collective piety but as a personal reflection that carried elements of critique against public religion. For this reason, his religiosity did not develop purely from metaphysical philosophical critique and cannot be simply called "philosophical religiosity" of the kind later found in Plotinus or Spinoza.

Although Socrates often referred to myths and gods in Plato's dialogues, he always linked them to the existence of the *daimonion* as his life's guide. For him, the *daimonion* was not merely a religious symbol but a personal reality present in his consciousness. This form of religious belief differed fundamentally from the piety of the *polis*. The distinction is evident, for instance, in the dialogue *Euthyphro*, when Socrates posed the question: is something "holy" because the gods command it, or is it holy apart from their command? This question troubled Euthyphro deeply because it implicated his devotion toward his father. Through such questioning, Socrates challenged collective assumptions about piety and urged Euthyphro to grasp the distinction between universal divine law and the socio-political laws of the *polis*. In this way, Socrates demonstrated that religious faith did not concern ritual obedience alone but also rationality, personal integrity, and the intrinsic value of human life (Žitinski, 2011).

Furthermore, Socrates emerges as a philosopher of personal integrity and individual responsibility. For him, the concept of personality was closely linked to rationality, the capacity that distinguishes humans from other beings. In the *Theaetetus*, discussions on knowledge always returned to this rational dimension, though they were never detached from the religious context that shaped Socrates' thought. Thus, his belief in the *daimonion* differed from the collective faith of the *polis*. He believed the *daimonion* was a unique divine being—not a semi-god like the figures in the Greek

pantheon—but an entity directly present in his conscience, offering moral and ethical guidance in decision-making (Matos & Šimunec, 2022).

Even though it remained framed in myth, the *daimonion* possessed an unusual character compared to the other divine entities believed in by the Athenians. The religiosity of the *polis* was tied to a collective vision of law, custom, and communal ways of life. Socrates, however, emphasized the personal relationship with the *daimonion*. Frederick Coplestone (1993) stressed that Socrates was not interested in formulating a monotheistic concept of God but rather in offering a clearer understanding of Deity. In other words, Socrates did not articulate "the One God" as in the Abrahamic traditions but introduced a new conception of divinity grounded in rationality, integrity, and conscience.

In the *Theaetetus*, we find a blend of these two dimensions: Socrates' references to myth and public religion of the *polis* on one hand, and his personal belief in the *daimonion* on the other. This duality explains why religious perspectives and myths remain relevant within the dialogue. Socrates did not merely discuss epistemology in the narrow sense but also opened a space for a religious understanding of wisdom as the pursuit of truth. Thus, the *Theaetetus* is not only an epistemological text but also a religious-philosophical one that demonstrates how faith, myth, and reason interweave in the human search for genuine knowledge.

Table 1. Socrates' Religious Belief

Key Aspect	Summary
Context of ancient Greek philosophy	In Socrates' time, philosophy still centered on the search for the first principle (*arche*) and cosmological reality; myths of the gods began to be criticized (Žitinski, 2011, p. 116).
Socrates' attitude toward myth	He did not completely reject myth; he did not frontally criticize the religion of the *polis* but offered a new interpretation through the presence of the *daimonion*.
Daimonion	A divine presence that spoke to Socrates' conscience; it served as a moral guide and emphasized the personal dimension of religiosity, distinct from the collective piety of the *polis* (Matos, Šimunec, & Guardini, 2021).
Individual vs. collective dimension	The faith of the *polis* was ritualistic and communal; Socrates emphasized individual religiosity grounded in inner experience and personal integrity.
The *Euthyphro* dialogue	Socrates questioned whether holiness was absolute or dependent on the gods' commands; he encouraged rational reflection on piety (Žitinski, 2011, p. 116).
Socrates' concept of personality	A philosopher of personal integrity; he stressed rationality and individual responsibility as the essence of humanity.
Coplestone's view	Socrates did not construct a monotheistic concept but sought to provide a clearer understanding of Deity (Coplestone, 1993, p. 111).
Relevance of the *Theaetetus*	Socrates combined references to the myths of the *polis* with his personal belief in the *daimonion*; this makes the text not only epistemological but also religious-philosophical.

Table 1 presents a simplified form of the extended narrative concerning Socrates' religious belief. Through the table, key aspects such as the context of ancient Greek philosophy, Socrates' attitude toward myth, the role of the *daimonion*, and the relevance of the *Theaetetus* appear in a more structured way. The long and detailed narrative has been condensed into concise points, enabling readers to grasp the larger pattern revealed: the shift from the collective religiosity of the *polis* toward a rational personal religiosity, the contrast between ritual piety and personal integrity, and the role of the *daimonion* as a unique symbol in Socrates' religious experience. Thus, the table serves not only as a summary but also as a visual tool for tracing the connecting thread between myth, reason, and the pursuit of truth as elaborated in the narrative text.

Religious Belief in the Theaetetus

As previously discussed, the dialogue *Theaetetus* focuses on the problem of defining and explaining knowledge. Its primary aim is not to formulate the nature of the gods, divine reality, or the first principle of creation. However, from the perspective of the phenomenology of religion, faith, religious experience (mysticism), and religious knowledge remain relevant to the discussion of defining knowledge. This discussion requires strict logical criteria, which creates a dilemma concerning the role of religious belief within the framework of the *Theaetetus*.

