

Plato on the grades of perception: *Theaetetus* 184-6 and the *Phaedo*  
Gail Fine; Cornell University/Oxford University

#### Abstract

In The Sixth Set of Replies to Objections to the *Meditations* (CSM II 294-5/AT VII 436-8), Descartes describes three grades of perception. Though there's room for dispute about how to interpret them, on one view the first involves just the stimulation of the sense organs and so is wholly and only physiological; the second involves sensory awareness but is non-conceptual and so non-propositional; the third is conceptual and propositional. In this paper, I ask which of these grades Plato places perception at in *Theaetetus* 184-6 and in the *Phaedo*. So far as I know, no one thinks perception is at the first grade in *Tht.* 184-6 and it's clear that it isn't. There is, however, considerable dispute about whether the passage places perception at the second or third grade. As to the *Phaedo*, I don't know of anyone who thinks it places perception at the first grade; but I'll briefly discuss some evidence that might tempt one to think it does so. There is dispute about whether the dialogue places perception at the second or third grade; so I'll spend more time on that. Further, since there's been so much discussion of perception in *Tht.* 184-6, I'll be relatively brief about it. I'll consider the *Phaedo* at greater length, since there's been relatively little discussion of its account of perception: which is somewhat surprising in view of the fact that the dialogue says quite a lot about perception.