

Dialectic in Plato's Meno, Phaedo, and Republic

HUGH H. BENSON

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For Ann, my best friend

"By and large the greatest philosophers have been the greatest, and the most self-conscious, methodologists; indeed, I am tempted to regard this fact as primarily accounting for their greatness as philosophers."

(Grice 1986, 66)

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Clitophon concludes his eponymous dialogue by addressing Socrates¹ as follows:

But if you're finally ready to stop exhorting me with speeches— I mean, if it had been about gymnastics that you were exhorting me, saying that I must not neglect my body, you would have proceeded to give me what comes next after such an exhortation, namely, an explanation of the nature of my body and of the particular kind of treatment this nature requires—that's the kind of thing you should do now. Assume that Clitophon agrees with you that it's ridiculous to neglect the soul itself while concerning ourselves solely with what we work hard to acquire for its sake. Suppose now that I have also said all the other things which come next and which I just went through. Then, please, do as I ask and I won't praise you before Lysias and others for some things while criticizing you for others, as I do now. For I will say this, Socrates, that while you're worth the world to someone who hasn't yet been converted to the pursuit of virtue, to someone who's already been converted you rather get in the way of his attaining happiness by reaching the goal of virtue. (Clitophon 410C8-E8)2

^{1.} Throughout this volume "Socrates" refers to the character depicted in Plato's dialogues. (For the sake of brevity, I will usually abbreviate "Socrates is depicted as Φ -ing" as "Socrates Φ -ies." But the latter should always be understood as an abbreviation of the former.) What the views of this Socratic character indicate about the views of the historical Socrates I do not address. What the views of this character indicate about the views of Plato, the author of the dialogues, is more complex. Roughly, I take the philosophical commitments of the character Socrates (evidenced by what he is both made to say and do) as evidence for the philosophical commitments of the author Plato, although there are a number of complexities. For example, insofar as we find the character Socrates exhibiting different views, either in virtue of what he is made to say or in virtue of what he is made to do, I will for the most part leave open whether these changes in the views of the character reflect Plato's own philosophical development or Plato's pedagogical approach. None of this, however, commits me to the mouthpiece interpretation at least as Wolfsdorf (2008a,19–25) understands it. See pp. 8–11.

^{2.} Unless otherwise noted, I will be using, although sometimes slightly modifying, the translations of Plato's dialogues found in Cooper and Hutchinson (1997).

Clitophon here offers a challenge to Socrates with which I, at least, am quite sympathetic—especially insofar as one takes Socrates to be committed to the view that knowledge is in some way essentially connected with virtue.³ For, like Clitophon, I have felt the force of Socrates' exhortation to pursue the knowledge that is virtue which I both recognize that I lack and value more than the knowledge of how to care for my body. And, again like Clitophon, having felt the force of this exhortation, I have wondered what comes next. How am I to go about acquiring this knowledge which is in some way crucially connected with virtue (henceforth, virtue-knowledge) and which I recognize that I lack and value more than other knowledge?

Clitophon supposes that Socrates possesses this virtue-knowledge himself and so Clitophon's conclusion challenges Socrates to teach him what Socrates himself knows.⁴ But I, like many, and perhaps most, Socratic scholars, take seriously Socrates' professions of ignorance and so doubt that Socrates has the virtue-knowledge Clitophon challenges him to teach.⁵ So, Socrates can respond to Clitophon's version of the challenge by simply denying that he has this

^{3.} Socratic intellectualism, what Brickhouse and Smith (2010, 1) call "virtue intellectualism," is traditionally associated with the doctrine that knowledge (of some sort) is (in some way) at least necessary and sufficient for virtue. See Irwin (1977, ch. 3), Vlastos (1981;1991, 200-35), Brickhouse and Smith (1994, 71), Irwin (1995, 75-76), Nehamas (1987), Penner (1990, 1991, 1996, 1997), Santas (1979, 181-217), Kahn (1996, 73) Rickless (1998), Segvic (2000), Sedley (2004, 19), Wolfsdorf (2008a, ch. 3). Even Brickhouse and Smith (2010, 153), who are at pains to deny that Socrates was committed to motivational intellectualism, agree that Socrates was committed to the view "that all virtue is really nothing but a kind of knowledge—knowledge of good and evil. And because it is the same knowledge that constitutes each of the several virtues, in some sense all the virtues are the same" (the unity of virtues). Indeed, they claim to have been able to find only one scholar who doubts Socrates' commitment to this latter view, the unity of virtues (Johnson 2005). Gentzler (1996, 258) cites the following passages: Apology 29D-30A, Laches 192C-194D, Charmides 174B-176A, and Protagoras 349E-360E. It is often maintained, however, that outside the so-called elenctic dialogues (see note 6, this chapter), Socrates is depicted as abandoning the necessity and sufficiency of knowledge for virtue in favor of the view that knowledge (of some sort) is only sufficient (see, for example, Meno 98B-99E) or only necessary (see, for example, Republic 4.427C-444E and 6.487D-497A). See, for example, Devereux (1978, 125-26n17), Vlastos (1991, 86-91), and Brickhouse and Smith (2010, 193-221). For a recent, and to my mind plausible, defense that Plato never abandons the intellectualism of the elenctic dialogues, see Carone (2001). See also Bobonich (2002), who argues that in the *Phaedo* and *Republic* (but not the *Laws*), Plato denies that nonphilosophers are capable of genuine virtue because nonphilosophers are not capable of genuine knowledge or wisdom. Since the present study spans the range of dialogues in which this doctrine may undergo a change, I will identify Socratic intellectualism with the weakest of the possible doctrines. As long as Socrates is depicted as maintaining at least an essential connection between knowledge and virtue the saliency of Clitophon's challenge will remain.

^{4.} See Slings (1999, 81).

^{5.} See the first of the two assumptions that frame the present study, pp. 11–19.

virtue-knowledge and assert, as he does often in the elenctic dialogues,6 that he is not a teacher. But that seems only a dodge. It only makes Clitophon's more general challenge more salient. For those of us, like Socrates and Clitophon, who feel the force of Socrates' exhortation to pursue the virtue-knowledge that we recognize that we lack, what comes next? How do we acquire the knowledge that Socrates has made us desire? Socrates, it would seem, owes us an answer to this question if, like Clitophon, we want to cease praising Socrates for some things and criticizing him for others. Perhaps Clitophon has overstepped in criticizing Socrates for getting in the way of my pursuit of the virtue-knowledge he has exhorted me to pursue. But, I am inclined to think that he has left me hanging—if this challenge goes unmet.8

I propose to take this challenge seriously. Throughout the Platonic dialogues Socrates seeks, and encourages others to seek, the knowledge and so the virtue he and they lack. But how are Socrates and his interlocutors to go about this? How is this missing virtue-knowledge to be acquired? Clitophon is right to expect an answer, and I propose to investigate the answer or answers found in the dialogues.

In doing so, I approach the essence of Platonic philosophy. For Plato, philosophy is the search for the knowledge or wisdom9 one lacks, as exemplified (most

^{6.} By the "elenctic" dialogues I mean (in alphabetical order): Apology, Charmides, Crito, Euthyphro, Euthydemus, Gorgias, Hippias Major, Hippias Minor, Ion, Laches, Lysis, Protagoras, and Republic 1. By "middle" or "classical" dialogues I mean (again in alphabetical order): Cratylus, Meno, Parmenides, Phaedo, Phaedrus, Republic 2-10, Symposium, Theaetetus. And by "late" dialogues I mean: Critias, Laws, Philebus, Politicus, Sophist, Timaeus. In categorizing the dialogues in this way, however, I do not mean to be presupposing a particular order of composition (either within the groups or between the groups as a whole). If the argument of this book succeeds, the dialogues will be seen to fall into roughly these three groups based, in part, on the focus of philosophical method found in each of the dialogues. See note 1, this chapter and pp. 8–11.

^{7.} For some reason to think that Plato may not have thought that Clitophon has overstepped, see Republic 7.537E1-539E1.

^{8.} Clitophon's challenge is a serious one whether or not Plato is the author of the *Clitophon*. For a careful discussion of the authorship of the Clitophon, see Slings (1999, 215-34) and Roochnik (1984). Moreover, Clitophon's challenge is a serious one whether or not it is found in the Clitophon. But for an interpretation to the effect that something like this challenge is found in the *Clitophon*, see Slings (1999, esp. 81 and 184). See Vasiliou (2008, 1) for a slightly different interpretation of Clitophon's challenge and C. Moore (2012) for Clitophon's failure to understand Socrates and so for the failure of his challenge.

^{9.} Throughout I will be taking "wisdom" (sophia), "knowledge" (epistêmê, phronêsis), and "expertise" (technê) as virtually interchangeable. For a brief defense, see Benson (2000, 10) and Hawtrey (1972, 6). Also see, for example, Gagarin (1969, 135n10), Stokes (1986, 208), Penner (1992, 149n14), Roochnik (1996, 277), Dancy (2004, 90), Fine (2004, 41n1), and Wolfsdorf (2008a, 103). For an excellent discussion of some of the issues involved, see Fine (2008).

often in the dialogues) by Socrates. ¹⁰ In what, however, does the nature of this search consist? In taking Clitophon's challenge seriously, I am presupposing that Plato has (or at least should have) an answer to this question. I am presupposing that he takes the goal of philosophy to be not simply a random pursuit of the virtue-knowledge one lacks, but a directed pursuit aimed at its acquisition. And so he owes Clitophon (and us) an account of how such an acquisition is to be accomplished. In responding to this challenge, then, I seek the nature of Plato's philosophical method. ¹¹ Put differently, I seek the nature of Platonic dialectic, as Plato's philosophical method has come to be called. ¹²

Structure of the Argument

I begin by turning first to the elenctic dialogues (chapter 2). Insofar as an answer to Clitophon's challenge is to be found in these dialogues, it is rather disappointing. I maintain that the method of learning¹³ testified to in these dialogues, to the extent that there is one at all, is the method of learning from someone (else) who knows. Nevertheless, a variety of worries concerning such a learning strategy are expressed in these same dialogues, and yet there is little evidence of any other strategy pursued or recommended. If the Socrates of these dialogues is representative of the Socrates Clitophon is addressing in the *Clitophon*, then Clitophon is right to challenge him. But, things begin to look differently in dialogues like the *Meno*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Republic*.

If learning from another appears to be a flawed approach for acquiring the knowledge one lacks (at least in the case of virtue-knowledge), perhaps the

^{10.} For a succinct statement of this connection between Platonic philosophy and knowledge acquisition, see Wolfsdorf (2008a, 3–4). See also Vlastos (1994, 4), Brickhouse and Smith (1994, 5), and Blondell (2002, 13).

^{11.} I use "method" advisedly. Brickhouse and Smith (2002) argue that a method requires a special expertise and that Socrates lacks expertise. We will see that the method recommended in the elenctic dialogues does not require a special expertise, but that the method recommended in the middle or classical dialogues may. It evidently requires considerable training to be employed proficiently; see pp. 255–259. Hence, I do not use the term "method" as Brickhouse and Smith use the term. See also Brickhouse and Smith (1994, 10).

^{12.} See Robinson (1953, 70), who writes "The fact is that the word 'dialectic' had a strong tendency in Plato to mean 'the ideal method, whatever that may be.' In so far as it was thus merely an honorific title, Plato applied it at every stage of his life to whatever seemed to him at the moment the most hopeful procedure."

^{13.} By "learning" I mean the acquisition of *knowledge*, not the acquisition of information, true beliefs, or even justification. As such, my use of "learning" is technical, but I prefer this stipulative definition of learning over the inelegant "knowledge acquisition."

approach of de novo discovery or learning on one's own will be more successful.¹⁴ But in the Meno, a famous difficulty is presented for attempting to learn when no one who knows is present from whom one can learn (chapter 3). This difficulty, which I will refer to as Meno's paradox, 15 is taken seriously by Plato and is resolved, at least to Plato's satisfaction, by the theory of recollection. This theory, however, leaves Clitophon's challenge untouched. It purports to explain the possibility of successful learning when no one is available from whom to learn the knowledge sought, but it offers no recommendation or advice on the method to be employed in seeking this knowledge. In terms of meeting Clitophon's challenge, the theory of recollection is a nonstarter.

Later in the Meno, however, the second of the two traditional features of classical Platonism found in the *Meno* is introduced—the method of hypothesis. 16 Both here in the Meno and then again in the Phaedo, Socrates appears to recommend this method as a different strategy for learning than the one recommended and pursued in the elenctic dialogues. Nevertheless, there are indications in the text that his recommendation is less than sincere.¹⁷ After maintaining that the reasons for doubting Socrates' sincerity are inadequate (chapter 4), I lay out the general structure of the method of hypothesis as thinly described in three central passages¹⁸ (chapter 5). The method consists of two stages. In the first, or proof, stage [Pa] one seeks to identify a hypothesis from which an answer to the question one seeks to know can be obtained, and then [Pb] one shows how the hypothesis provides the answer to the question. In the second, or confirmation, stage one seeks to confirm the truth of the hypothesis [Ca] by testing the things that start out from (hormêthenta) the hypothesis to see whether they agree with

^{14.} For these two approaches throughout the dialogues, see Alcibiades I 106D4-9; Laches 185C5-8, 186D8-187A1; Euthydemus 285A8-B1; Cratylus 435D1-436A8; Phaedo 85C7-8, 99C6-9; Parmenides 135A7-B2; and Timaeus 51D3-E6. See also Slings (1999, 161n307), and pp. 25–28.

^{15.} To distinguish it from the paradox that Meno offers at Meno 80D5-8 and the one that Socrates offers at Meno 80E1-5.

^{16.} The alleged first appearance in the dialogues of the theory of recollection and the method of hypothesis in the Meno, while the theory of Forms remains missing, is sometimes taken to indicate the transitional nature of the Meno between the elenctic dialogues and the classical dialogues. See, for example, Vlastos (1991, 125n74). While I remain neutral with respect to the chronological issue, I do not think that it is accidental that both of these features appear together in a dialogue that explicitly takes up the discovery or *de novo* approach to learning.

^{17.} In the Meno, Socrates apparently introduces the method of hypothesis only because Meno is unwilling to seek the knowledge of the nature of virtue before seeking the answer to whether virtue is teachable, while in the *Phaedo* Socrates appears to describe the method of hypothesis as a deuteros plous, often translated as "second best."

^{18.} Meno 86E6-87B2 and Phaedo 100A3-8 and 101D1-E3.

one another, and [Cb] by identifying a further hypothesis from which the original hypothesis can be obtained, showing how the original hypothesis is obtained, and continuing this process until one reaches something adequate (*hikanon*).

Having outlined the general structure of the method of hypothesis as described in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*, I turn to three passages in which Socrates is made to employ this new method—new at least from the perspective of the elenctic dialogues. Seeing Socrates at work will help to thicken Socrates' otherwise thin descriptions.¹⁹

In the last third of the *Meno*, Plato provides a rather extended example of Socrates at work attempting to discover *de novo* the knowledge whether virtue is teachable by means of the method of hypothesis (chapter 6). After identifying the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge as the hypothesis from which an answer to the question of virtue's teachability can be obtained ([Pa]), and briefly describing how it is obtained ([Pb]), Socrates sets out to confirm this hypothesis by attempting to identify a higher hypothesis—that virtue is good—from which the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge can be obtained (*Meno* 87C–89E) ([Cb]). Next, Socrates sets out to confirm the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge by testing to see whether the things that start out from it (*horméthenta*) agree with one another (*Meno* 89D–96D) ([Ca]). What is perhaps most remarkable about this example of Socrates at work is that, while the first procedure confirms the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge, the second procedure disconfirms it. This leads Socrates to conclude rightly (in my view) that knowledge concerning the teachability of virtue has yet to be acquired (*Meno* 100B4–6).

I turn next to the *Phaedo*, where Socrates employs the method of hypothesis in the course of his final argument for the immortality of the soul (chapter 7). The extent to which Socrates employs the method of hypothesis in this argument is a matter of considerable controversy, and I maintain that although Socrates does apply the method, the application is frustratingly brief. He identifies the hypothesis that Forms exist from which he obtains an answer to his question concerning the *aitia* of generation and destruction ([Pa] and [Pb]). He does not go on to confirm this hypothesis in either of the two ways provided by his method, but immediately turns to the argument for the immortality of the soul based on his purported answer to the question concerning the nature of the *aitia* of generation and destruction.

Finally, I turn to a rather surprising text, Socrates' response to Glaucon's query whether Kallipolis is possible (*Republic* 5.471C4–6.502C8) (chapter 8).

^{19.} Here, I think, we can learn a lesson from the vast literature devoted to the Socratic elenchus. Much of this literature is devoted to Socrates' employment of the elenchus, as opposed to his rather brief and infrequent descriptions of his "customary" method. The notion of Socrates "at work" I owe to the titles of Santas's classic papers (1971, 1973).

Here, Plato displays in helpful detail an application of the method of hypothesis as we have come to see it described and applied in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*. Socrates first identifies a hypothesis from which an answer to the question whether Kallipolis is possible can be obtained—the coincidence of philosophy and political power ([Pa])—and shows how it is obtained (Republic 5.473B4-E5) ([Pb]). Next, Socrates sets out to confirm the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide from a higher hypothesis concerning the nature of philosophy and shows how the hypothesis concerning the nature of philosophy entails the coincidence of philosophy and political power (5.474C8-6.487A8) ([Cb]). Finally, he sets out to test the things that start out from the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide, and he argues that they agree (6.487B1-502C7) ([Ca]). Here, then, we have what appears to be a complete and successful application of the method of hypothesis. (The allusions to the Meno's unsuccessful application are abundant.) Socrates is driven to discover whether Kallipolis is possible on his own, and he does so by employing an application of the method of hypothesis as we have seen it being developed in the Meno and Phaedo. Nevertheless, despite appearances, the application of the method remains incomplete, as becomes evident from Plato's discussion of dialectic in *Republic* Books 6 and 7.

With all of this in the background, I turn finally to Plato's description of dialectic—the philosophical method par excellence—in Books 6 and 7 of the Republic (chapter 9). These books contain some of the most entrenched images of Platonic philosophy—the images of the Sun, the Line, and the Cave, as well as one of the most influential passages in the Platonic corpus—the description of the education of the future philosopher-rulers. I maintain that throughout these key texts Plato describes in some detail a method of learning that has come to be known as dialectic, distinguishing it from its near cousin, which I call "dianoetic," much like in the elenctic dialogues Socrates is made to distinguish the *elenchos* from its near cousin, eristic. I further maintain that the dialectical method that emerges from these texts is an elaboration and development of the method of hypothesis as we have seen it described and practiced in the preceding chapters. Two features of this elaboration will occupy our attention. First, Plato avers that the upward confirmation path of the method of hypothesis ([Cb]) must be pursued until one reaches "the unhypothetical first principle (archê) of everything," which is identified with the Form of the Good. Second, just as the contrast between the elenchos and eristic in the elenctic dialogues proves uniquely valuable in coming to terms with the true nature of the *elenchos*, so Plato's extended contrast between dialectic and dianoetic will prove equally fruitful in coming to terms with dialectic.

Here, then, we have a well-considered response to Clitophon's challenge. How are we to acquire the virtue-knowledge that Socrates has so successfully encouraged us to seek? Plato's answer is by practicing dialectic and everything that comes to mean in the *Republic*. Of course, many questions remain, answers to which may be uncovered in other Platonic dialogues and perhaps in the work of Plato's most famous student, Aristotle. But for now at least we can declare that Plato has not left hanging those of us who have been persuaded to search for the knowledge we value and lack. He has recommended a strategy for acquiring that knowledge on our own.

Philosophical Developmentalism

Before introducing the two assumptions which frame the current study, I should make note of a certain development indicated by the structure of the argument just delineated. The argument begins by noticing a weakness in the method of learning recommended in the elenctic dialogues, and turns to the middle or classical dialogues for a resolution of this alleged weakness. This may suggest a commitment to what has come to be called a developmentalist interpretation of Plato.

Recent Anglophone Platonic scholarship has been dominated by two competing interpretative models. The first understands the doctrinal differences expressed in the dialogues to reflect differences in the author's own philosophical views. ²⁰ For example, the fact (if it is a fact) that in the *Protagoras* Socrates appears committed to the unity of the virtues (however this is to be interpreted), while in the *Republic* he does not, indicates that Plato has changed his position concerning the virtues. While in the *Protagoras* he was committed to the unity of the virtues, by the time he comes to write the *Republic* he is not. Perhaps the most extreme representative of this model is Gregory Vlastos²¹ according to whom the philosophical views expressed in the elenctic dialogues could not have

^{20.} N.b. I take the developmentalist/unitarian dispute to presuppose a doctrinal interpretation of Plato—i.e., an interpretation according to which Plato has philosophical doctrines or theses he is at least in part concerned to promote in the dialogues. Consequently, I take the doctrinal/nondoctrinal dispute to be roughly orthogonal to the developmentalist/unitarian dispute. For supporters of a generally nondoctrinal approach see, for example, Press (1995) and Gonzalez (1995a, 1995b). Nevertheless, I do not intend any of this to be very precise. There will be exceptions and refinements to any general discussion of Platonic interpretation. My goal here is not to engage in the scholarship of scholarship (for a now rather old but still excellent place to begin such scholarship, see Tigerstedt 1977), but simply to situate my approach within the leading schools of current scholarship. See also, more recently and more briefly, Byrd (2007a) and Brickhouse and Smith (2010, 11–42), who directly take up the developmentalist/unitarian dispute I am concerned with here. For a very nice collection of essays devoted to this issue, see Annas and Rowe (2002).

^{21.} See especially Vlastos (1991). For more moderate, and to my mind more plausible, developmental approaches, see, for example, Nehamas (1985, 1987, 1992), Penner (1992), Brickhouse and Smith (1994), Irwin (1995), and Sedley (2004).

inhabited the same brain as the brain inhabited by the philosophical views of the middle or classical dialogues, unless it were the brain of a schizophrenic.²² Two features of this model are essential. First, given the dialogical nature of the Platonic corpus, one must identify Plato's spokesperson in each dialogue. One must, that is, determine which character in each dialogue is representing Plato's views. For obvious reasons, this character is typically identified with Socrates.²³ Second, one must determine the compositional chronology of the dialogues. A mixture of philological, psychological, and philosophical considerations figure in this determination.²⁴ A third, sometimes overlooked feature of this interpretative model is a sort of moderate principle of charity. Plato typically does not alter his philosophical position because he has become bored with it or because it has fallen out of popular favor. Rather, he changes his philosophical position in light of perceived difficulties with his earlier view. His new position is offered in response to these perceived difficulties. The new position is meant to resolve those problems by amplification, addition, alteration, or, in the extreme case, simply abandonment. It is for this reason that this first interpretative model is often called "developmentalism," as opposed, for example, to "pluralism."

According to the second interpretative model, the doctrinal differences within the dialogues are exaggerated and misunderstood. Many of the alleged differences are merely slight modifications of inadequately expressed views found in other dialogues, 25 while the genuinely substantive differences, if there are any, fail to represent differences in Plato's philosophical views. Rather, these latter differences reflect Plato's pedagogical motivations and/or his method of presentation.²⁶ The idea is that Plato does not display his philosophical view all at once but, rather, introduces it to his audience piecemeal, holding back portions

^{22.} Vlastos (1991, 46).

^{23.} Once again put perhaps most boldly by Vlastos (1991, 117n50), in his "grand methodological hypothesis": "in any given dialogue Plato allows the persona of Socrates only what he (Plato), at the time, considers true, . . ." In the late dialogues, Socrates tends to play a more minor role, and Plato's views are typically expressed by the Eleatic or Athenian strangers.

^{24.} For some excellent discussions see, for example, Brandwood (1992), Nails (1992, 1994), Young (1994), and Kahn (2002). Brickhouse and Smith (2010, 13–19), who explicitly defend a moderate developmentalist view against recent objections, see themselves as defending two principles, the identity principle and the relevant dialogues assumption, which correspond very closely with my first two features.

^{25.} See Annas (1999, 2002), who focuses on this aspect of the unitarian model.

^{26.} For a clear and relatively complete statement of this aspect of the unitarian model, see Kahn (1996), especially with respect to the alleged differences between the elenctic dialogues and the classical dialogues. See also Nails (1993), J. Cooper (1997), perhaps Wolfsdorf (2008a, 207), and, of course, perhaps most famously, Shorey (1965, 1903/1968).

of theory until other portions are completely elucidated, exposing puzzles and problems that require resolution, and thereby facilitating a genuine understanding of his comprehensive view. Thus, the fact (if it is a fact) that in the Protagoras Socrates appears committed to the unity of the virtues (however this is to be interpreted), while in the Republic he does not, indicates the importance Plato places on his denial of unity. Plato wants his audience to see that the position he delineates in the Republic should not be adopted uncritically. The unity of the virtues is not implausible, but it is subject to a variety of philosophical difficulties that cannot ultimately be surmounted. So understood, this second interpretative model, often referred to as "unitarianism," is likewise subject to three analogous features. First, one must identify the dialogue or set of dialogues (often the Republic and its near cousins, whatever dialogues those are) that represent Plato's comprehensive theory. One must, that is, distinguish those dialogues in which Plato is proleptically introducing his philosophical perspective from those dialogues in which he takes himself to be exhibiting that perspective. Second, one must determine the (rough) pedagogical order in which Plato intended the dialogues to be read. A mixture of literary, pedagogical, and philosophical considerations figure in this determination. Finally, and more frequently recognized, one must propose a plausible philosophical development of Plato's comprehensive theory so that one can charitably correlate this development to Plato's proleptic approach. For example, one seeks to identify problems displayed in one set of dialogues that can be plausibly understood as resolved in others, so that the former can be plausibly seen as proleptically looking forward to the latter dialogues.

When these two interpretative models are presented in this way they appear to be *philosophically* indistinguishable.²⁷ Both models see the dialogues as displaying a philosophical development from one set of dialogues to another. The difference lies in what each model presupposes Plato's intentions are in writing the dialogues. According to the developmentalist model, Plato's intentions are to exhibit to the reader of his dialogues his philosophical views at the time he is composing the dialogue. According to the unitarian model, Plato's intentions are to teach his readers his philosophical views one step at a time. Both, however, depend on uncovering a philosophical development in the dialogues.

While Plato's intentions are historically interesting, they will generally be set aside in the current study. I am interested in the philosophical doctrines displayed in the Platonic dialogues, and I will be maintaining that those doctrines (at least those concerning learning) undergo a development over the course of

^{27.} This is, of course, not to say that there cannot be enormous philosophical differences between specific versions of the two models.

the dialogues.²⁸ Whether this development reflects Plato's proleptic intentions or his own philosophical development I leave to other scholars and other times. Throughout this study, I intend to remain generally neutral between these two interpretative models.²⁹

The Nature of Knowledge

Finally, two assumptions frame this study. They are:

- [a] Socrates takes himself to lack knowledge, 30 and
- [b] Socrates seeks and encourages others to seek the knowledge he and they lack.31
- 28. Consequently, I do not mean to suggest that Plato's intentions are irrelevant to my project. For example, I will be assuming that Plato does not intend to mislead his readers or conceal from his readers his genuine views. Moreover, I will be assuming that he has views which he intends at least in part to be exhibiting in the dialogues. See note 20, this chapter.
- 29. See Dancy (2004), who adopts a similar interpretative stance. See also Blondell (2002, 13). That the elenctic dialogues present a different method of learning than the method presented in the Meno, Phaedo, and Republic is a consequence of the argument put forward in this study. What explains this difference I leave to the debate between developmentalists and unitarians. How radical is this difference is also something I leave open. In particular, the two sets of dialogues are not inconsistent—at least with respect to method. Indeed, the elenchos's role in eliminating the false conceit of knowledge is included in the dialectical method of the Republic. (See Benson 2005 for an early and to some extent superseded defense of the continued role of the elenchos and, more recently, see Benson 2013 for an interpretation of Plato's image of the Cave that has this result.) And the *elenchos* is incorporated with minor changes to the status of its premises in the downward path of the confirmation stage of the method of hypothesis; see pp. 171-173 and 260-263. Nevertheless, the method of hypothesis supplants—for whatever reason—the *elenchos* as Plato's method of knowledge acquisition in the so-called middle or classical dialogues.
- 30. Passages in which Socrates disavows knowledge include: Apology 20D7-E3, 21B4-5, 23B2-4; Charmides 165B4-C2, 175C8-176B1; Laches 200E2-5, 199E11-12; Meno 71A1-7, B2-3, 80D1-8; Republic 1 337D3-5, 337E4-5, 354B9-C3; Hippias Major 286C8-E2, 304D4–E5; Lysis 223B4–8; Gorgias 509A4–7; Hippias Minor 372B3–E1; Cratylus 391A4– 6, 428D1-5; Phaedo 97B3-7, 99C6-D2; Phaedrus 229C6-230B1, 235C6-D3, 273D8-E4; Republic 1.337e4-5, 2.368B1-5, 3.416B9-C3, 5.450A7-451A9, 6.506C2-507A5, 7.517B6-7, 7.533A4-5; Symposium 198A1-D7; Theaetetus 145E8-9, 150C3-D2, 210C4-D2; Timaeus 39C5-D7. See, for example, Irwin (1977, 39-40), McKim (1985, 64), Vlastos (1985), Fine (1992, 204), Brickhouse and Smith (1994, 31–34), Gentzler (1996, 273), Forster (2007), and Fine (2008).
- 31. See, for example, Charmides 166C7-D4; Gorgias 453C1-4, 457E1-458A5, and 505E4-6; and *Protagoras* 360E3-8. That Socrates encourages others to seek the knowledge they lack is also indicated by his desire to persuade his interlocutors of their ignorance; see Apology 23B4-7. He does this in order to persuade them to join him in the search for the knowledge they, like he, lack. See Lysis 218A2-B5, Meno 84A3-C6, and Symposium

Two features of these assumptions require our attention. First, the nature of knowledge involved in each assumption is potentially equivocal; and second, the scope of ignorance presupposed in the first, and so the scope of the knowledge sought in the second, is imprecise.

Concerning the knowledge involved in each assumption, Vlastos, for example, has found in the elenctic dialogues a distinction between what he calls "elenctic knowledge," on the one hand, and "certain knowledge," on the other.³² Others have found a distinction between ordinary and expert knowledge,³³ between knowledge that and knowledge how or why,³⁴ or even between human and divine knowledge.³⁵ We might generalize these accounts into a distinction between ordinary and robust knowledge.³⁶ Consequently, assumptions [a] and [b] are equivocal with respect to the kind of knowledge Socrates takes himself to lack and seeks to acquire. Is it ordinary or robust?³⁷ Is the method of learning that we are seeking one that results in ordinary knowledge or robust knowledge?

In addition, the scope of the knowledge (whether ordinary or robust) that Socrates takes himself to lack in assumption [a] needs specification, and this in two ways. First, Socrates may be taking himself to lack all knowledge or merely some knowledge (of the relevant sort). And second, even if it is supposed that Socrates only takes himself to lack some knowledge, he may yet take himself to

²⁰⁴A1–7. This also helps explain why Socrates is depicted as continuing his elenctic examination of various interlocutors (cf., for example, Euthyphro) when it has become clear to everyone (except Euthyphro) that they lack the knowledge they professed to have. For a more complete defense of this account of the Socratic mission as portrayed in the elenctic dialogues, see Benson (2000, ch. 2, esp. 17–23). For others who recognize this aspect of the Socratic mission, see, for example, Scolnicov (1988, 17), Brickhouse and Smith (1990, 170; 1994, 17), R. Smith (1997, xviii), Matthews (1999, 29), Woolf (2002, 243), and Sedley (2003, 63; 2004, 8). I take the overriding goal of philosophy for Socrates as depicted in the dialogues and for Plato to be the acquisition of virtue-knowledge or wisdom, whether or not they think that goal can be achieved; pace (Forster 2006, 12–18). See Benson (2000, 23–29, 180–85).

^{32.} See, especially, Vlastos (1985).

^{33.} See, for example, Nehamas (1992, 293–94).

^{34.} Woodruff (1988), Brickhouse and Smith (1994), and perhaps Aristotle *Posterior Analytics* 1.13.

^{35.} Perhaps Sedley (2004, 111-13).

^{36.} See Fine's distinction between lower level and higher level knowledge, although she is rightly adamant that recognizing such a distinction in Plato does not commit one to a Vlastos-style dual epistemology (Fine 2008, esp. 65 and 75n47).

^{37.} Other distinctions that are sometimes made in this regard and that are substantially orthogonal to the robust/ordinary distinction are knowledge by acquaintance/propositional knowledge (see, for example, Bluck 1963, N. Smith 1979, Bedu-Addo 1983) and discursive/nondiscursive knowledge (see, for example, Gonzalez 1996, 1998a, 1998b).

lack all knowledge of an entire subject matter, like carpentry, arithmetic, medicine, or ethics, even though he recognizes that he has knowledge of other subject matters, like, sculpture, or ta erôtika, 38 or he may simply take himself to lack some knowledge of a particular subject matter.

Unfortunately, the task of fully specifying these assumptions lies considerably beyond the scope of this study, and I suspect beyond the evidence of the text. Nevertheless, some further specification of these assumptions is warranted.

If we begin with the scope question, it is unlikely that Socrates takes himself to lack all knowledge in light of his answer to Euthydemus' question, "Is there anything you know?' at Euthydemus 293B7. He replies that he knows "many things, though trivial ones" (Euthydemus 293B7-8). Notice that Socrates does not here suggest that he has one kind of knowledge but lacks another. Rather, he indicates that he knows some things (albeit trivial ones) and not others (presumably more important ones). Of course, Socrates appears to make a more blanket profession of ignorance in the *Apology* when he describes the outcome of his conversation with the politician during his test of the Delphic oracle.

So, I withdrew and thought to myself: "I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows anything kalon kagathon (κινδυνεύει μὲν γὰρ ἡμῶν οὐδέτερος οὐδὲν καλὸν κάγαθὸν εἰδέναι), but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know; so I am likely to be wiser than he to this small extent, that I do not think I know what I do not. (*Apology* 21D2–7)³⁹

But even here the profession does not need to be taken universally. To be sure, Socrates appears quite explicit in proclaiming his lack of knowledge of anything kalon kagathon. If we take kalon kagathon as the subject matter of ethics, then Socrates is here proclaiming blanket ethical ignorance, or lack of virtueknowledge. 40 But he leaves open his knowledge of other (perhaps trivial, relative

^{38.} See Symposium 177D8. For other Socratic knowledge professions, see especially Apology 29A4–B9, 37B2–8; Euthydemus 293B7–8, 296E3–297A2; Republic 1.351A4–5; Phaedo 74A9–B3; and perhaps *Philebus* 12C4.

^{39.} For an excellent discussion of this passage (and related ones in the Apology), see Fine (2008).

^{40.} Throughout, I will be using "ignorance" for lack of knowledge, not lack of belief, or even necessarily lack of true belief. See Fine (2008, 67) for a persuasive argument that kalon kagathon "probably refers just to what is fine and good in the human sphere, in connection with moral virtue."

to *kalon kagathon*) things.⁴¹ Moreover, it is difficult to imagine that Socrates has in mind ordinary knowledge in proclaiming a complete lack of virtue-knowledge. He is not claiming that for each thing that is fine and good (*kalon kagathon*) he fails to know it in the ordinary way. Socrates presumably knows in the ordinary way that virtue is good, for example. Rather, he is professing to lack certain, divine, expert—that is, robust—knowledge of each and everything *kalon kagathon*. Consequently, these passages suggest that the first assumption should be filled out as follows:

[a'] Socrates takes himself to lack (at least) robust⁴² virtue-knowledge. ⁴³

How, then, are we to understand the second assumption? *Prima facie* the answer to this question is straightforward: [b] assumes that Socrates seeks the knowledge he lacks;⁴⁴ [a'] maintains that the knowledge he lacks is robust virtue-knowledge. So, [b] should be understood as assuming that Socrates seeks robust virtue-knowledge. But there are at least two necessary elaborations.

First, the question of this study is meant to be fully general. I am not simply interested in determining how *Socrates* is made to attempt to acquire the knowledge he lacks. I am also interested in determining how Plato thinks the knowledge Socrates' interlocutors lack is to be acquired. So, we need to specify the sort and scope of the knowledge that Socrates has shown his interlocutors lack. Again, there is little reason to suppose that Plato took the scope of Socrates' interlocutors' ignorance to be fully general. At *Apology* 22C9–E5, Socrates maintains that the craftsmen, whom he examined after the poets, had knowledge of many fine things, but like the poets and politicians before them, they took themselves to know other things, *ta megista*, 45 which they did not. Further, there is little reason to suppose that the sort of knowledge Socrates takes himself to

^{41.} I leave open how to understand Socrates claim at *Apology* 21B4–5 to be wise concerning nothing large or small. See also *Apology* 21D1. For more detailed accounts of Socrates' various knowledge avowals and disavowals, see Vlastos (1985), Brickhouse and Smith (1994, 30–72), Benson (2000, 223–38), Wolfsdorf (2004a), Forster (2007), Fine (2008), and Wolfsdorf (2008a, 131–45).

^{42.} For a rough, yet succinct, description of the nature of robust knowledge, see Fine's phrase "a specialized, systematic, synoptic grasp of a given domain" (Fine 2008, 60).

^{43.} See also Fine (2008) and Wolfsdorf (2008a, ch. 3, esp. 145).

^{44.} See, for example, *Gorgias* 505E4-6, *pace* Peterson (2011, 56-57n80).

^{45.} See Brickhouse and Smith (1994, 34) for the connection between the knowledge of *ta megista* and the knowledge of virtue. See also, for example, Irwin (1995, 28) and Wolfsdorf (2008a, 141n157).

have shown his interlocutors lack is ordinary. In fact, that Socrates takes himself to have shown that they lack robust knowledge is indicated in a variety of ways. 46

The method by which Socrates attempts to lead his interlocutors to recognize that they lack the knowledge they think they have cannot establish that specific individual beliefs of the interlocutor are false. 47 Rather, it can only establish that the interlocutor's beliefs concerning a particular subject matter are incoherent. Since Socrates believes that establishing this suffices to show that the interlocutor lacks the knowledge he thinks he has, Socrates must believe that coherence of belief concerning a particular subject matter is a necessary condition for the knowledge he shows to be lacking. Such a necessary condition for knowing something is a robust condition and suggests a robust kind of knowledge. When, then, Socrates goes on to exhort his interlocutors to seek the knowledge he has shown they lack, he must be exhorting them to seek robust knowledge.

Again, in addition to coherence of belief, Socrates appears to require the ability to answer his "What is F-ness?" question in order to underwrite one's more specific knowledge claims. Thus, for example, in the Euthyphro, when Euthyphro testifies to knowing that prosecuting one's own father for murder is pious, Socrates encourages him to say what piety is. The idea seems to be that knowledge of what piety is, then, is a necessary condition for knowledge that prosecuting his father is pious.⁴⁸ Socrates' commitment to such a necessary condition of knowledge, sometimes referred to as the "priority of definitional knowledge," is again a commitment to a robust condition and suggests a robust kind of knowledge. 49 Thus, when Socrates encourages Euthyphro to teach him the knowledge he professes to have or to seek the knowledge he has been shown to lack (which does not happen in the Euthyphro because Euthyphro never confesses to lacking this knowledge), Socrates is professing to seek and encouraging Euthyphro to seek robust virtue-knowledge.

Finally, a variety of texts suggest that the knowledge that Socrates seeks himself and encourages others to seek is identical to, or at least necessary and sufficient for, virtue.⁵⁰ Ordinary knowledge may be more plausibly thought to be

^{46.} For somewhat a longer defense of this general point, see Benson (2000, 180-85), pace Vlastos (1994, 62, 74). See also Wolfsdorf (2008a, 183) and Charles (2006, 121).

^{47.} Or at least so I have argued in Benson (2000, chs. 1–3; 2011), contra, et al., Vlastos (1983) and Santana (2007).

^{48.} For a defense of this idea, see Benson (1990b) and, more recently, Prior (1998), Wolfsdorf (2004b; 2008a, 121-31), and Benson (2012a).

^{49.} If we fail to associate Socrates' commitment to the priority of definitional knowledge with a robust kind of knowledge, we will be forced to agree with Geach (1966, 371) that Socrates' commitment is an influential style of fallacious thinking. See Benson (2011b, 2012a).

^{50.} See note 3, this chapter.

necessary for virtue, but clearly robust knowledge would be plausibly required to be sufficient for virtue.⁵¹ Again, the knowledge Socrates seeks and encourages others to seek appears to be robust virtue-knowledge.

Of course, the idea that Plato is concerned with a robust form of knowledge in the so-called middle dialogues is a virtual commonplace. Even Vlastos, who takes Plato in the elenctic dialogues to dismiss the search for robust knowledge as a mere will-o'-wisp, 52 thinks that in the middle dialogues Plato's conception of knowledge is robust. 53 Plato's commitment to a robust conception of knowledge in the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Symposium*, and *Phaedrus* is indicated in a variety of ways, not least by the linkage between Platonic knowledge and Platonic Forms. At a minimum, Platonic knowledge requires cognition of Platonic Forms. Moreover, the *Phaedo*'s suggestion that knowledge can best be acquired after death (*Phaedo* 64C–66A) and the *Republic*'s elaborate educational scheme, which reserves final knowledge acquisition to the ripe old age of fifty for the philosopher-rulers in training, further manifest Plato's commitment to a robust conception of knowledge. It is this robust Platonic conception of knowledge that Aristotle appears to have in mind in his *Posterior Analytics* when he writes:

We think we understand something *simpliciter* (Έπίστασθαι. . . $\dot{\alpha}\pi\lambda\tilde{\omega}\varsigma$) (and not in the sophistical way, incidentally) when we think we know of the explanation because of which the object holds that it is its explanation, and also that it is not possible for it to be otherwise. It is plain, then, that to understand (τὸ ἐπίστασθαι) is something of this sort. And indeed, people who do not understand think they are in such a condition, and those who do understand actually are. Hence if there is understanding *simpliciter* of something, it is impossible for it to be otherwise. Whether there is also another type of understanding (τοῦ ἐπίστασθαι) we shall say later: here we assert that we do know things through demonstrations (δι' ἀποδείξεως εἰδέναι). By a demonstration I mean a scientific deduction; and by scientific I mean a deduction by possessing which we understand something. If to understand (ἐπίστασθαι) something is what we have posited it to be,

^{51.} Vlastos (1994, 60–61) would disagree. He takes the Socratic doctrine that virtue is knowledge to be understood as virtue is ordinary ethical knowledge. Such an understanding makes it decidedly more difficult to explain how such knowledge could be sufficient for virtue, as well as how it could have the kind of power ($\delta \dot{\nu} \nu \alpha \mu c$) Socrates indicates it has in the *Protagoras*.

^{52.} See note 55, this chapter.

^{53.} Vlastos (1994, 50-54). See also Nehamas (1992, 296-91).

then demonstrative understanding in particular must proceed from items which are true and primitive and immediate and more familiar than and prior to and explanatory of the conclusions. (In this way the principles will also be appropriate to what is being proved.) There can be a deduction even if these conditions are not met, but there cannot be a demonstration—for it will not bring about understanding (ἐπιστήμην). (Posterior Analytics 1.2.71b9-25; Barnes trans.)⁵⁴

Indeed, it is the robust nature of Platonic (and Aristotelian) knowledge that leads to the second point requiring elaboration. I suspect that some readers, especially those of the elenctic dialogues, would deny that Socrates seeks himself and encourages others to seek robust virtue-knowledge on the grounds that Socrates does not think such knowledge is obtainable for humans.⁵⁵ A host of commentators have maintained that when Socrates distinguishes between the human wisdom he has and the robust wisdom he lacks, he is alluding to the traditional human/divine divide.⁵⁶ Socrates' human wisdom, then, does not merely consist in his recognition of his lack of robust—divine—knowledge, but also in his recognition that such knowledge is beyond a human's ken. It is the property of the gods and unobtainable for a human.⁵⁷ Since it is unobtainable and

^{54.} Barnes (1994) chooses to translate *epistêmê* and its cognates as "understanding" precisely to highlight the robust nature of Aristotelian knowledge. See also Burnyeat (1981).

^{55.} Vlastos (1994, 62) suggests such a reason when he describes Socrates as debunking certain knowledge as "beyond a man's reach, denouncing it as a will-o'-wisp, a mirage, product of the extravagant aspirations of deluded metaphysicians and word-happy sophists." Another reason is offered in a note a few pages earlier: that Socrates is referring to ordinary elenctic knowledge as the knowledge we are "contentiously eager" to acquire "is clear from the fact that elenctic argument is the method by which it is being sought" (Vlastos 1994, 60n49). My goal in the next chapter is to maintain that the method by which Socrates seeks the knowledge he lacks is not elenctic argument, at least in the way Vlastos understands it.

^{56.} See, for example, Hawtrey (1972, 4), Brickhouse and Smith (1994, sec. 2.1), C. Reeve (1989, 33-37), Weiss (2001, 180), McPherran (2002, 126n34), Peterson (2011, 17-58), and C. Reeve (2013, 1–17). Against this reading, see Fine (2008, 77ff.). See also Scott (2006, 90) for a sober statement of the issue.

^{57.} See Kraut (1984, 291) and Vlastos (1994, 63). The unobtainability of divine knowledge is more difficult to sustain in the classical dialogues in light of Plato's apparent commitment to the theory of recollection; see Meno 81A-D, Phaedo 72E-78B, Phaedrus 246A-257B, and his discussion of the education of the philosopher-rulers in the Republic. Indeed, at Timaeus 51E5-6, Plato explicitly recognizes that robust knowledge (νοῦς), while possessed by the gods, is also possessed by a few humans. That Plato is concerned to seek robust knowledge, whether obtainable or not, is indicated in those dialogues avowing the doctrine of "becoming as like god as possible." See, for example, *Theaetetus* 176A8-B2 and Sedley (1991, 380), Annas (1999, 54, 57, 58n21, 66n43), and Carone (1998, 283–284, n 24).

Socrates' wisdom resides, at least in part, in the recognition that it is unobtainable, Socrates neither seeks himself nor encourages others to seek what cannot be acquired.⁵⁸

On the assumption that Socrates takes robust virtue-knowledge to be restricted to the gods, I find this argument rather persuasive; but, as they say, one person's *modus ponens* is another person's *modus tollens*. The argument against taking Socrates' goal to be robust virtue-knowledge has the following form:

- [1] If Socrates takes robust virtue-knowledge to be restricted to the gods, then he neither seeks nor encourages others to seek robust virtue-knowledge.
- [2] Socrates takes robust virtue-knowledge to be restricted to the gods.
- [3] Thus, Socrates neither seeks nor encourages others to seek robust virtue-knowledge.

Another argument, however, making use of the same first premise has a different conclusion, viz.:

- [1] If Socrates takes robust virtue-knowledge to be restricted to the gods, then he neither seeks nor encourages others to seek robust virtue-knowledge.
- [2*] Socrates seeks and encourages others to seek robust virtue-knowledge.
- [3*] Thus, Socrates does not take robust virtue-knowledge to be restricted to the gods.

I believe that the sorts of considerations I have outlined above favor [2*] over [2], but I need not argue that point here. Rather, I maintain simply that these considerations testify to [2*], whether or not the text also testifies to [2]. If, as some believe, there are also good reasons for attributing [2] to Socrates, then we will have to abandon [1]. That is, we will have to allow that Socrates seeks and encourages others to seek what he recognizes cannot be acquired.⁵⁹ Thus, when Socrates exhorts anyone he happens to meet to care for "wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of your soul," he is exhorting the person to seek robust virtue-knowledge, and when he claims that all of us, including himself, ought to be contentiously

^{58.} It is interesting that the same argument is typically not applied to Plato in the classical dialogues, although Peterson (2011) is an exception. Indeed, Vlastos takes this to be one of the ways in which his Socrates is "poles apart from both Plato and Aristotle" (Vlastos 1994, 63).

^{59.} *Pace* Scolnicov (1988, 13–14), Gentzler (1996, 259), and Peterson (2011, 34n39). Indeed, I am unaware of any textual evidence (at least from the elenctic dialogues) for [1]. The argument for [1] has been primarily one from plausibility. See pp. 21–24.

eager to know the truth concerning how we ought to live, 60 he is exhorting all of us, including himself, to seek to acquire the robust virtue-knowledge that we all lack. Consequently, assumption [b] should be understood as follows:

[b'] Socrates seeks and encourages others to seek the robust virtue-knowledge he and they lack.

Thus, we have the question with which this chapter began. Given that Socrates lacks robust virtue-knowledge and yet is contentiously eager to acquire it, and that he has discovered that others lack it as well and yet they too ought to be contentiously eager to acquire it, how, if at all, does Socrates proceed? What strategy does Socrates recommend for escaping this robust ethical ignorance?⁶¹ Clitophon intimates that he has none to recommend. How, if at all, can Plato respond to Clitophon's challenge?

^{60.} See *Gorgias* 505E4–5.

^{61.} This question is distinct from the question "What strategy is Socrates made to recommend for escaping vice?"; i.e., "How does Socrates recommend acquiring virtue?", to the extent that one sees Plato as abandoning what I referred to earlier as Socratic intellectualism; see note 3, this chapter. I will leave Plato's commitment to Socratic intellectualism unexamined in what follows, although I take it to be uncontroversial that Plato assumes an important cognitive contribution to virtue throughout his philosophical career. Consequently, I will be focusing on the question in the text as opposed to the questions at the beginning of this note to the extent that they differ.

2 LEARNING FROM OTHERS IN THE ELENCTIC DIALOGUES

Let us turn first to the elenctic dialogues to see how, if at all, Plato attempts to meet Clitophon's challenge. How, according to Plato in the elenctic dialogues, is the robust virtue-knowledge, which Socrates, his interlocutors—and apparently everyone else—lack, to be acquired? What method or procedure in the elenctic dialogues does Plato recommend for learning this virtue-knowledge that he has so relentlessly led us to value and so seek?

A standard response to this question, in the context of the elenctic dialogues, relies on a constructivist account of the Socratic *elenchos*. Indeed, much of the literature devoted to defending constructivist accounts of the *elenchos* is motivated, at least in part, by the desire to answer this question. Given that Socrates recommends and pursues knowledge acquisition throughout the elenctic dialogues, and that the *elenchos* appears to be his only strategy for such learning, the *elenchos* must be able to prove or otherwise establish individual atomic propositions.

^{1.} For the classic defense of this account, see Vlastos (1983; 1994, 1–37). Of course Vlastos, and perhaps some of his followers, would deny that Socrates pursues robust knowledge by means of the *elenchos*, since Vlastos thinks Socrates does not pursue robust knowledge at all, denoucing it as a will-o'-wisp.

^{2.} Jenks (2001, ch. 1) drove home for me this motivation of the constructivist interpretation. Recall also that Vlastos's "elenctic knowledge" is introduced as precisely the kind of knowledge that the *elenchos* is capable of yielding (Vlastos 1985; 1994, ch. 2). See also Gentzler (1995, 227).

^{3.} My use of "atomic proposition" is meant only to distinguish what the constructivist thinks the *elenchos* can achieve from what everyone would allow that the *elenchos* can achieve. Vlastos's 'the problem of the *elenchos*' presupposes that the *elenchos* can establish inconsistency— i.e., can establish that the proposition (p & q & r & not-s) is false or that not-(p & q & r & not-s) is true. Constructivists maintain, however, that it can also establish that *not-s* is false or that s is true; see Vlastos (1994, 20–21).

^{4.} See Vlastos (1994, 18) and R. Jackson (1990, 393): "The Socratic elenchus, on the other hand, is a method of discovery, for coming to know what is true." *Contra* Wolfsdorf (2008a,179), who writes "there is no such thing as the elenchus or elenctic method, as it is commonly conceived"; see also Brickhouse and Smith (2002).

Unfortunately, I am skeptical that constructivist accounts of the elenchos can succeed. I have argued elsewhere that the elenchos—at least as employed in the elenctic dialogues—cannot prove or otherwise establish individual atomic propositions and Socrates does not indicate that it can.⁵ I will not rehearse those arguments here.