In other words, the difficulty in defining knowledge can be interpreted in two ways. First, the concept of knowledge continues to be shaped by religious belief and mythological conceptual frameworks. Second, conversely, the difficulty arises if we assume that Socrates sought to demonstrate that the central problem lies in the autonomous epistemic capacity of human beings—that is, the ability to gain adequate understanding of reality and fact independently of religious belief.

This study addresses these questions by considering the limits of knowledge, divine inspiration believed to be the source of wisdom from God (or the gods), and the general position of philosophy and philosophers in relation to popular mythological beliefs. Thus, the *Theaetetus* does not present a purely epistemological debate, but also opens space for reflection on how religious dimensions shape, challenge, and even constrain humanity's search for a true definition of knowledge.

Perception, Belief, and Knowledge

At the beginning of the dialogue *Theaetetus*, Socrates asks Theaetetus to define knowledge in relation to perception. In other words, he questions whether perception can serve as the foundation of knowledge. Theaetetus responds by giving examples of various occupations in Athenian society, such as pottery, woodworking, and similar crafts (Plato & Cornford, 1957). According to him, knowledge is an instrumental ability acquired through repeated experience in producing something. First, one forms an idea of an object—such as a chair, sandal, or jar—then masters the method to bring that idea into reality.

For Socrates, however, these examples of craftsmanship are not sufficient to define knowledge as perception. He compares them to the work of his mother, Phaenarete, a midwife who helps deliver babies. Socrates likens his philosophy to the "art of midwifery": he himself cannot "give birth" to wisdom, but he can help others to "deliver" truth through dialectical conversation (Plato & Cornford, 1957). Defining knowledge, therefore, is far more complex than simply describing the products of artisanship.

Cornford argues that the purpose of this dialogue is not to define knowledge in relation to wisdom, but rather in a more operational and functional sense (Plato & Cornford, 1957). This claim is acceptable, considering that *Theaetetus* does not discuss *anamnesis*, the world of Ideas, or the Perfect Good. Nevertheless, the issue of belief still emerges: can belief be regarded as fully epistemic? And is "belief" here distinct from religious belief?

Plato makes a clear distinction between the two. *Pistis* (belief) is a higher level than assumption, but it is not belief in a religious sense. As Mladić (1997) notes, "belief" is better understood as a mental state concerning objects around us that can be apprehended. To move beyond perception, therefore, one must transcend the data obtained by the senses—eyes, ears, and others. Thus, belief derived from perception remains incomplete. Theaetetus attempts to touch on more abstract entities, such as mathematical forms and numerical relations, but for Socrates these are still insufficient to guarantee the truth of belief (Šarac, 2019).

At this point, a crucial question arises: if the "true belief" that Socrates seeks is neither connected to the existence of the gods nor grounded in mathematical calculation, does it nevertheless carry a religious meaning? Or, conversely, can Socrates be considered agnostic on this matter?

In this dialogue, Socrates also critiques the extreme positions of Heraclitus and Parmenides—namely, that reality is "in complete flux" or "entirely static." He insists that knowledge cannot rest solely on perception or sensory experience. The purpose of knowledge must extend beyond empirical

experience. The discussion of true belief is not an attempt by Socrates to persuade Theaetetus to believe in the *daimonion* or in a perfect world of Ideas, but rather to expose ignorance, both as an epistemic category and as a moral condition. The concept of the "soul" in Socratic terminology is closely related to reason. Although they may appear identical, the soul is an entity capable of reflecting on reality, grasping forms, and discerning the distinctive characteristics of all things (Đurić, 1976; Platon, 1979). Accordingly, dialogue becomes the process of the "birth of knowledge of truth" and cannot be reduced merely to the issue of perception.

As Devčić (1999) observes, Socrates' method aims to encourage his interlocutors "to seek and uncover truth within the depths of their own soul." In other words, truth is not delivered from the outside but discovered through self-reflection, while Socratic *maieutics* functions only as external assistance. Interestingly, in this dialogue Socrates does not associate the *daimonion* with the process of seeking knowledge. The *daimonion* appears only in his conscience, not as a predictor of his interlocutor's religious knowledge. He does mention myth, but only in relation to the problem of perception. Nonetheless, other parts of the dialogue show that mythological belief remains significant, given its entanglement with the laws and traditions of the Athenian *polis*.

The initial stage of this study demonstrates that Socrates and Theaetetus hold different understandings of knowledge. Theaetetus views it from a technical and practical perspective, while Socrates directs it toward a deeper meaning—not merely as an instrument for production and the marketplace, but as a moral foundation. Ignorance, therefore, does not simply mean a lack of knowledge, but also a morally misguided condition. This issue parallels the challenges of contemporary education, where students are expected to master technical skills such as technology, artificial intelligence, or computer engineering, yet fewer are motivated to understand social-political realities, including the role of religion, faith, and wisdom in communal life.

Knowledge, Truth, and Obedience to the *Polis*

In the dialogue *Theaetetus*, Socrates never asks Theaetetus to follow the voice of the *daimonion*; that is not the purpose of their conversation. However, Socrates recognizes that Theaetetus, like most of his pupils who lived within the *polis*, obeys laws that also contained popular religious beliefs. To understand the religious context of this dialogue, one must consider the mythological vision of society and the community of the *polis*. Why does Socrates refer to myth if the purpose of the dialogue is more individual, namely to lead his interlocutor toward discovering truth for himself? It is possible that these references represent Socrates' anticipation of his own trial, or perhaps Plato's intention to situate the discussion of knowledge within the broader political-philosophical context faced by his teacher.