Nevertheless, I do not deny that Socrates seeks the virtue-knowledge he lacks by employing the *elenchos*, nor that he encourages others to follow his example. The Socratic *elenchos* is usually not agonistic and critical but, rather, a cooperative procedure in which "Socrates is typically portrayed . . . as engaged in the pursuit of ethical knowledge with his interlocutors." But, how can this be? How can Socrates seek virtue-knowledge by means of the elenchos without being committed to thinking that the *elenchos* can prove or otherwise establish atomic propositions? Two responses to this question present themselves in the elenctic dialogues: a moderate constructivist response and the response I will be focusing on in this chapter. Neither of these responses is entirely satisfying.

The moderate constructivist simply grants that the *elenchos* cannot prove or otherwise establish individual atomic propositions, but maintains that, nevertheless, it can lead to the epistemic improvement of Socrates' interlocutors. According to this line of response, Socrates maintains that the robust virtue-knowledge he and others seek cannot be acquired. Such knowledge is, on this line of argument,

^{5.} For the complete argument, see Benson (2000, chs. 3 and 4), and more recently, Benson (2011b). Briefly, it goes as follows: All valid arguments establish that the conjunction of the premises and the negation of the conclusion is false—i.e., not-(p & q & r & not-s), where p, q, and r are premises of the argument for s. To establish that s is true there must be some epistemic difference between the premises and the conclusion—i.e., p, q, and r must be better known, more justified, more plausible, or just more epistemically tractible than s. But the doxastic constraint to the effect that the only epistemic constraint on a premise of the elenchos is that it is believed by the interlocutor (which I take to be constitutive of the Socratic elenchos) does not permit such a difference (since the interlocutor is also required to believe the conclusion). Consequently, I take the argument against constructivism to hang on the argument for the doxastic constraint. For important discussions of the doxastic constraint, see Irwin (1993), Brickhouse and Smith (1994, 12-16), Bailly (1999), and Beversluis (2000, 37–58). For others sympathetic with non-constructivism, see Grote (1875, 420–21), Vlastos (1956), Allen (1970, 46–48), N. White (2008), perhaps also Tarrant (2002), and MacKenzie (1988, 331–32). White's version of non-constructivism is importantly different from the version I defend, but the differences are not important in the present context. See also Woodruff (1988), whose view has important affinities with White's. While non-constructivism, as I call it, has met with few adherents (for perhaps the most recent rejection of my view and nonconstructivism in general, see Santana 2007), that Plato came to view the elenchos in this way by the time of the writing of the Sophist is indicated at Sophist 230A5-E4. Of course, even if one accepts a constructivist account of the elenchos, the evidence of the elenctic dialogues suggests that Socrates' preferred method of knowledge acquisition is learning from another who knows, and the primary thesis of this chapter is sustained.

^{6.} Wolfsdorf (2008a, 153). See also Gentzler (1996, 267).

beyond a human's ken. Nevertheless, one should still seek to learn because in doing so one's epistemic condition is improved. Consider, for example, Christians who strive to be like Christ. Such individuals (typically) do not believe that they have any possibility of succeeding, but they do believe that in striving to achieve what cannot be achieved they improve themselves ethically. So Socrates in striving to acquire and encouraging others to strive to acquire knowledge which he believes cannot in fact be acquired by any means, let alone by means of the *elenchos*, does not need to understand his elenctic encounters as doing anything more than leading to the epistemic improvement of his interlocutors. And when queried, along the lines of Clitophon, how one can acquire the virtue-knowledge one seeks by elenctic engagement, Socrates' answer is straightforward: one cannot acquire the virtue-knowledge one seeks by means of the *elenchos* or any other method. The goal in seeking virtue-knowledge is not virtue-knowledge acquisition or learning in the technical sense in which I am using it, but epistemic improvement.

Notice that this moderate constructivist response to Clitophon's challenge dissolves rather than resolves the challenge. It does not explain how the robust virtue-knowledge that Socrates seeks and encourages others to seek can be acquired. Rather, it contends that this knowledge cannot be acquired. Textual evidence for such a response in the elenctic dialogues, however, is somewhat sparse. Rather, the response seems to be offered as the best explanation of Socrates' seeking (and

^{7.} Notice, that like Vlastos (see note 1, this chapter), the moderate constructivist denies that robust knowledge can be obtained, but accepts that robust knowledge is that at which Socrates aims (unlike Vlastos). In aiming at robust knowledge, however, one does not believe it can be obtained, but one does believe it can be approached. That is, the moderate constructivist denies the conditional premise ([1]) of the *modus ponens/tollens* arguments at the end of the previous chapter. Among those who might be thought to recommend this latter, more moderate response are Brickhouse and Smith (1994, 41–42), McPherran (1996, 292–97), May (1997), Weiss (2001, 10, 57–63), and perhaps Gonzalez (1998a) and McCabe (2006, 44).

^{8.} I owe this example and much of my understanding of this second line of argument to correspondence and conversations with Nick Smith. A more Platonic example is becoming like god (ὁμοίωσις θε $\tilde{\omega}$) at *Theaetetus* 176B1; see note 57, chapter 1.

^{9.} See note 13, chapter 1.

^{10.} One might also worry about the philosophical (or psychological) plausibility of seeking what one believes cannot be acquired. Aristotle's alleged argument for *the* highest good at *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.2.1094A18–22 might be understood as doubting its plausibility. Ancient skepticism, however, might be understood as encouraging the search for knowledge despite the recognition that it cannot be acquired. One might also be uneasy about the consequences of this line of argument. If Socrates identifies virtue with knowledge and *eudaemonia* with virtue, then Socrates does not think one can achieve *eudaemonia*. To the extent that knowledge is beyond a human's ken, so is *eudaemonia*. (See, perhaps, Stoic ethics.) Brickhouse and Smith to their credit recognize this consequence and deny that Socrates identifies virtue with *eudaemonia*. See Brickhouse and Smith (1994, 112–36). For their more recent view about the relationship between virtue and *eudaemonia*, see Brickhouse and Smith (2010,185n24).

encouraging others to seek) the knowledge he (and they) lack and his view that this knowledge cannot be acquired. 11 Apparently, Socrates is advocating epistemic improvement, not the actual acquisition of robust knowledge. Nevertheless, it is clear that in non-elenctic dialogues Plato thinks robust virtue-knowledge can be acquired. Whatever else we are to make of Meno's paradox, the theory of recollection, and the conversation with the slave, Socrates takes himself to have shown

that we will be better men, braver and less idle, if we believe that one must search for the things one does not know, rather than if we believe that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it. (Meno 86B7-C1)12

Consequently, from Plato's perspective in dialogues like the Meno, Republic, Phaedo, Theaetetus, and Timaeus, this first response to Clitophon's challenge will not do. To the extent that one takes the robust virtue-knowledge that Socrates and his interlocutors seek to be obtainable, the constructive capacities of the elenchos—whether extreme or moderate—as it is employed by Socrates in the elenctic dialogues are inadequate as a response to Clitophon's challenge.¹³

^{11.} See [2] and [2*] from the end of chapter 1, this volume.

^{12.} Even if the "and" (μηδέ) at 86C1 is not epexegetical, suggesting an equivalence between believing that it is not possible to discover what one does not know and believing that one ought not to search for what one does not know, the first conjunct indicates that Plato does not endorse the belief that one cannot discover what one does not know. See also Republic 1.337D3-5, Phaedo 72E-78B, the elaborate description of "the greatest mathema" in Republic 6-7, Theaetetus 172C-177B, and Timaeus 51E and 90A-D. That Aristotle understood Plato as committed to the possibility of knowledge is indicated by his attribution to Plato of the knowledge argument for the existence of Forms; see Metaphysics 1.6.987a29-b8; 13.4. 1078b12-32, and 13.9.1086a32-b13. Indeed, the commitment to the possibility of knowledge is one of the ten theses that distinguish the elenctic Socrates from the Platonic Socrates, according to Vlastos (1991, 48, 77–79); see also McPherran (1996, 292–302) and Annas (1999, 52–71).

^{13.} An additional worry for the moderate constructivist is the relatively radical break of the Socrates of the elenctic dialogues with the Socrates of the middle dialogues. The disparity between the two Socrateses at least with respect to the human obtainability of robust knowledge may not be as radical as Vlastos's schizophrenic (see pp. 8-9), but one would like some explanation for the change. My view also is committed to a difference between the two Socrateses. The elenctic Socrates recommends pursuing robust virtue-knowledge from others who already possess that knowledge, while the middle Socrates recommends pursuing robust virtue-knowledge on one's own. I take my view to indicate a more continuous philosophical development (see pp. 8-11) than the development required by the moderate constructivist, but I suspect this rests on a subjective judgment of what makes one account of philosophical development more continuous than another—a judgment that cannot be defended in any kind of conclusive way. See also Scott (2006, 90) who, in my view, correctly doubts that there is any "evidence to clinch the issue" between those who take Socrates to reject the obtainability of robust virtue-knowledge and those who take Socrates to accept it.

Consequently, in the present chapter, I focus on a different response to Clitophon's challenge, one which emerges from Socrates' own words when he describes his elenctic engagement with the poets in the *Apology*.

After the politicians, I went to the poets, . . . intending in their case to catch myself being more ignorant than they. So I took up those poems with which they seemed to have taken most trouble and asked them what they meant, in order that I might at the same time learn something from them ("iv" äμα τι καὶ μανθάνοιμι παρ' αὐτῶν). (Apology 22A8–B5; emphasis added)

That is, I contend that in the elenctic dialogues Socrates attempts to learn (and encourages others like him to attempt to learn) via the *elenchos* by attempting to learn from those who already possess the virtue-knowledge he (and the others like him) lack. He does not employ the *elenchos* as a means of discovering on his own the knowledge he lacks (de novo learning or discovery). Rather, he employs it as a means of learning from one who already knows. Nevertheless, I maintain that at least twice in these same dialogues Socrates raises serious difficulties for such a method of learning. At the beginning of the *Protagoras*, Socrates worries about the risks of learning from another prior to determining whether what one is learning is good or bad for one's soul. It is suggested that one would need to already know what one is attempting to learn from another to avoid this risk. A similar point is made more directly in the *Charmides*, where Socrates maintains that one would need to already know what one is attempting to learn from another in order to identify someone with the knowledge from whom one wants to learn. Consequently, the picture of Socratic learning and the response to Clitophon's challenge in the elenctic dialogues remains unsatisfying at best. Socrates either has no response to offer at all or what he does offer is subject to serious problems of which Socrates himself is well aware. And Clitophon is right to press Socrates on the matter.¹⁴

^{14.} Like moderate constructivism, then, I too take Socrates in the elenctic dialogues as unable to acquire or learn the virtue-knowledge he seeks. But, on the moderate constructivist account, Socrates is unable to acquire the virtue-knowledge he seeks because of the nature of knowledge. The nature of the knowledge he seeks makes it unlearnable for humans. We can, at best, approach it. On the view for which I argue, Socrates is unable to learn the virtue-knowledge he seeks because he is employing an inadequate method, learning from those who know. We should not be surprised, then, if Socrates in the middle dialogues employs and recommends a different method for acquiring such knowledge, one with a greater chance of success, whether that reflects Plato's philosophical development or not. On the moderate constructivist account it remains unexplained why in the middle dialogues Socrates now takes knowledge (whether virtue-knowledge or not) to be obtainable. He does not take the nature of the knowledge sought in those dialogues to be less robust. What philosophical reasons, if any, does Plato have for now thinking the human/divine gap can be bridged? See the third feature of both developmentalist and unitarian accounts on pp. 8–11.

The Conceptual Possibility of Learning from One Who Knows

This will come as a bit of a shock for some. How can Socrates, who famously distrusts hearsay and the unquestioned authority of others, 15 recommend learning from others? We can begin to answer this question by noticing that Socrates explicitly recognizes at least two different ways in which one can come to have knowledge (whether virtue-knowledge or not): discovering it oneself or learning from one who knows. In the Laches, when Socrates encourages Lysimachus and Melesias (two Athenian fathers seeking advice on how to best educate their sons) to press Laches and Nicias (two Athenian generals) for evidence of the knowledge they should have if their advice is to be of any value, Socrates indicates that the generals might have acquired such knowledge in only two ways. After professing that he himself neither has had a teacher (διδάσκαλος) of the technê "concerning the care for the soul" (τεχνικός περί ψυχῆς θεραπείαν; *Laches* 185e4) nor has he been able to discover this technê on his own (αὐτὸς δ' αὖ εὑρεῖν τὴν τέχνην άδυνατῶ ἔτι νυνί), despite seeking it from his youth, Socrates avers

If Nicias or Laches had discovered it or learned it (ηΰρηκεν ἢ μεμάθηκεν), I would not be surprised, because they are richer than I and so may have learned ($\mu\alpha\theta\tilde{\epsilon}\tilde{\iota}\nu$) it from others, and also older, so they may have discovered (ηύρηκέναι) it already. (Laches 186C5-8)

In light of their age and their wealth, the generals might have learned the technê of the care of the soul on their own or they might have learned it from another (see also Laches 186D8-187A1, Alcibiades I 106D4-9, Protagoras 320B7-8, and Euthydemus 285A8-B1; for learning from another see Laches 189D5-E1). Here, Plato has Socrates explicitly testify to at least the conceptual possibility of learning from one who knows.¹⁶

Indeed, Plato's acceptance of the conceptual possibility of learning from one who knows should come as no surprise. The Platonic dialogues have been thought to advocate a rejection of the "paternalistic/authoritarian tradition" that, despite

^{15.} See, for example, N. White (1976, 3-4), and Welbourne (1986, 233) (despite their differences). See also Crito 46B4-6, Meno 97B1-4, and Theaetetus 201A7-C7.

^{16.} See also Laches 185B-186B and 189D for the suggestion that the fact that one has had a teacher can be offered as evidence that one possesses knowledge, and the Callias story at Apology 19D-20C. Even if one takes Laches 186C5-8 as ironic-i.e., that Socrates actually doubts that either Laches or Nicias has learned from another or discovered on his own knowledge concerning the care of the soul, one need not take Socrates as ironic about the two methods by which they might have acquired this knowledge, which he ironically supposes that they have.

Plato's efforts, "remained the dominant educational model throughout classical antiquity." According to this tradition, knowledge was simply handed down from one generation to the next—from teacher to student by "passive imitation of models, mechanical application of rules, rote memorization, obedience to commands and exhortations, and submission to discipline, including corporal punishment." In fact, Plato's rejection of such a transmission model of learning is so evident that one is likely to reject the proposal that in the elenctic dialogues Plato endorses the attempt to learn from one who knows. Plato, it may be objected, rejects the traditional model of learning according to which knowledge is transmitted from teacher to pupil. So, he evidently does not view his *elenchos* as a method of transmitting knowledge from one person to another, and does not encourage others to learn in this way.

But in rejecting this traditional pedagogical model Plato need not be rejecting the transmission model of learning altogether. He may, rather, be rejecting one or both of two of its contingent features. He may, for example, be rejecting the feature of the model that leaves unchallenged the authority—that is, the knowledge of the teacher. Rather, Plato may be encouraging the idea that to successfully learn from another one must challenge the alleged teacher to confirm his or her knowledge. Plato may also be rejecting the traditional model's apparent presumption that the mere ability to repeat or regurgitate the views of the teacher suffices for learning. Again, Plato may instead be recommending that to genuinely acquire robust knowledge requires more than the ability to repeat what the one who already possesses it says. 19 The point is that there are two ways by which one who knows might teach. One might simply encourage one's students to memorize what one has said or written. Or one might encourage the student to think for herself, to question the instructor, to propose her own answer and submit it to scrutiny. Indeed, this pedagogical model often goes by the name of "the Socratic method" in schools of education and law. But those of us who take Socrates' professions of ignorance seriously are usually quick to distinguish

^{17.} As Blondell (2002, 95–96) has persuasively argued, although as an anonymous referee has helpfully reminded me Plato appears to continue to endorse the paternalistic/authoritarian tradition of education for young children in *Republic* 2–3, whether or not he thinks such a method can lead to robust knowledge.

^{18.} See, especially, Republic 7.518B-D, and p. 239.

^{19.} Something like this seems to be what Polemarchus fails to understand in *Republic* 1. See also Nicias in the *Laches*, Charmides' third definition of *sophrosunê* in the *Charmides*, and Chance (1992, 24) on *Euthydemus* 274D6–275A7. See Penner (1992, 131) who writes "the whole point of the Socratic dialectic is to get people to see things for themselves, as a result of his refutations—and without their understanding being short-circuited by the device of giving them a formula." See also Nehamas (1985, 10–11) and Peterson (2011, 161).

the Socratic method of education and law schools from the Socratic method of the elenctic dialogues, precisely on the grounds that the "teacher" employing the former, but not the latter, method has the knowledge that his student seeks to

Indeed, the conversation with the slave in Plato's Meno is often criticized along these lines. For the conversation to do its philosophical work it needs to show how an individual can acquire the knowledge one seeks when no one already possesses that knowledge. But, Socrates knows the answer to the question that the slave is seeking to come to know, and his knowledge of that answer enables Socrates to guide the slave's acquisition of the knowledge as well. Plato would deny that Socrates' knowledge is necessary for the slave to learn, but that is beside the present point. The point is, rather, that those who object to the conversation in this way recognize two ways of learning from one who knows—the so-called Socratic way and the traditional way. For no one would claim that in the conversation with the slave Socrates is engaging in the traditional pedagogical model of memorization, imitation, and obedience. So, to turn to the perspective of the students, the ones seeking to learn, as opposed to the teacher, Plato can be encouraging such individuals to learn from the one who knows without encouraging them to simply memorize, imitate, or obey the teacher. He can instead encourage them to test, examine, and question the one who knows in an attempt to acquire their knowledge.²⁰

That Plato must not be rejecting the transmission model of learning altogether is indicated by the Platonic commonplace that knowledge can be taught. In endorsing the commonplace, Plato must think that at least one possible way to learn is to be taught.²¹ And so, in rejecting the transmission model of learning Plato is not altogether rejecting the possibility of learning from another.

Consequently the idea that Plato thinks that knowledge can be taught and learned from another should not surprise us.²² The question, however, is not

^{20.} This might help explain how the questioning in which Socrates engages the poets can serve as both a method for determining whether they have the knowledge Socrates seeks to learn and "at the same time" (ἄμα; 22B5) a method for acquiring that knowledge if they have it.

^{21.} For the claim that only knowledge is teachable, see Meno 87C1-3, and for the claim that all knowledge is teachable, see Meno 87C5-6; see also Euthydemus 282A7-D3 and Gorgias 454C-455A. See Wolfsdorf (2008a, 161), who takes the claim that knowledge is teachable to be analytically true at least for Plato.

^{22.} Devereux (1978, 118-20) would object to the conjunction that Plato thinks knowledge can be taught and that knowledge can be learned from another who knows. Devereux takes the introduction of the theory of recollection in the Meno to indicate that it is "not only possible to learn without a teacher, but that it is not possible to learn in any other way. All learning consists of drawing knowledge from oneself, and there is no such thing as teaching." Socrates is made to propose this extraordinary thesis, according to Devereux, because Plato is concerned to distinguish between sophistic teaching (according to which "what is taught

whether Plato believes it is conceptually possible to learn from another. The question is what method of learning does Plato recommend and endorse in the elenctic dialogues? So far I have merely argued that learning from someone who knows should not be ruled out *tout court*.²³

Socratic Recommendations

The question to be addressed in this chapter has two parts:

- [i] What method does Socrates recommend in the elenctic dialogues to others for learning the robust virtue-knowledge they lack?
- [ii] What method does Socrates employ on his own behalf in these same dialogues to learn the robust virtue-knowledge he lacks?

The answers to each of these questions could be different. Socrates might recommend that others relieve their ignorance by following a different strategy than he himself follows. Indeed, he might not recommend any strategy at all. But to see if he does, we will need to examine at least two different sorts of evidence. First, we must look at those passages in which Socrates explicitly exhorts others to secure the virtue-knowledge they lack and ask how and whether he there recommends that they should proceed. Second, we must look at Socrates' own practice. What does Socrates do, if anything, in order to secure the virtue-knowledge he recognizes that he lacks? We will see that insofar as the text suggests any answer at all to Clitophon's

comes from without") which is impossible and hence there is no such thing, and Socratic teaching (according to which "what is taught comes from within the student") which is possible and is represented in the conversation with the slave. See also Bluck's (1961, 21-25) distinction between sophistic and maieutic teaching, and more recently Vlastos (1991, 32), and Scott (1995, 42-46; 2006,142-44). These issues will occupy our attention throughout this chapter, but part of my point a few paragraphs back is to call into question the simple distinction between Devereux's "sophistic teaching" or Blondell's "paternalistic/authoritarian" teaching and Socratic teaching. Plato can be rejecting the possibility of "sophistic" or "paternalistic/authoritarian" teaching, without rejecting the possibility of learning from another who knows. See Weiss (2001, 96) for a more forceful rejection of this simple dichotomy. But in any case, passages like Laches 186C5-8 make it clear that Plato recognizes the possibility of learning from one who knows. Devereux does not indicate whether he thinks that this rejection of "sophistic teaching" is a feature of the elenctic dialogues or a development in the Meno. That Plato continues to recognize the distinction between learning from another and discovering for oneself, however, is indicated at Cratylus 435D1-436A8, Phaedo 85C7-8 and 99C6-9, Parmenides 135A7-B2, and Timaeus 51D3-E6.

^{23.} See also *Meno* 92E7-93A4 and the first sentence of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* 1.1.71a1-2.

challenge), the answer is the same in both cases (though it needn't have been). Socrates seeks to learn and encourages others to learn by searching for someone who has the virtue-knowledge they lack and by learning from him or her—or at least so I will argue.

Let us turn first to those passages in which Socrates explicitly exhorts others to acquire the knowledge they lack. Such passages, as it turns out, are quite rare, and for a very good reason. Socrates believes that before one can beneficially exhort individuals to seek the knowledge they lack, they must first be persuaded that they in fact lack the knowledge they are to be encouraged to seek. Socrates makes this explicit during the methodological digression in the Meno. He explains that in eliminating the slave's false conceit of geometrical-knowledge, the slave—far from having been harmed—has actually been benefited:

for now, as he does not know, he would be glad to find out (νῦν μὲν γὰρ καὶ ζητήσειεν ἂν ἡδέως οὐκ εἰδώς), whereas before he thought he could easily make many fine speeches to large audiences about the square of double size and said that it must have a base twice as long. . . . Do you think that before he would have tried to find out that which he thought he knew though he did not, before he fell into perplexity and realized he did not know and longed to know? (Οἴει οὖν ἂν αὐτὸν πρότερον ἐπιχειρῆσαι ζητεῖν ἢ μανθάνειν τοῦτο ὁ ὤετο εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς, πρὶν εἰς ἀπορίαν κατέπεσεν ήγησάμενος μη είδέναι, καὶ ἐπόθησεν τὸ είδέναι) (Meno 84B10-C6)²⁴

But the point is also made in more properly elenctic dialogues, although less directly.

Throughout the elenctic dialogues Socrates appears obsessed with leading his interlocutors to recognize their ignorance. But why is Socrates so concerned to bring about this result? At least one explanation for this obsession is a desire to lead the interlocutors to recognize their ignorance so that they will seek the knowledge they lack. 25 Consider, for example, Socrates' description of his encounter with the politician whom he had expected would serve as a counter-example to the Delphic oracle's pronouncement that no one was

^{24.} See Slings (1999, 140–41). For another explicit statement of this belief see *Sophist* 230A–E. Slings (1999, 59-63) describes this as Socrates' commitment to implicit protreptic to be distinguished from explicit protreptic, which simply exhorts individuals to wisdom before eliminating their false conceit.

^{25.} Whether for the sake of epistemic improvement or actual acquisition of knowledge. See pp. 21–24.

wiser than he. Once Socrates discovered that the politician did not have the wisdom he thought he had (and so failed as counter-example to the oracle), Socrates tried to *show him* that he did not have the wisdom he thought he had, thereby incurring the politician's and the bystanders' wrath.²⁶ He goes to this trouble not to anger the politician but to encourage him to seek the knowledge he lacks.

Similarly, Socrates seldom allows a single elenctic encounter to suffice with a given interlocutor. A single elenctic episode may suffice to establish an incoherence in the interlocutor's beliefs and so establish the interlocutor's ignorance, but it will almost never suffice to persuade the interlocutor of his ignorance. Consequently, Socrates engages in repeated elenctic episodes with the same interlocutor, not to rub his nose in his ignorance and thereby incur his wrath but, rather, at least in part to lead the interlocutor to the recognition of his ignorance. Socrates thereby removes the primary obstacle to the interlocutor's desire to seek the knowledge he lacks.²⁷

Thus, in the *Euthyphro*, Socrates offers two or three more elenctic arguments even after the "aporetic interlude" (11B6–11E2), not to rub Euthyphro's nose in his ignorance nor even to begin leading Euthyphro to the virtue-knowledge he lacks, but because Euthyphro is not yet ready to seek the knowledge he lacks. He still thinks he has it. He is simply at a loss as to how to express it. The obstacle to learning has not yet been removed.

I have no way of telling you what I know (οὐκ ἔχω ἔγωγε ὅπως σοι εἴπω ὁ νοῶ); for whatever proposition we put forward goes around and refuses to stay put where we establish it. (*Euthyphro* 11B6-8)²⁸

^{26.} Apology 21C7-D1; see also Apology 23B6-C1.

^{27.} See Woolf (2002, 243); see also Scolnicov (1988, 17), Sedley (2003, 63), and R. Smith (1997, xviii). Here then is an answer to Wolfsdorf's (2008a, 149) question "if Socrates' purpose were to test these interlocutors for knowledge, it is questionable why after one or two exposures of inconsistency, the discussion of F would continue." One or two exposures of inconsistency may suffice to show that the interlocutor lacks knowledge, but it may not suffice to persuade the interlocutor of this lack of knowledge.

^{28.} Translating ὁ νοῶ as "what I know" rather than "what I have in mind." While some may think that this is putting too fine a point on Euthyphro's profession (see, e.g., McPherran 1985, 286), Laches makes precisely the same claim at *Laches* 194A6–B4: "I am really getting annoyed at being unable to express what I know in this fashion" (ἃ νοῶ μὴ οΙός τ' εἰμὶ εἰπεῖν) and yet immediately follows this with the claim "I still think I know what courage is, but I can't understand how it has escaped me just now so that I can't pin it down in words and say what it is" (νοεῖν μὲν γὰρ ἔμοιγε δοκῶ περὶ ἀνδρείας ὅτι ἔστιν, οὐκ οΙδα δ' ὅπη με ἄρτι διέφυγεν, ὥστε μὴ συλλαβεῖν τῷ λόγῳ αὐτὴν καὶ εἰπεῖν ὅτι ἔστιν). That Laches still thinks that he knows, despite his inability to say what he knows, is beyond dispute.

Indeed, herein lies the value of Socrates' human wisdom. In being the only one who fails to believe that he knows what he does not, only Socrates seeks to learn the virtue-knowledge that he lacks.²⁹

Thus Euthyphro provides a paradigmatic example of why there are so few passages in which Socrates recommends a strategy for seeking the virtue-knowledge the interlocutor lacks. The obstacle standing in the way of such a strategy in Euthyphro's case is never removed. Despite Socrates' patience, Euthyphro (at least in the context of the dialogue) never recognizes that he lacks the relevant knowledge. And so, Socrates is never in a position to recommend a strategy to acquire it. And Euthyphro is not an anomaly. As various commentators have pointed out, Socrates is generally a failure at benefiting his interlocutors in the way he benefits the slave at Meno 84B10-C6.30 Of the twenty-three elenctic interlocutors31 in the elenctic dialogues only five—Charmides, Crito, Clinias, Ion, and Hippocrates—explicitly recognize that they do not know what they thought they knew. Only they appear to recognize their ignorance. Consequently, only in their cases is it beneficial for Socrates to recommend a learning strategy. What does he recommend?

Ion, Hippocrates, and Charmides all admit their ignorance near the end of their respective elenctic episodes. At Ion 541E1-542B2, Socrates asks Ion to choose between explaining his ability to speak truly concerning Homer by appealing to his expertise (τεχνικός)—which he had done earlier at 530C1–D3, but of which he has failed to give a demonstration—or divine dispensation (θεία μοίρα;

^{29.} See also *Lysis* 218A2–B5. See Woolf (2008, 7) concerning *Apology* 23B1–4.

^{30.} See, for example, Woolf (2008, 8n16) and Blondell (2002, 125).

^{31.} Meletus, Charmides, Critias, Crito, Dionysodorus, Euthydemus, Cleinias, Euthyphro, Gorgias, Polus, Calllicles, Hippias (twice), Ion, Laches, Nicias, Lysis, Menexenus, Hippocrates, Protagoras, Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Thrasymachus. I do not count among the elenctic interlocutors various relatively minor interlocutors, like Melesias and Lysimachus in the Laches, or Crito in the Euthydemus, because I do not believe that Socrates interacts with them elenctically—i.e., constructs an elenchos with them. But in any case, apart from Melesias and Lysimachus, with whom we will meet again later, they add nothing to the argument. Either they too fail to recognize their ignorance or they recognize it and Socrates turns to examine others who continue to profess their knowledge. I also do not count Meno, the slave, or Anytus from the Meno, for reasons that will become apparent in the next chapter. Of the 18 elenctic interlocutors who do not recognize their ignorance, some may be thought to come closer than others. Besides Euthyphro (see note 28, this chapter), Critias may be thought to recognize his ignorance at Charmides 169C3-D2 (but clearly not to admit it) and Menexenus may be thought to admit it at *Lysis* 213C9. In the case of Critias, however, if this is how one understands 169C3-D2, there is some reason to think that the strategy Socrates employs after this recognition of ignorance resembles the same strategy Socrates employs after Meno's recognition of ignorance in the Meno. See Kahn (1996, 184), who writes "the complex conditional reasoning of 169A-175D bears some resemblance to the hypothetical method of the Meno." In the case of Menexenus, immediately after 213C9, Socrates recommends turning to "the poets, the ancestral voices of human wisdom" (214A1-2).

cf. *Meno* 99E4–100B4). Ion, forgoing expertise, chooses divine dispensation. Socrates immediately brings the dialogue to a close as follows: "Then *that* is how we think of you, Ion, the lovelier way: it's as someone divine, and not as master of a profession ($\mu\dot{\eta}$ τεχνικὸν), that you are a singer of Homer's praises" (*Ion* 542B3–4).

Again, in the Charmides, Charmides appears to confess his ignorance twice. The first time (Charmides 162B9-10) is immediately followed by Critias' objecting that just because Charmides is unable to defend his answer to the "What is temperance?" question, it does not follow that the one from whom he heard this answer does not know it. Socrates thereupon turns his attention to Critias. The second time is at 176A6-B4, near the end of the dialogue. At this point Charmides proposes to associate every day with Socrates, and Critias encourages this response. Socrates, however, offers no substantive advice or recommendation, and agrees only not to oppose their proposal. It might be thought, however, that Socrates should oppose their proposal if he genuinely recommends learning from the one who knows as the way to rectify Charmides' ignorance. Socrates is clear that he does not possess the knowledge that Charmides seeks, and associating with him will not enable Charmides to learn from one who knows.³² But this is to assume that the point of associating with Socrates is to learn from him. If the point, instead, is to join him in the search for one who knows from whom to learn, as is suggested at the end of the *Laches* (see pages 34–35), there is no reason for Socrates to object to Critias' and Charmides' proposals. The bottom line, however, is that the *Charmides* ends without offering Charmides any substantive advice on how to seek the knowledge he now recognizes he lacks.

Finally, in the *Protagoras*, Hippocrates confesses his ignorance concerning the nature of a sophist at 313C3–4.³³ Socrates, thereupon, provides a thirty-three-line speech, interrupted only once, concerning what he takes a sophist to be, ending with the recommendation that they go talk with Protagoras and the other wise men around him about this.³⁴

^{32.} I owe this objection to Nick Smith.

^{33.} At 312E6, Hippocrates only confesses to not being able to say anything any longer. Socrates, however, takes him to be confessing his ignorance of the nature of a sophist at 313C1–2 and Hippocrates agrees at 313C3–4.

^{34.} Schofield (1992, 126–27) rightly notes that I failed to account for this passage in an earlier attempt to make a similar point. Schofield thinks that the *Protagoras* indicates that following the recognition of ignorance the next stage is a protreptic and cooperative exercise hinted at in the conversation between Socrates and Hippocrates on the way to Callias' house. As Schofield concedes, this conversation, however, is "not further described." If this is an example of what Plato recommends for acquiring the knowledge one recognizes one lacks, as Schofield believes, what that process or method is unfortunately remains hidden from the reader. For a slightly more detailed description of the episode leading up to the undescribed (or at least under-described) conversation on the way to Callias', see pp. 44–45.

In these three cases, then, if we look for Socrates' recommendation for how the knowledge these interlocutors rather uniquely and so admirably recognize that they lack is to be obtained, we will be disappointed. Socrates either fails to recommend any strategy at all, or he offers a quick account of his own and recommends that they approach others who have a reputation for wisdom. In every case, Socrates elenctically disengages from the interlocutor, and either the dialogue ends or Socrates turns to someone else who claims to possess the knowledge they seek.

The cases of Clinias in the *Euthydemus* and Crito in the *Crito* are rather different. In both cases they admit their ignorance relatively early on in their respective dialogues, and Socrates continues his dialogue with them. Perhaps, here we have some evidence for what procedure Socrates recommends to those who have come to recognize their ignorance.

Clinias, as far as one can tell, was never inclined to profess virtue-knowledge, and already by 275D5-6 appears willing to confess his ignorance. Socrates' explicit recommendation, however, is to answer the questions of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus, suggesting that they may do him a great service (ἴσως γάρ τοι ὡφελεῖ τὴν μεγίστην ώφελίαν; 275E1-2). When Socrates becomes skeptical of the two eristic brothers' sincere attempt to benefit Clinias, he does not recommend an alternative strategy for rectifying Clinias' ignorance but, rather, attempts to persuade him that he ought to devote himself to wisdom and virtue (ὅπως χρὴ σοφίας τε καὶ ἀρετῆς ἐπιμεληθῆναι; 278D2-3) and then later that the wisdom he ought to seek is not just any wisdom but a particular sort (282E2-4).³⁵ This is just the point at which one would expect Clitophon to raise his challenge. Now that Socrates has successfully persuaded Clinias to seek the virtue-knowledge that will lead to his happiness, how does Socrates propose that Clinias proceed? Unfortunately, in the Euthydemus Socrates appears unwilling or unable to recommend a method for learning such knowledge.

Unlike Clinias, Crito does appear willing to profess a kind of virtueknowledge—at least by implication. He offers no objection to Socrates' argument at Crito 47A-48A that the only opinions that matter, especially in matters as important as these, are the opinions of the one who has knowledge, and yet Crito does not rescind his advice to the effect that Socrates ought to escape (cf. 45A3, 46A7-8). The implication is that he takes himself to possess the knowledge necessary to offer such advice. By 50A4-5, however, Crito apparently has changed his mind. He says: "I cannot answer your question,

^{35.} The sort of wisdom to be sought is at least the robust virtue-knowledge introduced in chapter 1, this volume. See also the knowledge required of the philosopher-ruler in the Republic, chapters 8 and 9, this volume.

Socrates. I do not understand" (où $\gamma \grave{\alpha} \rho \grave{\epsilon} \nu \nu o \widetilde{\omega}$). Here at last we might expect an answer to Clitophon's challenge. What does Socrates recommend that Crito do to relieve his newly discovered ignorance?

Unfortunately, Socrates is not depicted as offering an answer. Rather, Socrates immediately turns to the speech of the laws— a speech of nearly 200 lines, interrupted by Crito's agreement only three times. To be sure, it is difficult to know what to make of this Socratic gambit. Plato may be hiding Socrates' attempt to teach Crito what Crito now recognizes he does not know behind the speech of the laws and thereby allow Socrates the pretense of avowed ignorance. Or Plato may be sincerely distancing Socrates from the argument— allowing Socrates to attest to its truth while simultaneously disavowing knowledge, like the poets in the *Apology* who "do not compose their poems with knowledge, but by some inborn talent and by inspiration, like seers and prophets who also say many fine things without any understanding of what they say" (*Apology* 22B9–C3). In either case, insofar as Socrates is made to recommend any strategy for acquiring the knowledge Crito now recognizes he lacks here in the *Crito*, it would appear to be to learn from the one who knows—either Socrates himself behind the veil of the speech of the laws, or the laws that have inspired Socrates to give the speech.³⁶

In addition to these five elenctic interlocutors, two other non-elenctic interlocutors appear to recognize their ignorance, eliciting a noteworthy Socratic recommendation. At the beginning of the *Laches*, Lysimachus and Melesias rather uniquely and admirably admit their unsuitability for educating their respective sons:

each of us has a great many fine things to say to the young men about his own father, things they achieved both in war and in peace in the management of the affairs both of their allies and of the city here. But neither of us has a word to say about his own accomplishments. (*Laches* 179C2-6)

While this is not an explicit admission of ignorance, it is clearly a lack of conceit met with in few of Socrates' interlocutors. This lack of conceit has prompted the

^{36.} Obviously, I prefer the second of these two options, given my commitment to the sincerity of Socratic ignorance (assumption [a] from chapter 1). It seems to me that this reading is supported by Socrates' concluding description of the laws' speech: "Crito, my dear friend, be assured that these are the words I seem to hear, as the Corybants seem to hear the music of their flutes, and the echo of these words resounds in me, and makes it impossible for me to hear anything else" (54d2–5). But this is certainly not definitive. Indeed, Harte (1999, 118–19) takes this passage to suggest that Plato does not endorse the speech of the laws at all. (For the trope of hiding behind the speech of another to express positive Socratic views, see Blondell 2002, 42.) In either case, however, Socrates' recommendation appears to be to learn from and follow the advice of the one who knows (pace Harte), just as it was at the beginning of the *Crito*.

fathers to invite Laches and Nicias to a display of fighting in armor, as advisers in the proper education of their sons. When Laches and Nicias offer incompatible advice, the fathers turn to Socrates to break the tie. This leads Socrates to make the point, familiar from the Crito, that in matters as important as these—the proper care and education of their sons—it is the advice of the one with knowledge that ought to be followed (Laches 185D-187B). Consequently, Socrates turns to an examination of the knowledge claims of Laches and Nicias.

Of course, the fathers do not explicitly testify to a desire to learn how to educate their sons. They only seek the advice of the generals on this issue. Thus, this passage does not explicitly testify to Socratic advice for learning the knowledge one lacks. It is difficult, however, to imagine that should they have sought to acquire this knowledge that Socrates' recommendation would have been any different. Indeed, something like this is indicated at the end of the dialogue when Laches' and Nicias' claims to virtue-knowledge have failed to be demonstrated. Laches advises that the two fathers dismiss Nicias and himself concerning the education of their sons and attempt to retain Socrates. Socrates responds that if during the preceding conversations he had appeared to know what the generals failed to know it would be a terrible thing not to come to the fathers' aid. Socrates continues,

But as things are, . . . what I say we ought to do . . . is to join in searching for the best possible teacher (κοινῆ πάντας ἡμᾶς ζητεῖν . . . διδάσκαλον ὡς ἄριστον), first for ourselves—we really need one—and then for the young men, sparing neither money nor anything else. What I don't advise is that we remain as we are. (*Laches* 201A2–7)

Here we have something approaching an explicit recommendation for what to do when one recognizes one's ignorance: do not remain in one's current state of ignorance, but find a teacher who knows from whom one can learn.³⁷

Taken together these passages suggest, then, that in the elenctic dialogues when Socrates is faced with an interlocutor who recognizes his ignorance, Socrates either has no recommendation (e.g., Ion and Charmides) for how to proceed (as Clitophon would have us suppose) or he recommends (implicitly or explicitly) to seek out someone who knows and learn from him or her (e.g., Lysimachus, Melesias, and perhaps Hippocrates and Crito). Insofar as Socrates has any recommendation for acquiring the virtue-knowledge one lacks, it appears to be to find someone who knows and learn from him or her.

^{37.} That the teacher should be someone with the knowledge one lacks is indicated by Socrates' position that since he too lacks the relevant knowledge he is in no position to replace Laches and Nicias as a teacher. See Nehamas (1992, 286–87) and note 22, this chapter.

Socratic Practice

Of course, one might object that this is very slim evidence on the basis of which to build an interpretation of Socratic learning. It is more likely that Socrates would encourage those who recognize their ignorance to follow his example. It is more likely, that is, that he would recommend that others acquire the virtue-knowledge they lack in the same way that he seeks to acquire the virtue-knowledge he lacks. Moreover, we have abundant evidence for Socrates' procedure, it might be supposed. Socrates has long ago recognized his ignorance and has spent a life-time attempting to rectify it. So let us turn to Socrates' own learning strategy, the second of the two questions I said we needed to address.

Evidence for Socrates' practice comes in two forms: Socrates' descriptions of his practice and examples of Socrates engaging in his practice.³⁹ Unfortunately, in both cases our evidence for the manner in which Socrates attempts to learn is not much better than our evidence for the manner by which he recommended others learn. What evidence there is, however, suggests that, just as he urges others, Socrates seeks to acquire the virtue-knowledge he recognizes he lacks by finding someone who has this knowledge and attempting to learn from him or her. He attempts to acquire virtue-knowledge by learning it from someone who knows.

Socratic Descriptions

Consider first, Socrates' own descriptions of his practice. While there are various passages throughout the elenctic dialogues in which Socrates describes his practice, few of them make any reference to his method for acquiring the virtue-knowledge he lacks. Most are descriptions of his practice of examining the virtue-knowledge claims of others. In a few of these passages, however, Socrates explicitly connects this practice of examining the knowledge claims of others with his learning strategy.

^{38.} For some reason to doubt that in the elenctic dialogues what Socrates does is what Socrates would recommend that his interlocutors do see Doyle (2012).

^{39.} The latter is considerably more abundant than the former and consequently the literature devoted to Socrates' practice in the elenctic dialogues has wisely focused primarily (although not exclusively) on the latter. This has not generally been the case concerning discussions of the Socrates' practice in the so-called middle dialogues. In chapters 6–8, I attempt to modify this approach to the middle dialogues.

^{40.} See, especially, Socrates' description of his examination of the Delphic oracle at *Apology* 21B–23B and the statement of his divine mission at *Apology* 29D2–30B2. See also Benson (2000, 18–29).

In describing his examination of the Delphic oracle's pronouncement that no one of the Greeks was wiser than Socrates, Socrates explains that after failing to refute the Oracle by uncovering a politician who was wiser than he, he went next to the poets. As we have seen, he describes his intentions with the poets as follows:

After the politicians, I went to the poets, . . . intending in their case to catch myself being more ignorant than they. So I took up those poems with which they seemed to have taken most trouble and asked them what they meant, in order that I might at the same time learn something from them (iv' ἄμα τι καὶ μανθάνοιμι παρ' αὐτῶν). (Apology 22A8-B5; emphasis added)

Here Socrates explicitly testifies to a learning strategy. He approaches individuals whom he expects to have the knowledge that he lacks and attempts to learn from them. Notice, however, that Socrates does not suggest that he simply assents to what the poets say. Even though he approaches traditional teachers, 41 he does not approach them in a traditional way. He takes up their poems and questions them concerning their meaning. 42 He does this for at least two reasons. First, he questions them in order to determine whether they have the knowledge that as teachers they are purported to have. He does this to verify their credentials and thereby test the oracle. Second, and "at the same time," he questions them in order to come to understand or internalize their knowledge, if they indeed have it. Thus, Socrates here does not indicate that he sought to learn in the traditional paternalistic/authoritarian way scholars have seen Plato rejecting. But he nevertheless does indicate that he sought to acquire knowledge by learning it from another who has it. It is difficult to believe that Socrates attempts to learn from the poets if they should turn out—as of course they all do—not to have the knowledge he expects them to have. The idea seems to be that he attempts to learn from them, if their knowledge claims are confirmed, while he attempts to persuade them of their ignorance, if they are not. How, exactly, Socrates thinks he is able to learn from them "at the same time" as he attempts to confirm their knowledge claims is far from clear, although his actual practice in the elenctic dialogues is a good place to look for an answer.⁴³ Nevertheless, it appears that, at least at the time of

^{41.} See, for example, Blondell (2002, 96) for the tradition of poets as teachers.

^{42.} See a similar approach suggested by Protagoras at *Protagoras* 338E–339A.

^{43.} In the *Charmides* (167B–172C) Socrates is made to express doubts about this possibility in light of the difficulty of identifying an individual who has knowledge without possessing the knowledge oneself. See pp. 45-47.

the Delphic oracle's response, the (or at least one) method for acquiring virtue-knowledge that Socrates himself pursues is to learn from those who have it. 44

That Socrates understands his learning strategy in this way is confirmed by a second passage, this time from the *Hippias Minor*. After Hippias boasts that he will "prove... that Homer made Achilles better than Odysseus and not a liar," Socrates responds:

Hippias, I don't dispute that you are wiser than I, but it is always my custom to pay attention when someone is saying something, especially when the speaker seems to me to be wise (μοι δοκῆ σοφὸς εἶναι ὁ λέγων). And because I desire to learn what he means, I question him thoroughly and examine and place side-by-side the things he says, so I can learn (καὶ ἐπιθυμῶν μαθεῖν ὅτι λέγει διαπυνθάνομαι καὶ ἐπανασκοπῶ καὶ συμβιβάζω τὰ λεγόμενα, ἵνα μάθω). If the speaker seems to me to be some worthless person, I neither ask questions nor do I care what he says. This is how you will recognize whom I consider wise. You'll find me being persistent at what's said by this sort of person, questioning him so that I can benefit by learning something (ἵνα μαθών τι ὡφεληθῶ). (Hippias Minor 369D1–E2; see also Hippias Minor 372A6–C5)

Once again Socrates explicitly testifies to his method of learning from those whom he thinks have the virtue-knowledge he lacks. This time, however, he indicates that he does not attempt to learn from them if he discovers or believes that they do not have such knowledge. The possession, better the presumption, of virtue-knowledge is a necessary condition for Socrates to seek to learn from them.⁴⁵

Notice, again, the presumption of knowledge and the desire to learn is followed by careful questioning of what the teacher means—by thorough questioning ($\delta\iota\alpha\pi\nu\nu\theta\dot{\alpha}\nu\rho\mu\alpha$), examination ($\dot{\epsilon}\pi\alpha\nu\alpha\sigma\kappa\sigma\bar{\omega}$), and reconcilation ($\sigma\nu\mu\beta\iota\beta\dot{\alpha}\zeta\omega$) of what is said. This trio of verbs recalls a similar trio in Socrates' statement of his divine mission when he explains that whenever he comes across anyone who professes to care about wisdom, truth, and the best possible state of their soul, he "question[s] him ($\dot{\epsilon}\rho\dot{\eta}\sigma\rho\mu\alpha\iota$), examine[s] him ($\dot{\epsilon}\xi\epsilon\tau\dot{\alpha}\sigma\omega$) and test[s] him ($\dot{\epsilon}\lambda\dot{\epsilon}\gamma\xi\omega$)" (Apology 29E4–5). Notice, also, that just as the Apology passage does not suppose that Socrates engages in this sort of questioning with anyone he happens to meet, but only with those who profess to care about wisdom, truth, and the best possible state of their soul, so here in the Hippias Minor Socrates does not profess to engage those whom he considers worthless (presumably with

^{44.} See also *Republic* 1.337D3-4: "What else, said I, but what is proper for an ignorant man to pay? It is fitting for him to learn from the one who knows."

^{45.} See Theaetetus 145C7-D5.

respect to wisdom or virtue-knowledge). Again, the point of the questioning is twofold. First, as the context of the *Apology* passage makes clear, the questioning is in part to determine whether the individual has the wisdom he or she professes to care about; 46 and second, the questioning is an attempt to acquire, understand, and internalize the knowledge, if the individual has it.

Of course, it would take a tin ear not to hear the irony in the *Hippias Minor* passage.⁴⁷ Socrates has already gotten Hippias to admit that, for example, the same person is both a liar and truthful, and he no longer has any genuine expectation of learning from Hippias (if he ever had any). He is mocking Hippias. Moreover, it is simply false to suggest that Socrates never questions in this way those whom he thinks lack the knowledge they profess to have. We have already seen that Socrates continues to question those whose ignorance has been exposed in order to encourage the interlocutor himself to recognize that ignorance.⁴⁸ But the parallel with the *Apology* suggests that the point of the irony needs to be carefully identified. Unless we are also going to take the *Apology* passages as ironic, Socrates is not being ironic about attempting to learn from those who know nor that he questions those who have some claim to know in order to test their knowledge and in order to learn from them. The irony here in the *Hippias Minor* is the suggestion that he still considers Hippias to possess such knowledge. 49 And this irony is thick. Without it Hippias is likely to end the conversation. Hippias has not yet (and probably never will) recognized his ignorance.

So Socrates is ironic in this passage to be sure. But there remains a serious point, and to miss it would be unfortunate. At least part of Plato's point in the Hippias Minor is to exhibit the inadequacy of the traditional paternalistic/

^{46.} Socrates indicates that if he discovers that they do not have the wisdom they profess to care about he reproaches them, presumably to encourage them to join in the search for the virtue-knowledge they lack (Apology 30A1-2).

^{47.} See Vlastos (1991, 138), who writes of this passage and of Hippias Minor 372A-B which refers back to our present passage: "This is [Socrates'] characteristic irony laid on thick."

^{48.} I owe this objection to the late Shyam Patwardhan, one of my students in a seminar I offered a few years ago, although he proposed it in a somewhat different way. Against this objection, see also Apology 23B5-7, where Socrates professes to "go around seeking out anyone, citizen or stranger, whom I think wise (τινα οἴωμαι σοφὸν εἶναι). Then if I do not think he is, I come to the assistance of the god and show him that he is not wise" (emphasis added). We will see below that the depiction of Socrates' practice in the elenctic dialogues matches this

^{49.} See also the Callias story Socrates tells at *Apology* 20A3–C3 in response to the informal charge of being a teacher. When Callias maintains that Evenus is a teacher of virtue, Socrates does not doubt (at least explicitly) that one can learn virtue from one who knows. Rather, he doubts that Evenus has the virtue-knowledge he professes to teach.

authoritarian model of education represented by Hippias.⁵⁰ To be beguiled by the irony in this passage is to miss one of the places where Socrates is made to contrast his method of learning with the one tendered by Hippias. Unlike the students Hippias prefers to address, Socrates is not interested in simply appropriating what Hippias and his ilk say. Rather, Socrates will "thoroughly question, examine, and attempt to reconcile" what Hippias says in order to determine whether Hippias is the authority he professes to be and in order to understand and internalize what Hippias says, if he is.

Finally, there is a passage in the *Charmides* which has been subject to a variety of readings but which may reinforce this picture of Socrates' method of learning. After Critias becomes annoyed at Socrates' questions and accuses him of trying to refute him rather than pursuing the nature of temperance, Socrates responds:

[H]ow could you possibly think that even if I were to refute (ἐλέγχω) everything you say, I would be doing it for any other reasons than the one I would give for a thorough investigation (διερευνώμην) of my own statements—the fear of unconsciously thinking that I know something when I do not (φοβούμενος μή ποτε λάθω οἰόμενος μέν τι εἰδέναι, εἰδὼς δὲ μή). And this is what I claim to be doing now, examining the argument for my own sake primarily (τὸν λόγον σκοπεῖν μάλιστα μὲν ἐμαυτοῦ ἕνεκα), but perhaps also for the sake of my friends. Or don't you believe it to be for the common good, or for that of most men, that the state of existing things should become clear? (*Charmides* 166C7–D6)

This passage has often been taken as indicating Socratic self-examination. In examining others' claims to virtue-knowledge, Socrates also is examining his own.⁵¹ But we must be careful here. What Socrates says is that he is examining or attempting to refute what Critias has said for the same reason that Socrates examines or attempts to refute what he, Socrates, says, viz. lest Socrates thinks he knows something he does not. Socrates is examining Critias' *logos*, at least, in part for his own (Socrates') sake. But how is this supposed to work? We can understand how examining or attempting to refute Socrates' own views might

^{50.} Blondell (2002, 116-64, esp. 128).

^{51.} See Tarrant (2000, 258) and Schmid (1998, 50); pace Woolf (2008, 17). Woolf concedes, however, that the passage provides evidence for Socratic self-examination. He simply denies that the passage indicates that in virtue of examining others, Socrates is examining himself. I am sympathetic with Woolf's reading.

amount to avoiding thinking he knows something he does not.⁵² But how does examining or attempting to refute Critias' views have this result? How does examining or attempting to refute Critias amount to an effort on Socrates' behalf to avoid thinking he knows something he does not? An answer to this question is suggested by the account of learning we have seen suggested in the *Apology* and Hippias Minor. In examining and attempting to refute Critias, Socrates is examining and attempting to refute the person from whom he is attempting to learn. Examining and attempting to refute such an individual helps to assure Socrates of two things. First, it assures Socrates that he is not learning from someone who fails to have the knowledge and authority he should have qua teacher. Second, it helps to assure Socrates that he does not merely have the ability to repeat what Critias has said, if Critias should turn out to have the requisite authority and knowledge, but a genuine understanding of what Critias has said. Socrates, that is, is taking care lest he thinks he knows something simply because Critias has told him. This, it appears, was Charmides' mistake. Such a precaution is necessary and appropriate if Socrates is attempting to learn from individuals who know, given Socrates' rejection of the traditional paternalistic/authoritarian pedagogical model.

Socratic Elenctic Engagements

But it is not just Socrates' descriptions of his practice that indicate that his strategy for acquiring the knowledge he lacks is to learn from those who already possess it. It is also indicated by his actual practice. Virtually every elenctic interlocutor in the elenctic dialogues has some claim to possess knowledge that Socrates professes to lack.⁵³ Euthyphro, for example, claims to know what piety is, and Socrates, thereupon, sets out to become his pupil on this matter.

^{52.} Another answer is that Critias is saying something that Socrates himself believes. See, for example, Woodruff (1988, 104) and Rappe (1995, 9 and 14). Woolf (2008, 14n25) correctly doubts that Critias' definition of temperance is meant to be a Socratic view, but even if it is, this answer cannot account for what looks like the fully general explanation of why Socrates engages in an examination and attempt at refutation of those with whom he converses.

^{53.} Charmides (Charmides 154E5-155A1), Crito (Crito 45A3 and 46A7-8 together with the argument at 47A-48A), Critias (Charmides 162D4-E5), Dionysodorus (Euthydemus 271C5-272B4, 273C2-274B4), Euthydemus (Euthydemus 271C5-272B4, 273C2-274B4), Euthyphro (Euthyphro 4E4-5A2), Gorgias (Gorgias 449C9-D2), Polus (Gorgias 462A5-7), Callicles (Gorgias 487A-488A), Hippias (Hippias Major 281A1-C3, 286D7-287B3), Hippias (*Hippias Minor* 364A1–B3), Ion (*Ion* 530C1–D3), Laches (*Laches* 184E11– 187A1, 190C4-5), Nicias (*Laches* 184E11-187A1, 196C1-4), Menexenus (*Lysis* 211B6-D4),

It is because I realize this that I am eager to become your pupil ($\mu\alpha\theta\eta\tau\dot{\eta}\varsigma$), my dear friend. I know that other people as well as this Meletus do not even seem to notice you, whereas he sees me sharply and clearly that he indicts me for ungodliness. So tell me now, by Zeus, what you just now maintained you clearly knew. . . . (*Euthyphro* 5c4–9; see also *Euthyphro* 5A3–4, 5A8, 5B1–5, and 15E5–16A4)

There may, of course, be irony here again, especially at the end of dialogue. But if there is, the irony is in supposing that Euthyphro has the virtue-knowledge that Socrates lacks, not in supposing that he wants to learn such knowledge from Euthyphro, if he had it.⁵⁴ Again, in the *Laches*, both Laches and Nicias claim knowledge that Socrates explicitly claims to lack. Socrates, thereupon, sets out to examine these knowledge claims. Socrates may not emphasize wanting to learn from them the knowledge he lacks,⁵⁵ but given what he is made to say about his examination of the poets in the *Apology*, there is no reason to doubt that he takes himself to be learning from them, should their knowledge claim be confirmed, "at the same time as" he examines their knowledge claims.⁵⁶

The only elenctic interlocutors who do not claim to possess knowledge that Socrates professes to lack are Lysis, in the dialogue named for him, and Clinias, whom we have met before. In neither case, however, are their respective examinations intended as some kind of joint strategy for acquiring the knowledge Socrates and his unconceited interlocutors recognize they lack. Rather, Socrates explicitly claims that his goal in examining Lysis is to keep him from acquiring the conceit to which most of his other interlocutors have succumbed (*Lysis* 210D4–E5), while Clinias is examined by Socrates to encourage him to seek the

Meno (Meno 71D5–8, 71E1–72A2), the slave (Meno 82E5–6), Hippocrates (Protagoras 311A8–B2, 312C4–5), Protagoras (Protagoras 316C5–317C5, 320B5–C4D), Polemarchus (Republic 1.331E7–8, 335E1–4), and Thrasymachus (Republic 1.338A1, 344D5–E3). See Nehamas (1992, 300–302) and Benson (2000, 26–29), pace Wolfsdorf (2008a, 150), who avers that some of Socrates' interlocutors are not alleged experts, in particular Charmides, Meno, Cephalus, and Polemarchus. All but Cephalus, however, has some claim to possess the knowledge Socrates professes to lack.

^{54.} See Nehamas (1987, 303–304), who writes "Ironically presupposing that Euthyphro is an expert, Socrates presents himself, equally ironically, as his student. But the point he makes is not itself ironical."

^{55.} Although, see Laches 181D6.

^{56.} See also *Protagoras* 311E6–312B6, 348C5–349A6, *Euthydemus* 272B7–D6, and *Gorgias* 489D7–E3. It is noteworthy that Callicles accuses Socrates of being ironic in the last passage, but Socrates responds that he is not. This is, of course, what Socrates should say if he is being ironic, but while Plato may be insuring that the reader does not miss the irony, he also may be certifying that there is a serious and sincere point underlying the irony.

knowledge he recognizes he lacks (Euthydemus 275A4-B6 and 278C5-E2). One cannot help but hear Clitophon's challenge in the background.

All of this, then, is entirely in keeping with Socrates' advice to his interlocutors who like him recognize their ignorance, as well as with his descriptions of his own method. Insofar as Socrates is depicted as doing anything to acquire the virtueknowledge he lacks, he appears to attempt to learn by engaging those who claim to already know, so that he can learn from them if they actually do. Once Socrates recognizes that they do not possess the knowledge they profess, he indicates no hope of learning from them or learning in any other way, although he will likely continue the dialogue with the interlocutors. Socrates continues not because he anticipates somehow learning from the interlocutors any longer, or because they have somehow begun a joint strategy for learning together, but, rather, because he wants them to recognize that they lack the knowledge they thought they had, a necessary preliminary for joining him in the pursuit to acquire it. But, the text suggests that this joint pursuit consists in nothing other than joining Socrates in searching for someone who knows what he and his interlocutors do not—who possesses robust virtue-knowledge—and attempting to learn from him or her.

The Failure of Learning from Those Who Know

So we have seen that if the elenctic dialogues provide an answer to Clitophon's challenge—an answer to how the virtue-knowledge that Plato has so successfully encouraged us to seek is to be obtained—it appears to be that we should seek out those who have the virtue-knowledge we seek and attempt to learn from them. Such an answer, however, may seem rather disappointing in light of other features of those same dialogues. In the elenctic dialogues Socrates appears to have been a dismal failure at uncovering anyone who possesses the virtue-knowledge he lacks. He has failed to uncover anyone from whom to learn. Indeed, the only individuals to whom he attributes knowledge that he lacks are the craftsmen whom he approached after the poets in testing the Delphic oracle. About them he says: "they knew things I did not know, and to that extent they were wiser than I" (Apology 22D3-4).⁵⁷ But he goes on to indicate that these craftsmen, because of this knowledge, took themselves to have knowledge of other greatest things (τἆλλα τα μέγιστα) that they did not have. Moreover, Socrates never testifies to trying to learn from the craftsmen the knowledge they did have. So, if Socrates' strategy for acquiring the knowledge he lacks, in particular the knowledge of the greatest

^{57.} How Socrates is able to recognize this is a difficult question in light of his argument in the Charmides to be discussed below.

things, is to find those who have it and learn from them, Socrates' strategy appears doomed to failure. Socrates is unable to discover any such individuals.⁵⁸

But, in fact, things are worse. Socrates' failure to discover any individuals with the virtue-knowledge he seeks to acquire is an accidental or contingent failure of the strategy of learning that encourages us to learn from those who know. Short of an argument to the effect that the robust virtue-knowledge Socrates seeks is unobtainable, we have no reason to think that learning it from others *cannot* succeed. Socrates has simply been unable to discover those who have the knowledge he seeks, but they exist (or, at least, might exist). Socrates' experience obviously does not give us much hope (and his interpretation of the Delphic oracle only makes things worse), but it does not make the strategy hopeless. Nevertheless, in at least two places in the elenctic dialogues Plato indicates the problem may be more serious.

In the conversation with Hippocrates at the beginning of the *Protagoras*, Socrates indicates that a sophist is "a kind of merchant who peddles provisions upon which the soul is nourished" (*Protagoras* 313C4–6), and then compares the sophist so understood to a merchant who peddles provisions for the body. The latter he says do not know which of their wares are good or bad for the body, nor do the buyers, "unless one happens to be a trainer or doctor" (*Protagoras* 313D4). Similarly, a sophist does not know which of his wares are good or bad for the soul, nor do the buyers "unless one happens to be a physician of the soul" (*Protagoras* 313E2).

So if you are a knowledgeable (ἐπιστήμων) consumer, you can buy $math \hat{e}-mata^{60}$ safely from Protagoras or anyone else. But if you are not, please don't risk what is most dear to you on a roll of the dice, for there is a far greater risk in buying $math \hat{e}mata$ than in buying foods. (Protagoras 313E2–314A1)

^{58.} Of course, this failure fits well with the fact that at the end of his life Socrates testifies to never having acquired the virtue-knowledge he spent his life seeking; see assumption [a] of chapter 1, this volume.

^{59.} Of course, if Socrates interprets the Delphic oracle as meaning that no one has robust virtue-knowledge, then Socrates has a reason to think that learning robust virtue-knowledge from another who has it cannot succeed, viz. the oracle has informed him that there are no such individuals. It is not obvious, however, that this is the correct way to understand Socrates' interpretation of the oracle (see Benson 2000, 169–72); but even if it is, Socrates is left with a significant portion of his philosophical career during which he did not have this reason for thinking he could not learn from others. Moreover, unless one thinks that having hit on the interpretation of the oracle he did, Socrates would not allow that his interpretation could be mistaken, the chance remains that his learning strategy could succeed, even for Socrates.

^{60.} Mathêmata here are probably best understood as whatever it is one learns or acquires—whether knowledge or belief or true belief—as a result of associating with the sophist, not necessarily knowledge.

The greater risk Socrates goes on to delineate is that, in the case of food, one can take it home after the purchase and have it examined by an expert, but in the case of mathêmata, they must be ingested on the spot without an opportunity for later examination. The suggestion here is that given the enormous risk involved in ingesting bad *mathêmata*—that is, *mathêmata* that are bad for one's soul—one should not seek to acquire virtue-knowledge from another unless one knows which mathêmata are good for one and which are not—unless, that is, one is an expert concerning the care of the soul. 61 But then one wonders why one would want to pay the sophists, if one is already an expert concerning the care of the soul. What is it that one would want to purchase from them? Indeed, the suggestion is, and it is only a suggestion, that the risk involved is so great that (at least with respect to *mathêmata* concerning the soul) one needs to already have the knowledge one seeks to safely acquire it from another.

Another, more troubling, difficulty for attempting to learn from one who knows appears in a challenging passage in the *Charmides*. In the *Protagoras* the worry concerns whether the one lacking the knowledge one seeks can determine whether what one acquires is beneficial. In the *Charmides* the worry concerns whether the one lacking the knowledge one seeks can determine whether another has the knowledge one wants to acquire.

The passage is complex and I do not have space to deal with it fully,⁶² but at Charmides 170D5-E3 Socrates begins by maintaining that an individual who only possesses knowledge of knowledge will lack the ability to recognize firstorder knowledge in another. 63 Socrates continues by offering the argument for this view,⁶⁴ which after some confusion⁶⁵ goes rather straightforwardly as follows:

[1] In order for A to recognize whether B has knowledge of subject matter F, A will need to examine B concerning F (*Charmides* 171A3–B6).

^{61.} See Nehamas (1985, 13; 1987, 297-98).

^{62.} For a longer discussion of this passage, see Benson (2003b).

^{63.} Pace Schmid (1998, 108-13), for example, who takes this passage to be part of the conclusion of the previous argument, with the new argument beginning at 170E4. N.b., Socrates also asks concerning the ability of the knower of knowledge to recognize ignorance in another in this passage, but no part of the subsequent argument appears to be addressed to this ability.

^{64.} The passage begins with the phrase σκεψώμεθα δὲ ἐκ τῶνδε, which Sprague (1973) translates as "And let's see what follows," while West and West (1986) translate it as "Let us investigate it from the following." The latter better fits what appears to be the logic of what follows at 170E4-171C10, viz. the argument for the claim at 170D5-E3. See also Schofield (1973, 122).

^{65.} So much so that Schofield (1973) advocates altering the text.

- [2] If B knows F, then what B says concerning F is true and what B does concerning F is done correctly (supplied).
- [3] So, A will seek to determine whether what B says concerning F is true and what B does concerning F is done correctly (*Charmides* 171B7–10).
- [4] But only the one who has knowledge of F will be able to determine whether the things said concerning F are true or the things done concerning F are done correctly (*Charmides* 171B11–C3).
- [5] So, if A lacks knowledge of F, then A cannot recognize that B has knowledge of F (*Charmides* 171C4–10).⁶⁶

Socrates concludes that the knower of knowledge, lacking first-order knowledge of a specific subject matter—health, justice, music, house building, and the like—is not able to examine and so recognize or know an individual possessing the knowledge of that subject matter. The knower of knowledge, *qua* knower of knowledge, fails to have the ability to recognize a first-order knower. And so, knowledge of knowledge does not suffice for knowledge of what one knows and does not know.⁶⁷

Notice that as long as [2] in this argument is understood simply as supplying a necessary condition for knowledge of a specific subject matter—that is, for the possession of a *technê*⁶⁸—the argument need not be seen as directed at the ability to recognize that others lack the knowledge they profess to have. If, for example, Plato takes coherence of the beliefs about the subject matter of one's professed expertise to be a necessary condition for possessing that expertise, Plato can allow that one may be able to recognize that an expertise is lacking without checking for the truth of the other's speech or the correctness of the other's actions. Nothing in the argument requires truth and correctness to be sufficient for knowledge or expertise. Consequently, nothing in the argument indicates that lacking first-order knowledge, one cannot

^{66.} See Gentzler's (1995, 228) "technê requirement on discrimination."

^{67.} Socrates nevertheless does maintain that knowledge of knowledge suffices for the knowledge that one knows and that one does not know. What precisely it means to say that one cannot recognize what B knows, but one can recognize that B knows, I do not pursue. What is essential for our present purposes is the method of learning we have been discussing requires that the one lacking knowledge of C be able to recognize another possessing that knowledge and the argument of the *Charmides* appears to indicate that that is impossible.

^{68.} All that this requires is that Plato would be prepared to recognize a distinction between knowledge and true belief. See, for example, *Charmides* 162D4–E5 and *Gorgias* 454C7–455A7, and Benson (2000, 93–94), Fine (1992, 209), and Irwin (1995, 27–28, 141–43); *pace* Beversluis (1974, 331–36), Kahn (1988, 87–88), Nehamas (1987, 282), Woodruff (1992, 102), Penner (1992, 151n18), and Nehamas (1992, 290). Of course, that Plato recognizes this distinction in post-*Meno* dialogues is uncontroversial. I here put to one side worries about deception and insufficient resources. For the former, see *Hippias Minor* 376A6–B6; for the latter, see *Euthydemus* 279C7–280A8.

recognize incoherence in another's (or one's own) beliefs. Nevertheless, as long as Plato maintains that truth and correctness are necessary conditions of knowledge and expertise, and that one cannot recognize truth and correctness without possessing such knowledge and expertise, an individual lacking knowledge of a specific subject matter will be unable to recognize another possessing knowledge of that subject matter. But this presents a serious threat to the method of learning indicated in the elenctic dialogues. Individuals seeking to acquire knowledge of bodily health—that is, seeking to acquire medicine, for example—and so seeking to discover someone else who has this knowledge from whom to learn, are in serious trouble. They fail to have the knowledge necessary for discovering such an individual from whom to learn.

Conclusion

We would do well, then, to take Clitophon's challenge seriously. The elenctic dialogues do a moderately good job of encouraging their interlocutors to recognize their robust virtue-ignorance and to seek the virtue-knowledge they recognize they lack. These dialogues do an even better job of having that effect on their readers—you and me. But Socrates offers his interlocutors and Plato offers his readers little, if any, guidance on how to pursue this sought-for knowledge. Insofar as any guidance is offered at all, it appears to be to seek others who possess the robust virtue-knowledge one wants to acquire and learn from them.⁶⁹ The history of Socrates' own search, however, gives us little reason to expect success. Not only does he continue to profess his own robust virtue-ignorance in the last few days of his life, but he has failed to discover anyone else who possesses this knowledge from whom we might learn. Moreover, he has raised psychological dangers and epistemological difficulties for ever successfully doing so. Plato may have a response to these difficulties in the elenctic dialogues, but if he does, one is hard pressed to find it. They look serious. ⁷⁰ We cannot help feel some sympathy to Clitophon's complaint that while Socrates is "worth the world to someone who hasn't yet been converted to the pursuit of [robust virtue-knowledge], to someone who's already been converted [he] rather get[s] in the way of his attaining happiness by reaching the goal of [virtue-knowledge]" (*Clitophon* 410E5–8). Perhaps, Plato has a better response to offer elsewhere.

^{69.} Other methods of knowledge acquisition may be found in these dialogues—e.g., dreams, oracles, etc. (although I am skeptical they amount to methods of knowledge acquisition), but in any case they are never recommended.

^{70.} See Nehamas (1987, 304), who writes "This, in my opinion, is one of the most crucial, interesting, and paradoxical consequences of Socrates' view of moral education: only one good human being can recognize another."

MENO'S PARADOX AND THE THEORY OF RECOLLECTION

Meno abruptly begins his eponymous dialogue as follows:

Can you tell me, Socrates, can virtue be taught? Or is it not teachable but the result of practice, or is it neither of these, but men possess it by nature or in some other way? (*Meno* 70A1-4)²

We might anticipate, then, that here in Plato's Meno we will get an explicit answer to Clitophon's challenge. How does Plato recommend that the robust virtue-knowledge he has encouraged us to seek be acquired—by teaching, by practice, by nature, or in some other way? As long as Plato accepts Socratic intellectualism (or at least the necessity of knowledge for virtue), one would expect that an answer to Meno's question would go a long way toward answering Clitophon's challenge.3 Of course, anyone familiar with the Meno will know that our expectations are likely to be frustrated. The Meno concludes by apparently denying that knowledge is necessary (although it may be sufficient) for virtue and maintaining that virtue is acquired by divine dispensation (θεία μοίρα). If we take the conclusion of the Meno as our guide, we might take Plato's response to Clitophon's challenge to be rather disappointingly: petition the gods and hope they bestow virtue (i.e., true belief) on you, and quit fussing over knowledge.

Nevertheless, despite this ostensible disappointment, a more satisfying answer to Clitophon's challenge than the one we considered in the previous chapter emerges in the *Meno*. Two features of

^{1.} See Scott (2006, 12–13) for an interpretation of the significance of this abrupt beginning. Scott may overdo Plato's focus on the distinction between *sophistic* and *Socratic* teaching; see note 22, chapter 2.

^{2.} For the textual difficulties with this passage, see Bluck (1964, 202–203) and Scott (2006, 16–18).

^{3.} See Bedu-Addo (1984, 14).

classical Platonism are introduced: the theory of recollection and the method of hypothesis.⁴ These two features are apparently motivated by the puzzle that Meno puts forward and Socrates repeats at Meno 80D-E, often referred to as Meno's paradox.⁵ This paradox raises a problem for the acquisition of knowledge or learning. As we have seen, problems concerning learning have been lying just beneath the surface of the elenctic dialogues for some time. Insofar as any method of learning is recommended by Socrates throughout the elenctic dialogues it appears to be one of seeking out someone who has the knowledge one seeks and learning from him or her. Nevertheless, such a method of learning faces a variety of difficulties, among which is the growing recognition that no one appears to have the robust virtue-knowledge that is sought and so there is no one from whom it can be learned. This suggests that if Socrates (or anyone else) is to ever acquire knowledge of something fine and good, he will need to search for it himself (or in concert with others equally ignorant). He will not be able to learn it from someone else who knows. He will need to discover it on his own. 6 But it is at precisely this point that Meno's paradox comes to the fore. For the paradox suggests that discovering knowledge on one's own, as a directed method of learning, cannot succeed, either. Both general methods of learning are threatened: learning from another and discovering on one's own. Following the paradox, however, Plato has Socrates introduce the theory of recollection and the method of hypothesis in order to show that the latter method

^{4.} In claiming that these two features are "introduced" I do not mean to presuppose a developmentalist interpretation of the dialogues; see pp. 8-11. Instead I simply mean to underscore that Plato has Socrates introduce these two features in such a way that neither Meno nor the reader of the dialogue is presumed to be familiar with them. Contrast, for example, the way in which the theory of recollection is introduced at *Phaedo* 71E3-6. In contrast, there is no suggestion that Meno is familiar with either the theory of recollection or the method of hypothesis (at least as a method of philosophical or moral inquiry). Rather, Socrates is made to explain both features to Meno.

^{5.} Even Weiss (2001, 49–76), who maintains that a portion of the paradox as presented in the Meno is not a genuine puzzle for Plato, thinks that the theory of recollection, the conversation with the slave, and method of hypothesis are offered as responses to the paradox. However, she takes the sophistry of part of the paradox as evidence for Plato's lack of seriousness in proposing the theory of recollection, the conversation with the slave, and method of hypothesis. The other part of the paradox Plato does not, indeed cannot resolve, according to Weiss.

^{6.} See Dimas (1996, 12). For the recognition in the dialogues of these two modes of knowledge acquisition see p. 25 and note 16, chapter 2. Contrast Gentzler (1996), who appears to take the method of searching together from ignorance as the same as the method of learning practiced and endorsed in the elenctic dialogues, and to take Meno's puzzle as applying equally to the method Socrates is about to begin with Meno and to the method he has been employing previously in the Meno and the elenctic dialogues. The problems may indeed be similar, but Plato presents them as different.

of learning, at least,⁷ can indeed succeed, and in what manner. Consequently, these two features of classical Platonism are where we should begin looking for a satisfactory response to Clitophon's challenge.⁸

Nevertheless, a variety of commentators would disagree. According to some of these commentators the problem presented by Meno's paradox is a not a serious philosophical problem requiring the resources of anything as elaborate as the theory of recollection and the method of hypothesis to resolve. The problem on their view can be resolved more simply. It can be resolved just by noticing an elementary equivocation or some other obvious logical fallacy. Meno's paradox presents no genuine philosophical problem of learning at all. Consequently, no substantive philosophical theory—certainly not the theory of recollection or the method of hypothesis—is required to resolve it. If these commentators are correct, it is a mistake to turn to the *Meno* and its theory of recollection and method of hypothesis to find a response to Clitophon's challenge. They are not offered as serious philosophical theses.

In the present chapter, I maintain that the *Meno* is the dialogue in which Plato's response to Clitophon's challenge begins to explicitly emerge. I argue that Meno's paradox is presented by Plato as a serious philosophical problem, whose solution requires substantive philosophical thinking resulting initially in the theory of recollection. Nevertheless, the theory of recollection is not sufficient for resolving Clitophon's challenge. For that we need in addition the method of hypothesis. The chapter, thus, will fall into three parts. First, I lay out the paradox as it is propounded at *Meno* 80D–E. I present the paradox as a conjunction of Meno's version at 80D5–8 and Socrates' version at 80E1–5. Henceforth, I will refer to the paradox as *Meno*'s paradox (as distinct from Meno's paradox or Socrates' paradox). Second, I argue that the paradox so presented cannot be resolved by noticing an elementary equivocation. It requires a serious philosophical

^{7.} The theory of recollection may provide resources for resolving the difficulty of recognizing the knower when one is ignorant oneself, which we saw highlighted in the *Charmides*, but it does not offer a methodology for recognizing such knowers nor does it do anything to address the Socratic problem that there simply does not seem to be anyone who possesses the robust virtue-knowledge we are eager to acquire.

^{8.} See Nehamas (1985, 8) who also sees Plato as using the paradox "to resolve a number of dialectical difficulties to which Socrates' practice had given rise."

^{9.} Eckstein (1968, 31–33) describes the theory of recollection as a "dodge." Weiss (2001, 75) denies that Plato believes the "myth" of recollection. Fine (1992, 213) claims that the theory of recollection is introduced not to resolve Meno's puzzle but to explain certain aspects of the resolution found in the elenctic dialogues; see also Irwin (1995, 135–36).

^{10.} See, for example, A. Taylor (1956, 135–36), Shorey (1965, 157), Klein (1965, 92), Phillips (1965, 78), Eckstein (1968, 29–30), Grube (1935/1980, 12), and Weiss (2001, 49–76).

response. Third, I consider how the theory of recollection is meant to provide that serious philosophical response.¹¹ Two features of this theory as described in the Meno will occupy our attention. First, I will focus on the minimal conditions Plato appears to think are necessary in order to account for *de novo* inquiry. We will see that they are two— prenatal knowledge and nature's connectedness but it is the former that occupies most of Plato's attention. Second, I will maintain that should these conditions suffice to resolve Meno's paradox, Plato still owes us an account of the method by which *de novo* inquiry should be pursued. To the extent that the two conditions which minimally constitute the theory of recollection are secured, they provide for the *possibility* of *de novo* discovery but they leave unaddressed the method by which one should seek to make this discovery. If we take Plato's theory of recollection as the solution to the question *how* the robust virtue-knowledge that we have been encouraged to seek is to be acquired, we get the rather unhelpful answer: recollect it! Fortunately, a more helpful methodological response is provided by the second feature of classical Platonism introduced in the Meno—the method of hypothesis. The theory of recollection provides the possibility of *de novo* discovery. The method of hypothesis provides the methodology of *de novo* discovery. The latter is Plato's response to Clitophon's challenge in the Meno, Phaedo, and Republic, and is the subject of the subsequent chapters.

Meno's Paradox

To begin, consider the context of the paradox as it arises in the Meno. After Socrates professes his inability to answer Meno's question concerning how virtue is acquired on the grounds that he fails to know at all what virtue is (οὐκ εἰδὼς περὶ ἀρετῆς τὸ παράπαν), the Meno begins its examination of the nature of virtue. The explicit motivation for this examination is Socrates' desire to be proved wrong that he has never met anyone who knows what virtue is. Meno claims that both he and Socrates have met Gorgias, and Gorgias surely knows what virtue is. Consequently, after asking Meno to put Gorgias aside, Socrates encourages Meno:

What do you say virtue is? Speak and do not begrudge us, so that I may have spoken a most unfortunate falsehood, in claiming never to have met

^{11.} Others who take the theory of recollection as a serious response to the serious problem posed by Meno's paradox include Hansing (1928), Gulley (1954, 194–95), Moravcsik (1970, 53), Irwin (1973–74, 753), N. White (1974, 289; 1976, 40, 56n18), Nehamas (1985, 29), Dimas (1996, 27-28), Kahn (1996, 159-61), Dancy (2004, 221-36), Kahn (2006, 122), Scott (2006, 87-94), and Charles (2010, 128).

anyone who knows [what virtue is], when you and Gorgias are shown to know. (*Meno* 71D5–8)¹²

In chapter 2, we have seen that in testing to see whether Meno does in fact have this knowledge, Socrates also attempts to learn from Meno what virtue is should Meno turn out to know it.¹³ But by 79E–80D, Socrates' attempt to learn from Meno what he knows has come to an end. Meno's failure to know what virtue is has been exposed to Socrates as well as to Meno (79E7–80B4).¹⁴

Nevertheless, Socrates does not abandon his attempt to learn what virtue is, nor does he turn to someone else with some claim to know what virtue is, as he does in the elenctic dialogues. Rather, after repeating his profession of ignorance (80C6-D3), Socrates encourages Meno to join him in the attempt to discover it: "Nevertheless I wish to examine with you and seek in common (μετὰ σοῦ σκέψασθαι καὶ συζητῆσαι) what [virtue] is" (Meno 80D3-4). One method of learning—acquiring knowledge from one who knows—has come to an end. Another method of learning has begun—acquiring knowledge on one's own. 16

^{12.} See Scott (2006, 12–13), who correctly sees this opening passage as indicating Meno's commitment to what we called in chapter 2 the traditional paternalistic/authoritarian model of learning. Indeed, Socrates here appears to at least recognize the possibility that Meno has learned—i.e., come to know—what virtue is from Gorgias.

^{13.} Admittedly, this is not explicit in the *Meno*, although as mentioned in the previous note, he does recognize the possibility.

^{14.} See Weiss (2001, 50n3) for an argument against taking this as a genuine profession of ignorance. For others who doubt the sincerity of Meno's profession, see Cobb (1973, 605–606), and Welbourne (1986, 238). For a brief defense of the sincerity of Meno's profession, see Benson (1990a, 138n28). Others who take the profession to be sincere include Bluck (1964, 268), Nehamas (1985, 8), Brickhouse and Smith (1994, 7), Irwin (1995, 17), Dimas (1996, 12), Gentzler (1996, 272), and Scott (2006, 69).

^{15.} See pp. 29–35, pace Gentzler (1996, 272, 272n38).

^{16.} See Scott (2006, 71). For the distinction between learning from another and learning on one's own see note 6, this chapter. The latter method of learning—what I will frequently refer to as *de novo* inquiry, *de novo* learning, or *de novo* discovery—does not presuppose another who has the knowledge one seeks. Indeed, Plato may not even be committed to presupposing the presence of another, whether a knower or non-knower. He may, however, believe that joint, as opposed to individual, inquiry is helpful. See Plato's citation of Homer's "Going in tandem, one perceives before the other" at *Protagoras* 348D1. But the context of this passage is not one in which both interlocutors recognize their ignorance. Socrates is still professing to learn from Protagoras.

The Text

At this point, Meno demurs. He wonders how such a method of learning is to proceed. How, he wonders, are they to search for what virtue is when neither of them knows what virtue is?17

[M1] In what way, Socrates, will you search for that thing which you do not know at all what it is? [M2] What sort of thing, of those things you do not know will you set up as the object of your search? [M3] Or even if you should happen upon it, how will you know that this is what you didn't know? (Καὶ τίνα τρόπον ζητήσεις, ὧ Σώκρατες, τοῦτο ὁ μὴ οἶσθα τὸ παράπαν ὅτι ἐστίν; ποῖον γὰρ ὧν οὐκ οἶσθα προθέμενος ζητήσεις; ή εί και ὅτι μάλιστα ἐντύχοις αὐτῷ, πῶς εἴσῃ ὅτι τοῦτό ἐστιν ὁ σὰ οὐκ ἤδησθα;) (Meno 80D5-8)18

This is immediately followed by Socrates' apparent explication of Meno's puzzle:

I know what you mean, Meno. Do you know how contentious an argument you are introducing, [S1] that it is possible for a person to search for neither what he knows nor what he does not know? For, [S2] he could not search for what he knows—for [S3] he knows it and there is no need to search for it—nor [S4] could he search for what he does not know—for [S5] he does not know what to search for. (Μανθάνω οἶον βούλει λέγειν, ὧ Μένων. ὁρᾶς τοῦτον ὡς ἐριστικὸν λόγον κατάγεις, ὡς οὐκ ἄρα ἔστιν ζητεῖν ἀνθρώπω οὔτε ὁ οἶδε οὔτε ὁ μὴ οἶδε; οὔτε γὰρ ἂν ὅ γε οἶδεν ζητοῖ οἶδεν γάρ, καὶ οὐδὲν δεῖ τῷ γε τοιούτῳ ζητήσεως οὔτε ὃ μὴ οἶδεν οὐδὲ γὰρ οἶδεν ὅτι ζητήσει.) (Meno 80E1-5)19

Socrates here suggests that Meno's puzzle is part of a contentious or eristic argument (ἐριστικὸν λόγον), the dilemmatic structure of which appears clear. Each of the following is claimed to hold for any person, A, and anything, x:

^{17.} See Weiss (2001, 51), who correctly observes: "Let us be clear that Meno's resistance to Socrates' ongoing investigation has nothing to do with any aversion on Meno's part to learning. On the contrary, Meno is glad to learn as long as he learns from someone who teaches." See also Devereux (1978, 118).

^{18.} Scott (2006, 75) calls this "Meno's challenge."

^{19.} Scott (2006, 75) calls this the "eristic dilemma."

- [1] Either A knows what x is or A does not know what x is 20 (supplied)
- [2] If A knows what x is, then A does not need to search for what x is ([S3])
- [3] So, if A knows what x is, then A cannot search for what x is ([S2])
- [4] If A does not know what *x* is, then A does not know what to search for ([S5])
- [5] So, if A does not know what x is, then A cannot search for what x is ([S4])
- [6] So, A cannot search for what *x* is—i.e., search or inquiry is impossible ([S1])

Meno's puzzle develops the second horn of the dilemma. Supplementing [4] as a reason for [5], Meno includes [4b]:

- [4a] If A does not know what x is, then A does not know what to search for ([M2])
- [4b] If A does not know what x is, then even if A happened upon x, A cannot know that this is x ([M3])
 - [5] So, if A does not know what x is, then A cannot search for what x is $([M1])^{21}$

Here, [4a] and [4b] appear to be independent reasons for [5]. [4a] appears to present a problem for beginning the inquiry; [4b] appears to present a problem

^{20.} I here restrict the paradox to inquiry concerning what *x* is. I do not thereby restrict the paradox to inquiry concerning the nature of universals or properties. As is clear from the example of knowing Meno by which Socrates illustrates the priority of definitional knowledge at 71B4–8 Socrates does not find the difference between Meno and virtue to be epistemically important, at least in this context. Nor do I mean to be ruling out the possibility that the paradox may even be understood as applying to inquiry more generally. It is clear, however, from the language of these two passages, together with what motivates Meno to present the paradox, that it at least applies to inquiry concerning what *x* is. Consequently, I will be offering an account of the paradox with such an inquiry in mind. Whether it should be understood more generally will in part depend on whether the account of the paradox can be so extended. I believe that Plato would allow any of the following to be substituted for *x* and so serve as objects of knowledge and/or inquiry: a proposition, an object, a definition, a *technê*, or a *mathêma*; (for this latter, see Dimas 1996, 1n1). But I need not argue the point here. Nothing in the argument that follows will depend on it.

^{21.} To get [5] we need to supply the following:

^{[-}a] If A does not know what to search for, then A cannot search for what x is, and

^{[-}b] If A cannot know that this is x, even if A happened upon x, then A cannot search for what x is.

Irwin's and Fine's interpretation (see pp. 86–87) can be understood as denying [-a], at least when the first what-clauses in [4a] and [-a] are understood interrogatively. (See pp. 69–72.)

for ending it. I will refer to these two problems as "the beginning problem" 22 and "the ending problem," 23 respectively.

Differences Between the Two Versions

While this would appear to be the intended structure of the paradox indicated by Socrates' explication, a number of differences between Meno's puzzle and Socrates' version have led some commentators to doubt that Plato is endorsing Socrates' explication. According to these commentators, Plato has Socrates "slyly"²⁴ alter Meno's paradox in such a way that it becomes easier to resolve.²⁵ Indeed, it would be more accurate to say that Meno's paradox never gets addressed. It is in Plato's view unresolvable. Consequently, Plato has Socrates slyly substitute a different paradox—a paradox he can resolve. Such an interpretation of these puzzles is, I believe, inadequate, but to see why we will need to look more closely at the differences between Meno's and Socrates' versions.

Julius Moravcsik pointed out long ago that "Meno's version of the paradox is about inquiry into that of which we are *altogether* ignorant. Socrates' restatement omits this strong qualification (παράπαν)."26 Thus, while Socrates suggests that his puzzle is the complete version of the contentious dilemma of which Meno's puzzle provides only the second horn, in fact Meno's puzzle is the following:

- [4a'] If A does not know what x is at all, then A does not know what to search for ([M2])
- [4b'] If A does not know what x is at all, then even if A happened upon x, A cannot know that this is x ([M3]),
 - [5'] So, if A does not know what *x* is *at all*, then A cannot search for what *x* is ([M1]).

^{22.} Dubbed by Scott (1995, 30) "the paradox of inquiry" (see also Weiss 2001, 53), by Matthews (1999, 58) "the Targeting Objection," and by Dimas (1996, 18) "the Conceptual Impossibility account."

^{23.} Dubbed by Scott (1995, 31; 2006, 83-84) "the problem of discovery" (at least on one interpretation of [4b]), by Weiss (2001, 53) "the paradox of knowing," by Matthews (1999, 58) "the Recognition Objection," and by Dimas (1996, 19) "the Rational Impossibility account."

^{24.} See Moline (1969, 154), although Moline argues that Plato's deception is legitimate. Moline doubts the sincerity of Meno's questions at 80D5-8. It is not until Socrates "slyly replaces" his puzzle for Meno's questions that we get a serious puzzle according to Moline.

^{25.} See, for example, Thomas (1980, 123), Moravcsik (1970, 57), and Weiss (2001, ch. 2).

^{26.} Moravcsik (1970, 57). See also Thomas (1980, 123, 128-29) and perhaps Scolnicov (1976, 52).

Socrates' second horn—[5]—is obviously different from Meno's [5']. Meno's [5'] claims that if one does not know *anything* about a thing one cannot search for what it is, while Socrates' [5] requires only that if one fails to know *something* about a thing, its essence perhaps, one cannot search for what it is. A similar point applies to the premise Socrates offers on behalf of [5]—that is, [4], as against Meno's [4a']. Meno claims that one cannot search for what one does not know *at all*—[4a']—while in Socrates' version the claim is that one cannot search for what one simply does not know.

A second difference between the two statements of the puzzle—almost too obvious to mention—is that Meno offers two considerations on behalf of [5']—the beginning and the ending problem—while Socrates only offers one, the beginning problem.²⁷ Given these two differences, Socrates' profession to be simply providing the full dilemma of which Meno's puzzle is only the second horn appears suspect.²⁸

That the Differences Are Philosophically Significant

It is one thing to recognize differences between these two versions of the puzzle, and quite another to suggest that these differences are philosophically significant enough to doubt the seriousness of the puzzles themselves. Of course, they would be philosophically significant if they permitted a resolution of Socrates' version that failed to resolve Meno's, and they have been thought to do so in at least two ways.

In the case of the first difference, Socrates' puzzle might be met by appealing to some specific instance of knowledge of *x*, compatible in some way with one's ignorance of what *x* is, in order to address the beginning and ending problems,

^{27.} This difference, too, is mentioned by Moravcsik (1970, 57).

^{28.} Weiss (2001, 58–59) adds to these differences: Meno's version is in the second person, while Socrates' is in the third, and Meno's version is inelegant, while Socrates' is an elegant classic dilemma. But these differences do not affect the solution (as Weiss would agree). Scott (2006, 78) correctly notes a fifth difference: Socrates adds [2] and [3]. McCabe (2009), too, offers an interpretation according to which the two versions of the paradox differ. According to McCabe, Meno's version is externalist, while Socrates' version is internalist. As a result the true belief resolution discussed below cannot succeed against the internalist version. Moreover, while the theory of recollection is sufficiently complex to address both the internalist and externalist versions, in the end Plato appropriately rejects it as an adequate solution in the *Euthydemus*. McCabe, however, does not address the methodological question which is at the heart of Clitophon's challenge. It is also significant that McCabe's account of Socrates' version makes it more difficult (rather than less difficult) to resolve than Meno's version. So, on McCabe's account Socrates has not substituted an easier version to resolve. He has instead substituted a more difficult version.

and thus respond to Socrates' puzzle. For example, one might argue that one's knowledge that virtue is good is sufficient to begin looking for what virtue is and sufficient for recognizing when one has hit upon what virtue is, and yet one's knowledge that virtue is good is compatible with one's ignorance of what virtue is. But it is difficult to imagine how one could appeal to some specific instance of knowledge of x—compatible with one's utter ($\pi\alpha\rho\dot{\alpha}\pi\alpha\nu$) absence of knowledge of what x is— in order to address the beginning and ending problems of Meno's puzzle. That is, it is difficult to imagine the availability of any knowledge sufficient to begin a search for what virtue is or to recognize that one has discovered it compatible with one's utter lack of knowledge of what virtue is. It is difficult to imagine, for example, a plausible argument to the effect that one's knowledge that virtue is good is compatible with one's complete absence of knowledge of what virtue is. This, then, provides a way of resolving Socrates' puzzle that leaves Meno's puzzle unscathed.²⁹

In the case of the second difference between the two versions (the fact that Socrates' version leaves out the ending problem), one might maintain that Socrates' consideration on behalf of the second horn—that is, the beginning problem ([4a'])—might be resolved, and yet Meno's other consideration—that is, the ending problem ([4b'])—goes unmet. For example, one might suppose one's beliefs (or non-robust knowledge states³⁰) about x, at least some of which must be true, are sufficient to begin an inquiry concerning the nature of virtue, but not sufficient for recognizing when one has discovered what virtue is. If, however, the ending problem remains unaddressed, then while Socrates' puzzle may have been resolved, Meno's puzzle will remain.31

Consequently, it appears that the differences between Meno's version of the paradox and Socrates' version are philosophically significant. This has led some scholars to doubt the veracity of Socrates' suggestion that Meno's puzzle is simply the second horn of his dilemma. Plato presents Meno's puzzle as philosophically significantly different from Socrates' second horn. Consequently, in going on to resolve Socrates' puzzle, Plato has left Meno's puzzle—and the problem of directed de novo learning—unresolved.

^{29.} See, for example, Scolnicov (1988, 53).

^{30.} Remember that throughout "knowledge" is "robust knowledge" and so lack of knowledge or ignorance (see note 35, this chapter) is compatible with true belief, justified true belief, or non-robust knowledge.

^{31.} Scott (2006, 76-87) offers a variant of this strategy. He maintains that there is an interpretation of [4b'] that, together with [4a'], can be easily resolved simply by noticing that there is cognitive space between complete ignorance and complete knowledge. But there is a second interpretation of [4b'] that cannot be so easily resolved. See also Weiss (2001, 57–58).

That the Differences Are Not Philosophically Significant

I maintain that this misrepresents Plato's intentions. One might begin by wondering why, if Plato did intend a difference between these two versions of the paradox, "he never mentions the fact, and thenceforth acts as though he has only one difficulty to face." But, more positive reasons can be offered for doubting that Plato took either of these two differences to be philosophically significant enough to permit a response to Socrates' puzzle that leaves Meno's unresolved.

Consider first the difference that Meno's version explicitly assumes complete ($\pi\alpha\rho\dot{\alpha}\pi\alpha\nu$) lack of knowledge, while Socrates' does not. The $\pi\alpha\rho\dot{\alpha}\pi\alpha\nu$ in Meno's version of the paradox does not come *ex nihilo*. Rather, it refers back to the $\pi\alpha\rho\dot{\alpha}\pi\alpha\nu$ in Meno's expression of his ignorance at 80B4–5. After professing to being completely at a loss ($\mu\epsilon\sigma\tau\dot{\nu}\nu$ $\dot{\alpha}\pi\rho\rho\dot{\alpha}\kappa$), benumbed in both his soul and tongue ($\xi\gamma\omega\gamma\epsilon$ $\kappa\alpha$) $\tau\dot{\nu}\nu$) $\tau\dot{\nu}\nu$ $\tau\dot{\nu}\nu$ 0, Meno professes to be unable to say *at all* what virtue is ($\nu\bar{\nu}\nu$ 0 δè οὐδ' ὅτι ἐστὶν τὸ $\tau\alpha\rho\dot{\alpha}\pi\alpha\nu$ $\xi\chi\omega$ $\epsilon\dot{\nu}\pi\epsilon\bar{\nu}$). But why should Meno make such an exhaustive profession? At best Socrates has shown him only that he fails to know what virtue is. He has not shown him that he fails to know what virtue is *at all*.

The answer lies at the beginning of the dialogue, when Meno first poses to Socrates the question concerning how virtue is acquired. ³⁴ Socrates responds by maintaining that he is so far from knowing how virtue is acquired that he fails to know what virtue is at all (οὐδὲ αὐτὸ ὅτι ποτ' ἐστὶ τὸ παράπαν ἀρετὴ τυγχάνω εἰδώς), for

[i]f I do not know what something is, how could I know what qualities it possesses? (δ δ è μ $\dot{\eta}$ o $\bar{l}\delta\alpha$ τ i $\dot{\epsilon}\sigma\tau$ iν, $\pi\tilde{\omega}$ ς $\dot{\alpha}$ ν $\dot{\delta}\pi$ ο \bar{l} όν γ έ τ i $\dot{\epsilon}$ l δ είην) (Meno 71B3-4)

Here, we have perhaps the clearest statement in the dialogues of Socrates' commitment to the priority of definitional knowledge. Socrates here testifies to complete

^{32.} N. White (1976, 56n17; 1974, 290n4).

^{33.} In this last clause Meno only professes to the complete inability to *say* what virtue is, not to the complete lack of *knowledge* of what virtue is, as Roslyn Weiss has helpfully driven home to me. But that Meno takes his complete inability to *say* what virtue is to result from his utter lack of *knowledge* is indicated by his previous claim that he is numbed not only in his tongue, but also in his soul, and his earlier use of $\alpha \pi o \rho (\alpha \varsigma)$, the noun form of the verb Socrates uses to express his utter lack of knowledge of what virtue is at 80C6-D1.

^{34.} For others who trace the origins of the puzzles at 80D–E to the beginning of the dialogue, see Welbourne (1986, 234) and Scott (1995, 27–28), or of the genuine puzzle underlying 80D–E (Scott 2006, 83–87).

and utter ignorance³⁵ of virtue resulting from his ignorance of what virtue is. More generally, Socrates assumes that failing to know what F-ness is, one fails to know anything else about F-ness. 36 Consequently, when Meno professes to recognize that he has been shown to be ignorant of what virtue is, he takes himself to be altogether ignorant of what virtue is, and this leads him to wonder how he can search for it.³⁷ Socrates' version of the paradox simply leaves out a step.

- [1] Either A knows what x is or A does not know what x is (supplied)
- [2] If A knows what x is, then A does not need to search for what x is ([S3])
- [3] So, if A knows what x is, then A cannot search for what x is ([S2])
- [PD] If A does not know what x is, then A does not know what x is at all (Meno 71B3-4
 - [4] If A does not know what x is at all, then A does not know what to search for ([S5])
 - [5] So, if A does not know what x is, then A cannot search for what x is ([S4])
 - [6] So, A cannot search for what x is—i.e., search or inquiry is impossible $([S1])^{38}$

Given Plato's philosophical commitments, viz. his commitment to the priority of definitional knowledge, the absence of the $\pi\alpha\rho\dot{\alpha}\pi\alpha\nu$ in Socrates' version of the

^{35.} By "ignorance" I mean lack of robust knowledge, not lack of belief or lack of true belief or lack of non-robust knowledge. Indeed, it is clear that Socrates does not lack beliefs, nor even true beliefs, nor perhaps even non-robust knowledge about virtue. He clearly believes correctly, for example, that virtue is good.

^{36.} For an extended argument that Socrates in the elenctic dialogues is committed to the priority of definitional knowledge, see Benson (1990b; 2000, ch. 6). See also Kahn (1996, 160-61), Irwin (1995, 25-26), Prior (1998), Dancy (2004, 35-64), Wolfsdorf (2004b), Sedley (2004, 26–27), Fine (2004, 57), Scott (2006, 85–87), Forster (2006), and Wolfsdorf (2008a, 183). Others have argued against this commitment; see Nehamas (1987, 277-93), Beversluis (1987), Vlastos (1990), and Brickhouse and Smith (1994, 45-60). Dancy (2004, 209-41) maintains that Plato abandons the priority of definitional knowledge (his (IA,)) in the Meno. But Plato appears to remain committed at the end of the Meno at 100B4-6 as well as in dialogues which are plausibly thought to postdate the Meno; see, for example, Republic 1. 354B9-C3, 6.505A2-506A8, 7.534B8-C5; Symposium 199C3-D8; and Theaetetus 146D3-147C6. Taking Plato to have in mind robust knowledge decreases the implausibility of the priority of definitional knowledge, or at least so I have argued; see Benson (2011b, 197-98).

^{37.} That Meno accepts the priority of definitional knowledge is indicated by his response to Socrates' question: "Or do you think that someone who does not know at all who Meno is could know whether he is good-looking or rich or well-born, or the opposite of these? Do you think that is possible? M: No, I do not. But, Socrates, do you really not know what virtue is?" (71B5-C1).

^{38.} See Irwin (1995, 131) for a similar expansion.

paradox is philosophically insignificant. Consequently, this difference between the two puzzles does not permit a response to Socrates' puzzle that fails to respond to Meno's.³⁹ Given the epistemological commitment to the priority of definitional knowledge, any successful response to Socrates' puzzle will successfully resolve Meno's as well, at least with respect to the first difference between the two puzzles.

Consider next the second difference between the two versions of the paradox: Meno's version of the paradox contains two difficulties for searching for what one does not know—the beginning problem and the ending problem—while Socrates' version only mentions the beginning problem. Perhaps this difference between the two versions is philosophically significant even if the other difference is not. If so, Plato can take his response to Socrates' version to leave unaddressed at least a portion of Meno's version. To begin to address this issue we must say more about the nature of these two alleged problems.

Meno puts the beginning problem as follows: "What sort of thing, of those things you do not know will you set up as the object of your search?"; while Socrates puts it: one who does not know what he or she is searching for "does not know what to search for." The idea appears to be that to set out to search for something one completely fails to know is impossible. For example, many of us would be at a loss at how to begin a search for fenestration, short of seeking someone who knows what fenestration is.⁴⁰ My search for fenestration cannot even begin. Such a search is, for many of us at least, impossible. Thus, Dominic

^{39.} Nehamas (1985, 10) agrees. As he puts it, "the function of *to parapan* is important and ineliminable," although, since he denies that Plato is committed to the priority of definitional knowledge, he would not accept my argument.

^{40.} My architect wife informs me that fenestration is roughly the window and door placement in a building. Turning to a dictionary would be analogous to turning to the one who knows, like my wife. I use the example of a search for what fenestration is to motivate the difference between the beginning problem and the ending problem, but in fact it is probably misleading. Socrates' and Meno's complete ignorance vis-à-vis virtue is different from my complete ignorance vis-à-vis fenestration. Socrates and Meno simply lack any robust knowledge of virtue. (See note 35, this chapter.) They possess numerous beliefs (whether true or false) about virtue. Witness the preceding discussion in the Meno. I, however, lack(ed) any beliefs (whether true or false) at all about fenestration (until recently). For this reason the Fine-Irwin interpretation of *Meno's* paradox (pp. xxx-xxx) may be correct as a resolution of the beginning problem. Socrates' and Meno's true beliefs or non-robust knowledge about virtue may suffice to begin a search for what virtue is, but they do not suffice for successfully concluding such a search. (It is for this reason, I think, that McCabe (2009, 241) maintains Meno's version of this problem, which she thinks concerns inquiry, is primarily an externalist problem.) Meno, however, may not see this clearly, and so recognizing that he lacks any knowledge concerning virtue finds both problems to be troubling. (See Scott 1995, 30; 2006, 76-87.) My present purposes, however, are simply to motivate the distinction between the two problems.