Seeking truth as the ultimate goal of wisdom indeed surpasses ordinary knowledge, and it does not necessarily involve religious sentiment imposed by myth. Socrates himself does not treat myths with hostility. He does not sharply criticize them as Xenophanes did but is closer to Protagoras' position, who argued that humans cannot truly know anything about the gods or their existence. On many occasions, Socrates even uses myth as allegory. For example, he states that "Memory is the goddess of remembrance" (Plato & Cornford, 1957), but he emphasizes that the independent human capacity to remember and store information about events and phenomena is far more important than the personification of that goddess.

In the *Laws*, Plato explains the relationship between civic obedience and the piety of the people, noting that every citizen obeys the law because they believe in the gods (Platon, 1979). He identifies three reasons why someone might become disobedient: first, they do not believe in the gods; second, they believe in the gods but think they are uninvolved in human life; or third, they believe in the gods but assume they can be bribed with sacrifices (Platon, 1979). Thus, civic obedience rests on the religious belief that the gods participate in everyday life, embody perfect morality, and cannot be influenced by bribes. This stands in stark contrast to the gods depicted in myth, who are often portrayed as committing errors, succumbing to human weaknesses, and even engaging in conflicts driven by selfish interests. An important question therefore arises: does Socrates encourage Theaetetus to reconsider his

faith in the gods on rational grounds, or does he merely affirm that belief in the gods' authority through the law is already sufficient for pragmatic purposes?

The aim of this dialogue is not to launch an explicit critique of society and the state. Yet Socrates alludes to the fact that political power can persuade citizens to believe that the government is good, even when politicians act wrongly (Platon, 1979). This critique is consistent with his rejection of demagoguery and tyranny, which he develops more fully in the *Republic*, but in the *Theaetetus* it is directed at the epistemic relativism of the sophists. According to Socrates, sophists use *logos* or rhetoric to convince others to accept opinions—even false ones. For Socrates, this is misleading, because if there exists a world of facts that truly is, then rhetoric should not serve as the standard of truth. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that both myth and rhetoric can still be used, whether as educational tools or— unfortunately—as manipulative political instruments.

In his discussion with Theaetetus, Socrates even questions the difference between human sensory capacities and those attributed to the gods. If Zeus is said to see, hear, or taste, then it implies he performs those functions in the same way humans do, which contradicts the concept of divine omnipotence (Plato & Cornford, 1957). Here Socrates stresses that the concept of divinity should not be understood in anthropomorphic terms. For him, "the divine" (*theion*) is the first principle, the metaphysical foundation of all existence, not a monotheistic person with attributes of revelation. Plato himself later identified this concept of divinity as spirit, the ideal foundation of the world (Devčić, 2009).

Even so, Socrates' argument concerning myth in this dialogue appears primarily dialectical, designed to test Theaetetus' personal belief. The issue of obedience becomes central. Religious belief in gods who are envious and vengeful clearly involves fear, and such fear gives rise to obedience. Socrates himself does not emphasize this emotional dimension, because for him the *theion* is an ideal foundation, independent and self-sufficient, without ears to hear or eyes to see. Yet because the mythological world is filled with conflict, chaos, and uncertainty, Socrates seeks to show that obedience to the law merely on the basis of its divine origin is not rational. Even so, in the *Critias*, Socrates does not agree with the idea of disregarding the law. He insists that every citizen, including himself, must obey the laws of the *polis* (Platon, 1979).

Table 2. Knowledge, Truth, and Obedience to the *Polis* (*Theaetetus*)

Key Aspect	Summary
Socrates' position in the dialogue	He does not ask Theaetetus to follow the voice of the *daimonion*; instead, he focuses on the personal pursuit of truth through dialectic.
Religious context of the *polis*	The civil law of the *polis* was closely tied to religious belief; obedience emerged because of faith in the gods.
Function of myth	Socrates used myth as allegory (example: "Memory is the goddess of remembrance" – Plato, 1959, p. 121). He did not reject myth, but neither did he treat it as the foundation of knowledge.
Three reasons for disobedience	(1) Lack of belief in the gods; (2) Belief in the gods but considering them uninvolved in human life; (3) Belief in the gods but assuming they can be bribed with sacrifice.
Critique of myth	The gods in myth are morally inconsistent: they can err, act selfishly, and engage in conflict. This stands in contrast to the concept of the *theion* as moral perfection.
Attitude toward politics and sophists	Politics can persuade the people to believe the government is good even when it acts wrongly (Platon, 1979, p. 44). Socrates criticized sophists who used *logos* or rhetoric to convince people of false opinions.
Concept of divinity (*theion*)	The *theion* is the first metaphysical principle, non-anthropomorphic, not a monotheistic person. According to Plato, it is identified with spirit as the ideal foundation of the world (Devčić, 2003, p. 82).
Implications of obedience	Belief in vengeful gods produces obedience based on fear. Socrates argued that obedience to the law should be rational, not merely rooted in myth.

Attitude toward the law of the *polis*	Despite his critique of myth, Socrates affirmed that all citizens, including himself, must obey the laws of the *polis*.

Thus, for Socrates, obedience to the law does not conflict with the pursuit of truth. Yet he also stressed that the philosopher's position often confronts popular reasoning rooted in myth and the secular order of the state. In the next stage of this research, we compared the concept of divinity in the *Theaetetus* with other Platonic works such as *Critias* and *Laws*. The results reveal that public morality in the *polis* was closely tied to religious images of the gods and their mythical stories. Socrates used myth as narrative, not as binding revealed truth. This is why his approach to knowledge is not merely a critique of popular belief but also of the state's role in regulating both public and private life. Finally, the mediation of the *daimonion* within Socrates himself affirms that the pursuit of knowledge is a quest for truth that concerns not only individual virtue but also serves as a critique of political interests. This issue remains relevant today, particularly in contemporary debates on democracy, populism, and the influence of media in shaping citizens' political decisions.