Scott has dubbed the beginning problem "the paradox of inquiry" because, as he puts it, it is a problem

about inquiry per se, whether that inquiry is successful or not. It is not possible even to inquire, i.e. to attempt to discover; there is a problem about even asking a question, let alone answering it. In denying that we can get even a successful inquiry going it is rather like a Zenonian argument against motion; we simply cannot move at all. 41

By contrast, Meno puts the ending problem as follows: lacking any knowledge at all of what one is searching for, "even if you should happen upon it, how will you know that this is what you didn't know?" This is not a problem about the possibility of searching for what one does not know but, rather, a problem about successfully completing such a search. It is the problem of hitting upon what one was searching for and recognizing that that is what one is searching for. Even if I were able to search for what fenestration is, how would I recognize success? How would I know when I had discovered fenestration—short of being told that I had by someone who knows what it is? How would I know, that is, when to stop searching? Consequently, Scott dubs this sort of problem "the problem of discovery": it is "not . . . a problem about inquiry *per se*, but . . . a problem about successful inquiry, i.e. discovery."42

Given the nature of these two problems, then, we must ask whether there is any philosophical significance to the fact that Socrates' version of the paradox lacks the "ending problem" or "problem of discovery." Panagiotis Dimas has argued that the appearance of two distinct problems here at Meno 80D-E is misleading. According to Dimas, the beginning problem found in the text is ambigious between Scott's paradox of inquiry and Scott's problem of discovery, and Dimas thinks the context indicates that the correct reading is the problem

^{41.} Scott (1995, 30). See also Weiss (2001, 53) and Matthews (1999, 58).

^{42.} Scott (1995, 31). See also Matthews (1999, 58). Weiss (2001, 53) objects to Scott's name for this problem and renames "the second paradox 'the paradox of knowing." Weiss is correct that Meno does not use the word for discovery (εύρίσκειν) in his version of the puzzle, but her use of "discover" as equivalent to "happen upon" does not reflect all of Plato's uses of εύρίσκειν. After a series of unsuccessful attempts to answer the "What is courage?" question in the Laches, Socrates is made to say that he and his interlocutors have failed to discover what courage is (Οὐκ ἄρα ηὑρήκαμεν, ὧ Νικία, ἀνδρεία ὅτι ἔστιν[199Ε11]). I have argued elsewhere for other reasons that this should not be understood as that Socrates and his interlocutors have failed to hit upon the correct answer. Socrates has not shown in the previous arguments that the answers to the "What is courage?" question are false. What he has shown is that none of them knows what courage is. Minimally, he has shown that if they did happen upon the correct answer, they did not recognize it as such. See Benson (2000, 70).

of discovery.⁴³ Consequently, a correct understanding of *Meno* 80D–E presents us with only one problem, the problem of discovery. Scott points out that even if the text presents us with two distinct problems, any resolution of the problem of discovery will resolve the paradox of inquiry. An argument that establishes the possibility of *successful* inquiry, *a fortiori*, establishes the possibility of inquiry.⁴⁴ Both scholars point to a passage with which Socrates concludes this entire methodological digression.⁴⁵ Socrates says

I would not confidently assert the other things said in defense of this account, but that we would be better and braver and less idle if we believe that one ought to inquire concerning those things he fails to know than if one believes it is not possible to discover nor necessary to inquire concerning those things one fails to know (εἰ οἰοίμεθα ἃ μὴ ἐπιστάμεθα μηδὲ δυνατὸν εἶναι εὑρεῖν μηδὲ δεῖν ζητεῖν), I would fight for in both word and deed as far as I am able. (Meno 86B6–C2; emphasis added)

According to Dimas,

The challenge was, says Socrates in plain unequivocal language, that it is not possible to discover what one does not know and for that reason one $\it ought$ not to search for it. 46

However successful one judges the attempts of Dimas and Scott to collapse the two apparent problems, this last point is instructive. Plato clearly presents Socrates at 86B6–C2 as taking his solution to the paradox to address Scott's paradox of discovery or what I call "the ending problem." He explicitly maintains that, whatever else he may have shown, he has shown that one ought to think that one can

^{43.} Dimas (1996, 19-20).

^{44.} Scott (1995, 30–31).

^{45.} It has been common to see the *Meno* as falling into three parts: (1) an attempt to answer the "What is virtue?" question (70A–79E); (2) a methodological digression, containing Meno's paradox, the theory of recollection, the conversation with the slave, and an argument for the immortality of the soul (80A–86C); and (3) the discussion concerning the teachability of virtue (86C–100A). In describing the middle portion of the dialogue (80A–86C) as a methodological digression I do not here mean to suggest that it is irrelevant to the dialogue's main questions—i.e., "What is virtue?" and "How is virtue obtained?" For those who think the passage contains the answer to at least this last question see, for example, Bluck (1964, 320–21), and perhaps Devereux (1978). At the surface level, however, it is presented as a digression.

^{46.} Dimas (1996, p. 22).

discover—that is, hit upon and recognize—what one has been searching for. This is important because the fact that Socrates' version only mentions the beginning problem cannot, then, be understood as philosophically significant. Plato takes Socrates to be responding to the paradox of discovery whether it is mentioned in Socrates' version of the paradox or not. Consequently, the suggestion that Socrates' version of the paradox differs from Meno's in virtue of dropping the ending problem may permit Plato to respond to Socrates' version without responding to Meno's, but it is a philosophical opportunity that Plato does not exploit. Either we should take Meno's beginning problem ([4a]) as simply an alternative formulation of Meno's ending problem ([4b]) à la Dimas, or we should take Socrates' version of the problem ([4]) as "a terse reformulation" of both of Meno's problems—[4a] and [4b].⁴⁷ In either case, for Plato this second difference between the two versions of the puzzle is not philosophically significant. Plato does not exploit an opportunity to respond to Socrates' version of the paradox and leave Meno's version unresolved.

The Paradox

We are now able to state the paradox as it is presented by both Meno and Socrates as follows:

- [1] Either A knows what x is or A does not know what x is (supplied)
- [2] If A knows what x is, then A does not need to search for what x is ([S3])
- [3] So, if A knows what x is, then A cannot search for what x is ([S2])
- [PD] If A does not know what x is, then A does not know what x is at all ([71B3-4])
- [4a'] If A does not know what x is at all, then A does not know what to search for ([M2] & [S5])
- [4b'] If A does not know what x is at all, then even if A happened upon x, A cannot know that this is x ([M3])
 - [5'] So, if A does not know what x is at all, then A cannot search for what x is ([M1])
 - [5] So, if A does not know what x is, then A cannot search for what x is ([S4])
 - [6] So, A cannot search for what x is, i.e. search or inquiry is impossible ([S5])

^{47.} See N. White (1976, 56n17). Much of the argument in this paragraph is indebted to Scott (1995, 26-31), but it is employed for slightly different reasons. Scott is concerned to argue that the ending problem, or his problem of discovery, is the problem of the paradox that Socrates is attempting to address in the methodological digression. I, however, am concerned here to argue only that the ending problem is at least one of the problems Socrates is attempting to address, and hence that the two versions of the paradox are not philosophically significantly different.

Nevertheless, we are a long way from understanding what Plato thinks is at stake in presenting the paradox so stated.

The Euthydemus Paradoxes

There might appear to be at least two very good reasons for doubting the seriousness of *Meno*'s paradox, understood as accurately captured by Socrates' dilemma. First, Socrates twice explicitly calls the dilemma an eristic or contentious argument. Second, similar puzzles in the *Euthydemus*—a dialogue evidently aimed at distinguishing eristic arguments from more properly Socratic arguments—are explicitly described as frivolity or play.

These things are the frivolous part of study (which is why I also tell you that the men are jesting) and I call these things "frivolity" ($\pi\alpha\iota\delta\iota\dot{\alpha}\nu$) because even if a man were to learn many or even all such things, he would be none the wiser as to how matters stand but would only be able to make fun of people, tripping them up and overturning them by means of the distinctions in words, just like the people who pull the chair out from under a man who is going to sit down and then laugh gleefully when they see him sprawling on his back. So you must think of their performance as having been mere play. (*Euthydemus* 278B2–C2)

Let us begin, then, with these puzzles in the *Euthydemus*.

The Puzzles

At Euthydemus 276A–277C, two arguments are put forward whose conclusions appear to be that learning ($\mu\alpha\nu\theta\dot{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\nu$) is impossible. So understood the structures of the two arguments are as follows:

First Argument (276A1-C7)

- [EII] Learners are either wise or ignorant.
- [EI2] Learners are not wise.
- [EI3] Learners are not ignorant.
- [EI4] So, there are no learners (learning is impossible).

^{48.} See 80E2 and 81D6.

Second Argument (276D7–277C7)

- [EIII] Learners either learn what they know or what they do not know.
- [EII2] Learners do not learn what they do not know.
- [EII3] Learners do not learn what they know.
- [EII4] So, there are no learners (learning is impossible).

We can see the similarity between these two arguments in the Euthydemus and the dilemma of the *Meno* if we reformulate the latter as follows:

- [M1] Searchers either search for what they know or what they do not know
- [M2] Searchers do not search for what they know (from [2] and [3])
- [M3] Searchers do not search for what they do not know (from [PD] through [5])
- [M4] So, there are no searchers (searching or inquiry is impossible)

The Equivocation

To return to the Euthydemus, Socrates explains that its arguments are "frivolous" because they depend on an equivocation. 49 He says to Cleinias

you must learn about the correct use of words—and our two visitors are pointing out this very thing, that you did not realize that people use the word "learn" (μανθάνειν) not only in the situation in which a person who has no knowledge of a thing in the beginning acquires it later, but also when he who has this knowledge already uses it to inspect the same thing, whether this is something spoken or something done. (As a matter of fact, people call the latter "understand" rather than "learn," but they do sometimes call it "learn" as well.) Now this, as they are pointing out, had escaped your notice—that the same word is applied to opposite sorts of men, to both the man who knows and the man who does not. There was something similar to this in the second question, when they asked you whether people learn what they know or what they do not know. (Eu*thydemus* 277E4–278B2)

^{49.} See "tripping them up and overturning them by means of the distinctions in words" at Euthydemus 278B6-7. See also Theaetetus 167E5-6.

The idea here seems clear enough. Socrates explains to Cleinias that the first *Euthydemus* argument depends on an equivocation of "learn" ($\mu\alpha\nu\theta\dot{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\nu$). Apparently one can be said to "learn" in two senses. First, one can be said to learn when one "who has no knowledge of a thing in the beginning acquires it later." We will call this learn₁. Second, one can be said to learn when one "who has this knowledge already uses it to inspect the same thing." We will call this learn₂ or understand.⁵⁰

Once these two senses of "learn" are disambiguated, however, the first *Euthydemus* argument no longer goes through. Both premises fail to be true when "learn" is used in the same sense in both premises. On the one hand, [EI2] is true for learn, but [EI3] is not. On the other hand, [EI3] is true for learn, or understand, but [EI2] is not. The only way to understand both [EI2] and [EI3] as true is to equivocate on the use of "learn." Socrates indicates that a similar point applies to the second argument. The idea here seems to be that [EII2] is true for learn, or understand, but not [EII3], while [EII3] is true for learn, but [EII2] is not. The question, then, is, Can the dilemma in the *Meno* be resolved similarly?

Resolving Meno's Paradox Similarly

Obviously, *Meno*'s paradox cannot be resolved exactly in the same way, since the equivocal word "learn" ($\mu\alpha\nu\theta\dot{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\nu$) does not occur in the *Meno* puzzle.⁵¹ But perhaps it can be solved in a way that has an analogous structure. For perhaps "search" ($\zeta\eta\tau\epsilon\dot{\nu}$) is subject to a similar equivocation.

Perhaps, that is, one can be said to search, when one has no knowledge of the object of the search, at the beginning but acquires it later, and one can be said to search, when one has the knowledge of the object of the search, at the

^{50.} See McCabe (1994, 80) for an alternative account of Socrates' diagnosis based not on different senses of $\mu\alpha\nu\theta\dot{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\nu$, but different tenses or aspects of $\mu\alpha\nu\theta\dot{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\nu$. There are other diagnoses available as well. See, e.g., Hawtrey (1981, 58–61). Here I focus on what I take to be the most obvious interpretation of Socrates' diagnosis. The same sorts of points that I make below concerning this diagnosis can be made concerning the alternative diagnoses.

^{51.} At 81D4-5 Socrates appears to identify $\mu\alpha\nu\theta\dot{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\nu\nu$ with $\zeta\eta\tau\epsilon\bar{\nu}\nu$, but this is, I think, misleading. It is difficult to see the force of the beginning and ending problems for learning that takes place with teachers who know what students are attempting to learn. Teachers can provide students with a place to begin their search and let students know when they have arrived at the correct answer, even though as we have seen, something like the ending problem may apply to identifying teachers. Moreover, Meno does not propose the paradox until the method of learning that takes place with one who knows has been abandoned and yet Socrates proposes that he and Meno should continue the search. Consequently, what is claimed to be recollection at 81D4-5 must be $\zeta\eta\tau\epsilon\bar{\nu}\nu$ —i.e., the kind of $\mu\alpha\nu\theta\dot{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\nu$ that amounts to discovering on one's own or *de novo* inquiry. (See notes 6 and 16, this chapter). The paradoxes in the *Euthydemus* apply to the kind of $\mu\alpha\nu\theta\dot{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\nu$ that requires teachers as well.

beginning and uses that knowledge to inspect the thing one knows. One might even propose that ζητεῖν in the sense of search, would be better translated as "examine" or "investigate," much as μανθάνειν in the sense of learn, would be better translated as "understand." If so, then we might suppose that [M2] is true for search,, but [M3] is not. That is, it is true that one does not search, -in the sense in which one fails to know the object at the beginning but acquires that knowledge at the end—for what one knows, but one does indeed search, (in that same sense) for what one does not know. On the other hand, [M3] is true for search, but [M2] is not. That is, one does not search, —in the sense of examine or investigate—for what one does not know; rather, one examines or investigates what one knows.

But there are at least two difficulties with such a resolution of Meno's paradox. First, the Euthydemus puzzles are resolved by recognizing that the second and third premises of each argument are both true only if μανθάνειν is used equivocally in the two premises. As I have said, if μανθάνειν is used in the same sense in both premises, whichever sense one wants, then one of the premises is false.⁵² If it is used as learn, then [EI3] and [EII2] are false; if it is used as learn, or understand, then [EI2] and [EII3] are false.

But this is not true of *Meno's* paradox, at least when ζητεῖν means search, that is, seeking to acquire the knowledge that one does not have. When ζητεῖν means search,, it is true that searchers, do not search, for what they know—that is, [M2]. But [M3] so understood is not obviously false. That is, it may remain true that searchers, do not search, for what they do not know—that is, [M3].

In fact, the considerations offered on behalf of [M3] in the Meno do not appear to rest on understanding ζητεῖν as "examine" or "investigate," but remain in force when ζητεῖν is understood as search. Consider first the beginning problem. The idea here is that it looks impossible to search (ζητεῖν) for what one does not know because one does not know what to search for (ζητεῖν). But recognizing that ζητεῖν here means search, rather than investigate or examine, does not resolve this problem. Even if ζητεῖν is understood as search,, it remains problematic how one is to begin searching, for what one does not know at all. The beginning problem does not arise simply for search₂. The beginning problem is a more obvious problem for search,—since one cannot begin the kind of search that explicitly requires knowledge in order to perform it if one fails to have that knowledge. But the beginning problem is also a problem for search, —the kind of search that does not explicitly require knowledge in order to perform.

^{52.} The same point applies to the premises of the arguments on behalf of [EI2], [EI3], [EII2], and [EII3].

Similarly, the ending problem fails to be resolved by disambiguating "search." Even recognizing that $\zeta\eta\tau\epsilon\tilde{\imath}\nu$ here means search, not to investigate or examine, it remains problematic how one is to recognize that one has hit upon what it is one is searching, for when one does not know at all what one is searching, for. Thus, even if $\zeta\eta\tau\epsilon\tilde{\imath}\nu$ is ambiguous much like $\mu\alpha\nu\theta\dot{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\imath\nu$, the puzzle in the *Meno* cannot be resolved simply by pointing to this ambiguity. *Meno*'s paradox remains even when $\zeta\eta\tau\epsilon\tilde{\imath}\nu$ is used unambiguously throughout—at least when it is used in the sense of search, ⁵³

Perhaps this suggests an alternative way in which *Meno*'s paradox depends upon an equivocation. Perhaps Plato wants the reader to see that search will appear impossible as long as one fails to recognize that "search" is ambiguous. Search is indeed impossible when "search" is understood as search₁. So understood, search₁ is impossible both when the searcher knows what he is searching for (since that would be search₂, not search₁) and when he does not know what he is searching for (since he can neither begin nor successfully end a search₁). But, there is another sense of "search"—search₂, to examine or investigate—which is possible. While search₂ remains impossible when the searcher fails to know what he is searching for, search₂ is possible when the searcher knows what he is searching for. So, the puzzle in the *Meno* is to be resolved by recognizing an ambiguity in ζητεῖν —realizing, in one of the senses of ζητεῖν, search₁ is indeed impossible, but, in the other sense of ζητεῖν, search₂ is possible when one knows what one is searching, for or examining.⁵⁴

If this is how the puzzle is to be resolved, a second difficulty presents itself. For if this is how the puzzle is resolved, then Meno's puzzle goes unresolved. Remember that Meno's puzzle concerns how the search that Socrates has encouraged Meno to begin is to take place. For neither Socrates nor Meno know what virtue is at all, or at least so they both claim, and Meno wonders how in such a state of ignorance they can begin their search or recognize when they have ended it. Pointing out that search₂ is possible in the sense that examining or investigating what one already knows when one knows what one is searching for will go nowhere in addressing the problem that Meno raises. Meno's problem concerns search₁. Moreover, it will leave unexplained Socrates' encouragement

^{53.} A similar objection to the *Euthydemus* interpretation is offered by Matthews (1999, 57–59).

^{54.} Understanding the resolution of the paradox in this way is similar to the interpretations of those scholars who take Plato to be denying the first horn of Socrates' dilemma—i.e., that one cannot search for what one knows. See, for example, N. White (1976, 42). Fine (1992, 206) also thinks that the first horn is false at least as it stands, but she also goes on to argue that Plato rejects the second horn. Neither of these scholars, however, takes the resolution of the paradox to require the recognition of an equivocation.

to search, for what neither he nor Meno know at all. If Plato intends to resolve Meno's paradox by appealing to search, he will need to account for the possession of knowledge by Meno and Socrates despite their professions. He will need something like the theory of recollection.⁵⁵ Consequently, turning to the eristic arguments of the Euthydemus will prove fruitless in resolving the puzzle in the Meno. Meno's puzzle and Socrates' version of it cannot be resolved simply by recognizing an ambiguity in ζητεῖν, and lacking explicit textual evidence to the contrary, we should not suppose that Plato thought it could.

A Different Kind of Equivocation

Nevertheless, one might think that while the Euthydemus arguments do not supply the precise resolution to Meno's paradox, they suggest the general line of attack that Plato is inclined to employ in responding to these kinds of puzzles. They suggest, that is, that Plato will resolve this Meno puzzle by revealing an elementary equivocation or some other logical fallacy. And Plato has Socrates describe the paradox as an "eristic argument" precisely to remind the reader of this general line of response.⁵⁶

Something like this is what Roslyn Weiss has in mind, I think, when she writes that the paradox "has no philosophical bite. It exemplifies the sort of argument that Socrates easily dispenses with in the Euthydemus."57 But, Weiss does not maintain that Meno's paradox is resolved by noticing an equivocation on ζητεῖν. Rather, following up on a suggestion by Ryle,⁵⁸ she indicates that the paradox is resolved by noticing an elementary equivocation on the phrase "what to search for." One might be said to fail to know what to search for either in the "adjectival" sense or in the "interrogative" sense.⁵⁹

^{55.} Consequently, N. White's (1976, 42) view that Socrates resolves the paradox by denying the first horn of the dilemma requires elaboration. If Socrates resolves the paradox in this way without explaining how Meno and Socrates have knowledge despite appearances, he leaves quite unresolved Meno's puzzle. Meno's puzzle concerns how search can take place in the face of apparent complete ignorance. Simply, to say that one can search for what one knows leaves that puzzle unexplained. See note 54, this chapter.

^{56.} See Chance (1992, 229n8), who takes Theaetetus 197A-B and 199A to indicate that "controversialists at the time were delighting in dragging about the concepts of learning and knowing."

^{57.} Weiss (2001, 54).

^{58.} Ryle (1976, 7–9).

^{59.} See N. White (1976, 58n31).

Perhaps, the clearest way to explain this distinction is as follows. If A fails to know what she is searching for in the interrogative sense, it follows that if what A is searching for is virtue (or what virtue is), then A fails to know virtue (or what virtue is). But if A fails to know what she is searching for in the adjectival sense, it follows that if what A is searching for is virtue (or what virtue is), then A fails to know that she is searching for virtue (or what virtue is). Consequently, if A fails to know virtue (or what virtue is), then A does not know what to search for in the interrogative sense, but may know what to search for in the adjectival sense. That is, to return to *Meno's* paradox,

[4a'] If A does not know what x is at all, then A does not know what to search for

is true in the interrogative sense, but not the adjectival sense. ⁶⁰ Of course, to see this as a resolution of the puzzle, one also needs to maintain that in order to search for what x is, one does not need to know what to search for in the interrogative sense. One only needs to know what to search for in the adjectival sense. ⁶¹ Thus, it might be supposed that while *Meno*'s paradox is not to be resolved by pointing to the same sort of equivocation that resolves the puzzles of the *Euthydemus*, it nevertheless is to be resolved by pointing to an elementary equivocation.

It is of course one thing to claim that a Platonic puzzle can be resolved by noticing an ambiguity in a key phrase or term, and quite another to claim that Plato was aware of such a resolution. Like Ryle, whom Weiss credits with calling our attention to the ambiguity of the phrase "what to search for," I am skeptical that

^{60.} Another way to understand this contrast may be via a *de re/de dicto* distinction. To search in the interrogative sense is to not know *de re* what one is searching for—i.e., to not know the thing whatever it is that one is searching for; to search in the adjectival sense is to not know *de dicto* what one is searching for—i.e., under the description of the thing one is searching for. McCabe (2009) might also be seen as indicating that the phrase "what one is looking for" is potentially equivocal. As she sees, it has an external (interrogative) sense in Meno's version and an internal (adjectival sense) in Socrates' version. But she does not think the paradox is resolved simply by noticing this potential equivocation.

^{61.} To see the equivocation explicitly, consider this portion of the paradox as follows:

^{[4}a'] If A does not know what x is at all, then A does not know what to search for ([M2] and [S5])

^[--] If A does not know what to search for, then A cannot search for what *x* is (supplied)

^[5] So, if A does not know what x is at all, then A cannot search for what x is ([M1])

^{[4}a'] is true in the interrogative sense, but [--] is not, while [--] is true in the adjectival sense, but [4a'] is not.

Plato was aware of this distinction. 62 But even if one could reasonably establish that Plato was aware of this distinction, two reasons remain for doubting that Plato employed this distinction to resolve *Meno*'s paradox.

First, according to Weiss's reading of the paradox, [4a'] is true on the interrogative reading, but false on the adjectival reading. It does not follow, according to Weiss, that if one fails to know at all what virtue is, that one fails to know that one is searching for virtue. Now, this may indeed be true, but seeing it requires more than simply recognizing the distinction between the interrogative and adjectival senses of what-clauses. It requires recognizing that knowing that one is searching for virtue does not amount to knowing something about virtue. It requires recognizing that the proposition that one is searching for virtue is not a proposition about virtue. This is required because of Plato's commitment to the priority of definitional knowledge as we discussed earlier, according to which failure to know what virtue is entails failure to know anything else about virtue. 63 Given such a commitment, why should one concede that Meno's and Socrates' ignorance of what virtue is is compatible with their knowledge that virtue is what they are searching for? Seeing that this latter knowledge does not amount to knowing something about virtue (if it does not) requires more than simply recognizing an elementary equivocation.⁶⁴ Consequently, merely recognizing the equivocation on the phrase "what one is searching for" does not suffice to resolve the paradox.

Second, as Weiss would readily admit, resolving *Meno*'s paradox by appealing to the equivocation on the phrase "what one is searching for" leaves completely

^{62.} Ryle (1976, 7–9). As far as I can tell Weiss's primary reason for attributing the awareness of this distinction to Plato is that immediately following the paradox Socrates cites two geometry examples that "are models of how one can inquire into something when the solution is not already known" (Weiss 2001, 55). I do not deny that the two geometrical inquiries that follow the paradox serve as Moorean counter-examples to the paradox. See G. Moore (1959, 144–45) and also Thomas (1980, 123, 130-31), who describes the character of Plato's response to the paradox as Samuel Johnson-like, referring to Johnson's famous stone kicking as a refutation of Berkeleian idealism. But a Moorean counter-example only serves to show that the argument on behalf of the paradox is in some way unsound. It leaves completely open the diagnosis of the problem. It is as though Moore faced with the Zenonian paradoxes for the impossibility of motion were to raise his hand, waive it back and forth, and declare "I refute you thusly." We might allow that such a display indicates that the Zenonian arguments are unsound. But such a display provides us no evidence that the Zenonian paradoxes result from an elementary equivocation, let alone a specific elementary equivocation. Consequently, even if Ryle's distinction between adjectival and interrogative senses of "what one is searching for" does resolve Meno's paradox, nothing in the text indicates that Plato would endorse this diagnosis.

^{63.} See note 36 this chapter.

^{64.} For some reason to think that Plato would maintain that knowing that virtue is what one is searching for does amount to knowing something about (or involving) virtue see my discussion of Plato's puzzle concerning false belief in the *Theaetetus*; Benson (1992, esp. 177n15).

unresolved the second consideration Meno offers on behalf of the impossibility of inquiry— [4b'], the ending problem. Remember that in addition to wondering how one can begin a search when one is completely ignorant, Meno wonders how one can successfully finish such a search. As Meno puts it: "Or even if you should happen upon it, how will you know that this is what you didn't know?" (Meno 80D7-8). There is no equivocating on the what-clause here. It must be read in the interrogative sense. Meno is wondering how one will know that one has hit upon virtue. The problem here concerns recognizing that one has completed a search, and the awareness of the distinction between adjectival and interrogative senses of what-clauses will not resolve this problem.

Of course, Weiss would agree. She maintains that the absence of Meno's second consideration in Socrates' version of the paradox is not an accident. According to Weiss, Plato fails to believe that this second consideration can be resolved at least in the case of searches for things like the nature of virtue. But, we have already seen that the way Socrates concludes this entire methodological digression ushered in by the paradox tells against this. At 86B6-C2 Plato presents Socrates as taking his solution to the paradox to address the ending problem. He explicitly maintains that, whatever else he may or may not have shown, he has shown that one ought to think that one can discover—that is, hit upon and recognize—what one has been searching for. 65 Plato takes Socrates to have provided a solution to the ending problem. But understanding Plato's resolution of the paradox as recognizing an equivocation between the interrogative and adjectival senses of what-clauses cannot explain how Plato has resolved the ending problem. Consequently, we should not suppose that Plato takes Meno's paradox to be resolved by recognizing an equivocation on the adjectival and interrogative senses of what-clauses.

An Eristic Argument

But if we are not to suppose that Plato takes *Meno*'s paradox to be resolvable by the recognition of some elementary equivocation or logical fallacy, how are we to explain his repeated comment that Meno is raising an eristic or contentious argument? Considerable attention has been devoted to Plato's understanding of eristic, particularly as distinguished from the Socratic *elenchos*. 66 No one to my knowledge has suggested, let alone shown, that according to Plato every eristic

^{65.} See Dimas (1996, 22) and Scott (1995, 31).

^{66.} See, for example, Kerferd (1981, 59–67), Benson (1989), and Nehamas (1990).

argument must consist in a deliberate use of fallacious argumentation.⁶⁷ The consensus, rather, seems to be that what distinguishes eristic argumentation from the sort of argumentation Plato approves of—Socratic *elenchos* and dialectic—is the purpose to which the argumentation is put. Roughly, the purpose of eristic argumentation according to Plato appears to be victory in argument, while the purpose of Platonic argumentation appears to be truth.⁶⁸ It is this purpose of eristic that allows it to employ elementary equivocations and other logical fallacies, but it is not required to do so. Sometimes sound arguments will lead to victory as well. Indeed, sometimes genuine (as well as clearly fallacious) paradoxes will deflect the course of what looks to be a losing battle and turn a lost cause into a victory. One suspects that those who practice eristic argumentation have a store of such paradoxes available to employ when the discussion appears to be going poorly. It is likely that Plato has in mind this aspect of eristic argumentation when he has Socrates describe Meno's puzzle as the second horn of an eristic argument. This is just the sort of obstructionist argument⁶⁹ that those who practice eristic argumentation would be likely to employ at this stage of the discussion—whether or not Socrates is ascribing such an obstructionist motive to Meno.⁷⁰

Preliminary Conclusion: A Serious Puzzle

Thus, Plato presents Meno's paradox as a serious philosophical puzzle that motivates serious philosophical reflection and theorizing.⁷¹ Plato does not take the

^{67.} See Nehamas (1990, 7), who maintains that Plato does not portray Protagoras as likely to use fallacious arguments despite having authored Techne Eristikon. Moreover, as Nehamas points out, there is no indication of fallacy at *Meno* 75C8–D7, where Socrates considers how he would respond to an eristic questioner who doubted his definition of shape. Nehamas goes on to argue that to appeal to the deliberate use of fallacy "as a neutral, methodological distinction, we need a general theory of fallacious arguments," which he doubts is available at this point; Nehamas (1990, 8).

^{68.} See Kerferd (1981, 62). Even Nehamas, who is generally critical of Kerferd's account, allows that eristic's purpose might be characterized as victory as such, while Socrates' purpose could be characterized as "victory for the correct argument, not for himself"; Nehamas (1990, 10).

^{69.} See N. White (1974, 289n1) who maintains that the correct translation of eristikon logon is "contentious" or "obstructionist argument."

^{70.} Commentators differ considerably over the sincerity and philosophical ability of Meno in the dialogue.

^{71.} I do not address here those who take the paradox to depend on a false dilemma in the first premise. Putting the paradox in terms of robust knowledge of what x is generally obviates this objection. But, in any case, recognizing epistemic space between complete lack of cognitive contact with an object and complete knowledge of what that object is motivates serious philosophical reflection and theorizing.

paradox to be the result of some elementary equivocation. To resolve the puzzle will take a substantive philosophical response, and examining this response is the first step in uncovering a satisfying response to Clitophon's challenge. As we have seen Plato's response to this challenge in the elenctic dialogues—to learn from others who know—was subject to serious problems and yet Plato failed to indicate how those problems were to be resolved. He merely continued to depict Socrates pursuing the elenctic method's procedure of examining those with a claim to knowledge, hoping it was possible to determine whether they had the knowledge they were alleged to have and at the same to learn from them if they did. In the *Meno*, Plato turns to the other general method of learning—*de novo* learning—and subjects it to a serious problem. But, unlike the elenctic dialogues, the *Meno* appears to offer a serious response to this difficulty before depicting Socrates pursuing a method by which such discovery can take place. It is Plato's response to the difficulty concerning the possibility of *de novo* discovery to which I now turn.

The Theory of Recollection

The Main Passage

Immediately following Socrates' version of the paradox, Meno asks Socrates whether he thinks the paradox is sound ($\kappa\alpha\lambda\tilde{\omega}\varsigma$). Socrates' negative reply provokes an explanation and the explanation is Plato's theory of recollection. The following is the entire text of the theory as initially presented in the *Meno*. Let us call this the main passage.

[A] S:... I have heard wise men and women talk about divine matters...

M: What did they say?

S: What was, I thought, both true and beautiful.

M: What was it, and who were they? [81A5-9]

[B] S: The speakers were among the priests and priestesses whose care it is to be able to give an account of their practices. Pindar too says it, and many others of the divine among our poets. What they say is this; see whether you think they speak the truth: [81A10–B3]

[C] They say that the human soul is immortal; at times it comes to an end, which they call dying, at times it is reborn, but it is never destroyed, [81B3-6]

[D] and one must therefore live one's life as piously as possible: Persephone will return to the sun above in the ninth year the souls of those from whom she will exact punishment for old miseries, and from these come noble kings, mighty in strength and greatest in wisdom, and for the rest of time men will call them sacred heroes. [81B6-C4]

[E] As the soul is immortal, has been born often and has seen all things here and in the underworld, there is nothing which it has not learned; so it is in no way surprising that it can recollect the things it knew before, both about virtue and other things. (ATE οὖν ἡ ψυχὴ ἀθάνατός τε οὖσα καὶ πολλάκις γεγονυῖα, καὶ ἑωρακυῖα καὶ τὰ ἐνθάδε καὶ τὰ ἐν Ἅιδου καὶ πάντα χρήματα, οὐκ ἔστιν ὅτι οὐ μεμάθηκεν: ὥστε οὐδὲν θαυμαστὸν καὶ περὶ ἀρετῆς καὶ περὶ ἄλλων οἷόν τ' εἶναι αὐτὴν ἀναμνησθῆναι, ἄ γε καὶ πρότερον ἠπίστατο.) [81C5-9]

[F] As the whole of nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, nothing prevents a man, after recalling one thing only—a process men call learning—discovering everything else for himself, if he is brave and does not tire of the search, (ἄτε γὰρ τῆς φύσεως ἀπάσης συγγενοῦς οὔσης, καὶ μεμαθηκυίας τῆς ψυχῆς ἄπαντα, οὐδὲν κωλύει εν μόνον ἀναμνησθέντα-δ δὴ μάθησιν καλοῦσιν ἄνθρωποι-τἇλλα πάντα αὐτὸν ἀνευρεῖν, ἐάν τις ἀνδρεῖος ἦ καὶ μὴ ἀποκάμνῃ ζητῶν:) [81C9-D4]

[G] for searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection. (τὸ γὰρ ζητεῖν ἄρα καὶ τὸ μανθάνειν ἀνάμνησις ὅλον ἐστίν.) [81D4-5]

[H] We must, therefore, not believe that debater's argument (τῷ ἐριστικῷ λόγω), for it would make us idle, and fainthearted men like to hear it, whereas my argument makes them energetic and keen on the search. I trust that this is true, and I want to inquire along with you into the nature of virtue. [81D5–E2]

I present the text of the main passage in its entirety because, despite the fact that in [H] Socrates explicitly testifies to the foregoing as a solution to Meno's paradox, how this so-called theory resolves *Meno's* paradox is far from clear. This has led commentators to look elsewhere for help (the conversation with the slave that immediately follows, 72 the summary of this methodological digression at Meno 85D9–86B5, 73 Socrates' identification of recollection with "working out the reason" (aitíaç loyiσμ $\tilde{\phi}$) near the conclusion of the Meno (98A3–5), and other dialogues) or to doubt that Plato took this theory to be a serious resolution of the paradox. Nevertheless, the conclusion of this passage, [H], indicates that Plato thinks that what he has presented so far suffices to resolve the paradox. So we should expect that Plato thinks this passage contains the primary ingredients for resolving the paradox whatever other details are to be found elsewhere.

One of the most striking features of the main passage is how little it says. Sections [A] and [B] appear entirely introductory, [H] appears to do little more than

^{72.} This is by far the most common strategy. See, for example, Vlastos (1965), Irwin (1973–74), Sharples (1985, 8), Fine (1992), and Gentzler (1996). I, too, will appeal to this conversation in coming to terms with the main passage, but it is the main passage which I take to be primary. The conversation with the slave is explicitly offered as a showing or illustration $(\dot{\epsilon}\nu\delta\epsilon(\xi\alpha\sigma\theta\alpha))$ of the theory adumbrated in the main passage.

^{73.} Again, I, too, will be mining this passage in attempting to come to terms with our main passage. The secondary role of 85D9–86B5 in coming to terms with the theory of recollection is indicated by its apparent aim of establishing the immortality of the soul. See p. 80.

^{74.} Weiss (2001, 63–76) offers the most sustained argument against taking Plato's introduction of the theory of recollection to be seriously intended as a resolution to Meno's paradox. See also Ebert (1973, 177), Rohatyn (1980, 71), and Jenks (1992, 328-29). Weiss offers four signs that Plato does not take the theory seriously at least as it is presented here in the Meno. (She takes Plato to be more amenable to recollection in the *Phaedo*, although even there, as she puts it, "Socrates is less than wedded to recollection"; Weiss (2001, 187).) "First, there is the sheer fact that he presents a myth, as opposed to a reasoned *logos*, in response to Meno's paradox.... Second, by presenting the myth as something he has heard, Socrates packages it to appeal to Meno, who regularly quotes approvingly the words of others. . . . Third, Socrates hints at the selfserving motive of those from whom he has heard it: the priests and priestesses who are its source endorse the myth so as to be able to give an account of their piety business. Fourth, it is unlikely that Socrates thinks he has solid grounds for accepting the myth as true" (Weiss 2001, 64–66). I cannot here adequately respond to Weiss's careful and ingenious interpretation. I will simply note that her interpretation depends in part on her interpretation of Meno's paradox, which I have been at pains to deny in the previous section. Moreover, her interpretation depends on her thesis that (especially in the Meno) Socrates encourages moral inquiry despite recognizing the unobtainablity of moral knowledge. Socrates encourages his interlocutors and us to seek to acquire moral knowledge, but he recognizes that we can at best acquire moral truth or true belief. In chapters 1 and 2, I acknowledged the coherence of such an interpretation of Socratic/ Platonic philosophical method, but I alleged that acceptance of such an interpretation was harder to reconcile with the texts of Plato's middle dialogues. Plato's response to Meno's paradox is as good a place as any to note the difficulty of reconciling these texts (whether or not the increased difficulty is an indication of Platonic development; cf. pp. 21-23). In any case, Weiss and I would agree that insofar as one allows that Socrates and/or Plato seeks and encourages others to seek virtue-knowledge which he recognizes cannot be acquired many of the (to my mind interesting) philosophical problems associated with Clitophon's challenge do not arise.

wrap things up, and [D] has been generally and rightly regarded as a digression. 75 That leaves [C], [E], [F], and [G]—roughly fourteen lines of text.⁷⁶

[C] maintains that

[i] the soul is immortal

based on what Socrates claims to have heard from the priests, priestesses, Pindar, and others among the poets.⁷⁷

[E] maintains in addition that

- [ii] the soul has been born often, and
- [iii] has seen (ἐωρακυῖα) all things here and in Hades,⁷⁸ and so
- [iv] there is nothing it has not learned (μεμάθηκεν).

Consequently (ὤστε),

[v] it is not surprising that the soul can recollect concerning virtue and other things what it knew (ἠπίστατο) before.

[F] maintains further that

- [vi] all nature is akin and so,
- [vii] nothing prevents the soul, from having recollected one thing discovering everything else.

Finally, [G] presents the theory of recollection itself,

[viii] searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection.

^{75.} See, for example, Thompson (1901, 120), Bluck (1961, 277), and Klein (1965, 94–95).

^{76.} See Allen (1959, 165) and Gentzler (1996, 273–74).

^{77.} Empedocles has been thought to have been meant. See, for example, Thompson (1901, 119) and Bluck (1961, 276). Scott (2006, 95) takes the phrase ὅσοις μεμέληκε περὶ ὧν μεταχειρίζονται λόγον οιοις τ' είναι διδόναι to indicate that Plato credits the priests and priestesses with some sort of rational authority, while Weiss (2001, 65-66) takes it to indicate the self-serving motives of the priests and priestesses.

^{78.} See, for example, Sharples (1985, 147–49), Weiss (2001, 72n53), and Scott (2006, 96) for the debate concerning the phrase καὶ τὰ ἐνθάδε καὶ τὰ ἐν Ἅιδου καὶ πάντα χρήματα. Whether it means "things here and things in Hades—i.e., all things" or "things here and in Hades and all things," [E] testifies to the fact that the soul has seen and so learned all things.

Prenatal Knowledge

The theory [viii] as presented in the main passage relies on two independent features. First, the theory specifies that there is nothing that the soul has not learned ([iv]). [i], [ii], and [iii] are all offered in support of [iv]. Their precise logical relationship to [iv] is, however, less clear. Near the conclusion of the summary of the methodological digression at Meno 86B1-2 Socrates indicates that the immortality of the soul ([i]) is a necessary condition for the truth of ta onta always being in our souls (ἀεὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια ἡμῖν τῶν ὄντων ἐστὶν ἐν τῆ ψυχῆ). This latter is not precisely [iv], but it is close. 80 We moderns may doubt that the immortality of the soul is necessary to account for the fact that knowledge or truth is always present in our soul (or mind). Instead, we are likely to appeal to the notions of tacit, latent, innate, or dispositional knowledge. But for Plato, a pre-existent, if not immortal, soul looks necessary. Indeed, [ii] and [iii] look like further attempts to explain the idea of innateness. Plato seems to suppose that the immortality of the soul alone does not explain that we have present in the soul knowledge of everything. We must also suppose that the soul during its immortal existence has been born many times and thereby has come to see everything, both here and in Hades (and anywhere else, if the former pair is not exhaustive).81 What is essential, however, for the theory of recollection (and so the response to Meno's paradox) is not how it comes about that there is nothing we have not learned. Rather, what is essential for Plato is that there is nothing we have not learned. It is from this prenatal possession of knowledge ([iv]), however it is to be explained,

^{79.} At the conclusion of the passage in the *Phaedo*, in which the argument for the theory of recollection is presented, Socrates is made to maintain that the immortality of the soul stands or falls with the theory of Forms (*Phaedo* 76D7–E7). In the *Phaedo*, Plato may believe that the theory of Forms is a necessary condition for the theory of recollection. On the relationship between the theory of Forms and the theory of recollection, see, for example, Thompson (1901, 127), Cherniss (1971), Gulley (1954, 195–96), Hackforth (1955, 74), A. Taylor (1956, 130), Bluck (1961, 37n2), Bedu-Addo (1983; 1991, 31n5), who take the theory of recollection to presuppose the theory of Forms, and Ross (1951, 18, 22), Ebert (1973, 180n2), Sharples (1985, 12–13, 147–48), and Weiss (2001, 74–75), who do not. Finally, see Dancy (2004, 240–41) who thinks Forms are absent in the *Meno*, but the introduction of the theory of recollection in the *Meno* leads to the introduction of Forms in the *Phaedo*.

^{80.} Difficulties here abound. At 86A6–10, Socrates appears to maintain that the episode with the slave reveals that the slave had true beliefs, not knowledge in his soul, which were stirred up during the conversation and can potentially be turned into knowledge by further questions. See, for example, Fine (1992, 223–24n40), Vlastos (1965, 153n14), and Dancy (2006, 225–26), pace Scott (2006, 110). Of course, other passages, suggest that it was knowledge that was present in the slave's soul prior to arriving at the true belief that can potentially be turned into knowledge; see, for example, 85D9–10. See pp. 83–85.

^{81.} See note 78, this chapter.

that Plato derives the possibility that the soul can recollect concerning virtue and other things what it knew (ἠπίστατο) before.

Of course, some will object that how Plato explains [iv] cannot be set aside. It is precisely the point at issue. According to this objection, the problem Plato is attempting to resolve by appealing to the theory of recollection is how learning is possible. Consequently, he cannot appeal (without threat of regress or circularity) to the fact that the soul has already learned everything in order to explain the possibility of learning. That only rearranges the lump under the rug. 82 Plato, however, has two not entirely compatible responses to this objection, both of which have some textual support.

First, *Meno's* paradox does not arise for learning in general, but for a specific sort of learning—what we might call "directed de novo discovery" or "de novo inquiry." The beginning and ending problems arise for the kind of learning that intentionally and systematically sets out to come to know on one's own some specific thing—for example, what virtue is.83 It does not raise any problems for intentionally setting out to come to know what virtue is from another who already knows it (even though, as we have seen in chapter 1, there may be other, perhaps related problems associated with this kind of learning). Remember, as long as Meno thinks he knows what virtue is, he has no trouble with Socrates learning the nature of virtue from him. Only when Socrates encourages Meno to join him in a concerted attempt to learn the nature of virtue from mutual ignorance does Meno raise his paradox. Nor does the paradox raise problems for learning in some undirected way—knowledge acquired by a kind of accidental, random, or unintentional acquaintance, viewing, or possession of a thing.⁸⁴ No difficulties arise for setting out to seek or for recognizing that one has acquired what was sought when one comes to know something one did not seek. Consequently, to the extent that Plato recognizes ways of coming to know other than directed de

^{82.} See, for example, Ross (1951, 25), Allen (1959, 166), Klein (1965, 95), Ryle (1976, 4), Weiss (2001, 70), Kahn (2006, 122), and Scott (2006, 96-97), who raise this worry in one form or another.

^{83.} And it is worth noting that this sort of learning is associated with Clitophon's challenge. Clitophon's worry is not simply how knowledge can be acquired, but how we can intentionally and systematically seek the knowledge Socrates has made us desire. What *method* can be employed to acquire the knowledge we seek?

^{84.} I use the words "acquaintance" and "viewing" intentionally to call to mind Plato's apparent commitment in dialogues like the *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus* to the view that our disembodied souls are in some way directly acquainted with or view the Forms. Nevertheless, the notion of accidental learning I am appealing to here need not depend on this technical sense of acquaintance or viewing. For the idea that the paradox does not arise for learning in general, see Ñ. White (1976, 43), Fine (1992, 215–16n2), and Dancy (2004, 222–26).

novo discovery, nothing prohibits Plato from appealing to these ways of learning to account for our previous possession of the knowledge required for our ability to learn on our own in a purposeful and systematic way.

Indeed, that Plato does recognize other ways of coming to know, of learning, other than the directed *de novo* learning explained by the theory of recollection is indicated in the text. Throughout the conversation with the slave in which Socrates aims to illustrate (ἐνδείξασθαι) the theory of recollection, Socrates continually contrasts what the slave is doing—that is, recollecting—with learning and being taught (see 82B6-7, 82E4-5, 84C10-D2, and 85D3-4). But this contrast would make little sense if Plato failed to recognize a kind of learning and being taught—a kind of knowledge acquisition—that was distinct from recollection. 85 So when Plato concludes that "searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection," he does not mean that *all* learning is recollection. The learning that could have taken place prior to the appearance of the paradox, if Meno had actually known what virtue is, and the learning that contrasts with the learning the slave is actually doing at 82A8-86B5 are not instances of recollection. Rather, the conclusion of the main passage [G] should be read as: all directed de novo learning is recollection. 86 Consequently, when Plato uses "learned" (μεμάθηκεν) in describing the soul's prenatal learning, he need not be using "learned" in the sense he is explaining. He appears to countenance ways of coming to know other than directed de novo discovery. Of course, one might be skeptical that Plato takes the learning accomplished prior to birth to be learning from someone else who knows. 87 But reading the conclusion at [G] as suggested opens the door to countenancing undirected or accidental de novo discovery as the means by which the pre-incarnate soul acquires the knowledge necessary for recollection, 88 and thereby avoids the objection that Plato has only managed to push the lump under the rug to a different place.

Alternatively, Plato may avoid this objection by maintaining that talk of the pre-incarnate soul's acquisition of knowledge found in [ii] and [iii] is merely

^{85.} An anonymous referee suggests that Plato may merely be contrasting recollective learning with an alleged common-sense sort of learning, but not with a genuine sort of learning. But this is difficult to square with Socrates' and Meno's apparent countenance of a genuine kind of learning prior to the appearance of the paradox.

^{86.} See the ζητεῖν in τὸ γὰρ ζητεῖν ἄρα καὶ τὸ μανθάνειν ἀνάμνησις ὅλον ἐστίν. Dancy (2004, 222) renders this as follows: "the whole of *looking for something* and learning it is recollection."

^{87.} I thank an anonymous referee for encouraging this objection.

^{88.} See *Phaedo* 63E–69E and *Phaedrus* 247C–249D (and pp. 110–111) for the suggestion that the soul can acquire knowledge of the Forms during one's disembodied prenatal existence by some sort of direct vision as opposed to a systematic method.

meant as a mythical way of understanding the soul as always having possessed this knowledge. Indeed, something like this is suggested by the way in which Plato appears to argue for the immortality of the soul near the end of the methodological digression. The argument is difficult⁸⁹ and its details are not important for our current purposes, but its basic structure is as follows: Socrates concludes that the soul is immortal because the truth is always present in the soul (ἀεὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια ἡμῖν τῶν ὄντων ἐστὶν ἐν τῆ ψυχῆ). This latter claim is a consequence of the claim that "the soul will have always learned" (ἄρ' οὖν τὸν ἀεὶ χρόνον μεμαθηκυῖα ἔσται ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ), which is in some way a consequence of a disjunctive syllogism based on the premise that the knowledge the slave has was either acquired at some point or he has always possessed it (Ἄρ' οὖν οὐ τὴν ἐπιστήμην, ἣν νῦν οὖτος ἔχει, ἤτοι ἔλαβέν ποτε ἢ ἀεὶ εἶχεν). I say "in some way a consequence of" this premise because it is not clear which of the disjuncts Plato takes himself to be rejecting (if either).90 If Plato is rejecting the first disjunct (i.e., that the slave's knowledge was acquired at some point), then the retained disjunct that the slave's soul always possessed this knowledge must be compatible with [iv], from the main passage, that there is nothing the soul has not learned. As such, "learned" here must be taken as roughly equivalent to "known" and the regress or circularity objection can never get off the ground. That this is what Plato may have in mind is suggested by the phrase here in the immortality passage that the slave's soul (and so all souls) "will have always learned." On the other hand, if Plato rejects the disjunct that the slave's soul always possessed this knowledge, then the retained disjunct that the slave's soul acquired this knowledge at some prior time must be understood as compatible with the conclusion that the slave's soul "will have *always* learned" this knowledge and so *always* have possessed the truth. The soul's knowledge acquisition is in some way compatible with its *always* having learned.

In either case, it is clear that Plato's attention is not focused on how or even whether knowledge is acquired prior to one's present incarnation. What is important if we are to explain how postnatally one is to purposively seek out and acquire on one's own the knowledge that one lacks is that one must have possessed that knowledge at some earlier prenatal time. It is from this feature of [iv], and not Plato's explanation of how that prior knowledge was acquired (if it

^{89.} See, for example, Sharples (1985, 156-57), who takes the argument to be fallacious, while Bluck (1961, 317) and Weiss (2001, 120n90) deny that it is meant to be an argument for the immortality of the soul.

^{90.} Of course, insofar as Plato takes the conclusion that the soul will have always learned to follow from both of the disjuncts, the argument does not have the form of a disjunctive syllogism.

was acquired), that Plato derives the possibility of recollection and so the possibility of directed de novo learning. Indeed, it is the soul's previous knowledge ($\eta\pi$ i σ tato), not learning, that Plato appeals to in [v]. Of course, if the lump cannot be pushed out from under the rug in either of these two ways, then Plato's solution to the paradox will have failed. But that Plato thinks the existence of prenatal knowledge, however it is acquired, is essential to resolving the paradox seems assured.

The Kinship of Nature

But this is only one of the two independent features on which the theory of recollection relies. The other ([vi]) is that all nature is akin. This claim is not a consequence of anything that preceded it in the main passage. 91 But what does it contribute to the theory of recollection?

Minimally, [vi] maintains that all of nature is sufficiently similar—perhaps of the same ontological kind—to be recollectable. Having maintained in [v] that some of the things we have previously learned are recollectable, in [vi] Plato supposes that all of the things (i.e., everything or all of nature) the soul has previously learned is of the same ontological kind (whatever kind that is) to be recollected as well. But [vii] suggests that something more is going on. Plato proposes that since all nature is akin, when individuals have recollected *only one* thing, they can discover all other things—a kind of closure principle. This suggests that to discover or learn something one need not (directly) recollect it. Since all nature is akin, it suffices to recollect (learn or discover) something else and recognize another thing's relationship to (perhaps that it starts out from) the recollected thing. In addition, Plato may here be alluding to his so-called inter-relational or holistic model of knowledge. According to this suggestion, Plato is alerting us to the notion that we do not learn, recollect, or discover one item or proposition

^{91.} Although, see Sharples (1985, 149), for example, for the suggestion that "the kinship of all *living* things was a Pythagorean doctrine" (my emphasis); see also Bluck (1961, 287–88). Nevertheless, Plato's "adaptation" of this doctrine is not a consequence of it, nor anything else occurring in the main passage.

^{92.} See Tigner (1970) for the view that this and this alone is what [vi] contributes to the theory of recollection.

^{93.} This reading has suggested the deductive or inference interpretation of the theory of recollection most famously defended by Vlastos (1965); see also Allen (1959, 166-67). See Moravcsik (1970, 60-61) for some difficulties with this interpretation.

^{94.} See, for example, Burnyeat (1970, 1981), Annas (1981, 282–92), Nehamas (1985, 20), Fine (1990, 114–15), McCabe (2000, 211–216), and Benson (2000, 189–221).

at a time but, rather, an entire field of elements or body of propositions. 95 Indeed, Plato's discussion of the Form of the Good in *Republic* 6 and 7 may reinforce this suggestion.96

If we ask, then, what this second feature adds to the theory of recollection on any of these readings, it is clear that it extends the possibility of recollection to the whole of nature. However [vi] is understood, its role is to extend the possibility of recollecting the whole of nature, either directly, indirectly, or wholly. Hence, [vi] does not add anything to the possibility of recollection itself.⁹⁷ It merely extends that possibility once acquired. What Plato takes to be required for the possibility of recollection is the prenatal existence of knowledge or learning. Given prenatal knowledge or learning, knowledge is recollectable. Given that all nature is akin, all knowledge (or knowledge of the whole of nature) is recollectable.

The Conversation with the Slave

Plato thinks, then, that prenatal knowledge, however this prenatal knowledge was initially acquired (if it was acquired at all), is fundamental for resolving Meno's paradox. 98 It is prenatal knowledge that allows for the possibility of recollection and so the possibility of directed de novo learning. Prenatal knowledge allows for the possibility of intentionally setting out to systematically come to know on one's own what virtue is, for example.99

^{95.} See, for example, Scott (2006, 97) and perhaps also Moravcsik (1970, 60).

^{96.} See pp. 265-266.

^{97.} It may, however, add features that encourage or discourage various methods of pursuing the recollection process. Part of my goal in this chapter is to maintain that the theory of recollection does not provide a response to Clitophon's challenge because it does not indicate what method is to be pursued in order to acquire—i.e., recollect—the knowledge one seeks. This is not to say that the theory of recollection has no impact on an appropriate response to Clitophon's challenge. Indeed, in offering a solution to Meno's paradox it permits the possibility that some method or other succeeds. Nature's connectedness may provide an additional enabling condition—permitting the method of hypothesis introduced at 86E, given its structure, to succeed in acquiring the knowledge it seeks.

^{98.} See Scott (2006, 85). For a similar understanding of the centrality of prenatal knowledge or truth within the soul, see Vlastos (1965, 158), although he arrives at this understanding by quite different means.

^{99.} See the first sentence of Aristotle's Posterior Analytics: "All teaching and all learning of an intellectual kind proceed from pre-existent knowledge" (Πᾶσα διδασκαλία καὶ πᾶσα μάθησις διανοητική ἐκ προϋ παρχούσης γίνεται γνώσεως) (Posterior Analytics 1.1.71a1; Barnes trans.)

That prenatal knowledge is fundamental to the theory of recollection, and so the resolution of *Meno*'s paradox, is reinforced by Socrates' concluding comments following the conversation with the slave. After describing the transition from the slave's true belief at the end of his conversation with Socrates to the knowledge the slave could have "if he were repeatedly asked these same questions in various ways" (*Meno* 85C10–11), Socrates concludes his commentary as follows:

And he will know it without having been taught but only questioned, and find the knowledge from himself? . . . And is not finding knowledge within oneself recollection? —Certainly. (*Meno* 85D3–8)

Considerable debate surrounds the question whether the "knowledge from himself" ($\dot{\epsilon}\xi\,\alpha\dot{v}\tau\bar{v}$) or the "knowledge within oneself" ($\dot{\epsilon}v\,\alpha\dot{v}\tau\bar{\phi}$) has always *tacitly* or *latently* been in one's soul¹⁰⁰ or has at some point been in one's soul but has been lost only to be remembered through the process of recollection. ¹⁰¹ But whichever view one attributes to Plato, he does not seem concerned to highlight it. Rather, what Plato is concerned to highlight is that the knowledge the slave has within himself (whether at one time in the past or tacitly at present) enables the slave to first truly believe and then potentially come to know, without being taught but by learning on his own, the length of the side of the double square. This is the key feature that the conversation with the slave was designed to show. ¹⁰² This is the key feature of the theory of recollection, ¹⁰³ which accounts for its ability to resolve *Meno*'s paradox. Plato evidently takes the pre-existence of such knowledge to resolve *Meno*'s paradox. Plato follows this passage with an argument aimed to establish the immortality of the soul based on the possession of this prenatal

^{100.} See, for example, Bluck (1961, 9ff.), Matthews (1999, 61ff.), and Scott (2006, 108–12).

¹⁰¹. See, for example, Vlastos (1965, 153n14), Fine (1992, 223-24n40), and Dancy (2006, 225-26).

^{102.} It is for this reason that I cannot adopt the so-called true-belief solution to *Meno's* paradox (see pp. 86–87), at least as understood as denying that previous knowledge is not necessary to resolve the paradox. It is the existence of such previous knowledge that Plato seems most concerned to assert in the main passage and to illustrate in the conversation with the slave. This, of course, leaves open at least for our present purposes whether the existence of such knowledge requires the present possession of tacit knowledge or merely true belief in order to begin and end an inquiry. For a longer discussion of the conversation with the slave in the *Meno*, see Benson (1990a). The present chapter, however, supersedes that discussion, especially the appendix.

^{103.} A feature it retains in the *Phaedo* (see 75B4–C6), whatever other differences there may be between the theories as presented in these two dialogues. See, for example, Gallop (1975, 115) for five respects in which the theory presented in the *Phaedo* differs from the theory as presented in the *Meno*.

knowledge. But it is difficult to see how any of this latter argument lends support to the solution of *Meno's* paradox except insofar as it proffers an explanation of the previous possession of this knowledge.

The Paradox Resolved?

At his point one might wonder how prenatal knowledge is meant to resolve Meno's paradox. How does the prenatal possession of the knowledge one seeks resolve the beginning and ending problems of the paradox? Unfortunately, Plato does not tell us. In the main passage, he tells us that the prenatal possession of knowledge permits its recollection, that the kinship of all nature permits the acquisition of all (other) knowledge, and that this suffices to resolve the paradox. In the conversation with the slave, he illustrates such prenatal knowledge. But nowhere does he explain *how* this resolves the paradox. He apparently means to leave this to the imagination and ingenuity of the reader. And, of course, there has been no lack of imagination or ingenuity on the part of Plato's readers.

Perhaps the most common speculation in this regard might be called the "Aha!" interpretation. 104 The idea is that the prenatal possession of the knowledge one seeks is plausibly thought to supply sufficient cognitive contact to begin the search and so resolve the beginning problem.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, a feeling of "inner conviction" often associated with recollection is meant to resolve the ending problem. We are, I think, to imagine something like the following experience: Imagine you are taking a philosophy final examination containing the question "What year did Socrates drink the hemlock?" You can imagine at first being at a loss as to the correct answer, but having studied a variety of dates the previous evening, you search your memory until the year 399 B.C.E "dawns" on you with a feeling of familiarity and conviction—a familiarity and conviction that can best be explained by your knowledge the previous evening that Socrates drank the hemlock in 399 B.C.E and that accounts for the conclusion of your memory search.

Such a feeling of familiarity and conviction—such an "Aha!" feeling is notoriously unreliable (to our chagrin) and not infallible. But, the "Aha!"

^{104.} See, for example, Hansing (1928, 241-42), Bluck (1961, 12-13), N. White (1976, 51-52), Dimas (1996, 26), Matthews (1999, 63), and perhaps Kahn (2006, 122).

^{105.} The beginning problem does not obviously involve any sort of recognition or awareness of the conditions required to begin a search for F-ness. Consequently, the beginning problem may be solvable by appealing to primarily external conditions like the mere existence of prenatal knowledge; hence my use of the terms "cognitve contact." On the other hand, the ending problem does appear to require some sort of recognition or awareness for its solution and hence a roughly internalist condition. See McCabe (2009) and notes. 28, 40, and 60, this chapter.

interpretation at least accounts for Plato's focus on prenatal knowledge and the recollection it makes possible. We do frequently take the feeling of conviction associated with a recollection as confirmation that our recollection has been successful. Thus, in appealing to prenatal knowledge and the recollection it makes possible, Plato is appealing to that feeling of familiarity and conviction associated with recollection as a solution to the ending problem. The fact that such a feeling is not infallible may be addressed in one of two ways. On the one hand, one might suppose that maintaining that Plato could not have mistakenly identified inner conviction with certainty is to be too interpretatively charitable. The fact that inner conviction does not solve the ending problem does not entail that Plato did not think it did. 106 On the other hand, one might question whether a resolution of the ending problem requires infallibility. To resolve the ending problem it must be supposed that one can recognize the object one seeks when one hits upon it. It may not require that one is certain that the object one seeks has been found. Fallible recognition may be sufficient.¹⁰⁷ In either case, prenatal knowledge may allow for sufficient cognitive contact with the object of one's search to begin the search and so resolve the beginning problem, and the inner feeling of conviction associated with recollecting prenatal knowledge may suffice for recognizing the successful conclusion of the search and resolving the ending problem.

Other commentators have suggested that Plato means to resolve the paradox by appealing to the true beliefs we all have had from birth—true beliefs concerning the object of our search. According to this true-belief interpretation, the *Meno* does not contribute anything that was not present in the elenctic dialogues for accounting for the possibility of directed *de novo* learning. All that the theory of recollection contributes is an explanation concerning how those true beliefs came to be in all of us from birth. But as an explanation, it is not necessary for the resolution of the paradox. Other explanations could account for the origin of those true beliefs. The true beliefs, present in our soul from birth, suffice to resolve the paradox.

The true-belief interpretation has trouble explaining why Plato makes Socrates maintain in the main passage that it is the theory of recollection that leads him to doubt the soundness of the paradox. If the presence of true beliefs at birth is all that is required to resolve the paradox, it is odd that Plato should appeal in the main passage to the rather extravagant theory of recollection as

¹⁰⁶. See, for example, N. White (1976, 52-53), who immediately acknowledges the philosophical failure of this approach to the resolution of the ending problem.

^{107.} For some reason to think that fallible recognition when combined with further testing may be sufficient at least in the *Republic*, see pp. 259–263.

^{108.} See, for example, Fine (1992), Irwin (1995), and Gentzler (1996).

his resolution. But what is most puzzling about this interpretation is that it appears to leave unexplained how the ending problem is resolved. Again, we might suppose that true beliefs concerning the object one seeks to come to know may supply sufficient cognitive contact to begin the search, and so resolve the beginning problem. But how do these true beliefs suffice to account for our ability to recognize when we have hit upon what we were searching for? The puzzle here is not that true beliefs cannot suffice for such recognition. Rather, the puzzle is that how they suffice is left unexplained. In addition to the true beliefs concerning the object of our search, we possess a number of false beliefs concerning that same thing—as is testified to by the practice of the *elenchos* in the elenctic dialogues. How, then, do the true beliefs suffice to recognize when we have successfully concluded our search without the false beliefs getting in the way?¹⁰⁹

In the end, however, we must accept that Plato simply gives us very little to go on. Plato presents what he takes to be a genuine philosophical puzzle concerning the possibility of directed *de novo* learning. This puzzle involves two problems—what we have called the beginning problem and the ending problem. Plato takes these problems to be resolved by appealing to the existence of prenatal knowledge. How the presence of prenatal knowledge resolves these problems, however, he does not say. Perhaps he means to appeal to the feeling of familiarity or conviction that is associated with ordinary recollection or merely to the presence of entrenched true beliefs that we possess at birth. Perhaps he has something else in mind. 110 But whatever he has in mind, he takes the resolution of Meno's paradox to require a substantive philosophical response. It requires a commitment to prenatal knowledge or its equivalent.¹¹¹ Given such a commitment, Plato has Socrates confidently assert that

^{109.} It is worth noting in this regard that both Fine and Irwin tend to focus on how true beliefs suffice to resolve the beginning problem. They say virtually nothing at all concerning how true beliefs suffice to resolve the ending problem. Gentzler (1996, 293-95) takes up the ending problem more directly. Perhaps some true beliefs are more stable and difficult to relinquish when faced with contrary evidence. I am skeptical that Plato recognizes the epistemological significance of such true beliefs or distinguishes them from knowledge, but to the extent that he does the distinction between the true belief solution so understood and the prenatal knowledge solution narrows.

^{110.} Scott (2006, 83-87) appears to hold that Meno's paradox—or more precisely the paradox of discovery or our ending problem—arises for internal reasons. That is to say it arises because of Socrates' commitment to "the foreknowledge principle" and the priority of definitional knowledge. The theory of recollection resolves this problem by providing prenatal knowledge required by the foreknowledge principle in combination with the priority of definitional knowledge.

^{111.} I here leave open the possibility of latent or tacit knowledge which we possess at birth and which is not explained by means of occurrent or explicit prenatal knowledge. See also note 100, this chapter.

I do not insist that my argument is right in all other respects, but I would contend at all costs both in word and deed as far as I could that we will be better men, braver and less idle, if we believe that one must search for the things one does not know, rather than if we believe that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it. (Meno 86B6-C2)

Response to Clitophon's Challenge?

However the theory of recollection resolves Meno's paradox, it leaves unaddressed Clitophon's challenge. The theory of recollection provides an explanation for the possibility of directed *de novo* learning—or at least that is what it purports to do. But it tells us nothing about what method or procedure to employ to recollect what one seeks to know. Recall, for a moment, the dialectical context preceding the paradox's introduction. Socrates and Meno had both professed their ignorance of the nature of virtue, and Socrates had urged Meno to join him in the search for what virtue is. Socrates, that is, had encouraged Meno to join him in a directed search for or discovery of the knowledge of the nature of virtue. Meno had no difficulty with such a learning project as long as a teacher and knower of virtue was available from whom to learn. But now that Socrates proposes that they attempt to learn on their own the nature of virtue, Meno raises his paradox. Whatever motivates Meno here, 112 the reader is faced with a question concerning the very possibility of such a search. Plato has responded to this question by proposing the theory of recollection. According to Plato, the theory of recollection—or the possession of prenatal knowledge and the kinship of nature—permits the possibility of such directed search and discovery. But it tells us nothing about how to go about that search. As far as Meno's methodological digression is concerned, Plato's response to Clitophon's challenge when there are no teachers about is "Recollect it!" But as a procedure that can be exploited for acquiring the knowledge one lacks, this appears exceedingly unhelpful. 113

Not everyone would agree that the methodological digression is as unhelpful in this regard as I have suggested. According to a variety of commentators, the conversation with the slave is meant to illustrate the appropriate procedure

^{112.} See Weiss (2001, 53-54), who doubts that Meno's introduction of the paradox is philosophically motivated. She also cites the following who are skeptical of Meno's philosophical motivation: Shorey (1965, 157), A. Taylor (1956, 135), and Bluck (1961, 8).

^{113.} See Bluck (1961, 14), who writes: "We may suppose that Plato was not so much concerned at the moment with methods of recollecting as with the prior question, whether it is conceivable that learning is recollection."

to employ for acquiring the knowledge one lacks.¹¹⁴ But this underestimates the significance of the dialectical context that inspired the paradox. In the dialogues we examined in chapter 2, whenever Socrates managed to lead his interlocutor to the recognition of ignorance, the dialogue either came to an end or Socrates turned to a new interlocutor with a claim to the knowledge being sought. Insofar as Plato had an answer to Clitophon's challenge in these dialogues it appeared to be to find others who have the knowledge one seeks and learn from them. But here in the Meno, when Socrates succeeds in leading Meno to the recognition of his ignorance, Socrates proposes something different. He proposes that Meno join him in the attempt to discover on their own the knowledge they seek. This proposal to acquire the knowledge they lack, not by searching for others who have it and learning from them but by attempting to discover it on one's own, inspires Meno's paradox. And the theory of recollection purports to resolve *Meno*'s paradox. But the conversation with the slave cannot purport to meet Clitophon's challenge in the case of inquiry or directed de novo learning.

Socrates is not searching in tandem with the slave to discover the length of the side of the double square. Socrates knows the answer to this question (as does Meno) before the inquiry begins. It is Socrates' knowledge of the answer that leads him to ask the slave the questions he does and eventually leads the slave to believe (if not yet know) that the answer is the length of the diagonal of the original square. If Socrates were as ignorant of the answer to the question of the inquiry as the slave, it is difficult to know how the conversation would have proceeded—at least the conversation following the slave's recognition of his ignorance from 84D to 85C. 115 But this is precisely what we need to know to answer Clitophon's challenge in the present context of the Meno. We need to know how to proceed to acquire the knowledge we lack when no one who possesses that knowledge is currently available. And the conversation with the slave simply does not illustrate such a procedure.

^{114.} Despite their differences, see, for example, Thompson (1901, 129–30), Irwin (1973–74, 754; 1977, 315–16), Bedu-Addo (1983, 236), Nehamas (1985, 16), Vlastos (1991, 118–20), Fine (1992, 207-13), Irwin (1995, 133-35), and Gentzler (1996, 277ff.). Both L. Brown (1967, 57-93) and Weiss (2001, 77-126) argue that the conversation with the slave is meant to be an example of how not to engage in moral inquiry.

^{115.} I say difficult, not impossible, because one might imagine that if Socrates had been ignorant of the answer, then the questions he asks the slave might have been reformulated as hypotheses to be confirmed. But for now it suffices simply to notice that Socrates and the slave are not engaging in a joint procedure to discover on their own the answer to the geometrical question and so to acquire the knowledge they lack. If something in the slave conversation does resemble Plato's recommended method for de novo inquiry, that will depend on first uncovering what Plato's recommended method is.

The objection I am raising here is distinct from a more common objection. 116 I am not objecting that the conversation with the slave fails to illustrate the theory of recollection because of Socrates' (occurrent or postnatal) knowledge of the answer to the geometrical question. In order to illustrate the theory of recollection, Plato must show that the slave has prenatal knowledge of the answer to this question and Socrates' knowledgeable questioning need not undermine that goal. If Plato succeeds in showing that the slave derived his answer from his own resources as a result of Socrates' questions, and not from Socrates' knowledge, the slave's prenatal knowledge (or at least something like it) will have been revealed. Socrates' knowledge does not undermine that goal, although it may make it more difficult to display. Meno and the reader will need to be on the lookout that Socrates' questioning did not manage to surreptitiously slip the slave information that does not derive from the slave himself. It is for this reason that Socrates repeatedly insists that Meno (and thereby Plato insists that the reader) take care to see whether Socrates is merely asking the slave questions or teaching him something.¹¹⁷ If Socrates lacked the knowledge the slave sought, such a worry would not arise.118

Consequently, Socrates' (occurrent or postnatal) knowledge of the answer to the geometrical question pursued in the conversation with the slave need not undermine the conversation's ability to illustrate the theory of recollection. The slave's prenatal, tacit, or latent knowledge can be illustrated even if Socrates, in leading the inquiry, has the knowledge that the slave seeks. As long as Socrates' knowledge is not transferred to the slave through his questions, the conversation

^{116.} See, for example, Bluck (1961, 13–14) and M. Brown (1967, 74).

^{117.} See Meno 82B6-7, 82E4-5, 84C11-D2, and 85D3-4.

^{118.} This may indicate that Socrates was aware of the distinction between two modes of Socratic teaching, i.e., two modes of learning that presuppose the existence of someone who knows. According to the first mode, the teacher—i.e., the knower—transfers or imparts information to the student or learner, but is questioned and examined by the learner in order to both confirm the knowledge of the teacher and "internalize" the information imparted. According to the second mode, the teacher pointedly and knowingly questions the learner so that the learner uncovers the knowledge from him or herself. The latter is the method that often gets named "the Socratic method" in schools of law and education. I concede that this latter mode of teaching is applied in the conversation with the slave, but I have been at pains to maintain that it is not a mode of teaching practiced (often) in the elenctic dialogues, because Socrates does not possess the knowledge that such teaching presupposes. A successful resolution to Clitophon's challenge in light of our examination of the elenctic dialogues requires a third method of learning—one that does not presuppose the existence of someone who knows. There may be salient similarities between this third mode of learning and the second one exemplified in the conversation with the slave, but the former goes considerably beyond anything found in the conversation with slave, or so I will argue. I owe the recognition of the first two modes of teaching to a very helpful conversation with Fiona Leigh.

will be successful. But Socrates' (occurrent or postnatal) knowledge of the answer to the geometrical question does undermine the conversation's ability to illustrate the proper procedure to employ for acquiring the knowledge one lacks when no one with that knowledge is available. If Meno and Socrates want advice on how they should proceed to acquire the knowledge of virtue they both lack, looking at the conversation with the slave will be no help. To get help with uncovering such a procedure they (and we) will need to look elsewhere. We will need to look to the second of the two features of classical Platonism introduced in the *Meno*—the method of hypothesis—or at least so I will argue in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The *Meno*, then, appeared a promising place to begin our search for a response to Clitophon's challenge in light of the failures of the previous chapter. Unfortunately, despite the promise of the dialogue's opening question, Socrates' attempt to acquire knowledge proceeded along the same lines as the dialogues examined previously. Socrates sought to acquire knowledge of the nature of virtue by attempting to learn it from Meno, who asserted its possession. Nevertheless, unlike the elenctic dialogues of the previous chapter, when Socrates succeeded in persuading Meno of his ignorance, the dialogue did not end nor did Socrates recommend looking for someone else who knows. Rather, Socrates encouraged Meno to join him in a search of joint discovery—seeking to acquire the knowledge of the nature of virtue, not by learning from one who already possessed it but by discovering it on their own. Despite the promise of this new beginning, Plato presented a serious philosophical challenge to this new approach to learning: Meno's paradox. To resolve this paradox Plato introduced his readers to the theory of recollection. But while Plato appeared to take this theory to resolve the paradox, and so make possible this new method of learning, he left unexplained how this new method is to proceed. Fortunately, a third of the *Meno* remains to be examined—the third in which Plato introduces his readers to his method of hypothesis. The method of hypothesis will occupy our attention in subsequent chapters.

4

NOT A MERE SECOND BEST

The Meno has long been considered a transitional Platonic dialogue. Indeed, Gregory Vlastos once maintained that he could identify the precise point in the dialogues where the historical Socrates (interpreted by Plato) gave off and Plato (on his own) began: Meno 80D-E. I am less sanguine than I once was about this historical and developmental claim. But, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the Meno does mark a break of some sort with the elenctic dialogues. At Meno 80D-E, Plato has first Meno and then Socrates pose a question that the readers of the elenctic dialogues have been wanting to pose for some time. Socrates' purpose in eliminating the interlocutor's false conceit of knowledge is to encourage the interlocutor to seek the virtueknowledge he has been shown to lack. But how is such a search to take place given Socrates' repeated claims that he too lacks this knowledge? Insofar as the elenctic dialogues offer any answer to this question, they recommend seeking out someone who knows and learning from him. But if no one with the requisite knowledge is to be found, how is one to proceed? Indeed, just as we saw reason to worry about the possibility of learning from others, one might worry whether discovering on one's own the knowledge one seeks is possible. This latter worry—put in the form of a paradox—is raised by Meno in response to Socrates' encouragement to join him in the search for knowledge of the nature of virtue, which both he and Meno recognize they lack.

In the pages that follow *Meno*'s paradox, I have argued, Plato proposes the first of two features of classical Platonism introduced in this dialogue, his theory of recollection, as the paradox's resolution. It is possible, according to Plato, to discover on one's own the knowledge one seeks in virtue of one's prenatal possession of this knowledge. The conversation with the slave, which immediately follows the introduction of the theory of recollection, is offered to illustrate this theory. Precisely how the theory and conversation accomplish this task is a

^{1.} Whether this break is interpreted as a developmental break or pedagogical break; see pp. 8-11.

matter of some controversy. I have proposed a rather deflationary interpretation according to which the theory resolves the paradox in virtue of two independent features: prenatal knowledge and the connectedness of nature. I have done so in order to focus on a different but related issue. However the theory of recollection and the conversation with the slave resolve the possibility question, they leave untouched the methodology question. That one should proceed to attempt to discover on one's own the knowledge one lacks because it is possible to succeed has been decided.² Nevertheless, what method one should employ in this attempt has been left unaddressed.³ Clitophon's challenge has yet to be resolved. It is not until the Meno's methodological digression has come to an end and a second feature of classical Platonism, the method of hypothesis, has been introduced that Plato begins to address Clitophon's challenge, or at least so I will argue.⁴

Even so, the method of hypothesis is introduced in the *Meno* only after Meno refuses to consider the question Socrates thinks is in some sense primary, and then as a concession won by Socrates as a consequence of Meno's refusal. This manner of introduction has led some scholars to wonder whether the method of hypothesis is of any philosophical importance whatsoever, let alone serving as Plato's resolution to Clitophon's challenge. Indeed, some have argued that the method of hypothesis is at best a second-best approach to be employed only when Plato's preferred method of search—dialectic as practiced in the elenctic dialogues, for example—cannot be employed.⁵ Others have suggested that it is a mere ruse to get Meno to search for the nature of virtue in spite of himself.6 Even Robinson, who is partially responsible for the view that the method of hypothesis is a key feature of classical Platonism, thought that the method as it

^{2.} See Meno 86B6-C2.

^{3.} For a similar view, see Menn's (2002, 215–16, 221) account of the different functions of the geometrical example in the conversation with the slave and the geometrical example by which Plato introduces the method of hypothesis.

^{4.} Wolfsdorf (2008a, 179) maintains that the introduction of the method of hypothesis in the Meno has "been misconceived and also overblown." According to Wolfsdorf, the only interesting difference between the method of hypothesis and the method employed in the elenctic dialogues is that the former reduces "a more difficult question to a less difficult one," which never happens in the elenctic dialogues. Wolfsdorf correctly maintains that Socrates attempts to acquire knowledge in the elenctic dialogues by means of the elenchos, just as he does in the Meno, Phaedo, and Republic, by means of the method of hypothesis. But the reduction difference is not the only difference between the two methods. Rather, the elenchos attempts to acquire knowledge by learning from one who knows; the method of hypothesis attempts to acquire knowledge on one's own. The structural differences that result from this difference will be the subject of the subsequent chapters.

^{5.} See, for example, Gonzalez (1998a, 10) and Seeskin (1993, 44-47).

^{6.} See, for example, Bedu-Addo (1984, 3).

appears in the *Meno* was inferior. This reading of the method of hypothesis is reinforced by the manner in which the method is introduced in the other dialogue in which these two features of classical Platonism explicitly appear, the *Phaedo*. In the final argument for the immortality of the soul in *Phaedo*, Socrates apparently describes the method of hypothesis as a "second sailing" (δεύτερος πλοῦς), which has generally been taken to mean a "second best." In the *Phaedo* too, then, Plato appears to introduce his method of hypothesis not as his preferred method of learning but, rather, as a second-best method—second best perhaps to the method of dialectic he describes in the *Republic*. Consequently, before focusing on this method in the chapters to come, we should perhaps assure ourselves that Plato thinks it is worth our attention.

In the present chapter, I maintain that it is a mistake to read Plato's introduction of the method of hypothesis as indicating that it is in some way inferior or second-best to some other preferred method of learning. Rather, Plato introduces the method as a recommended way of searching for the knowledge one lacks. The chapter falls into two parts. In the first part, I examine Plato's introduction of the method in the Meno. I maintain that Plato is not dissatisfied with the method of hypothesis as he introduces it there, and that he sincerely urges Meno to join him in applying it to the search for the knowledge of virtue's teachability—a knowledge which they both lack. In the second part, I examine Plato's introduction of the method in the *Phaedo*. I maintain that Plato's use of the phrase "second sailing" in his introduction of the method of hypothesis in the *Phaedo* is not meant to indicate that the method of hypothesis is an inferior or second-best alternative to some preferred method of learning—at least not one that is available to embodied souls. Rather, when Socrates is made to describe himself as using the method of hypothesis in order to seek the knowledge of the aitia of generation and destruction, Plato is thereby recommending the method of hypothesis as a method for acquiring knowledge. Thus, the method of hypothesis is introduced in these passages as a serious attempt to seek the knowledge one lacks on one's own, and we would do well to look more closely at these passages in an attempt to uncover Plato's response to Clitophon's challenge. I turn to that task in the subsequent chapter.

Introduction of the Method of Hypothesis in the Meno

At *Meno* 86C4–5, after disclaiming the *details* of the methodological digression but expressing his willingness to fight for the idea that "one ought to inquire concerning those things one fails to know," Socrates again encourages Meno to join

^{7.} See Robinson (1953, 110, 121).

^{8.} The theory of recollection is discussed at *Phaedo* 72E-78B.

him in the search for the nature of virtue, knowledge of which they both lack. Meno, however, would prefer to return to the question with which the dialogue began: whether virtue is taught, or whether it comes to humans by nature or in some other way. Socrates responds as follows:

Well, if I were directing you, Meno, and not only myself, we would not have investigated whether virtue is teachable or not before we had investigated what virtue itself is; but because you do not even attempt to rule yourself, in order that you may be free, but you try to rule me and do so, I will agree with you—for what can I do? So we must, it appears, inquire into the qualities of something the nature of which we do not yet know (σκεπτέον εἶναι ποῖόν τί ἐστιν ὁ μήπω ἴσμεν ὅτι ἐστίν). However, please relax your rule a little bit for me and agree to investigate whether it is teachable or not by means of a hypothesis (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως αὐτὸ σκοπεῖσθαι). (Meno 86D3-E4).

With this passage Plato introduces his method of hypothesis. Hardly a ringing endorsement, it has been supposed.

Plato is thought here to be introducing the method of hypothesis as a method inferior to some preferred method. It is not clear what the preferred method is supposed to be, but it is generally thought to be the method Socrates had been employing prior to the methodological digression. Meno, the suggestion goes, refuses to employ Plato's preferred method according to which one first investigates the nature of the thing—what the thing is (τι ἐστίν)—followed by an investigation of the thing's qualities or properties—what sort the thing is (ποῖόν τί ἐστιν). Meno insists that they investigate the qualities of virtue (whether it is teachable) before they have completed an investigation of virtue's nature (what virtue is). Plato depicts Socrates as proposing an alternative method, an investigation from a hypothesis, as a result of Meno's recalcitrance. Plato's preferred method, the suggestion goes, is an *investigation from the* nature of the thing, but Meno's refusal to allow Socrates to employ that method forces Socrates to a second-best method of an *investigation from a hypothesis*.

^{9.} See Bedu-Addo (1984, 1): "On the strength of this passage scholars have sometimes all too readily assumed that the following argument 'from a hypothesis' marks the abandonment of the enquiry into the nature of virtue, and that it has nothing whatever to do with recollection and the search for the definition of virtue in the dialogue." He cites Robinson (1953, 114-22), Crombie (1962, 529-48), Bluck (1964, 23), M. Brown (1967, 63-65), Allen (1970, 96), Rose (1970, 1-8), and Zyskind and Sternfeld (1976, 130-34). Others who maintain that the method of hypothesis is not Plato's preferred method include Bostock (1986, 166), Seeskin (1993, 45-47), Gonzalez (1998a, 153-87), Netz (2003, 308-309), Dancy (2004, 296), and Scott (2006, 132).

At least three considerations tell against this interpretation. First, we must be careful about placing too much weight on Meno's recalcitrance as an explanation for Plato's introduction of the method of hypothesis. This is Plato's dialogue after all, and if he had wanted to depict an ignorant Socrates and Meno investigating from the nature of virtue—his alleged preferred method—he could have. Plato chose not to depict such an investigation, and to appeal to Meno's stubbornness for an explanation of Plato's choice is to be beguiled by the drama of the dialogue. Of course, Plato's reason for introducing the method of hypothesis in this way may have been to depict how Socrates proceeded or how one is to proceed when faced with an interlocutor unwilling to follow his preferred method. But, he also may have chosen to depict Meno's stubbornness as a pretext to introduce a new method. Meno's recalcitrance alone explains nothing.

Second, understanding Plato's introduction of the method of hypothesis as a second-best method assumes that Plato is taking the question under investigation to be the teachability of virtue or, more generally, how virtue is acquired. The idea is that Plato is proposing two methods of arriving at an answer to this question: first, the preferred method of an investigation from the nature of virtue; and second, the second-best method of an investigation from a hypothesis. But this is not what Socrates actually says. Socrates says he does not want to investigate the question of how virtue is acquired until they first have investigated the question of what virtue is. He does not claim to want to investigate the question of how virtue is acquired by investigating what virtue is. It is true that the reason (or at least one of the reasons) Socrates would prefer to investigate what virtue is (sometimes referred to as the ti question) prior to investigating how virtue is acquired (sometimes referred to as the *poion* question) is that he believes one cannot know the answer to the latter question without knowing the answer to the former;11 that is, knowledge of the nature of virtue is epistemically prior to the knowledge of how it is acquired. But an epistemological priority need not imply a methodological priority.12 It is one thing to claim that I cannot know how something is acquired until I know the nature of that thing, as Socrates suggests at the end of the dialogue; it is quite another to claim that the best method for acquiring knowledge of how something is acquired is by first investigating its

^{10.} See Weiss (2001, 128-29).

^{11.} See pp. 58-59.

^{12.} One might here think of Aristotle's distinction between things more knowable in nature and things more knowable to us. See, for example, *Posterior Analytics* 1.2.71b33–72a5, and *Physics* 1.1.184a. See also Menn (2002, 216) on geometrical analysis.

nature. 13 So, we need not think that here at Meno 86D3-E6 Socrates is objecting to Meno because he is failing to follow his preferred method of investigating how virtue is acquired. Socrates may simply be objecting to Meno's failure to address a more important question—because it is epistemologically prior to Meno's question and any other question concerning virtue.¹⁴

Finally, even if Plato were to understand epistemological priority to entail methodological priority, the present passage still fails to require that the method of hypothesis is not his preferred method. Socrates asks Meno to let him at least use the method he wants—the method of hypothesis—since Meno will not let him investigate the question he wants: "What is virtue?" This does not entail that he would have failed to ask to use the method of hypothesis if Meno had permitted him to investigate the "What is virtue?" question. Our current passage provides no evidence for how Socrates would have proceeded if Meno had permitted him to investigate what virtue is. For all we know he would have asked Meno to permit him to proceed "from a hypothesis." 15 As we have seen, the method employed prior to Meno's paradox is unavailable. The discussion prior

^{13.} Indeed, at the beginning of the dialogue when the priority of the ti question is introduced, it is not presented as a methodological priority. When Meno asks Socrates to say how virtue is acquired, Socrates responds that he is so far from knowing the answer to that question that he doesn't even know what virtue is. Meno is surprised to learn that Socrates professes ignorance of this, thinking that the nature of virtue is not difficult to know, and Socrates encourages Meno to tell him what virtue is at 71D6-8. Socrates does not here ask Meno to tell him what virtue is so that they can answer the question how it is acquired. The question how virtue is acquired has been shelved while Socrates tests Meno's knowledge of the nature of virtue, a test Meno fails.

^{14.} Brickhouse and Smith (1994, 55-60) argue that many of the passages in the elenctic dialogues that have been cited on behalf of epistemological priority are better understood as evidence for procedural or methodological priority. But I am not persuaded by their argument. For example, they cite Euthyphro 6D9-11, Laches 191E10-11, Laches 192B5-8, and three passages from the Meno (73C6-8, 75A4-5, 77A5-9) as evidence for their procedural principle. But all of these passages come from portions of the dialogues in which the relevant interlocutor claims to know the answer to the ti question. So, at best these passages provide evidence for how to proceed to answer a question the answer to which one claims to know. They fail to provide evidence for how to proceed to answer a question the answer to which none of the present interlocutors claims to know, as is the case at this point in the Meno. See also Scott (2006, 132), who takes our current passage to require a temporal, and so methodological priority.

^{15.} Scott (2006, 130) describes a "model of inquiry" suggested by the methodological digression which Socrates would have proceeded to employ if Meno had been more pliant. According to Scott, this model of inquiry proceeds "incrementally" and "haltingly." It is not clear to me how the account of the method of hypothesis I develop over the next chapters differs essentially from Scott's incremental and halting model; see Scott (2006, 133n7). But he takes the distinction between beginning with how virtue is acquired before what virtue is to be more significant than I do.

to Meno's paradox depended on Meno's claim to know what virtue is. It was a method of learning from one who knows. ¹⁶ No one claiming such knowledge is any longer available at this point in *Meno*. Indeed, if what I have argued in chapter 2 is correct, what follows *Meno* 86E4 is one of the few, perhaps only, places in the dialogues we have been examining so far in which Plato depicts Socrates as engaging in the search for knowledge from mutual ignorance, as engaging in *de novo* discovery. And the method he depicts Socrates as employing is the method of hypothesis. If Plato has a better method, he has not displayed it.

In sum, *Meno* 86D3–E4 clearly and unambiguously testifies to three things: (1) a distinction between two questions, perhaps even two types of questions: "What is virtue?" (a *ti* question) and "Is virtue teachable?" (a *poion* question); (2) a Socratic preference for investigating the former question before investigating the latter question when all the participants to the discussion are ignorant of both; and (3) Meno's agreement to use the method of hypothesis as a concession for not permitting Socrates to investigate the question he would prefer to investigate. The passage does not testify to a distinction between two methods of investigating the same question, and *a fortiori* it does not testify to a preference of one method over another. Consequently, if Plato understands the method of hypothesis introduced at this point in the *Meno* as in some way inferior to some preferred method, the evidence for this must come from elsewhere.

Perhaps the passage that immediately follows and in which Socrates is made to explain what he means by "examining from a hypothesis" indicates Plato's disapproval. Socrates explains that he has in mind the method that geometers often use when a question is put to them the answer to which they do not know. The geometrical example that follows will occupy our attention later, ¹⁷ but for now some of its features seem clear. First, as I just noted, geometers appeal to this method when they fail to know the answer to the question posed. ¹⁸ As Socrates puts it, when geometers are asked whether a given area can be inscribed as a triangle within a given circle, they respond "I do not yet know whether that area has that property, but I think I have, as it were, a hypothesis that is of use for the problem" (87A1–3). Nothing here suggests that the geometers would prefer another method. They would, no doubt, prefer to answer the question *from knowledge*—whether their own or someone else's—but in lieu of that, their

^{16.} Or, at least, so I have argued. It also, of course, was a method of testing whether Meno did in fact know.

^{17.} See pp. 116-129.

^{18.} This is directed *de novo* discovery. The geometers attempt to acquire knowledge of the answer to a question on their own (not from another who knows).

preference is to answer it from a hypothesis. Given that to answer the question requires de novo discovery—that is, a search from mutual ignorance—searching from a hypothesis may prove helpful.¹⁹ In addition, the question to which the geometers do not know the answer but nevertheless seek to know by means of a hypothesis is a *poion* question—whether a specific area has a particular property. Thus, the situation of the geometers is like that of Meno and Socrates. They are being asked to answer a *poion* question, the answer to which they do not know. The geometers respond by attempting to answer from a hypothesis without suggesting that there is anything inadequate or undesirable about proceeding in this way, just as I have suggested Socrates recommends in the case of the teachability of virtue. The *ti/poion* distinction is a red herring at least as far as the geometrical example is considered. Nothing here indicates Plato's preference for asking a ti question or his disapproval of the method of hypothesis.²⁰

Nor does Plato's depiction of the application of the method of hypothesis to the case of the teachabilty of virtue at 87B indicate disapproval. At 87B2-4, Socrates encourages Meno to investigate the teachability of virtue in a way similar to the method of the geometers, saying: "since we do not know either what it is or what qualities it possesses, let us investigate whether it is teachable or not by means of a hypothesis" (87B3-4). Socrates focuses on their mutual ignorance for justifying the appeal to the method of hypothesis rather than on Meno's refusal to consider the "What is virtue?" question. He does not maintain that since Meno is unwilling to pursue the "What is virtue?" question, it is appropriate to examine from a hypothesis. Rather, he indicates that it is appropriate to examine from a hypothesis because of their complete (robust) ignorance of virtue (established before Meno's paradox). It is because they are completely ignorant of virtue—knowing neither what it is nor what qualities it possesses (οὐκ ἴσμεν οὔθ' ὅτι ἐστὶν οὔθ' ὁποῖόν τι)—that an appeal to a hypothesis is appropriate. If they had known something about virtue, they might have used that as a starting point. To be sure, their complete ignorance of virtue is a consequence of their ignorance of the answer to the "What is virtue?" question (which Meno refuses

^{19.} Note that the geometers here apparently do not maintain that searching for an answer to such questions by means of a hypothesis is the only way to proceed; they simply claim that searching from a hypothesis may prove helpful (προὔργου).

^{20.} It may be that in drawing these parallels between Meno's and Socrates' procedure and the procedure of the geometers Plato is thereby deriding the former procedure. In the Republic, Plato has been thought to disapprove of the method of the mathematicians. See, for example, Seeskin (1993, 44-47) and Gonzalez (1998a, 377n97). For a more positive view of Plato's attitude of mathematics, at least at the time of writing the Meno, see Vlastos (1991, 107–31), Burnyeat (2000), Menn (2002, 2002), and chapter 9, this volume. In any case, I see no evidence of such derision here in the Meno.

to pursue) because of Socrates' commitment to the epistemological priority of this question. But had Meno not refused to pursue this question, their situation would have been just the same—knowing neither what virtue is nor what qualities it possesses, and an appeal to a hypothesis would be just as appropriate.²¹

As it is, Socrates begins the investigation concerning the teachability of virtue by means of a hypothesis with the following exchange:

Among the things existing in the soul, of what sort is virtue, that it should be teachable or not? First, if it is another sort than knowledge, is it teachable or not, or, as we were just saying, recollectable? Let it make no difference to us which term we use: is it teachable? Or is it plain to anyone that men cannot be taught anything but knowledge? — I think so. Socrates: But, if virtue is a kind of knowledge, it is clear that it could be taught. — Of course. (*Meno* 87B5–C7)

It is sometimes claimed that Socrates here manages to turn the discussion, at least temporarily, back to the "What is virtue?" question.²² Indeed, Bedu-Addo maintains that Socrates' appeal to a hypothesis is simply a ruse to get Meno to consider the *ti* question, "What is virtue?" which he had refused to consider just a few lines earlier.²³ Socrates is not proposing an alternative method for answering the "Is virtue teachable?" question—an *investigation from a hypothesis*.

^{21.} It is true that the process of discovering the appropriate hypothesis to test may be more difficult, since there is no property/proposition against which to search for the reduced question. See pp. 133-135. But, perhaps we should follow Plato's lead here as well. Recall that the question with which the dialogue began is not so much "Is virtue teachable?" as it is "How is virtue acquired?" (Meno 70A1-4). If Plato is applying and endorsing the method of hypothesis in the last third of the Meno, as I maintain, then he appears to be recommending that one choose a potential answer to the question "How is virtue acquired?", viz. by teaching, and examine it by means of a hypothesis. A similar recommendation might be made in the case of "What is virtue?" If so, the distinction between the method of hypothesis and the *elenchos* is subtle, but still important. For, the *elenchos*, too, proceeds by examining a potential answer to the "What is virtue?" question. The difference lies in the fact that when one is examining by a hypothesis, not one of the interlocutors is committed to that answer. Indeed, the potential answer is converted to a question and one attempts to reduce this question to another one. Consequently, different explanations concerning how these potential answers are to be obtained and against what they are to be tested must be forthcoming. See the remaining chapters, this volume.

^{22.} See, for example, Sharples (1985, 162–63) and M. Brown (1967, 65). For someone who does not make this mistake but draws a conclusion with which I cannot agree, see Gonzalez (1998a, 174).

^{23.} Bedu-Addo (1984, 3).

He is instead surreptitiously returning to the method Meno had refused to pursue, the method of *investigating from the nature of the thing*.

But again, the ti/poion distinction fails to be apposite. The question that Socrates explicitly asks here is a *poion* question, not a ti question. He asks what sort of a thing is virtue ($\pi o i \acute{o} v \tau i \acute{e} \sigma \tau v$) such that it would be teachable or not. ²⁴ Socrates does not reduce the *poion* question "Is virtue teachable?" to the ti question "What is virtue?" or "Is virtue knowledge?"; rather, he reduces one *poion* question, "Is virtue teachable?" to another, "What kind of thing is virtue?" or "Is virtue a kind of knowledge?"²⁵

One might object that whatever the words Socrates uses to phrase the questions, a considerable difference in kind exists between the claim that virtue is teachable and the claim that virtue is a kind of knowledge. The one tells us something like a property or quality of virtue; the other tells us the kind of thing virtue is. ²⁶ It is inappropriate to lump both these claims together as answers to *poion* questions (whatever words Plato employs). The claim that virtue is a kind of knowledge is at least more like an answer to a *ti* question, a "What is F-ness?" question, than it is to an answer to a question about the properties or qualities of the thing. Consequently, the exchange at 87B5–C7 does manage to move Meno closer to the question he refused to pursue back at 86C8–D2, and thereby closer to Plato's preferred method.

Let us suppose that in moving from the question "Is virtue teachable?" to the question "What sort of thing is virtue such that it would be teachable and what sort of thing is virtue such that it would not be teachable?" Socrates has moved Meno closer to a *ti* question. Socrates, nevertheless, makes this move in the context of explaining how to go about answering such questions. Socrates does not recommend asking the open-ended question "What is virtue?" but, rather, "What is virtue such that it would be it teachable?" and "What is virtue such

^{24.} That this is not unintentional is indicated both at 87B6, where the protasis of the conditional is "if virtue is any other sort than knowledge" (ἔστιν ἀλλοῖον ἢ οῖον ἐπιστήμη), rather than "if virtue is anything other than knowledge" (ἔστιν ἄλλος ἢ ἐπιστήμη), and again at 87C5, where the protasis is "if virtue is some kind of knowledge" (ἐστὶν ἐπιστήμη τις ἡ ἀρετή), not "if virtue is knowledge" (ἐστὶν ἐπιστήμη ἡ ἀρετή).

^{25.} It is true that in providing an answer to this last question, Socrates sometimes suggests that virtue is knowledge, not a kind of knowledge. See, especially, 89C3–4 (although this is Meno, not Socrates) and 89D3–5. But the language by which the question is introduced ought to guide our understanding. Moreover, in other passages Socrates is more careful; see 88C4–D3 and 89A3–4. The text's apparent indifference to the *ti/poion* distinction might plausibly indicate Plato's as well.

^{26.} Aristotle tends to think of claims concerning what kind of thing a thing is as answers to *ti* questions. See *Topics* 1.9.103b20–25.

that it would not be teachable?" And similarly, he recommends attempting to answer these latter questions by asking "What would make it the case that virtue is so?" and "What would make it the case that virtue is not so?" Consequently, even assuming that Socrates has moved Meno closer to the original *ti* question that he did not want to pursue, nothing here indicates that Socrates is dissatisfied with the method he is recommending for answering it.²⁷

We have no reason, then, to suspect dissatisfaction with the method of hypothesis as it is introduced here in the Meno. Plato introduces it as a method to be followed when all parties are ignorant of the matter under investigation and as the method endorsed in similar circumstances by the geometers. Moreover, the initial application of the method—as an attempt to investigate whether virtue is teachable—appears to parallel the geometrical example he cited to illustrate the method. Of course, that Plato should endorse the method of hypothesis as a method to be followed when all parties to the investigation are ignorant of the matter under investigation is precisely what we should expect at this point in the dialogue, given what we have seen in the elenctic dialogues and Plato's response to *Meno*'s paradox. After proposing an affirmative answer to the question whether it is possible to acquire the Socratic goal of virtue-knowledge in circumstances of mutual ignorance, by presenting the theory of recollection illustrated by the conversation with the slave, Plato now proposes a method for acquiring it: the method of hypothesis. If Plato understands this method as in some way inferior to his preferred method, whatever that might be, evidence for this must come from elsewhere.

The Introduction of the Method of Hypothesis in the Phaedo

An obvious place to turn for such evidence is Plato's introduction of the method of hypothesis in the *Phaedo*, ²⁸ the dialogue in which according to Robinson one finds

^{27.} A further reason for doubting the methodological salience of the *ti/poion* distinction is that the question Socrates reduces the "What kind of thing is virtue?" question to at 87D2–8—i.e., "Is virtue good?" (see pp. 160–165), is not in any obvious way a *ti* question. A similar point can be made concerning the geometrical example. In addition, the *ti/poion* distinction is far less clear than I have been suggesting. For example, some commentators understand it as parallel to the essential/accidental property distinction; see, for example, Fine (1992, 225–26n42), Dimas (1996, 5–7), and Sharples (1985, 125). Other commentators understand it as parallel to the distinction between essence and essential properties; see Nehamas (1987, 283–85). I do not see how any of this elucidates the current passage.

^{28.} It is sometimes pointed out that the method has been introduced earlier at 85C7–D4 and 92C8–E2. We will consider this issue later (see pp. 107, 184–189). For now, notice that the former passage does not explicitly appeal to hypotheses, while the latter appears, if anything, to be an application of the method, rather than a description. For the bootstrapping nature of an account of Plato's method of hypothesis, see pp. 113–114.

"the main account of [the method of hypothesis] in Plato." ²⁹ In the course of Socrates' intellectual autobiography, ³⁰ Plato has Socrates describe the method of hypothesis as "a second-best" (δεύτερος πλοῦς) method, or at least so it has been alleged.

Following a recapitulation of Cebes' cloak objection to the first three arguments for the immortality of the soul (95A4-E6), Socrates is made to assert that the objection cannot be met without "a thorough investigation (διαπραγματεύσασθαι) of the aitia³¹ of generation and destruction" (95E9– 10), and he offers to go through his own experiences on these matters. He explains that he initially sought the wisdom known as natural science, wishing "to know the aitiai of everything, why it comes to be, why it perishes and why it exists" (Phaedo 96A9-10). Unfortunately, Socrates discovered that he had no gift for this latter form of inquiry, for it led him to unlearned even the things he formerly thought he knew. Next, Socrates describes his initial enthusiasm for something he heard someone³² reading from a book by Anaxagoras, according to which Mind (nous) was the aitia for everything. Again, Socrates expresses his disappointment, explaining that, as he read Anaxagoras' book himself, he discovered that Anaxagoras "made no use of Mind, nor gave it any responsibility for the management of things, but mentioned as aitiai air and ether and water and many other strange things" (Phaedo 98B8-C2). In response to this disappointment Socrates introduces the method of hypothesis as follows:

[A] I would gladly become the disciple of any man who taught the workings of that kind of aitia. However, since I was deprived and

^{29.} Robinson (1953, 123).

^{30.} See, for example, Gallop (1975, 169), Rowe (1993b, 227), McCabe (2000, 65n25), Byrd (2007b, 150–51), Gower (2008), and Menn (2010, 54). Politis (2010, 62) describes it as "Socrates' intellectual journey." This autobiography is often described as though it is meant to represent a chronological development leading up to the introduction of Forms as *aitiai*; see, for example, Ross 1951, 29. But Goodrich (1903, 382) pointed out long ago that the Anaxagoras episode is presented more as a parenthesis or digression than as the second step in the development of Plato's thinking toward Forms as *aitiai*. Concerning the question whose intellectual history this is actually supposed to be—Socrates', Plato's, or a purely fictional character—see, for example, Archer-Hind (1884, 125–26), Ross (1951, 29), Hackforth (1955, 127–31), A. Taylor (1956, 199–200), and Vlastos (1969, 297).

^{31.} The translation of *aitia* (Grube translates as "cause") is a matter of considerable controversy in this passage; consequently, I have left it untranslated. For important discussions, see Vlastos (1969), Frede (1980), Fine (1984), Bostock (1986, 135–56), Sedley (1998), Wolfsdorf (2005), Sharma (2009), and most recently Politis (2010).