Finding the Definition of Knowledge

The purpose of obedience to the civil laws of the *polis* is not the main subject of discussion, and precisely when the philosopher's social position is touched upon, a new horizon of knowledge emerges. In the academic environment of the *polis*, some of Socrates' contemporaries dealt with cosmological problems, while others—for example, the sophists—were more captivated by political power. For Socrates, philosophical inquiry into the nature of knowledge and the pursuit of truth was not a matter of constructing a coherent "system"—that task would later be recognized as Plato's—but rather of achieving a personal outcome that he sought to bring forth together with Theaetetus through dialogue. This mandate was inseparable from the central aim of philosophical inquiry via *logos*: to uncover the rationality that structures the world of facts. From the Stranger's explanation of *logos* as συμπλοκή τῶν εἰδῶν (*the embrace of ideas*) in the *Sophist*, we are justified in thinking that as speakers we—through *dianoia* (διανοια)—are capable of tracing truth within the *logos* of the world that reveals itself gradually, but never totally (Balabanić, 2022). The hiddenness of the totality of truth touches not only the reality before the subject but also the subject itself.

For this reason, Socrates' question about the value of philosophy concerns not only "what people of the *polis* think of the philosopher" but also "what the philosopher truly seeks." Within Romano Guardini's interpretation:

> In order to be able to speak of spiritual and divine things with complete freedom – in such a way that the words come from the heart of the subject and pierce to the vital centre of the hearer – the speaker must have separated himself from ties of money and struggle for power (Guardini, 1948).

A philosopher faithful to his true vocation might be mocked by the crowd—just as Thales was ridiculed by the peasant girl (Platon, 1979)—yet Socrates, rather than retreating, invited Theaetetus to weigh the "cost" of such a way of life while affirming that "the divine" is the highest moral measure:

> In the divine there is no shadow of unrighteousness, only the perfection of righteousness; and nothing is more like the divine than any one of us who becomes as righteous as possible. It is here that a man shows his true spirit and power or lack of spirit and nothingness (Plato & Cornford, 1957).

From this it becomes clear that "the divine" is not the shadow of anthropomorphic gods; it is the perfection and fulfillment of goodness. The problem with the mythical beliefs held by the *polis*—which sustained legal obedience—lay in the framework of "religious knowledge" that quickly became the object of skepticism by the faculty of reason. Socrates was indeed skeptical of myth, but he was not a relativist concerning the moral implications of the interpretation of the *theion* that he sought to develop in his discussion with Theaetetus.

On one hand, he guided Theaetetus to recognize the "logical traps" promoted by the sophists; on the other, he encouraged openness to test the limits of knowledge in order to experience truth. Since

knowledge is not fully contained in perception, fleeting mental clarity, or memory, it possesses a unique *telos*. The issue does not concern knowledge as a mere operational faculty of reason—as if divine truth were compressed into information about the world and objects. The question of truth transcends cosmological investigations such as in the *Timaeus* or the normative architecture of the *Republic*. Truth is "abstract"—like numbers and geometric forms—that we can only grasp through representation, not as solid objects of the senses. Yet precisely in this experience of truth Guardini affirms:

> In the experience of truth Socrates becomes certain of the meaning of his own existence and of existence in general… [Socratic-Platonic philosophy] is anything rather than a mere work of concepts… the man behind it is rich, strong, developed all around, and in touch with the most creative culture known to history (Guardini, 1948).

At first glance, the "existential" nuance of truth may appear trivial—anyone might claim to possess a "personal truth" according to their interpretation of life. But Socrates filtered such claims through dialectic: if "truth" is used in an epistemic sense, it demands both a knowing subject and a known object. At this point, the object of Socratic knowledge is neither the physical world alone nor mere numerical abstraction. Truth does not lie hidden in critique of the *polis* nor in mythological faith; all of these are merely stages that Theaetetus must pass through in the conversation. Nor is truth revealed merely by "negation": by stating what is not knowledge.

From this perspective, the Socrates–Theaetetus dialogue has a firm philosophical structure if we confine ourselves to the epistemic nature of the pursuit of truth. In that pursuit, Theaetetus does not need to invoke the mediation of the *daimonion*. And Socrates' *daimonion* should not be equated with the "demon" of later traditions. In Renaissance Neoplatonism, for example, Hermanus Dalmata described *daimones* as celestial spirits capable of communicating with humans, foretelling the future, and even being "invoked" in dreams or theurgical acts (Banić-Pajnić, 2017). Socrates did not assign such a role to the *daimonion* for Theaetetus; rather, he emphasized the power of dialogue as a process of "spiritual birth."

"Giving birth" to the soul is a form of κάθαρσις (*katharsis*)—a purification through thinking—that entails the rejection and removal of "ignorance" (*agnoia*) from within the soul (Mikecin, 2007). This ignorance is not identical with the level of education; it grows within a closed framework where the soul interacts with perceptual data but does not ascend toward the world of Forms (*eidos*). Gradual familiarity with Socratic intuitions does not "introduce" Theaetetus to an "atheistic concept" of the divine. Beyond affirming that the *theion* is wholly just, Socrates does not drag Theaetetus into a debate over the "inaccessibility" of the divine to the senses—though we can see why he invites Theaetetus to reflect on the "infinite" through two images: the aviary and the example of numbers–syllables (Platon, 1979). In the aviary, knowledge is depicted as a birdcage containing various species: a composite of justified and false beliefs (true vs. false belief). In the numbers–syllables example, rational judgment is limited by the first elements that cannot be further broken down.

Confronted with the ontological view of beings as composites of infinite elements, the divine is neither "composed" nor "uncomposed"; it surpasses such analogies. It is "infinite," yet different from the theistic concept in which "infinite" is bound to omnipotence and moral perfection—"when we say that God is infinite we say that God is able to do anything logically possible for God to do" (Yandell, 1994). In the Socratic–Platonic horizon, the *theion* is a primordial ideal—the perfection that serves as a latent measure for every moral decision, but it is "iconic": unchanging and not mystically communicative. For this reason, there is no "mysticism" in Socrates' *theion*. A seeker who wishes to experience *katharsis* cannot achieve it alone; he requires the presence of the other, the interlocutor. Here Socrates shows humility—he does not even call himself a "teacher," at most "someone who knows a little more" (Platon, 1979). This perspective opens the interpretation that the dialogue about knowledge possesses the dimension of "religious experience": not because its content is dogmatic, but because its structure of encounter is transcendent.

The explicit purpose of the dialogue—the definition of knowledge—is never attained; what emerges instead are distinctions: from perception, memory, learning, to abstract thinking. Yet Theaetetus is driven to search for a deeper meaning of "pursuing truth about knowledge"—which is at

the same time "truth about the self." This, we propose, constitutes an advance in ancient "theology": while the sophists were agnostic about the existence of the gods, and cosmologists reduced faith to a first principle, Socrates redirected the question back to the face of the Other. Following Lévinas, Josip Oslić reminds us:

> Being and God speak to us with their faces… The language of face is a language of mystery in which the unfathomable… exists only as boded, and never to be totally understood (Oslić, 2001).

For Socrates, every dialogue is an effort to give birth to the soul; he merely helps the interlocutor to reach their shared goal—truth. Because the truth of knowledge is not composed of perceptual data, mathematical laws, or trivial "meanings of life," it can be understood as the transcendence of the Other—the person we encounter and engage with in questioning.

It is with this character that all Socratic dialogues unfold, and the *Theaetetus* emphasizes the relation between defining knowledge and wisdom. Theaetetus is encouraged not only to pursue truth about himself as the ideal of personal endeavor, but also as a value of collective inquiry among interlocutors: on the question of the *theion* (the divine) and *theos* (God) in relation to knowledge. "Wisdom" in this dialogue is not doctrine or speculative pinnacle; it arises from mutual respect and openness to the arguments of the Other—who always retains mystery.

In the third stage of this research, we draw on modern philosophical-theological interpretations of the divine, God, and knowledge to address whether religious faith is relevant to Socrates' definition of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*. First, considering Guardini's position on Socratic *katharsis* as an existential experience of truth, it becomes evident that Socrates was not driven by rigid demands of systematic analysis; rather, he activated the interlocutor's speculation in a living conversation (Guardini, 1948). Second, Socrates did not impose his personal religious belief in the *daimonion* as a "divine entity" upon his interlocutor on the path of knowledge—although the idealist (ontological) concept of truth he employed is analogous to the theistic concept of God as infinite and eternal (Yandell, 1994). Third, the knowledge that arises from interpersonal communication is not founded on religious dogma, but the mode of encounter itself is transcendental in a broad sense: the Other is never an "open book." Facts, traits, and data can be gathered—yet the totality of the Other is never fully grasped—and precisely this is not the purpose of the Socratic approach to dialogue and the pursuit of truth. In simplified form, these findings can be presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Finding the Definition of Knowledge (*Theaetetus*)

Key Aspect	Content/Summary
Focus of the dialogue	The search for the definition of knowledge through dialectic; not the construction of a "system" (that is Plato's task).
Role of *logos* & *dianoia*	*Logos* as συμπλοκή τῶν εἰδῶν (*embrace of ideas*); truth unfolds gradually through *dianoia*.
Attitude toward myth & *daimonion*	Myth used as allegory/reference; the *daimonion* is not invoked as a mediator of knowledge for Theaetetus.
Concept of the *theion* (divine)	The *theion* as the perfection of justice/goodness; non-anthropomorphic; "iconic," unchanging, non-mystical.
Epistemic metaphors	Aviary (birdcage: mixture of true/false belief); numbers–syllables (limits of first elements).
Role of dialogue & *katharsis*	Dialogue = "spiritual birth"; κάθαρσις (*katharsis*) as the elimination of *agnoia* through thinking.
Explicit aim & outcome	Final definition of knowledge not achieved; distinctions arise (perception, memory, learning, abstraction) and deepen the pursuit of truth.
Methodological implications (stage III analysis)	(1) *Katharsis* as existential experience of truth (Guardini); (2) Analogy of idealist truth ↔ God as infinite (Yandell); (3) Knowledge born of encounter—transcendental relational mode (Oslić).

Table 3 underscores that the main focus of the *Theaetetus* is not the construction of a coherent philosophical system, as Plato would later undertake, but Socrates' effort to search for the definition of knowledge through the process of dialectic. In this sense, knowledge is not treated as a rigid theoretical construct but as the outcome of critical conversation that opens the possibility for new understanding. The dialogue, therefore, emphasizes the *praxis* dimension of knowledge: it lives in process, not merely in a final, definitive result.