^{32.} This person has been thought to be Archelaus; see, for example, Hackforth (1955, 124n4) and Gower (2008, 336n16).

could neither discover it myself nor learn it from another, do you wish me to give you an explanation of how, as a second best (δεύτερον πλοῦν), I busied myself with the search for the *aitia*, Cebes? ... (*Phaedo* 99C6–D3)

[B] After this, he said, when I had wearied of investigating things, I thought that I must be careful to avoid the experience of those who watch an eclipse of the sun, for some of them ruin their eyes unless they watch its reflection in water or some such material. A similar thought crossed my mind, and I feared that my soul would be altogether blinded if I looked at things with my eyes and tried to grasp them with each of my senses. So I thought I must take refuge in *logoi* and investigate the truth of things by means of *logoi*.³³ However, perhaps this analogy is inadequate, for I certainly do not admit that one who investigates things by means of *logoi* is dealing with images any more than one who looks at facts. (*Phaedo* 99D4–100A3)

[C] However, I started in this manner: taking as my hypothesis $(\dot{\nu}\pi o\theta \dot{\epsilon}\mu\epsilon\nu o\varsigma)$ in each case the *logos* that seemed to me the most compelling, I would consider as true, about *aitia* and everything else, whatever agreed with this, and as untrue whatever did not so agree. But I want to put my meaning more clearly for I do not think that you understand me now. (*Phaedo* 100A3–8)

We will return to the [C] portion of this passage in greater detail in the next chapter, but now I want to focus on how the entire passage is alleged to indicate that the method of hypothesis is introduced as a second-best method. The idea seems to be that in the [A] portion of the text Socrates contrasts a preferred method of learning the *aitia* of generation and destruction with a second-best method of acquiring this knowledge, the method he proposes to go on to describe. In the [B] portion, the allegation continues, Socrates indicates a preferred method of acquiring this knowledge by means of some sort of direct or immediate access to the truth concerning such *aitiai* as opposed to his indirect or mediate method by means of *logoi*. In the [C] section he allegedly describes

^{33.} Again, the translation of *logos* (translated by Grube as "discussions," "words," and "theory") in this passage is a matter of considerable controversy, so I leave it untranslated. On the translation of *logos* in this passage, see, for example, Ross (1951, 27), Hackforth (1955, 138), Bluck (1955, 164), and Rowe (1993b, 240).

(at least roughly) his indirect method by means of *logoi*, what we have been calling the method of hypothesis. Thus, the method of hypothesis is thought to be introduced here in the *Phaedo* as an indirect method of learning, second best to the preferred method of learning by some more direct method of accessing the object of one's search.³⁴

This passage, however, is considerably more complex than this argument supposes. One must distinguish between potential answers to the "search for the *aitia* of generation and destruction" (which I will call "the *aitia* question" ³⁵) and the method or manner by which one proposes to carry out this search.³⁶ In the course of Socrates' autobiography we are given three distinct answers to the aitia question: the answer of the natural sciences (roughly, sensible processes and objects), Anaxagoras' answer (Mind), and Socrates' answer (Forms). At 95E9-10, Socrates proposes to describe the method by which he arrived at the last answer. What contributes to the complexity here is that Plato frequently describes the answers to this inquiry as inquiries or methods as well (see 96B9, 96C2, 97B6-7, 97D2, 99D1). And this is as it should be. An answer to the aitia question provides a method for answering individual aitiai questions concerning specific facts or events, like Helen's being beautiful.³⁷ But the method by which one answers these questions depends on the answer one gives to the *aitia* question, and so it cannot be the same as the method by which one arrives at the answer to the *aitia* question. With this distinction in mind we can return to 99C-100A.

^{34.} To be frank, I could find nothing approaching an argument like this in the literature. Indeed, I could find nothing approaching an argument for the view at all. Those who take the method of hypothesis to be introduced as a second-best method appear to take it to be the explicit reading of the text; Rose (1966, 464, 467) makes this point. Those who apparently take the second-best interpretation to be the explicit reading of the text include Murphy (1936, 40), Robinson (1953, 110), Tait (1986, 457), Bostock (1986, 166), and Gonzalez (1998a, 10, 14, 188, 192, 351n3). Insofar as any argument is to be found, the argument concerns the correct meaning of δεύτερον πλοῦν. But as I will go on to argue, even if one takes δεύτερον πλοῦν to mean "second best," as I will concede, it does not follow that the method of hypothesis is a second-best method, at least for us.

^{35.} See p. 190.

^{36.} Sharma (2009, 175n65) makes a similar distinction.

^{37.} If one accepts Anaxagoras' answer that Mind is the answer to the *aitia* question, then Helen's being beautiful is explained by its being best that Helen is beautiful (see 97C4–D1 and Henry 2013). If one accepts Plato's answer that Forms are the answer to the *aitia* question, then Helen's being beautiful is explained by Helen's participating in the Form of beauty. (For "Forms," see note 59, this chapter.) And if one accepts the natural scientists' answer, Helen's being beautiful is explained by her shape or color (see 100C10–D2).

The contrast in the [A] portion is not between two different methods of searching for an answer to the aitia question, but between two different answers to that question. Socrates has just completed describing his disappointment with Anaxagoras' failure to teach him that Mind is the aitia of things. Rather, Socrates explains, Anaxagoras taught that such things as air, ether, and water were the true *aitiai* of things. Thus, when Socrates offers to describe what follows as a "second best," he is describing the answer to the *aitia* question that he is about to offer as a "second best," not the method by which he searched for, investigated, or busied himself with that answer.³⁸ It cannot be the method of arriving at this answer that is second best, because no method of arriving at Mind as answer to the aitia question (other than reading, being taught, or learning from one who knows) has been offered in the discussion concerning Anaxagoras. And, no one I am aware of takes Socrates to be seriously³⁹ indicating that the method of hypothesis is second best to a preferred method of being taught or learning from someone who knows. 40 Rather, Socrates indicates that he has failed to learn the answer to the aitia question from someone else or on his own (99C8-9), and the answer he is about to offer is a second-best answer. It is the best answer he can offer to the question "What is the *aitia* of generation and destruction?" But, it is deficient in two ways. Socrates would have preferred to give Anaxagoras' answer and he would have preferred to know the answer he is about to give.41

^{38.} For those who take the contrast to be between two answers to the search for the *aitia* of generation and destruction, not between two methods of knowledge acquisition, see Bluck (1955, 111n1), Rose (1966, 464, 469), Gentzler (1991, 265–66), Rowe (1992, 90; 1993b, 239), Byrd (2007b, 147–48), and Sharma (2009, 140–43). Dancy (2004, 294) seems to think it is both a contrast in methods and in answers; see also Hackforth (1955, 127n5, 138–39).

^{39.} See Burnet (1911, 108), Crombie (1962, 530–31), Sayre (1969, 4n3), and Bedu-Addo (1979, 113), who take Socrates' comment concerning second best to be ironic.

^{40.} Of course, if Plato were to take learning from one who knows as his preferred method of learning that would still require him to offer a second-best method of learning in order to respond to Clitophon's challenge, given the problems associated with learning from one who knows, which were delineated in chapter 2, this volume. See Gower (2008, 336–41) for an argument that the Anaxagoras parenthesis in particular and the autobiography in general are meant to reveal that a philosophical theory (at least) should not be acquired by learning from an authority.

^{41.} The connection between Socrates' failure to know the answer that he is about to give and his preference for Anaxagoras' answer can be explained by Socrates' inability to obtain the answer from the nature of the good (the unhypothetical first principle). See notes 45 and 46, this chapter, and chapter 9, this volume. For Socrates' reticence to profess knowledge of the answer he is about to give, see also 107A8–B9.

This latter point is reinforced by an earlier passage that evidently looks forward to our current passage.⁴² At 85C7–D1, Simmias explains that one must bring about for oneself one of the following:⁴³

- [i] learn the truth about these things or find it for oneself (μαθεῖν ὅπη ἔχει ἢ εὑρεῖν), or,
- [ii] if that is impossible, adopt the best and most irrefutable of men's logoi ...

The salient contrast here is not between two methods of learning about things. Rather, the contrast is between *knowing* about things and adopting the best and most irrefutable *logos* about those same things. The latter, presumably, is "second best" to knowing it.⁴⁴ *Phaedo* 85C7–D1 does not also include a contrast in answers about things, as does the [A] portion of 99C–100A. Rather, the former focuses only on a contrast in the cognitive grasp of the answer. But this is at least part of the point made in [A]. In [A], Socrates expresses his hope to have come to know the *aitia* of generation and destruction by learning the teleological *aitia* from Anaxagoras, a kind of *aitia* that Socrates finds particularly attractive. However, after being disappointed with Anaxagoras, Socrates proposes to offer an alternative answer, less to his liking⁴⁵ and not one he would claim to know,⁴⁶ but one which is the best and most irrefutable *logos* available. In both these ways, then, the answer he is about to propound is "second best" to knowledge of Anaxagoras' teleological answer.

Even so, Socrates does offer to provide a display (ἐπίδειξιν) of how he busied himself (πεπραγμάτευμαι)⁴⁷ in the search of a second best *aitia*. This suggests that the subsequent display will be not only of a distinct answer to the question

^{42.} See, for example, Huby (1959, 13), Gallop (1975, 146–47), Rowe (1993c, 176), and Kanayama (2000, 93). The first three take Simmias to be describing the method of hypothesis described by Socrates at [A], while the last takes Simmias to be describing a method to be contrasted with the Plato's method of hypothesis.

^{43.} One must do this, that is, if one is to keep from being soft; *Phaedo* 85C6. See *Meno* 81D5–E1 and p. 88.

^{44.} That Plato does not think we should rest content short of knowledge is clear at *Republic* 6.504B8–D3.

^{45.} Perhaps because it is not obtained from the Form of the Good.

^{46.} Perhaps because he fails to know the Form of the Good; see *Republic* 6.506C–D and note 45.

^{47.} See διαπραγματεύσασθαι at 95E9-96A1.

"What is the *aitia* of generation and destruction?" but also of a distinct method for answering it.⁴⁸ But this raises the following question: "What is the method with which the forthcoming display is contrasted?"⁴⁹

The [B] portion of our passage provides at least a partial answer to this question. Plato here seems to be contrasting two different methods of answering the *aitia* question: a method of investigating by means of *logoi* (τ òν ἐν λόγοις σκοπούμενον) and a method of investigating by means of facts (τ òν ἐν ἔργοις). The former method evidently refers to the method he proposes to describe in [C], the method of hypothesis, and then to display in what follows. So, if the method of hypothesis is thought to be inferior to some other preferred method of answering the *aitia* question, perhaps the method of investigating by means of facts is the preferred method (π ρῶτος π λοῦς) against which the method of hypothesis is to be contrasted.

Such an understanding of the passage cannot be sustained. The method of investigating by means of facts is described in [B] as "looking at things with my eyes and trying to grasp them with each of my senses." Socrates tells us that he grew tired of and feared that he would be completely blinded by this method. This method is the method he was employing in seeking the answer proposed by the natural scientists. Socrates could have grown tired of no other method in the context of this passage.⁵² And the reference to becoming blind evidently refers back to Socrates' proof that he had no gift for the kind of investigation predicated on the natural science answer to the *aitia* question. He explains there that that kind of investigation had made

^{48.} For those who take the contrast to be between two distinct methods, see, for example, Goodrich (1903, 282–83; 1904, 7), Ross (1951, 27), Robinson (1953, 110), Wiggins (1986, 2,14), Kanayama (2000, 89), and Fine (2004, 45n12).

^{49.} Sharma (2014).

^{50.} I am tempted not to translate ἔργοις for reasons similar to those in notes 31 and 33, this chapter. But enough is enough. I should perhaps also note that in employing the phrase "by means of" I am simply imitating Grube's translation of ἐν. Perhaps translating as "in *logoi*" and "in facts" should be preferred for its evident obscurity.

^{51.} *Pace* van Eck (1996, 225–26), who takes Plato's answer to the *aitia* question, what he calls Plato's theory of explanation, to be identical to the *logoi* method, and so presumably not identical to the method of hypothesis. See also Kanayama (2000, 51), who takes the method of hypothesis to be a species of the *logoi* method, and Sharma (2014).

^{52.} Unfortunately, Socrates says little about the method by which he sought the natural science answer, but he does not suggest that he tried to learn it from others, as he does Anaxagoras' teleological answer. Given the description of it at 99E3-4 (βλέπων πρὸς τὰ πράγματα τοῖς ὅμμασι καὶ ἑκάστη τῶν αἰσθήσεων ἐπιχειρῶν ἄπτεσθαι αὐτῶν) and the contrast with investigating by *logoi* it appears to be simple unmitigated sense perception.

him quite blind (96C5-6).⁵³ So, the method of investigating by means of facts is apparently the method Socrates and the natural scientists used to arrive at the first answer to the *aitia* question—roughly, simple, unmitigated sense perception. But Plato does not take simple unmitigated sense perception, which Socrates has grown tired of and fears will blind him, to be his preferred method of knowledge acquisition against which the method of hypothesis is no more than a second-best.⁵⁴ Moreover, the last sentence of [B] suggests that investigating by means of *logoi* and investigating by means of facts are on a par with respect to investigating in some sort of direct or immediate way. As Socrates puts it: "I certainly do not admit that one who investigates things by means of *logoi* is dealing with images any more than one who looks at facts" (100A1-3). So, the method of investigating by means of facts looks no more (nor less) direct than the method of investigating by means of *logoi*.

Nevertheless, the method of investigating by means of *logoi* does look less direct than, and so perhaps inferior to, something (as of course does the method of investigation by means of facts). If, however, we are to understand the method by means of *logoi*, identified with the method of hypothesis in [C], as inferior to some Platonically preferred direct method of learning, we will need to look elsewhere for evidence of such a preferred method.⁵⁵ Some commentators have looked to the elenctic dialogues and maintained that Plato takes the method of hypothesis to be inferior to the method of *elenchos*.⁵⁶ Others, by far the most

^{53.} Bluck (1955, 113n2) takes the reference to blindness in [B] to be ironical, but makes no mention of the earlier reference. See also *Phaedo* 97B3–7, where Socrates explains that he has abandoned the method of the natural scientists and adopted a "confused" method of his own. Here, however, Socrates is apparently referring to abandoning the answer of the natural scientists and the adoption of his own answer, not the methods employed to arrive at those answers.

^{54.} Nevertheless, some scholars continue to take the method of hypothesis to be contrasted with the method of the natural scientists. It is for this reason that Burnet (1911, 99) takes the "second best" comment to be ironical; see also Robinson (1953, 110). Similarly, Kanayama (2000, 95) and Sedley (2004, 108) take the method of hypothesis to be contrasted with the method of natural scientists and so take δεύτερος πλοῦς to mean simply "second voyage" or "second attempt," rather than "second best."

^{55.} Thus, I concede that the last sentence of [B] does indicate a potential distinction between direct and indirect methods of learning. My point here is simply that investigating by means of *logoi* and investigating by means of facts are both indirect methods of learning. See Archer-Hind (1884, 189–90) and Rowe (1992, 92), who recognize "three kinds of routes" in this passage. It remains to be seen whether Plato can be seen to be recommending a direct method of learning for embodied souls. I maintain below that he does not.

^{56.} See, note 5, this chapter.

numerous, have looked to dialogues like the *Republic* and maintained that Plato takes the method of hypothesis to be inferior to the dialectical method, however that is to be understood.⁵⁷ But the *Phaedo* itself provides the preferred method against which the method of hypothesis is second best.⁵⁸

Earlier in the *Phaedo*, in the passage known as Socrates' defense (63E–69E), Socrates is made to explain why the genuine philosopher will seek, rather than fear, death. At least part of the explanation offered appears to depend on the view that the body interferes with the soul's acquisition of the robust knowledge that genuine philosophers seek. Socrates explains that the soul can best grasp the truth when it is free of the bodily senses, which deceive the soul, and that the Forms⁵⁹ are grasped best by the soul when separated from the body. Socrates concludes this part of his explanation as follows:

Then he will do this most perfectly who approaches the object with thought alone, without associating any sight with his thought, or dragging in any sense perception with his reasoning (μετὰ τοῦ λογισμοῦ), but who, using pure thought alone, tries to track down each reality pure and by itself, freeing himself as far as possible from eyes and ears, and in a word, from the whole body, because the body confuses the soul and does not allow it to acquire truth and wisdom whenever it is associated with it. Will not that man reach reality, Simmias, if anyone does? (*Phaedo* 65E6-66A8)

^{57.} See, for example, Murphy (1936, 46), Robinson (1953, 110), Sayre (1969, 40–44), Gonzalez (1998a, 14), Scott (2006, 204), and Byrd (2007b, 142). See pp. 254–255.

^{58.} My former student Josh Dhanens (reinforced by Shipton 1979) first suggested to me that Socrates' defense at the beginning of the *Phaedo* is the place to look for the method to which the method of hypothesis is inferior. Neither of them would agree with what I do with their suggestion.

^{59.} This may be the first occurrence of the Forms in the Platonic corpus, depending on the order in which one takes the dialogues to be composed. But for my general desire to set these sorts of issues aside, see pp. 8–11. The relationship between knowledge (and so knowledge acquisition) and the Forms will be a recurring theme throughout, but a full account of this relationship will not be attempted here. For important discussions, see, for example, Cross and Woozley (1971), N. White (1976, 89–116), Annas (1981, 190–271), Fine (1990), N. White (1992), and Ferejohn (2006a, 2006b).

^{60.} This clause may indicate that Plato takes embodied learning to be impossible. See also 66B5–7, 66D7–E4, and Rowe (1992, 100); contra 67A6–B2, the theory of recollection as a response to Meno's paradox, the account of the philosopher-rulers in Republic 5–7 and, for example, Vlastos (1965, 153n14). Insofar as the passage is read as indicating the impossibility of acquiring knowledge, Clitophon's challenge will remain unresolved. Plato will have no successful method of embodied learning to recommend. See chapter 2, this volume.

Plato here indicates that the best way for philosophers to acquire the knowledge they seek is to separate the soul from the body. It for this reason that the genuine philosopher—the genuine seeker of knowledge—seeks, and does not fear, death. For death is the separation of the soul from the body (*Phaedo* 64C4–9). Plato suggests, although he does not explicitly maintain, here that in such circumstances (i.e., when the soul has been separated from the body) a disembodied soul can acquire the knowledge it seeks by directly accessing or viewing the Forms. But those of us who are still embodied cannot acquire knowledge in this way. We cannot directly view the Forms unencumbered by the body. For us, an alternative method of learning must be pursued, one which strives to suppress the deceptive influences of the bodily senses, but not one that can eliminate them. Such a procedure, however, may seem—at least from a certain perspective—to be second best or inferior to the direct viewing of the Forms as a disembodied soul.

To return to Socrates' account of his intellectual autobiography, near the end of the [B] portion of 99C–100A, Plato may indeed be contrasting his method of hypothesis with a preferred method of learning, viz. the disembodied soul's direct viewing of the Forms. But Socrates indicates no other method of learning he would prefer in the circumstances he finds himself following his disappointment with Anaxagoras. And what are these circumstances? Socrates is attempting to acquire knowledge of the *aitia* of generation and destruction, which he has hitherto been unable to discover for himself or learn from another in an embodied state. In these circumstances, Plato appears to recommend the method of hypothesis. But these are precisely the circumstances relevant for Clitophon's

^{61.} Such a view (metaphor?) is made more explicitly at *Phaedrus* 247C–249D. This view is also suggested by our earlier discussion of the theory of recollection in the *Meno*, although the *directed* attempt to acquire knowledge of a specific Form may be subject to *Meno* paradox like problems; see p. 80 and note 88, chapter 3.

^{62.} To eliminate them is to die.

^{63.} Woolf (2004, 102) apparently takes Plato here to be recommending the direct viewing of Forms while embodied. If so, then the method of hypothesis will be second best to embodied direct viewing. Besides the general philosophical implausibility of such a view, as well as the difficulties associated with being encouraged to view the Forms directly in a systematic and directed way, a variety of passages indicate that Plato values the senses (when properly employed) in philosophical inquiry—at least when embodied. See, for example, *Phaedo* 74C7–75A10, *Republic* 7.523A1–C5, the downward paths of the confirmation stage depicted at *Meno* 89C5–96D4, and *Republic* 6.487A–502C and chapters 6–9, this volume. See Bedu-Addo (1983, esp. 236, 239–40, 243–44; 1991, esp. 37–38, 44–48, 53) and Rowe (1993b, 139–40). We will also see that Plato spends considerable time, especially in the *Republic*, explaining how to avoid letting the evidence of the senses play an inappropriate role. It is the unmitigated and uncritical use of sense perception which Plato abandons and, perhaps uncharitably, attributes to natural science.

challenge. Being told to die is not a helpful answer to the question we are concerned with in this study. Like Clitophon, we want to know what strategy Plato recommends that we pursue *now* in order to eliminate our robust ethical ignorance.

Consequently, Plato's introduction of the method of hypothesis in the *Phaedo* should not be taken as indicating that Plato disparages or otherwise fails to endorse it as a method for acquiring the knowledge one seeks and so as a way of responding to Clitophon's challenge. He indicates no other method he prefers for embodied souls, and the only method (assuming that it is a method) he may prefer is reserved for the afterlife. To be sure, Plato does not enthusiastically testify to the method's chances of success. Socrates is made to profess only a "second-best" answer—perhaps the best and most irrefutable of those available, but not yet known—as a result of employing this method. But, again, he is not made to recommend an alternative, short of death.

Conclusion

Insofar as Plato has a response to Clitophon's challenge—insofar, that is, as Plato recommends how to proceed once one recognizes one's own ignorance and one recognizes the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of learning from another who knows—Plato's method of hypothesis as introduced in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo* looks like a good place to begin to uncover such a response. Of course, if Plato goes on in the remainder of the Meno or the Phaedo to abandon the method of hypothesis in favor of some other method—for example, if Plato reverts to the elenchos, as some have thought he does in the Meno⁶⁴—then the suggestion that Plato takes the method of hypothesis as the beginning of a response to Clitophon's challenge will have been refuted, or at least seriously damaged. It is one thing to fail to disparage the method as in some way inferior to his preferred method. It is another thing to actually endorse it by employing it. I have argued that Plato fails to disparage it. In succeeding chapters I will argue that he goes on to employ it, at least in some crucial places. For now, we would do well to look more closely at Plato's method of hypothesis as introduced in the *Meno* and the Phaedo. In those dialogues, at least, it appears to be the best answer he has to Clitophon's challenge, at least for those of us embodied.

^{64.} See, for example, Weiss (2001, 130-34).

THE METHOD OF HYPOTHESIS

A PRELIMINARY SKETCH

A certain amount of bootstrapping is inevitably involved in any account of Plato's method of inquiry. This is in part because fundamentally two kinds of evidence are available as a result of the dialogue form: Plato's descriptions of that method (often put into the mouth of Socrates) and Plato's depictions of (often Socrates') applications of that method.1 Unfortunately, Plato's descriptions are infuriatingly brief, often incomplete, and sometimes obscure. To supplement, complete, and clarify those descriptions we naturally turn to Plato's depictions of his method. But this requires identifying those portions of the dialogues in which his method is being depicted. Surely, Plato is not always displaying applications of his method of inquiry in the dialogues. The introductory scene of the Symposium (172A-178A) presumably is not an application of such a method, nor is the Menexenus. These are comparatively easy cases. But are the myths which appear throughout the dialogues, most famously at the end of the Gorgias, Phaedo, and Republic, meant to be applications of philosophical inquiry?² Is Protagoras' Great Speech in the *Protagoras* a depiction of Plato's method of inquiry or Protagoras' (or of inquiry at all)? Is Socrates' defense speech in the Apology an application of a method of inquiry or a display of the results of a life devoted to inquiry? Are the apparently distinct methods that Plato depicts within a single dialogue or across dialogues evidence of Plato's development, his methodological pluralism, or distinct portions of some larger method of

^{1.} Evidence outside the dialogues—for example, Plato's Letters (esp. the Seventh Letter) and Aristotle's account of Plato—will not be considered here, although nothing about Plato's method presented in what follows is inconsistent with this evidence. A similar dichotomy—between description and application—can be found in Aristotle. The literature concerning what Aristotle describes in Posterior Analytics and the Topics and what Aristotle does in his other works is enormous, but perhaps a good place to start is Irwin (1988), Reeve (1992), Barnes (1973/1994), Bolton (1994), R. Smith (1995), and Anagnostopoulos (2009). Nevertheless, Plato's use of the dialogue form provides additional complexities.

^{2.} See, for example, Annas (1982), McCabe (1992), Murray (2005), and Rowe (2005), who argue that Plato's myths should not be dismissed as window dressing but instead are presented by Plato as part of his philosophical enterprise.

which these applications are part?³ All of these are hard questions, and only some of them will be addressed in what follows. But my present point is that answers to these questions depend on previous considerations concerning the nature of Plato's method of inquiry. How could one even begin to answer whether Plato takes his mythological passages as instances of philosophical inquiry without some sort of commitment to what Plato takes his method of philosophical inquiry to be? But on what are such considerations to be based, if not on his various descriptions—brief, incomplete, and obscure as they are? We are thus forced, it seems to me, into a bootstrapping enterprise. On the one hand, the descriptions of method found in the dialogues need to be supplemented, completed, and clarified by the applications. On the other hand, identifying the applications requires a relatively detailed, complete, and clear description of the method. We have to start somewhere, and I begin with Plato's descriptions—brief, incomplete, and obscure as they are.

Even so, I begin austerely and conservatively. That is, I begin with what those descriptions alone require us to conclude about Plato's method. For the reasons given above, I will not (yet) supplement our understanding of these descriptions with the depictions of the method which often immediately follow the descriptions, nor will I supplement our understanding with reflections about the nature of other methods to which Plato may be referring in his descriptions. I will not, that is, unless these reflections are at least as uncontroversial as the direct evidence of Plato's text. As I have just said, we have to start somewhere, and I start from what is required in Plato's opening descriptions found in Plato's text.

Consequently, in this chapter I examine three passages, the first one in the *Meno* and the second two in the *Phaedo*, in which Plato appears to describe his method of hypothesis. We will see that they in fact provide very little information about the nature of Plato's method. They tend to raise more questions than they answer. But, partially as a result, these descriptions are not incompatible, and together they indicate a very general structure of the method Plato recommends for seeking knowledge on one's own. My goal is to uncover from these passages a structure thick enough to enable us to identify passages in the dialogues in which Socrates employs this method.

The structure that emerges consists of two stages, which I will call a proof stage and a confirmation stage,⁴ themselves each consisting of two procedures. In outline, Plato describes the following method to learn on one's own the answer to some question, Q1.

^{3.} For the beginnings of an argument for the last option, see Benson (2005).

^{4.} My use of "proof" and "confirmation" is more suggestive than technical.

The Proof Stage

- [Pa] Identify a second question (Q2) from whose most compelling answer (the hypothesis, H1) the answer (A1) to the initial question (Q1) can be obtained.
- [Pb] Show how A1 is obtained from H1.5

The Confirmation Stage

- [Ca] Test the things that start out from (hormêthenta) H1 for agreement or disagreement with each other.
- [Cb] Identify a second reduced question (Q3) from whose most compelling answer (a higher hypothesis, H2) H1 can be obtained, show how H1 can be obtained from H2, and continue this process until one reaches something adequate (hikanon).

But numerous questions remain concerning the nature of hypothesis, obtaining one answer from another, the things that start out from a hypothesis, agreement, reduction, and adequacy, among others.

Nevertheless, the results of this chapter, together with the preceding one, provide a defeasible way of identifying applications of the method of hypothesis in Plato's text. Chapter 4 gave us reason to expect that when Plato depicted instances of de novo inquiry, of the directed attempt to acquire knowledge when no one present possessed that knowledge, he would depict an instance of the method of hypothesis. The current chapter will give us reason to expect that when Plato depicts an argument with the above form (or at least part of it), he is depicting an instance of the method of hypothesis. When a text meets both of these expectations, our understanding of the structure of Plato's method of *de novo* learning is thereby confirmed and we can safely use this text for a deeper understanding of that method. In this way we can begin to answer many of the questions that remain following the examination of the introductory passages examined here. This is the task of the next three chapters. As a result we will uncover a fairly elaborate method for acquiring the virtue-knowledge one seeks. We will, that is, uncover a response to Clitophon's challenge.

But I do not suppose that a different answer might not be achieved from different starting points. I have tried to motivate my starting points. I have

^{5.} This portion of the proof stage is not explicitly described in any of the description passages, but can plausibly be assumed when the proof is not immediate and trivial.

argued that Clitophon's challenge is serious and especially so given the elenctic dialogues' failure to recommend a method for learning that does not depend on learning from one who knows. In addition, I have maintained that Meno's paradox and the theory of recollection indicate that Plato believes Clitophon's challenge can be met, but they do not explain how. As a result, the description of the method of hypothesis, which immediately follows the paradox and theory of recollection, looks like a good place to start. Moreover, I have tried to eliminate one of the considerations for not taking this starting point seriously. Plato does not disparage or otherwise treat the method of hypothesis as a second-best method for learning—at least for those of us who remain embodied. A second consideration for not taking this starting point seriously, however, has not been eliminated. That second consideration is that the method Plato introduces in the Meno is not found outside the Meno. It is proposed in the Meno and then abandoned. The goal of this chapter, in part, is to maintain that such a consideration is a feature of how one approaches the evidence. If one begins conservatively with what is fairly explicit in the initial description of the method of hypothesis in the Meno, one can find that method more fully described and depicted in other dialogues. But I do not presume that other starting points might not be fruitfully pursued. Nor do I presume that the process of rubbing descriptions up against depictions and depictions against descriptions might not produce different results. I simply maintain that a plausible Platonic response to Clitophon's challenge can be uncovered by pursuing the course that follows.

The Description in the Meno

The Passage

After requesting that Meno permit him to investigate whether virtue is teachable from a hypothesis ($\dot{\epsilon}\xi\ \dot{\nu}\pi o\theta \dot{\epsilon}\sigma\epsilon\omega\varsigma$), Socrates explains what he means as follows:

I mean "from a hypothesis" in this way, the way the geometers often examine (λέγω δὲ τὸ ἐξ ὑποθέσεως ὥδε, ὥσπερ οἱ γεωμέτραι πολλάκις σκοποῦνται), when someone asks them, for example, about an area, whether it is possible to inscribe this area in this circle as a triangle. [A geometer] might say, "I don't yet know whether this [area] is such [as to make the construction possible], but I think I have as it were a hypothesis that would help towards the question (ἀλλ' ὥσπερ μέν τινα ὑπόθεσιν προὔργου οἶμαι ἔχειν πρὸς τὸ πρᾶγμα), as follows: if this area is such that

when it is applied to the given line [sc. the diameter of the circle], it falls short by an area similar to the applied area, then one thing seems to me to follow, but another if it is impossible for this to happen. So after hypothesizing (ὑποθέμενος) I am willing to tell you what follows about inscribing [the area] in the circle, whether it is impossible or not." (Meno 86E6-87B2; Menn trans.)6

Two things immediately stand out about this passage. First, it is not really a description of a method, but an illustration. Nevertheless, it is not an application. Socrates is not applying the method on behalf of some inquiry. Rather, the passage is an illustration serving as a description. Second, the illustration is remarkably obscure. Nevertheless, this is how Plato introduces the method of hypothesis and so it is where we, too, will begin.8

The Method

Scholarly attention has been primarily focused on the details of the geometrical example referred to in the passage. But given the brevity of the description of the example, Plato seems focused on the method illustrated by the example.9 And

^{6.} Menn (2002, 209). I here employ Menn's translation of this passage both because I think it nicely illuminates the structure of the geometrical example being illustrated and in order not to bias my difficulties with his understanding of this passage later.

^{7.} Scott (2006, 134) calls this passage "one of the most perplexing of all the works of Plato." Wolfsdorf (2008b, 46n30) writes that, "Heijboer (1955) notes that in 1832, Patze (1832) had collected twenty-two interpretations and that by 1861, Blass (1861) had collected about thirty. A century after Blass, Bluck (1964, 441-61) discusses five 'among the most interesting explanations' of his predecessors [Benecke 1867, Butcher 1888, Cook Wilson 1903, Farquharson 1923, and Heijboer 1955]. Note that Heath's interpretation (Heath 1921, I:298–303) is the same as Cook Wilson's. Since Bluck's count, at least four additional 'interesting' interpretations have been published [Gaiser 1964, Sternfeld and Zyskind 1977, Meyers 1988, and Lloyd 1992]."

^{8.} According to Sayre (1969, 3), "Plato's first explicit remarks on methodology" are in the Phaedo; the above passage from the Meno refers to the method of hypothesis, but does not discuss it in "general terms." Sayre is right that the Meno generally leaves more questions unanswered than answered concerning the method of hypothesis. Nevertheless, Plato clearly means to be explaining (however obscurely) at 86E6–87B2 the method he is about to employ.

^{9.} Meyers (1988, 173–74) prudently objects to those who claim that a proper interpretation of the geometrical example is not important for understanding the method of hypothesis described here in the Meno. I am sympathetic with the sentiment, but I am not persuaded by Meyers's interpretation of the problem. For responses to Meyers's objection, see, for example, Heath (1921, 302), Lloyd (1992, 181), and Wolfsdorf (2008b, 52).

the method illustrated is reasonably clear. Socrates describes geometers attempting to answer a question, the answer to which they fail to know. The question, on the Cook Wilson interpretation, 10 is "Can a given area be inscribed in a circle as a triangle?" Let us call this "the inscription question," for short. After expressing their ignorance concerning the answer to this question, the geometers propose a hypothesis ($\dot{\nu}\pi\dot{\omega}\theta\epsilon\sigma\nu$) that may be helpful in answering the inscription question. If the area, when applied to the diameter of a circle, falls short by an area similar to the area applied to the diameter, then the area can be inscribed in a circle as a triangle, and if it cannot be so applied, it cannot be so inscribed. More briefly, the area has the inscription property (i.e., can be inscribed in a circle as triangle) just in case it has the application property (i.e., when applied to the diameter of a circle, falls short by an area similar to the original area applied to the diameter). 11 Let us call this "the bi-conditional." As such, the method appears to be one of reducing one question to another question—reducing the inscription question to what we might call "the application question" 12—and then answering the question to which the original question has been reduced. This is reinforced by Socrates' concluding comment that the geometers are willing to answer the inscription question, whose answer they did not know, in light of their answer to the application question.

^{10.} This interpretation seems to have attained a kind of consensus in recent years. See, for example, Mueller (1992, 178), Menn (2002, 209–15), Scott (2006, 134–37), and Wolfsdorf (2008b, 48–54). Earlier supporters of this interpretation include Heath (1921, I:298–303) and Gulley (1958, 7n1). But nothing about the general structure of the method I discuss later depends on accepting this interpretation.

^{11.} Meyers (1988, 175) objects that "there is no hint whatever in the text" of a bi-conditional. All that is required by the geometrical example, on her interpretation, is that the hypothesis is a sufficient condition for answering the original question. Nevertheless, part of the force of the Cook Wilson interpretation derives from its ability to account for the bi-conditional suggested by the concluding phrase at 87B2 (something which Butcher's [1888] interpretation on which Cook Wilson's was based could not do). (Heijboer (1955) objected that the mathematics involved to account for the bi-conditional on the Cook Wilson interpretation was too complex.) It is difficult to see how we are to understand the concluding phrase without taking it to presuppose the bi-conditional: it is possible to inscribe the area if it can be applied, but if not, not. See, especially, Bluck (1964, 324–25). We will see in chapter 6 that the application of the method of hypothesis to the question whether virtue can be taught also indicates a bi-conditional; see pp. 156–157. It is less clear, however, whether Plato takes this feature of the geometrical example and the application which follows it to be methodologically salient.

^{12.} See *Prior Analytics* 2.25.69a20–36, where Aristotle illustrates the method of reduction $(\dot{\alpha}\pi\alpha\gamma\omega\gamma\dot{\eta})$ by referring to the example pursued in the subsequent passage in the *Meno*. I owe this reference to Menn (2002, 212n25) and Wolfsdorf (2008b, 57). Others who see the method illustrated by this example to be one of reducing one question to another include Vlastos (1991, 123), Lloyd (1992, 166), Scott (2006, 133–34), and Wolfsdorf (2008b, 62).

Here, then, we have Plato's introductory description of the method of hypothesis. The example Plato uses to illustrate his method has the following structure:

Q1: Does the area have the inscription property?

Bi-conditional: The area has the inscription property just in case the area has the application property.

Q2: Does the area have the application property?

A2: The area does (or does not) have the application property.

A1: The area does (or does not) have the inscription property.¹³

This suggests a relatively straightforward answer to Clitophon's challenge. When one wants to acquire knowledge of something on one's own—that is, not from someone else who knows—behave as the geometers do when they are in a similar position. Inquire or examine "from a hypothesis" (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως). That is, find another question whose answer will help to answer the original question. Then, answer this new question and so arrive at the knowledge one sought. End of story. But, this can hardly be the end of the story.

It cannot be the end of the story because the introductory description, as I have just articulated it, leaves too many questions unanswered. First, nothing in this introductory description explains why Plato describes this procedure as "examining from a hypothesis." One wonders what it is to think of something as a hypothesis in this case and which of the steps in the procedure is the hypothesis from which one examines. Moreover, we are also not told how one discovers the bi-conditional by which one identifies the reduced question (Q2). And finally, and perhaps most important, we are not told how one goes about answering the reduced question. What method, one might ask echoing Clitophon, does Plato recommend for seeking out an answer to the reduced question? How does Plato recommend one acquire this knowledge? Without an answer to this last question, Plato's method of hypothesis

^{13.} The generalization of this structure corresponds to the first procedure of the proof stage [Pa]; see pp. 115.

^{14.} A similar question might be asked about Aristotle's discussion of demonstrating what something is in essence by hypothesis (ἀποδεῖξαι τὸ τί ἐστι κατ' οὐσίαν, ἐξ ὑποθέσεως) in *Posterior Analytics* 2.6.

^{15.} Throughout I will refer to the question to which the original question has been reduced (Q2) as the "reduced question," not the question that has been reduced. The latter question (Q1) I will refer to as the "original question."

understood as an attempt to respond to Clitophon's challenge looks like a nonstarter.¹⁶

I maintain that the geometrical illustration leaves these questions open. If we are to answer these questions we will need to look elsewhere, in particular we will need to look to other Platonic descriptions and depictions. Given the conservative approach I have described above, all that we can safely conclude from this illustration is the very general thin structure indicated by our initial reading. Plato recommends by means of this rather obscure illustration that, when one seeks to discover *de novo* the answer to a question, one should adopt the procedure of the geometers and turn to a second question (however it is to be discovered) whose answer (whatever its initial cognitive valence and however it is to be acquired) will help (whether by being a necessary and sufficient condition of the answer to the original question or in some other way) in answering the original question. And when one does this, one is in some way "examining from a hypothesis" (whatever or however many things, whether propositions or otherwise, are hypotheses).

What Is Meant by "Hypothesis"?

Let us begin by asking why Plato describes this method as "examining from a hypothesis." Richard Robinson investigated more than five decades ago what referring to something as a hypothesis (hupothesis/ $\dot{\nu}\pi\dot{o}\theta\epsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$) means throughout Plato's corpus. According to Robinson's investigation of Plato's use of the word and its cognates (including the root verb $\tau(\theta\eta\mu\iota)$ "[t]he noun 'hypothesis' in Plato always means that which is posited as a beginning, whether a beginning of practice or of deduction" and that "[w]hat is posited is always provisional and tentative." More recently, David Wolfsdorf has argued that in fourth-century

^{16.} Plato cannot think that merely finding the bi-conditional and then assuming one or the other answer to the reduced questions suffices. The geometers do not simply assume any random answer to the reduced question, but they set out to determine its correct answer. *Pace* Rose (1970, 1). N.b: a similar regress objection has been raised against the theory of recollection as a response to *Meno*'s paradox. But, the objection here has more force than in the recollection case. In the latter case, the issues surrounding disembodied knowledge acquisition were potentially different from those surrounding embodied acquisition. Directed inquiry may not be at stake and a kind of direct access may be available which is not available to the embodied soul. One is hard pressed to see how these differences would apply to the reduced question in the hypothesis case.

^{17.} Robinson (1953, 69).

^{18.} Robinson (1953, 94). According to Robinson, provisionality is one of the five features of the method of hypothesis that can be summed up in five words: "hypothesis, deduction, consistency, provisionality, and approximation" (Robinson 1953, 109). Since Robinson thinks that the method described and applied in the *Meno* does not exemplify provisionality, he denies that the method introduced in the *Meno* is "very like Platonic hypothetical method in

Greek intellectual contexts, including Plato, hupothesis is used to mean "postulate"—that is, "cognitively secure proposition." In doing so, Wolfsdorf takes himself to be rejecting Robinson's well-entrenched tradition according to which Platonic *hupotheseis* are hypotheses—that is, provisionally accepted propositions.¹⁹ Dominic Scott has argued, however, that if we fail to recognize the provisionality of the *hupotheseis* we will fail to distinguish the method illustrated in this example from any other Socratic argument; ²⁰ for every Socratic argument depends upon premises that are taken as more cognitively secure than its conclusion. As a result, we will fail to do justice to the context of the introduction of the method of hypothesis. ²¹ The context, according to Scott, is a concession to Meno's unwillingness to pursue an answer to the "What is virtue?" question. If Socrates is to continue his inquiry concerning the teachability of virtue without completely abandoning his commitment to the priority of definitional knowledge, he must proceed on a provisional assumption (or hypothesis) concerning the nature of virtue.²² But, I have argued that the context of the introduction of the method of hypothesis is wider. The method of hypothesis is being introduced not merely as a method for attempting to acquire knowledge when the method of acquiring knowledge of a definition is somehow blocked. Rather, the method is introduced as a method for acquiring knowledge on one's own from

general." Here is a clear example of how different starting points shape one's understanding of the method. Others who adopt the provisionality feature include Ross (1951, 28), Bluck (1961, 85–91), C. Taylor (1967, 194–96), Bailey (2005, 100n5), and Scott (2006, 138–40).

^{19.} In calling Platonic hupotheseis propositions I simply mean to be following Wolfsdorf at this point. In the Meno, the hupotheseis do appear to be propositions of the form "a given area has the inscription property just in case it has the application property," "a given area has the application property," "something is knowledge just in case it is teachable," "virtue is knowledge," "virtue is good." In the *Phaedo*, *hupotheseis* appear to be things, like Forms or aitia, or theories, like the theory of Forms or theory of causation or both; pace Bluck (1955, 161-62); see pp. 189-198. Finally, in the Republic, Plato appears to refer to things like the odd, the even, the figures, and the three kinds of angles (Republic 6.510C3-5) as hupotheseis; see p. 247. I prefer to refer to Platonic hupotheseis as things that serve as robustly unknown starting points in a discovery procedure. Whether Plato takes such things to be propositions, theories, objects, and/or Forms I believe is under-determined by the text, and perhaps goes beyond Plato's own explicit thinking. For a similar sentiment (confined to dialogues prior to the Theaetetus), see Wolfsdorf (2008b, 182a).

^{20.} Wolfsdorf (2008b, 177–81) appears happy to accept this result. See note 4, chapter 4.

^{21.} Scott (2006, 222-24). Scott's argument is aimed at the bi-conditional interpretation according to which the hypothesis is "the given area has the inscription property just in case it has the application property." Scott takes the argument against the bi-conditional interpretation to depend on his argument for the provisionality of the hupotheseis.

^{22.} See also Bluck (1964, 76).

(robust) ignorance, ²³ rather than from one who knows. This wider context indicates that the essential feature of a *hupothesis* is not that it is provisional but that it is not (robustly) known. If it were otherwise, then the *hupothesis* would either be known by the teacher and the method of hypothesis would fail to provide a method of *de novo* learning, or the *hupothesis* would be known by the inquirer and the question of knowledge acquisition would have only been pushed back to how knowledge of the *hupothesis* is learned. ²⁴ What is essential about *hypotheseis* in the context of their introduction in the *Meno* is not that they are cognitively secure or provisional, but that they are (robustly) unknown starting points. ²⁵ That is what accounts for their role in pursuing *de novo* learning. That is what makes the procedure an inquiry or examination "from a hypothesis."

Consequently, I will return to the translation of *hupotheseis* as "hypotheses" henceforth. But in doing so I do not mean to be presupposing an answer to the question whether they should be understood as cognitively secure or provisional. The context of the introduction of the method of hypothesis indicates that for Plato hypotheses are roughly: [i] starting points of a rational discovery procedure²⁶ [ii] that are not yet (robustly) known.²⁷ This, at least, is what makes the

^{23.} Recall that by "robust ignorance" I simply mean lack of robust knowledge; see note 35, chapter 3.

^{24.} See note 16, this chapter.

^{25.} See Rose (1970, 2) and Santas (1980, 252-53).

^{26.} For the connection between *hupotheseis* and beginnings or *archai*, see also Menn (2002, 217–18, n33), Huffman (1993, 78–92), and Netz (2003, 309).

^{27.} Even Wolfsdorf takes the cognitive security of the *hupotheseis* to lie somewhere between Platonic true belief and the Platonic robust knowledge that requires "a 'reasoning of the cause." See Wolfsdorf (2008b, 41; 2008a, 181). J. Cooper (2004, 21) maintains that On Ancient Medicine "is very probably the first recorded use of those words [the noun and its related verb] to indicate a ὑπόθεσις of some sort in any context of logical argument, theoretical analysis, or explanation." For the author of *On Ancient Medicine* they were used to indicate "an underlying idea or basic conception or foundational notion that one puts forward, and on which one can then construct a body of explanatory theory in some area"; J. Cooper (2004, 23). According to Cooper, these words had a negative connotation for the author of On Ancient Medicine, associating the use of hypotheseis with his Empedoclean opponents, whose hypotheseis were arbitrary, or merely plausible. Nevertheless, the author's own "basic conception or foundational notion" fell short of robust knowledge as well (cf. "complete knowledge," J. Cooper 2004, 12). That, I take it, is Cooper's point in describing the first discovers' starting point as a "proto-theory." Thus, Plato's diverse uses of *hypothesis* (cf. J. Cooper 2004, 19n22) have this in common: they are all meant to be "an underlying idea or basic conception or foundational notion that one puts forward, and on which one can then construct a body of explanatory theory in some area" which is robustly unknown. Sometimes they are explicitly conditional and no other considerations are offered on their behalf; sometimes they are offered as justifications or explanations which fall short of robust knowledge; and sometimes they are mistakenly taken to be robustly known.

examination "from a hypothesis." It is a method that begins from something not yet known (as we would expect). Such an understanding is compatible with both Plato's word usage and beyond. How cognitively secure these hypotheses need to be must await an examination of Plato's other descriptions and/or depictions. Plato's introductory description leaves this undetermined. Consequently, we should not dismiss passages as evidence of Plato's method of hypothesis because he uses *hupothesis* for a cognitively secure or provisional proposition.

Which Step Is the Hypothesis?

A similar answer awaits the related²⁸ issue concerning which step in the procedure is the hypothesis. It is natural to read 87A2-7,

but I think I have as it were a hypothesis (ὥσπερ μέν τινα ὑπόθεσιν) that would help towards the question, as follows: if this area is such that when it is applied to the given line [sc. the diameter of the circle], it falls short by an area similar to the applied area, then one thing seems to me to follow, but another if it is impossible for this to happen. ²⁹

as indicating that the hypothesis is "the area has the ascription property just in case it has the application property." Let us call this the "bi-conditional interpretation." But others have thought³⁰ that, when Plato writes at the end of the passage at 87A7–B2 that "So after hypothesizing (ὑποθέμενος) I am willing to tell you what follows about inscribing [the area] in the circle, whether it is impossible or not,"31 he indicates that the hypothesis is that the area has the application property, or that the area lacks the application property.³² It is only after hypothesizing one or the other of these answers to the reduced question (Q2) that one should be willing to answer the original question (Q1).

^{28.} Those who take the hypothesis to be the bi-conditional are inclined to take the hypothesis as cognitively secure, while those who take the hypothesis to be the right-hand side of the bi-conditional or its negation are inclined to take the hypothesis as provisional. See note 21, this chapter.

^{29.} Menn (2002, 209).

^{30.} See, for example, Bedu-Addo (1984, 6, 6n22). He maintains that the qualification "as it were" (ὤσπερ μέν τινα) at 87A2 indicates that the conditional statements that follow are not hypotheses in the strict sense of the word.

^{31.} Menn (2002, 209).

^{32.} Bedu-Addo (1984, 6) translates ὑποθέμενος οὖν ἐθέλω εἰπεῖν σοι τὸ συμβαῖνον as "accordingly, I should like to make a hypothesis and tell you the result...."

As far as the text of the introductory description goes, both the bi-conditional and the answer to the reduced question have a claim to be called the hypothesis and both play an important role in the procedure. The bi-conditional enables the inquirer to identify the question to which the original question has been reduced, and the answer to the reduced question provides an answer to the original question. But which of these—the bi-conditional or the answer to the reduced question—is the hypothesis the text of Plato's introductory illustration leaves open.³³ And, one ought not dismiss passages that do require one or the other of these answers as thereby useless for understanding Plato's introductory illustration.

How Is the Q2 Discovered?

Concerning the question how the bi-conditional by which one identifies the reduced question is to be discovered, some have thought that a careful examination of the briefly illustrated geometrical example will prove helpful. According to the Cook Wilson interpretation, the bi-conditional is in fact discovered by means of geometrical analysis, and Stephen Menn has plausibly argued that Plato is alluding to geometrical analysis with this example here in the *Meno*. Menn maintains that "it is tolerably certain, . . . that Plato was aware of analysis as a distinctive geometrical practice." Thus, Plato *could be* alluding to geometrical analysis with this example in the *Meno*. And, Menn maintains that "Plato is recommending a method for finding appropriate hypotheses" in the current passage and the method by which this is in fact done in the geometrical example

^{33.} Thus, Bedu-Addo (1984, 6) and Mueller (1992, 178–79), for example, take both of these propositions to be hypotheses. Mueller calls the bi-conditional the "theorem" in the geometrical example and the "hypothesis-theorem" in the virtue application, and the answer to the reduced question the "diorismos" in the geometrical example and the "hypothesis-lemma" in the virtue application. Menn (2002, 209–10) explicitly takes the proposition "that the given area can be applied to the diameter of the given circle (in the form of a rectangle) in such a way that it falls short by a figure similar to the applied area" as the (a?) hypothesis. According to Robinson (1953, 121), what is hypothesized in the case of geometrical analysis is a positive answer to the original question. Since whatever is being hypothesized at 87A7–B2, it cannot be a positive answer to the ascription question, Robinson concludes Plato cannot be alluding to geometrical analysis with this example.

^{34.} And that Plato "at least experimented with taking [geometrical analysis] as a model for philosophical reasoning"; Menn (2002, 196).

^{35.} Menn (2002, 204). Menn's evidence for Plato's awareness is three passages in Aristotle (*Posterior Analytics* 1.12.78a6–13, *Sophistical Refutations* 16.175a26–28, *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.3.1112b15–27). All three of these passages testify to a familiarity in the Academy with geometrical analysis.

^{36.} Menn (2002, 212).

is the method of geometrical analysis. So, Menn concludes that Plato is here alluding to the method of geometrical analysis for arriving at the bi-conditional.

Menn's argument depends upon the claim that Plato is recommending a method for finding appropriate hypotheses. But this is not, it seems to me, what Plato is recommending. Rather, I have argued, Plato is recommending a method for learning on one's own (and not by learning from someone who knows) the knowledge of the answer to the question whether virtue can be taught (especially when one lacks knowledge of the answer to the question "What is virtue?"). His recommendation is to proceed as geometers do when they do not know an answer to a question. They (at least sometimes) reduce the original question to another question and attempt to answer the latter question. To find in this passage a recommendation for how to carry out such a reduction—that is, how to find an appropriate hypothesis—is to find in this passage more than there is.

Of course, Menn would likely agree. As he puts it,

In giving the geometrical example, Plato leaves it mysterious how the geometer finds the appropriate hypothesis: on a superficial reading, it looks as if the geometer is simply guessing, or intuitively divining that the hypothesis . . . would be useful for investigating the problem at hand; it would then be just a lucky coincidence, or a confirmation of the geometer's power of intuition, that the hypothesis turns out to be necessary and sufficient for solving the problem.³⁷

Menn concludes his careful explication of how geometrical analysis does lead one to the bi-conditional by maintaining that the example provides a "perfect proof for Gaiser's thesis that Plato's dialogues allude to doctrines that they do not fully explain, in an attempt to rouse Plato's readers to seek further enlightenment in the Academy."³⁸ Those on the cutting edge of the geometry of the day will recognize the recommendation of geometrical analysis. The rest of us will, at best, be encouraged to take up geometry in the Academy.

This strikes me as an odd way to recommend a method for finding the biconditional required for following Plato's recommended method of learning. Plato has offered a relatively straightforward explication (the theory of recollection) and illustration (the conversation with the slave) of the possibility of

^{37.} Menn (2002, 212). See also Vlastos (1991, 123).

^{38.} Menn (2002, 215).

purposively coming to know on one's own the answer to a question one fails to know. But when Plato turns to recommending the method to do so, he becomes obscurantist and cultish.³⁹

Nevertheless, I do not mean to suggest that Plato could not be recommending geometrical analysis in this passage, as Menn suggests. My present point is more modest. It is simply that nothing in the passage requires such a recommendation. What Plato recommends is that when one attempts on one's own (i.e., not from a teacher) to learn the answer to a question one fails to know, one should follow the example of the geometers and reduce that question to another question and then set out to answer the reduced question. If Plato is also recommending that the way to identify the reduced question is by engaging in geometrical analysis, Plato's use of his obscure geometrical example does not require this, and we will need to look at Plato's other introductory descriptions and depictions of his method to discover such a recommendation. Again, Platonic passages which do not indicate a requirement of geometrical analysis should not, at least on the basis of Plato's introductory description, be dismissed as evidence for Plato's understanding of the method of hypothesis.

^{39.} Menn (2002, 215n31) cites with approval Heath's (1921, 302) comment "Plato was fond of dark hints in things mathematical." But it is one thing to be fond of "dark hints" and another thing to be offering a recommendation by means of these "dark hints." I prefer a Vlastosian reading of these "dark hints" according to which Plato is "preening himself" for his geometrical achievement; Vlastos (1991, 123). Only those on the cutting edge of contemporary geometry can keep up with Plato, but all of us can understand and follow his recommendations. See also Scott (2006, 137).

^{40.} I should also point out that the specific interpretation of geometrical analysis which Menn depends on is not required by Plato's text nor is it uncontroversial. According to Menn, geometrical analysis has roughly the following form. First, one assumes a positive answer to the original question—for example, that the given area has the inscription property. Then, one draws various inferences from that positive answer until one reaches a proposition that "clicks." It is either somehow just known to be true or known to be false. If it is known to be false, one concludes by *modus tollens* that the positive answer is false—i.e., that the original question should be answered negatively. If the proposition entailed is known to be true, one tries to reverse the inferences, deriving the positive answer to the original question from the proposition known to be true. If one succeeds, one has a proof—at least to the degree that the proposition is known to be true—of the positive answer. If one does not succeed, one keeps looking for an inference that does reverse. While there is no guarantee that such a reversible proposition can be found, as Menn puts it, "it does very frequently happen that steps of geometrical arguments are reversible . . . , and in carrying out the analysis intelligently we will try to avoid obviously non-reversible steps"; Menn (2002, 198). The process of inferences from the positive answer to a proposition known to be true is analysis, and the process back from the proposition known to be true to the positive answer to the original question is synthesis. Not everyone, however, would accept Menn's interpretation that the analysis portion of the method consists in inferences from the positive answer to the original question. Other commentators take analysis to consist in looking for premises from which a positive answer to the original question can be deduced. See, for example, Farquharson (1923), Cornford

How Is A2 Discovered?

Finally, one might wonder how the answer to the reduced question is to be discovered. If Plato does not have an answer to this question, the significance of Plato's recommended method for de novo inquiry is suspect. In the introductory description, Plato recommends that when one wants to purposively learn an answer to a question one does not know without learning this answer from another who knows it, one should reduce the original question to another question and seek to discover the answer to the reduced question. But how does Plato recommend that one seek to purposively acquire that knowledge on one's own?

To pick up on a suggestion from Menn's interpretation, Plato may recommend that one continues this reduction process—reducing one question to another—until one reaches a question the answer to which just "clicks." One knows in some sort of immediate way what the answer is. Unfortunately, there is no evidence of an appeal to such a "click" in our text. 41 Alternatively, perhaps Plato takes the reduced question to be in some way more epistemically tractable. For example, Plato may take the reduced question to be one which can be answered by employing one's sensory experience. 42 Unfortunately, Plato's general hostility to sense experience makes this particular response look unpromising. 43 On the other hand, nothing in the introductory description rules out an appeal to sensory experience either, or to a "click" for that matter. Perhaps more troubling, the application question (the reduced question) may not have been solvable at the time of the writing of the Meno, depending as it does (at least

^{(1932, 43-50),} Lee (1935), Gulley (1958), Bluck (1964, 77n1), perhaps Hintikka and Remes (1974, 7-21), and Mueller (1992, 175). On behalf of Menn's pattern, see Heath (1926, 137-42), Cherniss (1951, 414-19), Robinson (1936, 464; 1953, 166), Mahoney (1968, 321), Knorr (1986, 354-57), Behboud (1994, 53), and Wolfsdorf (2008b, 54-55, 54n50). I owe many of these references to Wolfsdorf's careful discussion. One of the virtues of Menn's interpretation is that it explains the salience of the bi-conditional, as opposed to simply the conditional (for example, "if the area has the application property, then the area has the ascription property"). One of the vices is the relative scarcity of such bi-conditionals, especially outside of mathematics.

^{41.} Other than, I suppose, that such "clicks" just do occur in the case of geometrical analysis. In the final section of Menn's paper (2002, 219-23), he connects this "click" to the activation of habitual knowledge, roughly what I called in chapter 4 "tactic" or "latent" knowledge. Menn's "click" corresponds to my earlier talk of the "Aha!" feeling.

^{42.} On Meyers's (1988, 177–78) interpretation of the geometrical example, the application condition (which is only sufficient not necessary on her interpretation) can simply be seen to be met.

^{43.} See, for example, pp. 110–111.

according to the Cook Wilson interpretation) on the use of conics. 44 If this is so, then Plato will have appealed to an example of a reduced question whose answer he realized was unknown.

In the end, our introductory text remains silent on how the answer to the reduced question (A2) is to be discovered. Plato tells us that when attempting to discover *de novo* knowledge of an answer to a question one should reduce that question to another question. But he does not tell us how to go about purposively answering that reduced question, other than perhaps to reduce that question to a third question, and so on.

Conclusion of the Meno's Description

The Meno's introductory description of his recommended method for de novo learning is baffling. On the one hand, its general recommendation is simple and straightforward. When one seeks to learn on one's own, one should reduce the original question (Q1) whose answer one seeks to know to another question (Q2) and answer this latter question (A2), and so answer the original question accordingly (A1). On the other hand, the simplicity and brevity of this recommendation leaves much unexplained. The method is hypothetical to the extent that it relies on beginning the search from things that are recognized as not yet (robustly) known, but whether the hypothesis, so understood, is the biconditional by which one identifies the reduced question, or the answer to the reduced question from which the answer to the original question is obtained, is left open. Plato's use of the geometrical example in this passage may indicate that the procedure to acquire the bi-conditional, and so the reduced question, is the method of geometrical analysis, although it need not. 45 Alternatively, Plato may simply be using this geometrical example to recommend the general procedure of reducing the original question to another. Finally, Plato's appeal to this geometrical example may indicate the way in which the answer to the reduced question is to be determined, but it may not. Moreover, the fact that the answer to the geometrical example's reduced question may not have been known at the time

^{44.} See Menn (2002, 214), who thinks the solution is in the air at the time of the writing of the *Meno*, and Wolfsdorf (2008b, 50), who thinks the solution postdates the writing of the *Meno*. Bluck (1964, 448–49) cites Heijboer (1955, 95) and Heath (1921, 301) approvingly for the claim that it was unlikely that Plato knew the solution at the time of the writing of the *Meno*. Bluck takes this as a reason for rejecting the Cook Wilson interpretation since Bluck takes 87A7–B2 to indicate that the reduced problem had a recognized solution.

^{45.} And the text is silent concerning the nature of the method of geometrical analysis to which Plato is referring; see note 40, this chapter.

of the composition of the Meno obscures which way of answering the reduced question Plato is recommending by this example. In sum, Plato's initial description of the method of hypothesis in the Meno is exceedingly thin. To thicken our understanding of Plato's recommended method of de novo inquiry we will need to look elsewhere. Plato's initial description of the method of hypothesis fails to go very far.

The Description in the Phaedo Phaedo 100A3-8

Perhaps we can begin to thicken Plato's initial description of the method of hypothesis by returning to the introduction of the method at Phaedo 99C6-100A8. In the [C] portion of this introduction, Plato appears to describe the method he has been illustrating by means of the obscure geometrical example in the Meno. Recall that after agreeing to provide a display of how, following his previous failed attempts, he busied himself with an investigation into the aitia of generation and destruction, an investigation by means of logoi, Socrates says

[C]..., I started in this manner: taking as my hypothesis (ὑποθέμενος) in each case the *logos* that seemed to me the most compelling (κρίνω ἐρρωμενέστατον), I would consider as true, about aitia and everything else, whatever agreed (συμφωνεῖν) with this, and as untrue whatever did not so agree. But I want to put my meaning more clearly for I do not think that you understand me now. (Phaedo 100A3-8)46

On an initial reading of the text the method again appears clear enough. Socrates testifies to hypothesizing some *logos* that he judged to be most compelling, and setting down as true whatever agreed with this logos and setting down as not true whatever did not agree. Nevertheless, like the Meno description, a variety of questions arise. Gallop summarizes "the main" questions as follows:

(1) What is meant at 100A4 by ["taking as my hypothesis in each case the logos that seemed to me the most compelling"]?⁴⁷ (2) How can the metaphor of ["agree"] (A5) be interpreted in such a way that "putting

^{46.} Henceforth, I will refer to Phaedo 100A3-8 as "the Phaedo's introductory description of the method of hypothesis."

^{47.} I here insert Grube's translation for Gallop's translation of ὑποθέμενος ἐκάστοτε λόγον δν αν κρίνω ἐρρωμενέστατον εἶναι. Similarly, for συμφωνεῖν, later.

down as true whatever things seem to me to [agree] with it, and as not true whatever do not" will seem a logically defensible procedure? (3) How is this procedure related to its context, especially to the illustrations at 100B–101C;⁴⁸

We will return to the third question later, in chapter 7.⁴⁹ For now, I focus on the first two. I begin by comparing this passage with the introductory illustration of the method of hypothesis from the *Meno*.

Of course, an objection to this way of proceeding immediately arises. Robinson, for example, has maintained that the description of the method of hypothesis from the *Phaedo* refers to a different method from the one illustrated by the obscure geometrical example in the *Meno*. His reasons are twofold. First, he maintains that the direction of the deductive or rational procedure in the *Meno* goes almost wholly *toward* the hypothesis, rather than *from* it, while here in the *Phaedo* the direction of the deduction is *from* the hypothesis, rather than *to* it. Second, according to Robinson, "the elements of provisionality and approximation seem to be absent" in the *Meno*, while they are present in the *Phaedo*.⁵⁰

One can see immediately why this objection should not detain us, given my decision to begin with descriptions and to proceed conservatively. Robinson's objection presupposes a more elaborate account of the nature of the method

^{48.} Gallop (1975, 178).

^{49.} I will, however, be maintaining in the present chapter that the "procedure," as Gallop calls it, is meant to be fully general and that it is offered as the procedure Socrates allegedly employed in order to acquire the knowledge of the answer to the question "What is the *aitia* of generation and destruction?"; *pace*, for example, Bluck (1955, 167–68,173), and Rowe (1993a, 54; 1996, 237). Others who take the method as meant to be fully general include Gallop (1975, 166, 181), Bostock (1986, 157), Blank (1986, 151n20), Mueller (1992, 181), and Dancy (2004, 294).

^{50.} Robinson (1953, 12). I have encountered the objection that the two methods are distinct more often in conversation, than in print. In print, others who apparently agree with Robinson include Weiss (2001, 187n10), Wolfsdorf (2008a, 179), and perhaps J. Cooper (2004, 19n22). Weiss (2001, 187n10) does not offer any reasons for taking the two methods as distinct. Wolfsdorf (2008a, 179) takes at least one distinguishing feature to be the reduction of one more difficult question to another less difficult question found in the *Meno*, but not in the *Phaedo*. We will see below that the method of hypothesis as I understand it, and at least as applied in the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, does include this feature, although not explicitly. J. Cooper (2004, 22), I think, takes the distinguishing features of the *Meno*'s method to be the connection with mathematics and the corresponding formal process of deduction which he thinks are absent in the *Phaedo*. I have already indicated that the strength of the connection to mathematics and formality of the process outside of mathematics is underdetermined by the text of the *Meno*.

of hypothesis than we have uncovered from Plato's initial description of the method in the *Meno*. If any evidence for the direction of the deduction appears in the Meno's initial description, it goes from the hypothesis proposed in the geometrical example—either the bi-conditional or the positive or negative positing of the right hand side of that bi-conditional—to the answer to the inscription question. That is, the deduction goes from the hypothesis. One can contend, as Menn, for example, does, that the description refers to a particular version of geometrical analysis and so indicates a method of arriving at the bi-conditional or an answer to the reduced question which would suggest a direction of deduction to the hypothesis. But, as we saw, none of that is required by the initial description. Robinson's evidence that the deduction goes in the other direction comes from his examination of the application of the method of hypothesis to the question whether virtue is teachable in the passage that follows our obscure geometrical illustration. We have not, however, even begun to examine the application of the method in the Meno, choosing instead to get as clear a description of the method as possible before attempting to identify the application.⁵¹ Consequently, if we begin with the descriptions, this alleged difference between the two presentations of the method does not arise (at least yet). Moreover, our conservative procedure had the result that the evidence of the Meno's geometrical illustration left under-determined the provisionality of the hypothesis. All that appeared required from the initial description was that the hypothesis failed to be (robustly) known. But the initial description left open the degree of cognitive security required of the hypothesis. Consequently, Robinson's second alleged difference also does not (yet) arise. The point is that Plato's initial description of the method of hypothesis in the Meno is so under-described that it provides no reason to maintain that the Phaedo passage is referring to a different method. Both the Meno and the Phaedo passages appear to refer to a recommended method of knowledge acquisition that does not depend on learning from others who know and does depend on appealing to hypotheses. If the methods described in the two passages are found to conflict, then we will be forced to see them as referring to distinct methods. But so far we have no reason to see a conflict and so, for the moment at least, we should consider the possibility that

^{51.} This is particularly salient, since I will be arguing (in chapter 6) that if we begin with a description of the method of hypothesis based on the Meno and Phaedo descriptions we will see that the method as applied in the Meno actually extends to Meno 96D. But in the application from 89D-96D the deduction goes from the hypothesis. Robinson thinks the application stops at Meno 89C, and so thinks the deduction as applied in the Meno only goes to the hypothesis. This really is a bootstrapping affair.

they are compatible and see what the two passages together can tell us about the nature of Plato's method of hypothesis.⁵²

To return to the Meno, Socrates considers a question the answer to which he does not yet know: Is virtue teachable? (Meno 86C8). To acquire this knowledge Socrates recommends that, like a geometer, one propose another question whose answer, if posited in one way, leads to one answer to the original question and whose answer, if posited in another, leads to the other answer to the original question. Then, one sets out to answer this second, or reduced, question. We saw, however, that the initial description in the Meno provided little guidance for how to discover the reduced question, nor how to go about answering it. Here in the Phaedo, Socrates is again faced with a question whose answer he fails to know:53 "What is the aitia of generation and destruction?" (95E9-96A1), which we have called "the aitia question." And Socrates explains that he ultimately employed the method he is describing at 100A3-8 in an attempt to learn the answer. If the parallel with the *Meno* is meant to hold, we should expect Socrates to explain that he looked for a second question whose answer, if posited in one way, leads to one answer to this question, and if posited in another way, leads to another answer; and then he set about answering this second question. Thus, the parallel with the Meno suggests that in order to answer the question "What is the aitia of generation and destruction?" (Q1), one looks for another question (Q2) that answers the *aitia* question and seeks to answer this reduced question. Then one sets down as the answer to the aitia question (A1) the answer that agrees with the answer to the reduced question (A2), and as not true the answer that does not agree with the answer to the reduced question.

Understood in this way, the [C] portion of Plato's introductory passage provides a fairly immediate answer to Gallop's first question: What is meant at 100A4 by "taking as my hypothesis in each case the *logos* that seemed to me the most compelling"? "To take as one's hypothesis in each case the *logos* that seemed to me most compelling" is to answer the reduced question in the way that one

^{52.} See Dancy (2004, 296), who thinks that the words $\dot{\nu}\pi$ 0θέμενος at 100A3, B5, 101D7, and $\dot{\nu}\pi\dot{\nu}$ 0θεσις at 101D2, 3, 7, and 107B5 "are enough in themselves to connect what is done here with what is said in the *Meno*." Others who think that the same method is being referred to (if imperfectly) include Cherniss (1947, 169), Hackforth (1955, 141), Bluck (1964, 87–90), Sayre (1969, 3n1), Bostock (1986, 166), Kahn (1996, 315–19), Gonzalez (1998a, 197–99), and Scott (2006, 139–40).

^{53.} At least, at this point in his narration of his intellectual history. See Bedu-Addo (1979, 111), who thinks that 95D6–E1 indicates that Socrates professes to know that the soul is immortal and so presumably the premises of the final proof of the soul's immortality. Against this, however, see pp. 202–203, this volume.

judges most compelling. Thus, the comparison with the Meno indicates that the logos hypothesized is the answer to the reduced question judged to be most compelling, whatever Plato takes such an answer to be.⁵⁴ To return to the *Meno* example, if the answer to the application question that is most compelling is that the area has the application property, then this is the logos hypothesized and judged to be most compelling.⁵⁵ Understood in this way, the method appears to be fully general as is indicated by the phrases "in each case" at 100A4 and "everything else" at 100A6.56 Nevertheless, a logos is not hypothesized in the abstract, but in the context of a specific question—the answer to which one seeks to know.⁵⁷

It may be objected to this alleged parallel with the Meno that unlike the Meno's questions,58 the Phaedo's aitia question is not a "yes or no" question. It is more open-ended.⁵⁹ And this difference between the two dialogues raises special difficulties for identifying a second question whose most compelling answer suffices to answer the original question. But before we place too much weight on this difference between the two passages, we should recall that the original *Meno* question was not a "yes or no" question, either. Rather, the original Meno question concerned how virtue was acquired—by teaching, or practice, or nature, or in some other way (Meno 70A1–4 and 86C7–D2). When forced to consider this question (rather than the question he prefers to consider, "What is virtue?"), Socrates treats it, without comment, as "Is virtue teachable (or not)?" Socrates has substituted a "yes or no" question for a broader question 60 without comment.

^{54.} An additional aspect of Gallop's first question, however, remains unresolved. The comparison with the Meno leaves open whether the answer to the reduced question (A2)—i.e., the logos hypothesized is meant to be a proposition, a theory, a definition, or even, I suppose, an object. It does, however, tell against Gallop's view (supported by Rowe 1993a, 1996) that the hypothesis under consideration in the *Phaedo*'s application is the conjunction of the theory of Forms and the theory that Forms are the aitia of generation and destruction; pace, for example, van Eck (1994, 1996). For more on this dispute, see pp. 198-204.

^{55.} See p. 138-139 for what is meant by "most compelling."

^{56.} See note 49, this chapter.

^{57.} See McLarty (2005, 126) and Mueller (1992, 181). I concede that the *Phaedo* does not explicitly refer to a reduced question. My point is simply that we can come to terms with Gallop's first question and contextualize the *logos* hypothesized by seeing it as the most compelling answer to an implicit reduced question, as suggested by the Meno.

^{58.} By the Meno's questions I mean both "Does the area have the inscription property?" and "Is virtue teachable?"

^{59.} Belnap and Steel (1976, 19-34) would classify the Meno's questions as a type of whetherquestion and the *Phaedo*'s question as a which-question.

^{60.} By a "broader question" I mean one which presents as its subject more alternatives; see Belnap and Steel (1976, 16-34).

So this difference is apparently unremarkable at least as far as Plato is concerned. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the *Phaedo*'s question appears broader still than the *Meno*'s original question, leaving inexplicit the alternatives available for its answer. While we might plausibly collect a list of available alternatives from the description of Socrates' intellectual history, there is no reason to suppose this list is exhaustive nor any evidence for the justification of such a list. Of course, similar worries may apply to the list of alternatives in the *Meno*'s original question.

But to return to the description of the method of hypothesis, this difference between the *Meno*'s questions and the *Phaedo*'s question, need not disturb the parallelism with the *Meno*. Such a difference affects how the reduced question is to be found more than it does the recommendation to find such a reduced question. The broader the original question, the less likely one will be able to strictly reduce the original question to another. Discovering a second question whose answer will *determine* an answer to the original question will become more difficult the further away one moves from a "yes or no" question. ⁶³ But we have already seen that the project of discovering the reduced question was left

^{61.} Although Plato's use of the phrase "or in some other way" at both *Meno* 70A3–4 and 86D1 indicates that Plato may not have agreed that the *Phaedo*'s question is broader. According to Belnap and Steel (1976), which-questions are distinguished from whether-questions in virtue of their presentation of alternatives. Whether-questions present a finite set of alternatives, which set is explicitly (or nearly explicitly) contained in the question. For example, the whether-question "Is it raining or snowing?" presents the alternatives "It is raining" or "It is snowing" as the only alternatives from which the respondent can choose. Which-questions "present their alternatives by reference to a matrix and one or more category conditions" (Belnap and Steel 1976, 22).

^{62.} Among the alternatives suggested by Socrates' intellectual history are ordinary physical properties, objects, or processes (like heat, cold, blood, air, fire (96A9–B9), flesh, bone, a head (96C8–E5), addition, division (96E6–97B3)), or *nous* or mind (97B8–C6); or Forms (like beauty, bigness, tallness (100C9–E7), shape, and color (100D1–2)).

^{63.} In the relatively simple case of a "yes or no" (or any only two alternative) question like "Is a F?" one simply needs to discover another property G such that the strongest answer to the question "Is a G?" suffices to answer the question "Is a F?" This can be accomplished when G is a sufficient condition for F and the most compelling answer to "Is a G?" is yes, when G is a necessary condition for F and the most compelling answer is no, and when G is necessary and sufficient for F, whichever answer is most compelling. As the number of alternatives increases ("Is a F or G or H?"), so do the number of potential "reduced questions" and so the difficulty of hitting on the correct one, one whose strongest answer determines the answer to the original question, until one reaches the limit of "What is a?" where the difficulty of hitting on the correct reduced question looks unfathomable. In these cases, one seeks questions which may simply serve to limit the potential options and in conjunction with other hypotheses may serve to answer the original question. Such questions prove *helpful* in answering the

under-determined in the Meno passage and yet the recommendation remained to find a second, reduced question that would be helpful in answering the original question. Thus, the parallel with the Meno suggests that at Phaedo 100A3-8 Plato is recommending that in order to answer the question "What is the aitia of generation and destruction?" one should look for another question that ideally determines, but minimally helps with, the answer to the *aitia* question, and then choose the answer to this question that one judges to be most compelling. But, again, how one is to discover such a question is left open, and this discovery becomes especially difficult in the case of the wider-ranging question of the *Phaedo*. Nevertheless, having hit upon such a reduced question, and having hypothesized its most compelling answer, one sets down as true the answer to the aitia question that agrees with this *logos* and as not true the answer that does not.

Here, then, we arrive at Gallop's second question. This question involves a sort of vagueness or equivocation surrounding the metaphor (if it is a metaphor) of agreement. Plato's use of "agree" or συμφωνεῖν might be rendered as "is consistent with" or "is entailed by," but both of these renderings are problematic. For example, suppose one hypothesizes the logos that the given area in the Meno illustration has the application property because one judges it to be the most compelling answer to the application question. Plato might be recommending that one consider as true whatever is consistent with that *logos* and as not true whatever is not consistent with it; alternatively, he might be recommending that one consider true whatever is entailed by that *logos* and as not true whatever is not entailed by that *logos*. If the former, then Plato will be plausibly recommending that one consider not true whatever is not consistent with the given area having the application property (at least until one can confirm the hypothesized *logos*); but, he will also be implausibly recommending that one consider true whatever is consistent with the given area having the application property. For example, that Aristotle is an Athenian citizen is consistent with the given area having the application property. But, it would be unreasonable to consider that Aristotle is an Athenian citizen is true simply because it is consistent with such a hypothesized logos. Unfortunately, understanding Plato in the latter way—that is, as taking

original question rather than strictly determining the answer to the original question. Notice that there are two ways in which the answer to the reduced question can be said to determine the answer to the original question. The answer to the reduced question determines (in the strong sense) the answer to the original question when however the reduced question is answered fixes the answer to the original answer. This will require (at least) that G is a necessary and sufficient condition for F. But the answer to the reduced question determines (in a weaker sense) the answer to the original question when a specific answer to the reduced question fixes the answer to the original question. This will only require that G is sufficient for F, although it may also require that the potential answers to the original question are exclusive.

"agree" to mean "entailed by"—will not help. In this case, Plato will be plausibly recommending that one consider true whatever is entailed by the hypothesized *logos* that the given area has the application property; but, he will be implausibly recommending that one consider not true whatever is not entailed by this *logos*. Again, that Socrates is an Athenian citizen is not entailed by the answer that the given area has the application property, but it would be unreasonable to consider that Socrates is an Athenian citizen is false simply because it is not entailed by that *logos*.

A variety of suggestions have been offered to avoid finding Plato logically inept or confused. 64 Some readers understand Plato as using συμφωνεῖν equivocally, using it to mean "entailed by" when applied to things one considers true, and as "consistent with" when applied to things one considers not true. Others understand Plato as using συμφωνεῖν for some hybrid logical relation that somehow includes both consistency and entailment. 65 Still others understand Plato as using συμφωνεῖν for some quasi-logical relation—analogous, for example, to musical harmony. 66 Finally, some understand Plato as using συμφωνεῖν for a logical relation "less stringent" or less precise than logical consistency or entailment as a result of either the relatively early stage in the development of logic at the time of Plato's writing 67 or Plato's realization of a necessary lack of precision and rigor in disciplines outside of mathematics. 68

While none of these alternatives is fully satisfying, I suspect that something like the last is most plausible. But whichever alternative one chooses, it is important to see that the problem is less troubling to the extent that Plato's recommendation is understood within a context of inquiry. To return to the *Meno* illustration. If the *logos* hypothesized and judged to be most compelling is that

^{64.} See Bostock (1986, 162–63), who takes Plato not quite to say what he intended. It is, according to Bostock, "a slip on Socrates' part."

^{65.} See, for example, Gentzler (1991). Hackforth's (1955, 139) view that Plato is recommending that we consider as true what is entailed by the hypothesis and consider as not true the contradictory of what is entailed, does not seem compatible with the text. The contradictory of what is entailed is obviously not the same as what is not entailed. But perhaps Hackforth takes Plato to be speaking loosely or imprecisely. See note 64.

^{66.} See Bailey (2005) for an interesting argument along these lines. See also Sedley (2003, 125n6).

^{67.} See, for example, Dancy (2004, 297), and perhaps, also Robinson (1953, 126–29), Annas (1981, 288–89), and Mueller (1992, 181).

^{68.} Perhaps, see Mueller's (1992, 183) discussion of "harmonious expansion" and, of course, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.3.

the area has the application property, then what the metaphor of agreement means in this case is relatively clear. The method directs one to consider true the answer to the inscription question that agrees with the area having the application property. But the only answer to the inscription question that is either entailed by or consistent with this answer to the reduced question is the answer that the area has the inscription property. The method also directs us to consider not true the answer that does not agree with the answer that the area has the application property. Again, the only answer to the inscription question that is either not entailed by or not consistent with this answer to the reduced question is the answer that the area does not have the inscription property. ⁶⁹ Plato is not recommending that one consider true anything at all (like Aristotle's and Socrates' citizenships) that is consistent with the hypothesized answer to the reduced question, nor as not true anything not entailed by that answer. Rather, he is recommending that one only consider as true or not true the answer to the original question.⁷⁰

So, if we read Plato's brief introduction to the method of hypothesis in the *Phaedo* in light of his obscure geometrical illustration in the *Meno*, a reasonably coherent picture develops. Plato has Socrates recommend that when one seeks to acquire knowledge of the answer to a specific question (Q1), one should look for another question (Q2) whose answer will help with an answer to the original question. Once such a question is found, one should hypothesize the answer to the second question (A2) that one judges to be most compelling, and should

^{69.} One might wonder in this case, why Plato uses the plural ἄ since there is only one answer that agrees with the hypothesis that the area has the application property and only one answer that does not agree with this hypothesis. One response may be that Plato is thinking of a plurality of instances of the method (see Hackforth 1955, 139). Plato may also be thinking of cases in which the move from the hypothesis to the answer to the original question is not so immediate, either because there are intermediate steps (which would be in agreement or not with the hypothesis (see Hackforth 1955, 139)) or because, outside the precision of mathematics and simple "yes or no" questions, other answers might need to be employed which are consistent with the hypothesis and salient to the original question in order to reach the answer to that original question. Despite my sympathy with Hackforth's response to Plato's use of the plural, I do not endorse Hackforth's view that the hormêthenta of 101D5 are identical with the things said to agree or not agree in the present passage, nor that the procedure described at 101D4-6 is identical with the procedure here at 100A3-7. See pp. 139-149.

^{70.} See Gallop (1975, 181), Mueller (1992, 181), and Kanayama (2000, 64), although the latter seems to think that recognizing the salience to a given context of inquiry favors the consistency interpretation. In the relatively simple cases, like the Meno illustration, in which the questions are "yes or no" and the most compelling answers to the reduced questions are necessary and sufficient for one of the answers to the original question, the gap between consistency and entailment, so to speak, will disappear. In the more complex and messier cases, because of broadening of the question and imprecision of the subject matter, the gap will reappear.

consider as true the answer to the original question (A1) that agrees with that answer and consider as not true the answer to the original question that does not. This, of course, cannot be the end of the matter. In the relatively simple case of "yes or no" questions in relatively rigorous and developed disciples like geometry, the procedure may be relatively straightforward, but in messier cases involving broader and perhaps more pressing questions, and less rigorous and less developed disciplines like ethics and political philosophy, the task of discovering the appropriate reduced question whose answer helps with an answer to the original question will become more difficult and mysterious, and the notions of reduction and determination will become less precise and determinate if we are to get interesting results. Nevertheless, Plato has offered here in his opening description of the method of hypothesis in the *Phaedo*, when read in light of the obscure geometrical illustration in the *Meno*, the beginning of a response to Clitophon's challenge.

Indeed, if we return to the questions left unanswered by Plato's geometrical illustration in the *Meno*, this introductory passage from the *Phaedo* helps here as well. Recall that one of those questions concerned the epistemic status of Plato's hypotheses, while a second concerned the identification of the relevant hypotheses. The *Phaedo* passage, when read in light of the geometrical illustration, indicates that the hypothesis, or what Plato calls in the *Phaedo* "the *logos* hypothesized," is the answer to the reduced question that one judges to be most compelling. The text leaves under-determined whether the hypothesis so understood is a theory, a proposition, a definition, or even an object, but it indicates that the hypothesis is the answer to the reduced question (the affirmation or negation of the right hand side of the bi-conditional), rather than the bi-conditional itself. To return to the geometrical illustration, the hypothesis is that the given area has the application property (A2), not that the given area has the inscription property just in case it has the application property.

Moreover, the epistemic status of the hypothesis so understood looks rather provisional. To some extent this follows immediately from the identification of the hypothesis with the answer to the reduced question, rather than with the bi-conditional.⁷³ But in the *Phaedo*'s introductory description, Plato provides no

^{71.} Although even here the procedure whereby one uncovers the reduced question whose most compelling answer determines an answer to the original question will not be straightforward. Even in the case of geometrical analysis, there is no guarantee that the propositions entailed by a positive answer to the original question will either be in some way obviously false or convertible. See note 40, this chapter.

^{72.} See also 101D7, where the object of hypothesizing is called a hypothesis, rather than a *logos*; (ὑπόθεσιν ὑποθέμενος).

^{73.} See notes 21 and 28, this chapter.

justification or explanation for hypothesizing the *logos* one does. He simply recommends hypothesizing the answer one judges most compelling (ον αν κρίνω ἐρρωμενέστατον εἶναὶ; 100A4). But he tells us nothing about what makes one answer to the reduced question more compelling than another. This may suffice for Wolfsdorf's notion of cognitive security. It has a kind of attraction that somehow anchors it cognitively. It is judged to be most compelling. But, Plato offers no explanation for choosing the answer to the reduced question one does, other than that one judges it to be most compelling. Plato may or may not take one's judgment here to be justified, reasonable, or otherwise secure. He simply does not tell us. At this point in the procedure the hypothesis must be treated as roughly provisional.

With respect to the remaining unanswered questions, however, the *Phaedo*'s introductory description provides little help. Plato does not tell us how one identifies the reduced question from the answer to the original question, nor how one goes about verifying, falsifying, justifying, explaining, or otherwise acquiring knowledge of the hypothesis that one judges to be most compelling in order to move beyond a provisional answer to the original question—that is, in order to move toward the acquisition of the knowledge one seeks. In fact, in the case of the first question, things have gotten worse with the introduction of open-ended questions like the one under consideration in the *Phaedo*. Nevertheless, in the case of the last question, we do get some help when we turn to the second of the two passages in the *Phaedo* that appear to be general descriptions of his method of hypothesis.74

Phaedo 101D1-E3

Following the introduction of the theory of Forms and an answer to the question that lead to the introduction of the method of hypothesis in the first place, 75 Socrates says

But [a] you, . . . would hold on (ἐχόμενος) to the safe part of the hypothesis (ἐκείνου τοῦ ἀσφαλοῦς τῆς ὑποθέσεως) and give that answer. [b] If someone held on (ἔχοιτο) to the hypothesis itself (αὐτῆς τῆς ὑποθέσεως), you would ignore him and would not answer until you had examined

^{74.} Pace Bluck (1955, 166n2; 1957, 21–24), who takes the two passages to be concerned with distinct methods. Henceforth I will refer to Phaedo 101D1-E3 as "the Phaedo's second descriptive passage of the method of hypothesis."

^{75.} Or at least so I will argue in chapter 7.

whether the hormêthenta from it agree with one another or contradict one another (τὰ ἀπ' ἐκείνης ὁρμηθέντα σκέψαιο εἴ σοι ἀλλήλοις συμφωνεῖ ἢ διαφωνεῖ). [c] And when you must give an account (διδόναι λόγον) of your hypothesis itself you will proceed in the same way: you will assume another hypothesis (ἄλλην αὖ ὑπόθεσιν ὑποθέμενος), the one which seems to you best of the higher ones (ἥτις τῶν ἄνωθεν βελτίστη φαίνοιτο) until you come to something adequate (ἰκανὸν), [d] but you will not jumble the two as the debaters do by discussing the hypothesis and the hormêthenta from it at the same time (περί τε τῆς ἀρχῆς διαλεγόμενος καὶ τῶν ἐξ ἐκείνης ώρμημένων), if you wish to discover the truth. (Phaedo 101D1-E3)

Again, on an initial reading, the text appears reasonably clear. Plato is considering how one should go about examining, investigating, or coming to know the hypothesis itself. His answer envisions two distinct procedures. On the one hand, [b] one should examine whether the *hormêthenta* from the hypothesis "agree" with one another—whatever precisely that means. On the other hand, [c] one should look for another, "higher" hypothesis which seems best and agrees with the original hypothesis and then a "higher" hypothesis which seems best and agrees with the second hypothesis, and so on until one reaches something "adequate"—again whatever precisely all of this means. To put it in the context of the *Meno* illustration, Plato indicates that when one turns to investigating, examining, or seeking to come to know that the area has the application property (A2), one [b] should examine whether this answer (A2) (which one judged most compelling) has *hormêthenta* which "agree" with another and [c] look for other "higher" hypotheses (A3 through

^{76.} See, for example, Robinson (1953, 136–41) and Bostock (1986, 170). Among those who do not read the text in this way are the following: Hackforth (1955, 139) takes the procedure described at 101D4–6 to be identical with the procedure described earlier at 100A3–7. Blank (1986, 162), if I understand him correctly, takes there to be three distinct procedures aimed at addressing three different questions, none of which are concerned to prove the hypothesis. Kanayama (2000, 76–77) argues that the problems associated with this passage—in particular the translation of ἔχοιτο as "attacked" and the obscurity of the process of examining whether the *hormêthenta* from the hypothesis are in accord with one another—cannot be solved "as long as we suppose that [this passage] focus[es] on the truth of the hypothesis." He writes "suppose Socrates . . . is not talking about how to check the truth of the hypothesis but about how to ascertain the truth of the target proposition" (Kanayama 2000, 79). In what follows I offer a resolution to these problems while continuing to suppose that Socrates is talking about how to check the truth of the hypothesis, as the passage is I believe naturally read, even when ἔχοιτο is not read as "attacked."

An-1) which seem best and agree with this answer until one comes to something "adequate" (An). Despite the apparent plausibility of this initial reading, again a number of problems arise, among which are what is meant by ta hormêthenta, "agreement," "higher" hypotheses, and something "adequate." I address each of these issues in turn, but first I turn to the translation of ἔχοιτο at 101D3.

I have followed the majority of scholars in rendering ἔχοιτο as "held on to" rather than Grube's "attacked." Among other reasons, the verb in its participial form has been used just two lines earlier to mean "hold on to" (or "cling to," on Grube's translation), and it would be odd, if not impossible, for Plato to use it to mean something as different as "attack" in such short order. 78 But, then, why does Socrates recommend answering in [a] but not answering in [b]? According to "the attack," translation the idea seemed to be as follows: One should hold on to the hypothesis (the answer to the reduced question which one judged most compelling (A2)) and answer the original question accordingly (A1). But if someone were to attack this answer (A2), one should not answer him—that is, ignore his attack, until one first examined the hormêthenta from it to see if they agree with one another. If they do not, one should abandon the hypothesis—that is, the answer to the reduced question one judged most compelling (A2), and look for another one. But if they do agree with one another, then one should proceed to respond to the attack of the hypothesis (A2) by providing a higher hypothesis from which the answer to the reduced question can be determined, and so on. This way of understanding Plato's recommendation to answer in [a] and not to answer in [b], however, fails to appreciate the difference in the objects of ἐχόμενος in [a] and ἔχοιτο in [b].⁷⁹

^{77.} I have also made some other minor changes. See Gallop's (1975, 53) translation.

^{78.} Those who reject the "attack" translation include H. Jackson (1882, 148n1), Archer-Hind (1884, 102-103), Burnet (1911, 113), Robinson (1953, 125), Gallop (1975, 235n67), Bostock (1986, 166-68), Blank (1986, 148n5), Rowe (1993b, 63n25), Kahn (1996, 318n35), Kanayama (2000, 76–77), and Byrd (2007b, 146). Those who accept it, in addition to Grube, include Bluck (1955, 116n2), Huby (1959, 14), van Eck (1996, 221n10), and Dancy (2004, 298n24). H. Jackson (1882, 148n1) and Archer-Hind (1884, 102–103) recommend deleting the entire sentence εἰ δέ τις... διαφωνεῖ:. Others have proposed more moderate emendations; see, for example, Goodrich (1904, 8).

^{79.} The subjects of the two verbs are different as well. In [a], Cebes appears to be the one holding on while in [b] the subject appears to be an indefinite "one."

In [a], Cebes holds on to the safe part of the hypothesis (τοῦ ἀσφαλοῦς τῆς ὑποθέσεως)⁸⁰ and answers accordingly, while in [b] someone holds on to the hypothesis itself (αὐτῆς τῆς ὑποθέσεως), which leads Plato to recommend that Cebes not answer. But, why should the contrast between the safe part of the hypothesis and the hypothesis itself lead Cebes to answer when the former is held on to but not when the latter is held on to?

In the immediately surrounding pages, Plato uses forms of the word here translated as "safe" with reference to the proposed answer to the *aitia* question which provoked the use of the method of hypothesis in the first place. ⁸¹ That answer is roughly that Forms, like Beauty and Bigness, are the *aitiai* of a thing's becoming beautiful or big. ⁸² Thus, the answer to the original question (A1) which agrees with the hypothesis that is judged most compelling (A2) is repeatedly referred to as safe. "The safe part of the hypothesis," then, refers to the safe answer to the original question which agrees with the hypothesis, and the contrast between [a] and [b] is the contrast between the answer to the original

^{80.} I have been persuaded by Ravi Sharma and an unpublished paper by David Sedley that this or something very like it is the correct way to render τοῦ ἀσφαλοῦς τῆς ὑποθέσεως. Perhaps "the safe aspect or feature of the hypothesis" would do just as well. See also Rowe (1993a, 62; 1996, 235). Rowe reads this as the strongest bit of evidence for his and Gallop's (Gallop 1975, 179ff.) view that, when Plato depicts Socrates applying the method in the *Phaedo*, the hypothesis is the conjunction of the proposition that Forms exist and the proposition that Forms are *aitiai*. I will return to the Gallop-Rowe view later, in chapter 7. While I do not think the initial hypothesis is the conjunctive one Rowe and Gallop do, I agree that what is referred to by "the safe part of the hypothesis" is "the *aitia* thesis" (A1), the answer to the *aitia* question (Q1). Gallop-Rowe must explain why Plato contrasts this answer with the "hypothesis itself," rather than with "a different part of the hypothesis." See Plass (1960, 111–12) for "the safe *consequent* of the hypothesis."

^{81.} At 100C9-E2, Plato writes: "I no longer understand or recognize those other sophisticated *aitiai*, and if someone tells me that a thing is beautiful because it has a bright color or shape or any such thing, I ignore these other reasons—for all these confuse me—but I simply, naively and perhaps foolishly [hold on] ($\xi\chi\omega$) to this, that nothing else makes it beautiful other than the presence of, or the sharing in, or however you may describe its relationship to that Beautiful we mentioned, for I will not insist on the precise nature of the relationship, but that all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful. That, I think, is the safest ($\alpha\sigma\varphi\alpha\lambda\dot{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\alpha\tau\sigma\nu$) answer I can give myself or anyone else. And if I [hold on] ($\dot{\epsilon}\chi\dot{\epsilon}\mu\epsilon\nu\sigma$) to this I think I shall never fall into error. This is the safe ($\alpha\sigma\varphi\alpha\lambda\dot{\epsilon}\sigma\nu$) answer for me or anyone else to give, namely, that it is through Beauty that beautiful things are made beautiful or do you not think so too?" See also 10586-C2, where Socrates is made to propose an additional safe answer, more subtle than the safe answer described at 100C9-E2.

^{82.} I here come close to violating my conservative approach to the text by presupposing a reading of an application of the method of hypothesis. But, in referring to the "safety of the hypothesis," Plato appears to be forcing us to look outside his description. Nevertheless, I intend no other aspect of the interpretation of this contrast to refer to Plato's depiction of the method's application.

question (the (safe) "consequent" of the hypothesis (A1))83 and the answer to the reduced question (the hypothesis itself (A2)). But, then, why does holding on to the former permit one to answer while holding on to the latter requires one to refrain from answering (and answer what)?

The idea seems to be that when one investigates or seeks to acquire knowledge of the answer to a specific question, one should search for a further question to which the original question can be reduced. Then, holding on to the answer to the original question that agrees with the answer of the reduced question which one judges most compelling, one should answer the original question accordingly, since that answer is (perhaps, has been rendered) at least provisionally safe. To return to the illustration from the Meno, one should hold on to the answer (A1) to the inscription question (Q1) that agrees with the answer (A2) to the application question (Q2) that one judges most compelling, and answer the inscription question accordingly. But if someone (whether oneself or another) should hold on to the answer (A2) to the reduced question (Q2) that one judges most compelling, one would ignore that individual and refuse to answer the reduced question as provisionally safe until one performs two procedures. That is, in the Meno illustration, one should ignore anyone who holds on to the answer to the application question which one judges to be most compelling until one performs the two procedures. If this is the right way to understand these opening lines, we do not need to rely on a doubtful translation of ἔχοιτο in order to see that Plato is considering how one should go about examining, investigating, or coming to know the answer to the reduced question (as opposed to merely hypothesizing the answer one judges to be most compelling).84 To correctly hold on to the

^{83.} At Metaphysics 5.2.1013b17-21, Aristotle explicitly takes the relationship between the hypothesis and its conclusion (συμπεράσματος) to be analogous to the part/whole relationship. Unfortunately, Aristotle takes the relationship to go in the opposite direction. The hypothesis stands to the conclusion as a part to a whole. Perhaps, Aristotle's use of συμπεράσματος suggests that Aristotle has a formal logical relationship in mind rather than the different relationship Plato has in mind suggested by the latter's use of hormêthenta. In any case what is described as safe in the passage from the *Phaedo* is a *hormêthen* of the hypothesis.

^{84.} Notice that if this is the proper understanding of this passage, Plato is distinguishing between investigating or seeking to come to know an answer to a question, on the one hand, and merely hypothesizing an answer to a question, on the other hand (roughly, distinguishing between two ways of answering the same question). To do the former correctly Plato recommends proceeding by way of a hypothesis. To do the latter correctly one simply needs to answer according to what one judges most compelling. Notice also that understanding this passage as describing a method of examining the hypothesis without relying on translating ἔχοιτο as "attacked" tells against a common understanding of Plato's recommendation here

answer to the reduced question—that is, the hypothesis itself (A2)—without being ignored and to answer the reduced question safely, two procedures are required.

But how are we to understand these two procedures directed at A2? In the case of the first procedure, Plato recommends that one inquire whether the hormêthenta from A2 (τὰ ἀπ' ἐκείνης ὁρμηθέντα) agree or disagree with each other (ἀλλήλοις συμφωνεῖ ἡ διαφωνεῖ). It is perhaps natural to understand Plato to be recommending that one check to see whether the logical consequences of the hypothesis are consistent or inconsistent with each other. But how plausible is it to suppose that the logical consequences of one's hypothesis might fail to be consistent with each other? Only a self-contradictory hypothesis could have inconsistent logical consequences, and it is not likely that one would judge such a hypothesis to be the strongest answer to one's reduced question. 85

The good news is that $\tau \acute{a} \acute{o} \rho \mu \eta \theta \acute{e} \nu \tau \acute{a}$ are not Plato's usual words for logical consequences. Requences. Plato's typical words for logical consequences are $\tau \acute{a} \emph{o} \nu \mu \beta \emph{a} (\nu \nu \nu \tau \emph{a}.^{87})$ A more literal translation of $\tau \acute{a} \acute{o} \rho \mu \eta \theta \acute{e} \nu \tau \emph{a}$ might be "inquire whether the things that start from this hypothesis." But precisely what Plato means by such things is simply left unaddressed in the passage. Further, we are familiar from a few pages back with the difficulties surrounding the translation of $\sigma \nu \mu \phi \nu \nu \epsilon \tilde{\imath}$ and its contrary. One might expect Plato to use the word in the same sense here at 101D5 as he used it in the previous passage at 100D5, but as we saw it is not clear what sense that was. Unfortunately, our current passage does not provide any

according to which only the second, and not the first procedure, is meant to be a response to the attack. The idea on this common understanding is that one ignore the attacker until one performs the first procedure, and only *after* this first procedure is completed (and presumably the hypothesis survives the procedure) does one turn to responding to the attack by performing the second procedure. On the interpretation proposed without relying on translating ἔχοιτο as "attacked" Plato is recommending that anyone holding on to the hypothesis itself should be ignored until both procedures (in no particular order) have been performed. This will become important later, since we will see in two of the most complete depictions of the method of hypothesis in the dialogues, Socrates is depicted as performing the second procedure before performing the first, suggesting that no particular temporal order is required.

^{85.} For this objection, see, for example, Gallop (1975, 189) and Bostock (1986, 168). It is true that some propositions appear quite plausible and yet turn out on closer examination to be self-contradictory as we have learned from Russell, but such propositions are relatively rare.

^{86.} See Gallop (1975, 188). See also ώρμημένων at 101E3.

^{87.} See Burnet (1911, 114), who identifies τά όρμηθέντα with τά συμβαίνοντα.

additional information. 88 All that the current passage indicates is that Plato recommends that before holding on to the answer to the reduced question—that is, before holding on to the hypothesis itself (A2)—one should test the things that begin from it (its hormêthenta) to see whether they agree or disagree with each other. So, the schema from the Meno illustration has been augmented, if only slightly, as follows:

Q1: Does the area have the inscription property?

Bi-conditional: The area has the inscription property just in case the area has the application property.

Q2: Does the area have the application property?

A2: The area does have the application property (the most compelling *logos*, the hypothesis (H1)). This cannot be safely held on to but must be subject to two procedures: P1 and P2.

P1: Inquire whether the *hormêthenta* of A2 agree with one another.

A1: The area does have the inscription property (the safe part of the hypothesis that can be held on to pending the results of the procedures directed at A2).

To get a better understanding of this procedure (P1), we will need to look outside our current passage to various apparent applications of the method of hypothesis in the dialogues. For now, it suffices to see that Plato recommends such a procedure, whatever it amounts to.

Concerning the second procedure, Plato writes as follows:

And when you must give an account (διδόναι λόγον) of your hypothesis itself (ἐκείνης αὐτῆς) you will proceed (διδοίης) in the same way (ώσαύτως): you will assume another hypothesis (ἄλλην αὖ ὑπόθεσιν

^{88.} Comparison with the *Meno's* introductory description will not help because we saw that that introductory description left unanswered how one should go about answering the reduced question—i.e., how one should go about examining the hypothesis itself. Bostock (1986, 170), Gentzler (1991, 273), and Mueller (1992, 182) all correctly see that this procedure amounts to testing the hypothesis against "other things that we believe" (Bostock) or "background assumptions" (Gentzler) in a way reminiscent of the elenchos (Mueller; see also (Bedu-Addo 1979, 120). But they are mistaken, it seems to me, in finding this understanding of the procedure in the present passage. It is, at best, a kind of inference from charity. Mueller thinks such a procedure is not important in mathematics and so doubts it can be accommodated into the method Plato is introducing. In chapter 9, I offer an interpretation of Plato's discussion in the Republic that does accommodate the elenchos.

ύποθέμενος), the one which seems to you best of the higher ones (ἥτις τῶν ἄνωθεν βελτίστη φαίνοιτο) until you come to something adequate (ἱκανὸν)....

This passage also raises a number of questions: (1) What does Plato mean by "giving an account of the hypothesis itself"? (2) What does Plato mean by "proceeding in the same way"? (3) What does Plato mean by "a higher hypothesis"? (4) in what sense is one hypothesis better than another? and (5) what does Plato mean by "something adequate"?

Throughout the dialogues, in passages evidently unconnected with the method of hypothesis, Plato uses the notion of giving an account of something. Sometimes the idea is colloquial or at least nontechnical. At other times Plato appears to have something more precise in mind. For example, earlier in the *Phaedo* (76B5–C3), he takes the ability to give an account of what one professes to know to be a necessary condition for one's knowledge profession to be true. This may be taken to require little more than the ability to respond to questions in a consistent (and perhaps coherent) way. But, it may also be taken to require the ability to justify or explain what one claims to know. When Plato writes "when one must give an account of the hypothesis itself," we might expect that the description of the procedure to follow will be an attempt to justify or explain the hypothesis. As such, we might expect that the procedure will amount to an argument (perhaps, even a proposed proof) on behalf of the hypothesis itself. Indeed, in turning to the next two questions associated with this procedure, our expectations appear to be met.

Plato tells us that when one gives an account of the hypothesis itself one should proceed in the same way,⁹³ but in the same way as what? The same way, presumably, as one proceeded in an attempt to come to know the answer to

^{89.} See, perhaps, Laches 187B8-C3 and 187D1-5.

^{90.} See also, Republic 7.534B3-7 and Timaeus 51E3-4.

^{91.} See, for example, *Laches* 187E6–188A3, and perhaps *Protagoras* 336B8–D4, 347E1–348A2, *Theaetetus* 169A6–9, and 175C8–D2. I do not mean to belittle the ability to respond to Socratic questioning in a consistent manner. None of the interlocutors in the elenctic dialogues appears to have this ability. Indeed, Plato may view this as a form of justification or explanation.

^{92.} See, for example, *Charmides* 165A8–B4, *Cratylus* 426A1–B3, *Meno* 81A10–B3, and *Republic* 6.507A1–6. These two aspects of "giving an account" may correspond to the two procedures Plato has in mind in this passage.

^{93.} Perhaps, "give an account in the same way"; see the διδοίης at 101D7.

the original question described back at 100A3-8 (Q1). Recall that Plato's advice there was to propose another question to which the original question could be reduced (Q2), hypothesize the answer to the second question which one judged to be most compelling (A2), and accept as true the answer to the original question which agreed with the most compelling answer and accept as false the answer to the original question which did not (A1). Thus, Plato is recommending that when one gives an account of the hypothesis itself that is, when one seeks to hold on to the answer to the reduced question—one should proceed in the same way as one proceeded when attempting to hold on to the answer to the original question. One should propose another question to which the reduced question can be reduced (Q3), choose the answer to this new question which one judges to be most compelling (A3), and accept as true the answer to the reduced question which agrees with the most compelling answer and accept as not true the answer which does not (A2). To return to our Meno illustration, when one gives an account of the answer that the area has the application property, one should propose a question to which the application question can be reduced, choose the answer to this new question which one judges to be most compelling, and accept as true the answer to the application question which agrees with it and as not true the answer which does not.