Furthermore, the role of *logos* and *dianoia* is central. *Logos* is described as συμπλοκή τῶν εἰδῶν, or the "embrace of ideas," showing that knowledge emerges through the interconnection of ideas rather than in isolation. Meanwhile, *dianoia* (reflective thought) serves as the means by which truth is gradually uncovered. Socrates thus emphasizes that truth is not something immediately and fully disclosed but a gradual process that tests human patience and rational openness.

Socrates' attitude toward myth and the *daimonion* also reveals uniqueness. Myth is not rejected outright but employed as an allegorical tool to illustrate concepts. The *daimonion*, often regarded as a religious inner voice, is not positioned as a mediator of knowledge in the dialogue with Theaetetus. This demonstrates that knowledge is emphasized as the product of rational dialectic between subjects rather than something dependent on religious revelation or external authority. The concept of the *theion* here is equally significant. Socrates defines the *theion* as the perfection of justice and goodness, not as the anthropomorphic figures of mythological gods. With its "iconic," unchanging, and non-mystical character, the *theion* is positioned as a moral horizon that guides the pursuit of truth. This signals a shift from the popular religious beliefs of the *polis* toward a more universal and normative philosophical understanding.

The metaphors employed in the dialogue also enrich the discussion. For instance, the aviary is used to depict knowledge as a mixture of true and false beliefs, while the numbers–syllables example shows the limits of human reasoning at the level of irreducible elements. Both metaphors illustrate that knowledge always exists in tension between true and false belief and is bounded by the capacities of human reason. In addition, the roles of dialogue and *katharsis* are crucial. Dialogue is understood as "spiritual birth," a process of κάθαρσις (*katharsis*) that eliminates *agnoia* (ignorance) through thinking. In other words, knowledge is not merely the accumulation of information but an existential transformation of the soul through interaction with others.

Yet the explicit aim of the dialogue—the final definition of knowledge—is never attained. What emerges are distinctions among perception, memory, learning, and abstract thinking. Paradoxically, this "failure" opens a space for deepening the meaning of the pursuit of truth, while affirming the dialogical and processual character of knowledge in the Socratic tradition. Finally, the methodological implications of the third stage of analysis underscore the relevance of this dialogue today. First, *katharsis* is understood as an existential experience of truth (Guardini, 1948). Second, Socrates' idealist concept of truth can be analogized with the theistic idea of God as infinite (Yandell, 1994). Third, knowledge is understood as the outcome of interpersonal encounter—a transcendental relational mode (Oslić, 2001). Thus, the *Theaetetus* is not merely a classical text of epistemology but also an offer of a philosophical framework on the relation between truth, religiosity, and human relationality.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study affirm that the dialogue *Theaetetus* cannot be understood merely as a text of pure epistemology, but rather as a conversational space that integrates the search for the definition of knowledge with religious dimensions. Socrates acknowledged the existence of the *daimonion* as a personal moral guide, distinguishing his religiosity from the communal piety of the *polis*, which was ritualistic and mythological. At the same time, he placed the *theion* as a non-anthropomorphic moral horizon that guided the pursuit of truth. In this framework, myth was not entirely rejected but used as allegory to test the consistency of reason. These findings demonstrate that Socratic epistemology operated within a religious-philosophical framework: dialogue was not only a means of seeking rational definitions, but also a medium of *katharsis* to shape personal integrity while simultaneously testing the rationality of the laws of the *polis*.

Explaining these findings becomes significant when related to the gaps in previous research. Studies on the Socratic method emphasized the power of dialectical questioning as a tool for uncovering truth (Bussanich & Smith, 2013; Harter, 2013; Martínez Hernández, 2024), but tended to stop at the ethical dimension. The religious dimension embedded in Socratic practice—particularly the role of the *daimonion* and its relation to the myths of the *polis*—has often been overlooked. Meanwhile, research on Plato has largely focused on metaphysical systems, the theory of Forms, or political philosophy (Bobonich, 2009; Press et al., 2015; Young, 2013), such that the religious nuance in his dialogues is viewed as mere ornamentation. Likewise, studies on the Socrates–Plato relationship emphasized interpretive problems regarding the representation of thought (Nichols, 2011; Warnek, 2005; Zilioli, 2015), but did not touch on the religious dimension of the *Theaetetus*. The only study approaching this area is Balabanić (2022), which highlights the theological and scientific significance of *logos* in the *Theaetetus*. However, that study does not frame the issue within the phenomenology of religion or in relation to the *daimonion* and the concept of the *theion*. Thus, this study offers novelty by positioning the religious-philosophical dimension as central to epistemological analysis in the *Theaetetus*, not as a marginal embellishment. In this sense, the research emphasizes that the religious dimension is not peripheral but an integral element of the Socratic search for knowledge.

The findings also show that Socrates rejected grounding knowledge solely in perception or true belief, instead insisting on the necessity of dialogue that gives birth to truth through *maieutics*. The involvement of the *daimonion* shows that the pursuit of truth is rooted in personal moral integrity, not merely in formal rationality. The *Theaetetus* thus possesses a structure that is both philosophical and religious: epistemology cannot be separated from the moral and religious horizon that affirms human existence. This positions the dialogue not only as an epistemological text, but also as a religious-philosophical reflection on humanity's search for truth in relation to law, myth, and fellow interlocutors.

Historically, these findings demonstrate that Socratic philosophy emerged in an atmosphere of the *polis* saturated with ritual and myth. Socrates' decision to affirm the *daimonion* as a personal voice of conscience can be read as a subtle critique of the dominance of collective religiosity, without entirely rejecting *polis* traditions. He never severed ties with the beliefs of his society but reinterpreted them through personal inner experience. This position indicates that for Socrates, faith and philosophy were not two separate realms but rather mutually animating ones. He regarded the gods as beings vastly superior in power and wisdom, yet in practice he emphasized rationality as the means of testing the meaning of holiness and divine law (McPherran, 2009).

This dimension gave rise to the embryo of rational theology, which later influenced Plato and the Stoics, as an effort to reconcile religious commitment with philosophical reasoning. Socrates was not merely a follower of *polis* religious traditions, but also a reformer who used reason to renew the religious conceptions of his time. His stance toward myth and law can be read as an effort to challenge and renew established religious conceptions, a pattern later known as the "Socratic Problem," the enduring tension between the freedom of philosophy and socio-religious authority (Schliesser, 2012).

The traces of Socratic religiosity continued into post-Socratic traditions. The Stoics, Epicureans, and Cynics developed forms of spirituality rooted in Socratic principles, particularly the emphasis on self-control, the pursuit of inner truth, and this-worldly mysticism that distinguished them from other more transcendent mysticisms (Hunt, 2013). Indeed, the influence of Socratic religiosity was acknowledged in early Christian tradition: Justin Martyr referred to Socrates as one of the "Christians before Christ," since he was believed to have inherited traces of universal truth and morality that found fulfillment in Christ's teaching (Banna, 2024).

Socially, this position reveals the tension between public faith, which binds citizens through law and religious festivals, and personal faith, which demands individual accountability. Public faith in the context of the ancient *polis* is evident in festivals such as the Panathenaia or the Eleusinian Mysteries, which affirmed collective loyalty to the city's patron deity. This aligns with contemporary studies showing that public religion tends to manifest through communal and political activities, where religious organizations shape social norms and even public policy (Glazier, 2020; Zehavi, 2017). Public

religion also operates through public theology, which seeks to assert the role of religion in the public sphere by bridging theological language with socio-political discourse (Carbine, 2014). In this sense, the religiosity of the *polis* functioned as both a social adhesive and a means of political legitimation.

By contrast, personal religiosity in Socratic religiosity took a different form. Socrates emphasized the role of the *daimonion* as a voice of conscience that demanded moral responsibility from the individual. This type of personal faith did not always align with public structures but rather served as a critical reflection on communal practices. In the study of religion, personal religion is understood as individual engagement with the transcendent beyond the framework of official institutions, including private rituals, subjective interpretation, and coping with traumatic experiences (Kindt, 2015; Parker, 2015; Sinding Bentzen, 2019). Thus, the difference between public and personal religiosity lies in the locus of authority: the former rests on collective agreement, while the latter is rooted in the individual conscience.

Although they appear opposed, the relationship between the two is in fact complementary. Recent research shows that personal belief can trigger constructive public engagement, such as civic participation, critiques of injustice, and the promotion of social responsibility (Smidt, 2008). This resonates with Socrates' position in the *Theaetetus*, where, while emphasizing the freedom of conscience through the *daimonion*, he still affirmed the importance of obedience to the laws of the *polis*. In other words, personal and public religiosity exist in a dialectical relationship: the public dimension preserves social cohesion, while the personal dimension safeguards moral integrity. The tension between them is not a sign of absolute conflict but an opportunity to renew society's understanding of truth and justice.

Ideologically, Socrates' courage to question the foundations of piety and the truth of the gods of the *polis* constitutes a critique of political power that employed myth for legitimation. Put differently, the *Theaetetus* shows that epistemology cannot be detached from the historical, social, and ideological dimensions of the Athenian *polis*. This critique is evident in Socrates' skepticism toward traditional religious practices that associated wealth and safety with divine favor. Instead, he argued that material fortune was not identical with divine blessing, thereby undermining the religious basis often used by the *polis* to justify social status and political power (Jakubiec, 2021).

Furthermore, Socrates offered a form of moral theology that separated piety from blind obedience to collective myths. He emphasized that divine law should be just and rational, not merely a reflection of the contradictory will of the gods. This stance generated controversy in Athens because it implicitly relativized the authority of public religion and was even considered one of the factors leading to his trial (Lännström, 2013; Pascual, 2020).

The philosophical method he employed—the Socratic method of questioning and refutation—also functioned as political critique. By challenging the claims of knowledge and virtue held by officials and religious leaders, Socrates highlighted the limitations of human understanding while demonstrating that political legitimacy grounded in myth could not be accepted uncritically (Cain, 2007; Hani, 2022). Socrates' choice to conduct dialogues in public spaces further showed that his critique was not directed exclusively at elites, but invited broader audiences to form temporary communities of truth-seekers outside the authority of the political-religious order of the *polis* (Keum, 2016).

The legacy of this Socratic critique later had wide influence on modern political thought. Hannah Arendt, for instance, viewed Socrates' method as a model of critical thinking that could preserve the public sphere from domination by opinion and dogma, particularly in times of crisis of shared values (Zhavoronkov, 2017). Moreover, the concept of "political religion" developed by Eric Voegelin and his successors reminds us that twentieth-century totalitarian ideologies operated under a similar logic: exploiting religious symbols to demand absolute loyalty from citizens (Bohmann, 2009; Mommsen, 2007). Within this framework, Socrates' courage in ancient Athens remains relevant across eras, because questioning piety was not only a theological matter but also an ideological resistance to political claims equating obedience to the state with obedience to the divine.

Reflection on these findings highlights both functions and dysfunctions. The function of this study is that it opens the religious dimension that has often been neglected in studies of Plato's epistemology. By emphasizing the role of the *daimonion*, myth, and the *theion*, this research broadens the

understanding that the Socratic pursuit of knowledge is not only rational but also moral and religious. The dysfunction, however, arises when emphasis on the religious aspect risks reducing the *Theaetetus* to a purely spiritual text. If readings overemphasize religiosity, then its epistemological dimension could be diminished. For this reason, balance becomes crucial: Socratic philosophy must be understood as a dialectical space where epistemology and religiosity mutually reinforce each other. This balance is consistent with Plato's philosophy, which from the beginning interwove knowledge and religion. Through the theory of Forms, knowledge (*epistêmê*) is understood as recognition of true reality, while belief (*doxa*) only grasps its shadow (Moss, 2021; Moss & Schwab, 2019). Thus, epistemology cannot be separated from a metaphysical horizon that carries a religious dimension.

At the center of this connection lies the Form of the Good, the metaphysical principle that makes the world intelligible while guiding humans toward ethical life (Nathan, 2022; Wolfsdorf, 2011). The famous cave allegory also illustrates that true intellectual liberation requires a spiritual journey: leaving darkness to reach the light of truth (Bakewell, 2023; Kim, 2004; Weissman, 2021). Contemporary readings even stress the allegory's relevance for liberatory education and decolonial awareness, showing that Plato's epistemology has always been transformative. The religious dimension in Plato's philosophy becomes even clearer in the *Timaeus*, where the Demiurge is portrayed as the divine cause that orders the cosmos according to the principle of goodness (Migliori, 2023). In the *Laws*, Plato also recognized the importance of civic religion as social glue, though he critiqued practices portraying the gods as bribable through offerings or prayers (Centrone, 2023). Thus, Plato did not reject the role of public religiosity but redirected it to align with rational and moral principles.

The integration of epistemology and theology in Plato's thought even provided a foundation for early Christian tradition. Gerson (2008) shows how the Idea of the Good was interpreted personally, opening the way for Christian Platonism. In this framework, wisdom is seen as the knowledge of Divine Ideas, with God as the source of all human wisdom (Evans, 2010). In this sense, a sharp separation between epistemology and religiosity not only reduces Plato but also ignores the immense influence of his philosophy on Western theological tradition. Thus, a balanced reading of the *Theaetetus* affirms that epistemology and religiosity are not two mutually exclusive realms but two horizons that mutually reinforce each other. Philosophical knowledge directs humans toward goodness and justice, while the religious dimension ensures that knowledge does not fall into empty relativism. This balance enables the *Theaetetus* to remain faithful to the Socratic–Platonic intention: to seek truth that is both rational and transcendent.

As an action plan, this study suggests that classical philosophy research should more boldly integrate religious-philosophical analysis with historical and social approaches. In contemporary academic contexts, such a reading is relevant for philosophy and religious education in fostering awareness that knowledge is not merely a technical skill but also the formation of moral conscience. In the public sphere, such an approach can function as a critique of the ideological manipulation of religion and myth in politics, while encouraging models of legal obedience that are rational and ethical. By placing religiosity and epistemology in balanced dialectic, the *Theaetetus* can be reread as a text that provides a foundation for a healthy relationship between knowledge, faith, and life in the *polis*—a reflection that remains relevant in the era of modern democracy.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the dialogue *Theaetetus* cannot be read merely as a text of pure epistemology, but rather as a work that integrates the pursuit of knowledge with the religious and socio-political dimensions of the Athenian *polis*. The main findings affirm that Socrates expressed personal religiosity through the *daimonion*, which differed from the collective piety of the *polis*; that he employed myth as critical allegory rather than dogmatic revelation; and that he emphasized the non-anthropomorphic concept of the *theion* as a moral horizon. Epistemology in the *Theaetetus* operated through dialogue, *logos*, and *dianoia* in a *kathartic* manner, so that knowledge was understood as a transformative process rather than as a final definition. At the same time, obedience to the laws of the *polis* was upheld, yet grounded in rationality rather than in religious fear.

The primary contribution of this study lies in positioning the *Theaetetus* as both a religious-philosophical and an epistemological text. By integrating the phenomenology of religion with philosophical analysis, this research shows that Socratic epistemology was not merely a logic of knowledge, but a *praxis* of wisdom binding together knowledge, faith, and political life. Its novelty is in opening a pathway of interpretation where epistemology and religiosity do not negate one another, but rather mutually reinforce each other, while also demonstrating their relevance for education, public ethics, and critiques of the ideologization of religion in modern politics.

The main limitation of this study lies in its textual focus, restricted to the *Theaetetus* with only limited comparison to other Platonic dialogues such as the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Critias*, *Phaedo*, and *Laws*. It does not fully explore the continuity of Plato's religious-epistemological thought in other major works such as the *Republic* or the *Timaeus*. Therefore, future research may broaden the scope by incorporating these texts and by examining the reception of Socratic and Platonic thought in post-classical traditions, including its influence on early Christian theology and modern philosophy. In this way, the relationship between epistemology, religiosity, and public life can be more comprehensively understood, making a greater contribution to the study of philosophy and religion.

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