Understanding Plato in this way provides a way of interpreting Plato's reference to a higher hypothesis. The higher hypothesis is the answer one judges to be most compelling to yet another question to which the reduced question has been reduced. And, the best of those higher hypotheses is simply the answer to that new reduced question one judges to be most compelling. The procedure can be put schematically, using the *Meno* illustration again, as follows:

Q1: Does the area have the inscription property?

Bi-conditional: The area has the inscription property just in case the area has the application property.

Q2: Does the area have the application property?

P2: Look for a higher hypothesis from which A2/H1 can be obtained.

*Bi-conditional*²: The area has the application property just in case the area has Φ .

Q3: Does the area have Φ ?

A3/H2: The area does have Φ .

A2/H1: The area does have the application property (the most compelling logos, the hypothesis). This cannot be safely held on to but must be subject to P1 and P2.

P1: Inquire whether the *hormêthenta* of A2/H1 agree with one another.

A1: The area does have the inscription property (the safe part of the hypothesis that can be held on to pending the results of the procedures directed at A2).⁹⁴

Thus, H2 is a "higher hypothesis" than H1 in virtue of H2's being an answer to a question (Q2) to which H1's question was reduced, and H2 is the best of the higher hypotheses in virtue of H2 being judged the most compelling of the answers to Q3. Notice that I have doubly designated the answer to the first reduced question as "A2/H1." This is because, as we have seen, when the answer to the first reduced question is simply the answer that one judges most compelling, the answer is considered a hypothesis. But when one wants to hold on to this answer and safely answer Q2, or give an account of one's answer to Q2, one will need to find a second question (Q3) whose most compelling answer (H2) agrees with H1. When one succeeds in doing this, one can answer Q2 "accordingly"—that is, "safely"—and H1 becomes A2.

Schematizing the second procedure in this way highlights the question-and-answer nature of Plato's method of hypothesis. The original question leads to a reduced question, which in turn leads to another reduced question, and so on. In this way, the method is in keeping with dialectic as it is traditionally conceived. The scheme also underscores the importance of the concept of reduction and the corresponding concept of one answer being obtained from or helping with another—concepts Plato represents with the vague, obscure, and perhaps indeterminate notions of agreement and disagreement. But short of Plato's reference to geometry in the *Meno*, one of the disciplines in which these concepts are likely to be more well defined, the passages in which Plato introduces his method of hypothesis simply leave these concepts unaddressed.

Finally, this scheme provokes a question that has been threatening for some time: When does this process end? At what point in this process has the knowledge that we seek been acquired? In terms of the scheme, how high must one go or at what point does the search for reduced questions and their corresponding higher hypotheses result in knowledge acquisition? Again, Plato's answer is characteristically unhelpful. He tells us we continue this process of answering a reduced question by the answer that is most compelling and looking for a higher

^{94.} See *Topics* 1.10–11 for the suggestion that Q1 might be called the "problem" and A1 the "thesis." Q2, then, is a higher problem and A2 the "hypothesis." See also Aristotle's use of "avber"0 at *Posterior Analytics* 1.32.88a30–36 and 2.13.97a28–34.

^{95.} See, for example, Topics 1.4.

question whose most compelling answer provides or helps with the previous answer and so on until one reaches something adequate (hikanon).

At least three different interpretations have been proposed for understanding Plato's directive here. Some have taken Plato to be looking forward to the Form of the Good and the unhypothetical first principle of everything in the Republic.96 But if we are to honor our conservative approach, such an appeal to the Republic should be resisted. Plato may, indeed, have these things in mind here in the *Phaedo*, but there is nothing about the present passage in the *Phaedo* that requires an appeal to the Form of the Good or the unhypothetical first principle. Second, some have understood Plato to be here requiring that one continue this process until one finds something adequate to one's opponent, until, that is, one's opponent ceases the attack.⁹⁷ To the extent that the "attack" translation of ἔχοιτο has been rejected, this interpretation looks more difficult to sustain. Finally, scholars have taken Plato to be advocating a more cooperative enterprise and so take *hikanon* to mean adequate to everyone involved in the shared search. Indeed, Blank has examined the other uses of hikanon and its various forms in the *Phaedo* and has concluded that they all support such an understanding.98 This suggests that Plato takes the search for the knowledge of the answer to the original question to have come to an end (the knowledge we have been seeking to have been acquired) whenever everyone involved in the search has become satisfied. If he thinks something more is necessary, he does not say so here in these introductory passages. We might hope that Plato has something more to offer elsewhere.

Conclusion

We have seen that the passages in which Plato introduces his method of hypothesis in the Meno and the Phaedo tend to raise more questions than they answer. Nevertheless, a preliminary sketch of his method has emerged.

First, nothing in Plato's introduction of the method in the Meno is incompatible with his introduction of that method in the *Phaedo*. It is true that Plato

^{96.} Assuming as they do that the Form of the Good and the unhypothetical first principle are identical; see, for example, Bedu-Addo (1979, 123-24).

^{97.} See, for example, Robinson (1953, 137).

^{98.} See Blank (1986, 155-61), who offers a nice defense of this view and cites an abundant literature. More recent examples include Bostock (1986, 175) and Byrd (2007b, 147). It should be noted that Aristotle suggests that the same method can be employed to meet an attack and to search cooperatively for the truth at *Topics* 1.2.101a25–101b4.

introduces the method of hypothesis in the Meno by appealing to a rather obscure geometrical example, and indicates that the method he is introducing is the same as (or at least similar to) the method practiced in geometry, and no such reference to geometry or any other mathematical discipline is made in the *Phaedo*. But that alone does not suffice for taking the two dialogues to be discussing distinct methods. Plato's appeal to geometry in the Meno does not require that the method of hypothesis employ all of the features in the same way as its application in geometry and the other mathematical disciplines, and appealing to geometry again in the *Phaedo* may have indicated otherwise. 99 Indeed, appealing to the Meno's description helped to resolve one of the outstanding difficulties associated with the first *Phaedo* passage. Recall that Plato's recommendation at *Phaedo* 100A3-8 to set down as true everything that agreed with the hypothesis and as false everything that did not agree appeared to have the implausible consequence of either setting down as true something evidently false or as false something evidently true. We saw, however, that if we read Plato's recommendation with the Meno passage in mind, we would recognize that Plato's recommendation should be read as relative to a context of inquiry—in particular, as relative to an answer to the original question which led to the hypothesis in the first place. When read in this way, while Plato's recommendation may not be faultless, the radical implausibility resulting from other readings does not result.

Of course, the compatibility of these passages in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo* is primarily a result of the thinness of the descriptions themselves. To the extent that one goes on to thicken these descriptions, either from other parts of the respective dialogues or from outside those dialogues, inconsistencies between the methods proposed in the two dialogues may arise. And as a result one may be tempted to maintain that the two dialogues propose two different methods. But at least at this stage in our own inquiry we have no reason to do so. And we will have to balance the considerations that might lead one to understand Plato's account of the method of hypothesis in the *Meno* as inconsistent with his account in the *Phaedo* against the considerations that allow their compatibility. An indefeasible interpretative principle here is not forthcoming. How we fill out these initial descriptions will depend on any number of defeasible issues. But at least one of those defeasible issues ought to be the compatibility of the accounts from one dialogue to another.

^{99.} That Plato has the *Meno* in mind while composing the *Phaedo* is indicated by his reference back to the conversation with slave when he introduces the theory of recollection in the *Phaedo*; see 73A7–B2.

Finally, despite the thinness of these initial descriptions, a general structure of the method of hypothesis has emerged. The two dialogues together reveal that the method Plato is proposing here in order to acquire on one's own the knowledge one lacks—in order, that is, to learn *de novo*—has two stages. The first stage, described in the Meno and the first Phaedo passage, might be thought of as a reduction or proof stage. According to Plato, when one seeks to learn the answer to some question (Q1), one seeks to identify a second question (Q2) whose answer (A2) one finds most compelling and which helps with an answer to the original question, and then one sets down as true that answer to the original question (A1) which agrees with the most compelling answer of the reduced question. In some cases, perhaps the ideal cases, when a salient bi-conditional is available, setting down as true the answer to the original question which agrees with the answer to the reduced question will be immediate and obvious. In other, perhaps most, cases, the movement from A2 to A1 may take some intermediate steps and background assumptions. When it does, the two parts of this initial reduction or proof stage will resemble the geometrical methods of analysis and synthesis, respectively. The similarity with analysis and synthesis explains the appropriateness of calling this "the proof stage." We can make explicit the two parts of this stage as follows:

The Proof Stage

- [Pa] Identify a second question (Q2) from whose most compelling answer (the hypothesis, A2/H1) the answer (A1) to the initial question (Q1) can be obtained.
- [Pb] Show how A1 is derived from A2/H1; sometimes this will be immediate and trivial, sometimes not.

The second passage from the *Phaedo*, however, indicates that a second stage is necessary if one is genuinely to acquire the knowledge of the answer to the original question which one sought. I will call the second stage "the confirmation stage" for it is aimed at confirming, justifying, defending, or otherwise holding on to and making safe (or knowing) the hypothesis itself—that is, the answer to the reduced question one judged most compelling (A2). This stage, too, consists of two parts. In one part, one tests the hormêthenta of the hypothesis to determine "whether they agree with one another or not." In the other part, one performs the procedure of the proof stage on the hypothesis itself. That is, one looks for a second reduced question (Q3) whose most compelling answer (H2/ A3) helps with or provides the answer one took to be most compelling to the first reduced question; and having found such a question, one sets down as true the hypothesis itself (A2). Again, we can make explicit the two parts of the confirmation stage as follows:

The Confirmation Stage

- [Ca] Test the things that start from (*hormêthenta*) H1 for agreement or disagreement with each other.
- [Cb] Identify a second reduced question (Q3) from whose most compelling answer (a higher hypothesis, H2) H1/A2 can be obtained, show how H1/A2 can be obtained from H2, and continue this process until one reaches something adequate (*hikanon*).

At least since Robinson, it has been common to describe the method of hypothesis as consisting of both an upward and a downward path, 100 but the sketch of the method of hypothesis we have just uncovered makes such a description potentially misleading. Both stages of the method could be plausibly described as consisting of an upward and downward path. The upward paths of both stages would consist in identifying the relevant hypotheses which help with either the answer to the original question, [Pa], or the answer to the reduced question, [Cb]. In addition, both stages appear to have a downward path. In the case of the first stage, the downward path would consist in something like a proof from the most compelling answer to the reduced question (H1/A2) to the answer to the original question (A1), [Pb], while in the second stage it would consist of testing the hormêthenta of the most compelling answer to the reduced question (H1/ A2) to see whether they agree with one another, [Ca]. But notice that while it may be reasonable to characterize the upward paths of the two stages as roughly similar, roughly different tokens of the same general type of procedure consisting (at least in part) in identifying a higher hypothesis, the downward paths of the two stages are quite different. The downward path of the proof stage amounts to providing or displaying an argument or proof of the answer to the original question from the most compelling answer to the reduced question.¹⁰¹ It corresponds roughly to the synthesis portion of the method of analysis and synthesis mentioned earlier. 102 But the downward path of the second stage is not a display of an argument or proof. Rather, it is a test of the most compelling answer to the reduced question. It is an examination of the agreement or disagreement of

^{100.} See Robinson (1953, 160-62).

^{101.} See Annas (1981, 292).

^{102.} See note 40, this chapter.

the hormêthenta of the hypothesis with each other. Consequently, while I will continue to refer to the upward and downward paths of the method of hypothesis, out of respect to the tradition and its descriptive elegance, I will make clear whether I am referring to the downward or upward paths of the proof stage or of the confirmation stage—because it makes a difference.

Of course, numerous questions remain concerning this general structure, including among others:

- 1. What is the nature of the relationship between the answers to the reduced questions and the answers to the original questions? (That is, what is the nature of the relationship between the hypothesis and the item whose knowledge one seeks?)
- 2. What is the relationship between the method of *de novo* learning that Plato is recommending and the mathematical method of Plato's time?
- 3. What are the *hormêthenta* and in what sense do they "agree" or "disagree" with each other?
- 4. How long does the progressive procedure in the upward path of the confirmation stage ([Cb]) need to continue? (That is, what is it to reach something adequate?)

We will need to face all of these questions as we go on. For now, we have identified a structure detailed enough to recognize instances of its application in the dialogues. Our next task will be to examine some of those applications in the dialogues. Doing so will help answer at least some of these outstanding questions.

THE METHOD OF HYPOTHESIS

SOCRATES AT WORK IN THE MENO

At 87B2–4, Socrates encourages Meno to investigate the teachability of virtue in a way similar to the method of the geometers, saying¹

since we do not know either what it is or what qualities it possesses, let us investigate whether it is teachable or not by means of a hypothesis (ἐπειδὴ οὐκ ἴσμεν οὕθ' ὅτι ἐστὶν οὕθ' ὁποῖόν τι, ὑποθέμενοι αὐτὸ σκοπῶμεν εἴτε διδακτὸν εἴτε οὐ διδακτόν ἐστιν). (Meno 87B3-4)

Here, we might anticipate an application of the method of hypothesis just described by Plato's obscure geometrical example in the previous passage. Unfortunately, the application that follows is fraught with difficulties, not the least of which is where the application ends. Does Socrates employ the method of hypothesis in the argument for the thesis that virtue is teachable (87B–89C), only to follow this with a different method directed at the thesis that virtue is not teachable? Or, does Socrates employ the method of hypothesis all the way through the argument that virtue is not teachable (89D–96D), at which point Socrates tries to resolve the conflict resulting from these two arguments by abandoning the method of hypothesis? Or, finally, does Socrates employ the method of hypothesis throughout the remainder of the dialogue, all the way through to the conclusion?

It follows from this reasoning, Meno, that virtue appears to be present in those of us who may possess it as a gift from the gods. We shall have clear knowledge of this when, before we investigate how it comes to be present in men, we first try to find out what virtue in itself is. (*Meno* 100B2–6)

^{1.} This chapter is a substantial revision of and so supersedes Benson (2003a).

^{2.} Robinson (1953, 117) "assumes" a positive answer to this question.

In this chapter I defend the second alternative. Plato depicts Socrates employing the method of hypothesis all the way through both the argument for virtue's teachability and the argument for virtue's unteachability. At 96D, Socrates appears to abandon the method of hypothesis and resolves the incompatibility arising from these two arguments in a way he explicitly asserts falls short of knowledge. Read in this way the last third of the Meno³ depicts an application of the method that we sketched in chapter 5, and will usher in a thicker understanding of Plato's method of hypothesis.

Before turning to this defense, however, we should notice that in introducing the application of the method of hypothesis at 87B3-4, Socrates focuses on his and Meno's mutual ignorance for justifying the appeal to the method of hypothesis. It is not Meno's refusal to consider the "What is virtue?" question that motivates the move to the method of hypothesis.⁴ Rather, Socrates maintains that it is appropriate to employ the method of hypothesis because of their complete ignorance of virtue established before Meno's paradox. It is because they lack robust virtue-knowledge—knowing neither what virtue is nor what qualities it possesses that appeal to a hypothesis is appropriate. When de novo learning or inquiry is at stake—when, that is, one seeks to discover on one's own without attempting to learn from someone else who knows what one fails to know—Plato recommends employing the method of hypothesis. Here in the Meno, at least, he recommends the method of hypothesis in response to Clitophon's challenge.

The Proof Stage: Meno 87B-D

As we have already seen, Socrates begins the investigation concerning the teachability of virtue as follows:

Among the things existing in the soul, of what sort is virtue, that it should be teachable or not? First, if it is another sort than knowledge, is it teachable or not, or, as we were just saying, recollectable? Let it make no difference to us which term we use: is it teachable? Or is it plain to anyone that men cannot be taught anything but knowledge? —I think so.

Socrates: But, if virtue is a kind of knowledge, it is clear that it could be taught — Of course. (Meno 87B5-C7)

^{3.} See note 45, chapter 3.

^{4.} Although their failure to know the answer to this question, given Plato's commitment to the priority of definitional knowledge, does explain their complete robust ignorance of virtue.

I have already responded to those who take Socrates here to be turning the discussion, at least temporarily, back to the "What is virtue?" question.⁵ Rather, just as in the geometrical example, Socrates introduces the investigation of the teachability of virtue by reducing the original teachability question ("Is virtue teachable?") to another question, the reduced knowledge question ("Is virtue knowledge?"). Socrates carries out this reduction by maintaining that a property of virtue (being a kind of knowledge) is both necessary and sufficient for virtue's teachability, just as the geometers proposed a property of the area (the application property) which was necessary and sufficient for the area to have the inscription property. At 87C2, Socrates maintains that it is clear to all that no one can be taught anything other than knowledge; that is, Socrates maintains that virtue's being knowledge is a necessary condition of its teachability. And, then at 87C5-6, he maintains that it is clear to all that if virtue is knowledge, it is teachable; that is, Socrates maintains that virtue's being knowledge is a sufficient condition of its teachability.⁶ So, just as in the geometrical example, Socrates reduces the question under investigation to another question by identifying a property—being a kind of knowledge—the possession of which is necessary and sufficient for virtue's having the teachability property. Schematically:

Q1: Is virtue teachable?

Bi-conditional: Virtue is teachable just in case virtue is knowledge.

Q2: Is virtue knowledge?

A2: Virtue is (or is not) knowledge.A1: Virtue is (or is not) teachable.

That Socrates should maintain that virtue's being knowledge is both necessary and sufficient for virtue's teachability is striking. The only side of this biconditional that Socrates employs in the argument that follows is the sufficiency condition. We will see that, at 87D2–89C4, Plato provides an argument for the claim that virtue is a kind of knowledge (A2), from which it follows that virtue is teachable (A1), given the sufficiency condition. Again, at 89C5–96D4, Plato provides an argument that virtue is not teachable, from which it follows that virtue is not a kind of knowledge, given the sufficiency condition. The necessity

^{5.} See pp. 100-102.

^{6.} For both the necessary and sufficient condition, see Bluck (1964, 326), Sharples (1985, 162), and Scott (2006, 136).

condition appears otiose for the purposes of the arguments that follow.⁷ The fact that Plato depicts Socrates as maintaining the necessity of knowledge for teachability despite its not being required for the argument may indicate Plato's desire to underscore the parallel with the geometer's method. Like the geometers, Socrates reduces the teachability question (Q1) to the knowledge question (Q2). He does this by appealing to a bi-conditional, again like the geometers, although in fact the bi-conditional is not required for the depiction of the method of hypothesis that follows. Moreover, again just as in the case of the geometrical example, the present passage presents us with two aspects of the method. Immediately following 87B5-C7, Plato writes:

We have dealt with that question quickly, that if it is of one kind it can be taught, if it is of a different kind it cannot.... The next point to consider seems to be whether virtue is knowledge or something else. (Meno 87C8–D1)

Here, Plato distinguishes between the stage of identifying the question to which the question of virtue's teachability is to be reduced from the stage of coming to know or discovering the answer to this reduced question. We saw in the previous chapter that Plato described this latter stage in the *Phaedo* as consisting of two confirmation processes on the answer to the reduced question which one judged most compelling (A2).8 The first confirmation process was described as examining whether the *hormêthenta* of the reduced question agree with one another or not, and the second confirmation process amounted to giving an account of that most compelling answer by applying the proof stage to it. Socrates turns first to this second confirmation process in the pages of the Meno which follow.

Before turning to those pages and the process of confirmation they display, let us pause to see what, if anything, we have learned about the proof stage, sketched in

^{7.} Moreover, the necessity condition seems in conflict with the theory of recollection and the conversation with the slave concerning which Plato has just taken care to remind us. The slave is depicted as recollecting—i.e., being taught—true belief, as opposed to knowledge, a distinction Socrates makes much of at the end of the dialogue (97 Dff.). I do not mean to deny that Plato thinks knowledge is necessary for teachability; see, for example, *Timaeus* 51E2–3. Rather, my point is simply that even the appearance of conflict need not have arisen given that the necessity condition plays no role in the arguments which follow, except perhaps at 99B5-D6. Of course, if Plato should deny that knowledge is necessary for teachability, this would tell against Menn's (2002) interpretation according to which Plato is recommending the method of geometrical analysis for arriving at the reduced question. For if knowledge is not necessary for teachability, beginning with the hypothetical answer to the original question that virtue is teachable will not lead one to the reversible proposition that virtue is knowledge, and so since virtue is knowledge, virtue is teachable.

^{8.} We also saw in the previous chapter that the geometrical illustration in the Meno offered no guidance on how one should go about answering the reduced question.

chapter 5, from the application of it here in the *Meno*. Recall that one of the issues left under-determined by the geometrical illustration was whether *the* hypothesis was the bi-conditional (the area has the inscription property just in case the area has the application property) by which one identified the reduced question (Q2), or the answer to the reduced question which one judged most compelling (A2). A similar debate concerns the present application of the proof stage. The dispute concerns whether the hypothesis under consideration is "Virtue is teachable just in case it is knowledge" (the bi-conditional) or "Virtue is knowledge" (A2). Richard Robinson, in the first edition of *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, and supported much later by Zyskind, Sternfeld, and Stokes, argued for the former. In the second edition, Robinson reversed his position as a consequence of the arguments of Cherniss and Friedländer, followed by a host of others, and defended the position that the latter—"Virtue is knowledge"—is the hypothesis under consideration. But unfortunately nothing in the current passage advances the debate, if for no other reason than that the term "hypothesis" does not occur in the present passage and so nothing is so designated. 11

Nevertheless, in the very next line (87D3), the claim that virtue is good is explicitly called a hypothesis, and this serves as the most compelling answer (the answer that "stands firm for us") to a further question to which the "Is virtue knowledge?" question has been reduced. This might suggest that the answer (A2) to the "Is virtue knowledge?" question (Q2), to which the "Is virtue teachable?" question (Q1) has been reduced, ought to be designated as the hypothesis of the proof stage. That is, it suggests that the answer to the reduced question (A2) is *the* hypothesis, not the bi-conditional. Moreover, we saw that the first description passage from the *Phaedo* (100A3–8) suggested that the *logos* hypothesized was the answer to the reduced question one judged most compelling. Further, at the end of the argument for the teachability of virtue in response to Socrates' question whether the good are good by learning, Meno asserts

Necessarily, as I now think, Socrates, and clearly, on our hypothesis, if virtue is knowledge, it can be taught (κατὰ τὴν ὑπόθεσιν, εἴπερ ἐπιστήμη ἐστὶν ἀρετή, ὅτι διδακτόν ἐστιν). (*Meno* 89C2-4)

^{9.} Robinson (1941, 120–23), Zyskind and Sternfeld (1976), and Stokes (1963, 197–98). To be precise, in the first edition, Robinson identified the hypothesis, not with the bi-conditional, but with the conditional claim that if virtue is knowledge, then it is teachable. See also Weiss (2001, 131n10).

^{10.} Cherniss (1947), Friedländer (1945), Bluck (1964, 325), Stahl (1971), Sharples (1985, 167), and Scott (2006, 139).

^{11.} Of course, ὑποθέμενοι is used at 87B3-4, but it is used absolutely. Friedländer (1945, 255), and apparently Cherniss (1947, 140n38), think otherwise, but see Bluck (1964, 325).

Some scholars have thought the Greek here indicates that the hypothesis referred to is "virtue is knowledge" 12 (A2), which by this stage in the dialogue has been at least upwardly confirmed, while others take the Greek to at least *allow* that the hypothesis is "if virtue is knowledge, then it can be taught." The evidence provided by the Meno's application of the method of hypothesis, then, encourages the view that the hypothesis is the answer to the reduced question judged most compelling (A2) and not the bi-conditional (or conditional); but, as the last passage makes clear, the evidence is hardly definitive.

What is important, however, is not what is designated as the hypothesis, but that both the bi-conditional and the answer to the reduced question (A2) are employed in the method of hypothesis. The bi-conditional (or perhaps the conditional in the virtue case) is used in order to identify the reduced question that will help in answering the original question. The answer to the reduced question one judges most compelling is used to answer the original question and to decide on which answer to begin the confirmation stage. It is also important that both the bi-conditional and the answer to the reduced question are robustly unknown starting points for those seeking to learn on their own whether virtue is teachable. 14 It is difficult to believe that identifying *the* hypothesis is essential for understanding the method, given how Plato seems unconcerned to make this clear. What is essential is identifying the relevant claims and recognizing their cognitive status, not determining which is designated "the hypothesis." 15

^{12.} See, for example, Sharples (1985, 167).

^{13.} See, for example, Stokes (1963, 297–98).

^{14.} Wolfsdorf (2008a, 162) thinks that the principle reason for thinking that the hypothesis is the bi-conditional is that the bi-conditional is a postulate and so cognitively secure (as is the hypothesis that virtue is good). But it is difficult to believe that the evidence that Socrates is committed to virtue is knowledge (and so is cognitively secure for Socrates) is not just as strong as the evidence that Socrates is committed to knowledge is teachable. See note 3, chapter 1, and Vlastos (1991, 124), who calls the view that virtue is knowledge "a cardinal Socratic doctrine." Wolfsdorf's appeal to analyticity in this context risks anachronism.

^{15.} Scott (2006, 138n17) argues that it is essential to determine what the hypothesis is because Socrates describes the method as a method from a hypothesis, not a method from hypotheses. Consequently, there must be one dominant hypothesis. Even if this is true, an adequate understanding of the structure of the method does not depend on determining which is the dominant hypothesis. Both claims are employed as starting points and both are unknown. Even Scott, by endorsing Cherniss's "elegant solution," allows that there is a different dominant hypothesis at each level of argument—i.e., for each application of the upward path of confirmation; Scott (2006, 139). Determining which is the hypothesis may influencewhether one thinks that the *Meno*'s application and description is an earlier approximation of later, more fully worked out applications and descriptions (see, for example, Stokes 1963, 298), but I have set aside these sorts of issues early on in our study. Further, we will see that in Plato's image of the Divided Line in the Republic, Socrates is made to describe the method as

In any case, Socrates begins employing the method of hypothesis by (1) reducing the question under investigation (Q1) to another question (Q2), both of whose answers are unknown. 16 Socrates carries out the reduction by (2) identifying a property whose possession is sufficient (and necessary) for the possession of the property under consideration in the original question. He identifies a property whose possession is at least sufficient and ideally necessary for something to possess the property of teachability. Finally, (3) Socrates distinguishes between identifying such a property, (i.e., identifying a reduced question (Q2)) from determining whether the thing possesses that property (i.e., answering the reduced question (A2)). What Plato has portrayed is the proof stage of the method of hypothesis as we have sketched it in chapter 5. He has not explicitly portrayed the downward path of the proof stage, the display of how the answer to the reduced question answers the original question, but that is because in the present case the result is immediate. Given that virtue's being knowledge is at least sufficient for virtue's being teachable, answering the reduced question by the compelling answer that virtue is knowledge immediately entails that virtue is teachable.¹⁷ Let us see how Socrates continues to employ the method of hypothesis.

The Upward Path of Confirmation Stage (87D2-89C4)

Immediately following Socrates' encouragement to inquire whether virtue is a kind of knowledge, Plato writes the following:

Well now, do we say that virtue is itself something good, and will this hypothesis stand firm for us, that it is something good ($\kappa\alpha$ ì αὕτη ἡ ὑπόθεσις μένει ἡμῖν, ἀγαθὸν αὐτὸ εἶναι)? . . . If then there is anything else good that is different and separate from knowledge, virtue might well not be a kind of knowledge; but if there is nothing good that knowledge does not encompass, we would be right to suspect that it is a kind of knowledge. (*Meno* 87D2–8)

a method from hypotheses (in the plural; *Republic* 6.510B5), although I suppose Scott could take the plural as indicating an inappropriate use of the method of hypothesis. See pp. 242 ff. See Rose (1970), who argues that Socrates recognizes a plurality of hypotheses in a single argument.

^{16.} Indeed, these answers are perhaps unknowable prior to knowing the answer to the "What is virtue?" question which Meno has refused to pursue, given Socrates' commitment to the epistemological priority of definitional knowledge.

^{17.} It is also the only answer to the original question which is consistent with virtue's being knowledge.

Here, Plato appears to be recommending the second of the two procedures he describes in the *Phaedo* for confirming the answer to the reduced question one judges most compelling.

Socrates describes the procedure here as falling into two parts. First, he reduces the question whether virtue is knowledge to the question whether virtue is good, and proposes that the most compelling answer is that it is—that is, that virtue is good. He explicitly refers to this compelling answer as a hypothesis (ἡ ὑπόθεσις). Indeed, the answer is judged so compelling that Socrates explains that it is a hypothesis that will "stand firm for us" (μένει ἡμῖν). It is not immediately clear what the force of "standing firm for us" is supposed to be, but one is reminded of the image of the statues of Daedalus which Plato employs near the end of the dialogue. Socrates is made to explain that knowledge is more valuable than true belief because true belief, like the unchained statues of Daedalus and unlike knowledge, runs away and does not remain for long (98A1-2). The idea seems to be that an answer that stands firm, remains, or does not run away from us is in some sense better confirmed, more evident, more compelling, or more stable than one that does not. It is, we might say in light of our sketch of the method of hypothesis, an answer or hypothesis that is "adequate" (hikanon).18

Second, Socrates explains that the next step is to determine whether anything else is good other than knowledge. If not, the "lower" hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge can be obtained from the "higher" stable hypothesis that virtue is good. That is, Socrates proposes to show how the answer to the reduced question (that virtue is knowledge (A2)) is obtained from the answer to the second or higher reduced question (that virtue is good). This is the downward path of the proof stage in our sketch of the method of hypothesis [Pb]. Socrates recognizes, however, that the argument here will not be immediate. The conditional that if something is good, then it is knowledge (let alone the corresponding bi-conditional) is not asserted, but defended and explained. Showing how the answer to the first reduced question ("Is virtue knowledge?") is to be obtained from the answer to the second reduced question ("Is virtue good?") will take some work.

Consequently, these two parts of the procedure described at 87D2-8 together amount to an application of the proof stage of the method of hypothesis directed at the answer to the reduced question, whether virtue is knowledge.

^{18.} Wolfsdorf (2008a, 162) takes the proposition that "virtue is good" (or on Wolfsdorf's translation, "excellence is good") to be "assumed by the interlocutors to be self-evidently true."

That is, these two parts together amount to an application of the upward path of the confirmation procedure [Cb]. We can put this schematically as follows:

Q1: Is virtue teachable?

Bi-conditional: Virtue is teachable just in case virtue is knowledge.

Q2: Is virtue knowledge?

P2 (87D2–89C4): Look for a higher hypothesis from which A2/H1 can be obtained

Conditional²: If something is good, then it is knowledge; this is explained,

rather than asserted without defense.

Q3: Is virtue good?

A3/H2: Virtue is good; this answers stands firm.

A2/H1: Virtue is knowledge.

A1: Virtue is teachable.

Unfortunately, the text which follows does not proceed as Socrates suggests it will at 87D2–8. He does not defend the conditional that if something is good, then it is knowledge. I suspect that Socrates does not attempt to defend this conditional because, at least on a fairly straightforward reading, it is evidently false. Many good things are evidently not knowledge. Rather, what Socrates appears to argue for is that knowledge is what makes things good. The idea seems to be something like the following.

Knowledge is what makes qualities or features of the soul, things like "moderation, and justice, courage, intelligence, memory, munificence, and all such things," beneficial, and its absence makes those qualities harmful.¹⁹ Socrates

^{19.} Plato here apparently allows that psychological qualities or features (perhaps capacities) like courage and temperance when knowledge is not present are not beneficial and so are not virtues (88A6-B3). In the case of courage, Plato suggests that when knowledge is absent the psychological feature is more properly called rashness (although he also appears to call it courage as though there are two forms of courage—rashness and courage proper; see 88B3-6). But he makes no such qualification in the case of temperance at 88B6-8. Temperance without knowledge is harmful. See, for example, Penner (1973, 42n11) and Scott (2006, 146, 149); against this, however, see, for example, Irwin (1977, 295-96n16) and Vlastos (1991, 228n92). This has led some to conclude that for Socrates virtue is really knowledge plus, for example, the psychological feature that results in rashness (when knowledge is absent) and in courage (when knowledge is present). See, for example, Santas (2001, 41–42). If so, Socrates' argument for the teachability of virtue would fail since only a portion of virtue is teachable the knowledge portion. The other portion of virtue—the psychological feature—must be acquired in another way. But I think Socrates' point in this argument is not that virtue is the psychological feature plus knowledge. Rather, virtue is what makes the psychological feature beneficial. But the presence of knowledge (see note 20, next) is what makes the psychological feature beneficial. Similarly with beneficial physical features. What makes those features beneficial is virtue/knowledge. So, virtue is knowledge. See also Phaedo 68C5-69C3 and 82A10-B9.

appears concerned to maintain both that the presence²⁰ of knowledge is necessary for the virtues being virtues (or good)—without it these qualities are harmful—and that the presence of knowledge is sufficient for the virtues being virtues (or good)—with it these qualities are beneficial. The presence of knowledge accounts²¹ for the benefit and harm of these qualities of the soul. Socrates then goes on to make a similar point about physical qualities. Knowledge, Socrates argues, is what makes the qualities of the body, like "health, . . . and strength, and beauty, and also wealth" beneficial, and its absence makes them harmful. Again, the presence of knowledge is necessary and sufficient for the goodness or benefit of these physical qualities. But, since virtue also is what makes psychological qualities beneficial, and so virtues (or good), and what makes physical qualities beneficial (or good),²² it follows that virtue is knowledge. As Socrates puts it, "So, virtue is knowledge, either in whole or in part" (Meno 89A3-4).²³ And, so

^{20.} I use the word "presence" here, but Plato seems to fluctuate between the phrases "with knowledge" (σὺν νῷ; 88B5) and "without knowledge" (ἄνευ νοῦ; 88B5), and phrases like "lead by knowledge" (ήγουμένης... φρονήσεως; 88C2), which is contrasted with ἀφροσύνης. For the purposes of the present argument it does not matter which description Plato prefers as long as he identifies one or the other (the presence of knowledge or being lead by knowledge) as what makes the qualities of the soul beneficial or harmful, since he also identifies virtue with what makes the qualities of the soul beneficial or harmful. Nevertheless, Plato here may be transitioning from Socratic intellectualism (that knowledge (i.e., its presence) is necessary and sufficient for virtue which many scholars have found in Plato's elenctic dialogues) to the weaker view that knowledge (i.e., its presence) is only necessary, but not sufficient (it must lead in addition) for virtue which many scholars have found in Plato's so-called middle and late dialogues. See note 3, chapter 1. In a longer argument evidently involving many of the same issues (Euthydemus 278E-282D; Vlastos (1991, 227) describes Meno 87E-88E as its "miniaturized doublet") the "lead by knowledge" version appears more prominent. If Plato does eventually opt for the "lead by knowledge" version, one might worry about the success of the current argument, since the premise that all and only knowledge is teachable may be more plausibly understood as the presence of knowledge is teachable, not that being lead by knowledge is teachable. But Plato's lack of precision in this argument may indicate that he does not think the argument hangs on these issues.

^{21.} Perhaps "causes" in the sense of aitia, which Plato discusses at Phaedo 96A5ff. See Scott (2006, 148-49).

^{22.} Something like this may be the point of 87D8-E4. The idea is that virtue makes the virtues virtues in the same way that piety makes pious things pious (see Euthyphro 6D9-E1) or that beauty makes beautiful things beautiful (see Phaedo 100C3-101D1). The point of citing the Euthyphro passage is to at least suggest that such an idea need not commit one to a fullfledged theory of Forms, although as we will see in the next chapter a commitment to such a theory does commit one to such a view, at least according to Plato. See Scott (2006, 148).

^{23.} Sharples (1985, 165) renders this "excellence is wisdom, either the whole of wisdom or some part of it," explaining "It has been shown both that knowledge or wisdom is necessary for excellence, and that everything else has good or bad consequences depending on whether or not knowledge directs it; but this does not in itself rule out there being some part of knowledge that is not required for excellence.... The Greek could equally well, as far as the

virtue is teachable: "Necessarily, as I now think, Socrates, and clearly, on our first hypothesis, if virtue is knowledge, it can be taught" (*Meno* 89C2–4).²⁴

Whatever we think of the argument here, and certainly neither Plato's commitment to it nor its logical structure are uncontroversial, ²⁵ Socrates appears to be employing the second of the two confirmation procedures he describes in

grammar goes, be rendered 'wisdom is excellence, either the whole of excellence or a part of it' (so Thompson 1901) but this would wreck Socrates' argument; if wisdom is only a part of excellence, it does not follow that excellence will be teachable, for the other parts of excellence might be something which one cannot be taught." It seems to me that the whole force of the argument in this portion of the *Meno* is that virtue is some kind of knowledge; see 88D2–3. It does not establish what kind of knowledge and hence can at best be seen as arguing what sort of a thing virtue is, not what virtue is. Thus, we should understand this passage as suggesting that virtue is a part of knowledge in the sense that it is one of the kinds of knowledge and that all kinds of knowledge are teachable. See Irwin (1995, 372n21).

24. The argument between these two passages (89B1–C1) is difficult to decipher. It appears to have the following structure. If virtue came by nature, there would be individuals who could recognize the young who were virtuous by nature, but there are no such individuals. So virtue does not come by nature. So virtue is teachable. (See Scott 2006, 157-58.) This argument depends on taking teaching and nature as the only two ways virtue can be acquired, contrary to the implication of Meno's question at the beginning of the dialogue, as well as Socrates' apparent resolution at the end of the dialogue of the aporia that results from the argument that virtue is teachable and the argument that virtue is not teachable. Perhaps we should take the argument as a quick application of the downward path of the confirmation procedure: if virtue is knowledge, then virtue is teachable; if virtue is teachable, then it does not come by nature (89A5-6; this does not depend on taking nature and teaching as the only two possibilities for acquiring virtue, but it does depend on taking them to be exclusive); if it does not come by nature, then there should not be individuals who recognize the young who are virtuous by nature; there are no individuals who recognize the young who are virtuous by nature. The hormêthenta of the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge (at least those we have looked at so far) agree with each other. Scott (2006, 157) appears to think that the Καὶ γὰρ at 89B1 will not permit the passage from 89A5-C1 to be read as single argument. But Sharples (1985, 165) rightly points out that this second argument is "from observation of the actual state of affairs," which lends some support to reading the passage as an application of the downward path. But, in fact, this second argument simply looks inadequate and out of place.

25. See the previous notes. The version of the argument and my understanding of the passage owe much to Scott (2006, 145–57), although he would not approve of my way of putting things. See also Vlastos (1991, 200–32) and more recently, Brickhouse and Smith (2010, 172–89), among many others, for a discussion of the Socratic moral psychology surrounding this passage. It must be admitted, however, that Socrates' summary of the first part of the argument at 88C4–D3 suggests a different way of understanding the argument. It makes it look as though Plato sees the argument as having the form: knowledge is the only beneficial feature of the soul; virtue is a beneficial feature of the soul; so, virtue is knowledge. See, for example, Thompson (1901, 161) who evidently takes the argument that way. Unfortunately, it is difficult to see how Socrates can get the first premise. It looks like courage, temperance, and the like are also beneficial features of the soul (esp. in light of the difficulties discussed in note 19, this chapter). Socrates would need an argument to the effect that courage, temperance, etc., are identical to knowledge. Perhaps, that is the point of 88B1–D3, but it is hard to see how. Moreover, it is difficult to see what role the second part of the argument concerning physical features plays. Scott (2006, 157) interestingly concludes his discussion

the *Phaedo*. He reduces the reduced question (Q2) to a second reduced question (Q3), whose most compelling answer is in some way "adequate" (A3/H2) and from which the answer to the reduced question (A2) can be obtained. Indeed, this is just the proof stage directed at the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge. The difference lies in that the answer (A3/H2) to the second reduced question (Q3) to which the first reduced question (Q2) has been reduced—that is, that virtue is good—is in some way given or stable, "adequate" (hikanon). It "stands firm for us." Consequently, at least for the purposes of the inquiry in the Meno, it does not require further confirmation in the upward direction. The upward path of the confirmation stage [Cb] has come to an end.

Before concluding our review of 87D2-89C4, we should pause to consider how this application of the upward path of the confirmation stage augments our understanding of the structure of the method of hypothesis. We have seen that the general structure of the second confirmation procedure is fairly well represented and adds nothing new. But Plato has provided a brief description of what it is for a hypothesis to be "adequate"—it is in some way to "stand firm for us." Plato has also provided an explicit application of the downward path of the proof stage [Pb] included in the upward path of the confirmation stage. Recall that this part of the proof stage was plausibly associated with synthesis in geometry, and in the present application it is clearly not immediate or straightforward. The argument displaying how the answer to the reduced question (A2/H1) is obtained from the answer to the second reduced question (A3/ H2) is complex and protracted. Indeed, it explicitly appeals to other premises (hypotheses?) like "the presence of knowledge makes courage beneficial" and "the presence of knowledge makes health beneficial." Moreover, it is difficult to see how the inferences from such explicit premises and the hypothesis that virtue is good to the lower hypothesis that virtue is knowledge can be thought to be deductively valid in a rigorous way. To achieve anything like the deductive rigor associated with disciplines like geometery we will need to clean up the argument considerably and supply numerous premises, each of which will also presumably need to be confirmed either by being "adequate" or by being obtained from yet higher hypotheses. Plato's display of the upward path of the confirmation procedure here makes clear the messiness of the method when applied outside the rigors of the mathematical disciplines. But the structure of the procedure is discernible. And the recommendation to pursue such a procedure can be accommodated.

of the problems associated with this argument as follows: "The problem with the hypothesis is not that it is false, but that it is inadequately understood. Ultimately, the only solution will be to ascend the upward path towards the Good recommended in the Republic"; see chapter 9, this volume.

The Downward Path of the Confirmation Stage (89C5–96D4)

Of course, that the argument from 87D2 to 89C4 represents the second of the two procedures described in the *Phaedo*—the upward path of the confirmation stage [Cb]—has been maintained before. ²⁶ But, the method of hypothesis here in the *Meno* has sometimes been thought to conclude with this procedure. ²⁷ At 89C5, it is suggested, Socrates returns to the original question whether virtue can be taught, and examines it not from a hypothesis, but by means of an *elenchos* or in some other way. However, the question whether virtue is knowledge—that is, the question to which the question of virtue's teachability has been reduced (Q2)—has not in fact been abandoned. Plato makes this clear by introducing the next portion of the dialogue as follows:

I am not saying that it is wrong to say that virtue is teachable if it is knowledge, but look whether it is reasonable of me to doubt whether it is knowledge (ὅτι δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐπιστήμη, σκέψαι ἐάν σοι δοκῶ εἰκότως ἀπιστεῖν). Tell me this: if not only virtue but anything whatever can be taught, should there not be of necessity people who teach it and people who learn it? (Meno 89D3–8)

Socrates here maintains that what he is doubting is not that virtue is teachable, but the hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge. Virtue's being a kind of knowledge remains the topic of investigation. Socrates has not abandoned the method of hypothesis and begun a different procedure for addressing the question whether virtue is teachable. He is still seeking to confirm the most compelling answer to the reduced question (A2/H1).

But why? Why does Socrates express doubt concerning virtue's being a kind of knowledge? Hasn't that issue already been resolved? Hasn't he already confirmed that virtue is a kind of knowledge all the way up to the "adequate"

^{26.} See, for example, Thompson (1901, 153), Bluck (1964, 89), Sharples (1985, 10), and Bostock (1986, 166).

^{27.} See, for example, Robinson (1953, 116–17) and Bedu-Addo (1984, 2). Gonzalez (1998a, 180) apparently thinks that the method of hypothesis continues following 89C, but he takes the fact that Socrates uses the method first to show that virtue is teachable and then to show that virtue is not teachable as evidence for the view that the method of hypothesis is inadequate and only leads to half-truths based on the ambiguity of words. Scott (2006, 139–40) correctly, in my view, sees that following 89C, Socrates finds an inconsistency in the *horméthenta* of the hypothesis. Vlastos (1991, 124ns72–73), too, takes the method to continue following 89C, but he does not take the argument from 89C–96C as directed against the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge. Rather, he thinks the argument against virtue is knowledge is to be found at 96D–98C.

hypothesis that virtue is good? Yes. But as we should recall from chapter 5, that is only one of two necessary confirmation procedures required before "holding on to and answering" the reduced question. Socrates must also test the answer to the reduced question to see whether its *hormêthenta* agree or disagree with each other. It is this second, downward confirmation procedure [Ca] that Socrates turns to in the extended discussion that follows.

To see this, let us look at the structure of the argument from 89C5 to 96D4. The details of the argument here, like the previous argument, are complex and controversial. But the basic structure that emerges from the passage is relatively clear.

At Meno 89D3-8, Plato makes clear that an immediate consequence of the hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge is that virtue is teachable. This is, of course, not surprising. The hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge was introduced precisely because it had that consequence. The hypothesis was introduced because Plato had argued that being a kind of knowledge was necessary and sufficient for something to be teachable, and here Plato employs the sufficiency claim. But Plato also indicates at 89D3-8 that a consequence of this consequence—that is, a consequence of virtue's teachability—is that there should be teachers and pupils of virtue. As Socrates puts it

Tell me this: if not only virtue but anything whatever can be taught, should there not be of necessity people who teach it and people who learn it? (*Meno* 89D6-8)

Socrates here endorses the following conditional: if something is teachable, then there are teachers and students of it. This has seemed to some scholars to be the first bad step in an argument that has been roundly criticized.²⁸ But, this conditional may not be as implausible as it has been made out to be.²⁹ The conditional

^{28.} For example, Cornford (n.d., 245) thinks there is a flaw in the argument from no teachers to not teachable (see also Cornford 1952, 59-60; and Desjardins 1985, 272n14); Devereux (1978, 122-23) thinks the argument from no teachers to not teachable only applies to teachable in the sophistic sense (not in the Socratic sense) (see also Wilkes 1979); and Bedu-Addo (1984, 10–14) thinks the argument from no teachers to not teachable is tongue-in-cheek; according to Bedu-Addo (1984, 12n49), the arguments on behalf of "virtue is not knowledge" are deliberately fallacious. Vlastos (1991, 124n73) describes the argument against the teachability of virtue from 89D-96C as "lame," but he thinks the argument against virtue is knowledge at 96D-98C is "perfectly solid." Bluck (1964, 19-30) apparently takes the argument against the teachability of virtue to be taken seriously and hence takes seriously the aporetic conclusion of the dialogue. Others who appear to take the argument seriously include Rose (1970, 3-4), Burnyeat (1980, 187), and Weiss (2001, 139-40).

^{29.} See Bluck (1964, 342) and Scott (2006, 161-62).

is a claim about the *horméthenta* of the thesis that virtue is teachable, and it amounts to the reasonable thought that if someone were to assert that some discipline or ability were teachable, it would be reasonable to seek to confirm this assertion by looking for examples. It would be reasonable, that is, to look for its teachers or students. Certainly, if such teachers and students were to be found, the assertion would appear supported, perhaps even confirmed. And if no such teachers or students were to be found, one might wonder whether the assertion were true. It may not follow that the discipline or ability is not teachable merely from the fact that no examples of such teachers or students are to be found, but it would not be unreasonable if this lack of teachers and students led one to doubt whether it was true. And doubting its truth is precisely what Socrates says he does.³⁰

Whether or not the conditional is reasonable, Socrates seems to endorse it and claims that, despite having often tried with the help of many others who themselves were very experienced in this matter, he has been unable to find any such teachers of virtue (89E6–9).³¹ The arrival of Anytus leads Socrates to invite him to join in their search for teachers of virtue,³² and thereupon Socrates embarks on a rather long argument (89D–96D), first with Anytus (90A–95A) and then with Meno (95A–96D), to the conclusion that no teachers or pupils of virtue are to be found. If the argument is successful, it follows that virtue is not teachable (or, at least not likely to be teachable, given the thesis of the previous paragraph), and so not a kind of knowledge (or, at least not likely to be a kind of knowledge), given that knowledge is sufficient for teachability.

Socrates begins the discussion with Anytus by asking him to whom he would send someone to learn to become a good doctor, a good shoemaker, a good flute player, or any other expert. Anytus and Socrates agree that they would send such an individual to those who profess to teach the expertise and charge a fee for it (90C9–E9). Then, Socrates asks to whom they should send Meno, who wants to become a good household and city manager—that is, who wants to acquire virtue-knowledge (90E10–91B2). In light of what they have

^{30.} It must be admitted, however, that Socrates's use of ἀναγκαῖον at 89D7 suggests Socrates' commitment to something rather stronger. That is, he appears to assert that if something is teachable it is not simply likely that there are teachers and students of it, but that it is necessary that there are. Nevertheless, when Socrates asserts the contra-positive of the thesis in the next lines (89E1–3), his use of εἰκάζοντες εἰκάζοιμεν may indicate something like the weaker version. See Scott (2006, 162). In any case, the more we take Socrates to be endorsing the stronger necessary version, the less plausible Socrates' argument becomes.

^{31.} See chapter 2, this volume.

^{32.} That this is what the search is for is indicated by Socrates' use of $\zeta\eta\tau\eta\sigma\epsilon\omega\varsigma$ at 89E10, given the use of $\zeta\eta\tau\bar{\omega}\nu$ and $\zeta\eta\tau\bar{\omega}$ at 89E6 and 89E8, and by 90B3–6.

just agreed about the other expertises, Socrates proposes that the answer must be the sophists. Anytus, however, explodes. He denies that the sophists are teachers of virtue, and accuses them of harming those with whom they associate. Socrates wonders how Anytus is able to form such a view, given that by his own admission he has never met a sophist (92B7-C7).³³ But, rather than pursuing this line of argument, Socrates asks Anytus to whom he would recommend sending Meno to learn virtue, if not the sophists. Anytus proposes that anyone among the καλοὶ κἀγαθοί will do (92E3-6). At this point Socrates offers an argument against the καλοὶ κἀγαθοί as teachers of virtue that relies roughly on the following three claims:

- (1) If any of the καλοὶ κἀγαθοί were teachers of virtue, Themistocles, Aristides, Pericles, and Thucydides would have been (93C3-5, 94C7-E2).
- (2) If Themistocles, Aristides, Pericles, and Thucydides had been teachers of virtue, they would have taught their sons to be virtuous (93C6–D8; 94C7-E2).
- (3) The sons of Themistocles, Aristides, Pericles, and Thucydides were not virtuous (93D9–E1).

It follows according to Socrates that "virtue can certainly not be taught" (Meno 94E2). Anytus gets angry and leaves.³⁴

Socrates next turns to Meno and proposes two main lines of argument, one directed at the failure of the καλοὶ κάγαθοί, the sophists, and the poets as teachers of virtue; and the second directed more specifically at the sophists. The first relies on the claim that

(4) The teachers of every other subject matter do not disagree over whether their subject matter can be taught (96B3-4).

And yet,

^{33.} It is not obvious how to understand Socrates' criticism here since later in his discussion with Meno he appears to deny that the sophists are teachers of virtue on different (presumably better) grounds. In the discussion with Anytus, Socrates appears to be recommending some sort personal experience of sophists for making such a judgment, and yet his discussion with Meno does not appear to rely on any firsthand experience of sophists. Perhaps, Plato is encouraging the reader to wonder about what sort of personal experience or empirical evidence is appropriate; see pp. 250-263.

^{34.} See Scott (2006, 165n3), who also cites Bluck (1964, 432–33) and Sharples (1985, 178, 188) for supposing that Anytus leaves, rather than stays but remains silent for the rest of the dialogue.

(5) The καλοὶ κἀγαθοί (at least those in Thessaly (95A6–B5)), the sophists (95B9–C4), and the poets (at least Theognis (95C9–96A5)) do disagree over the teachability of virtue.

The second depends on the claim that

(6) The teachers of every other subject matter are recognized as teachers of that subject matter and skilled in that subject matter (96A6–B1).

And yet, as the discussion with Anytus has made clear,

(7) The sophists are not so recognized (95C5–8).

Socrates concludes this portion of the dialogue by securing Meno's agreement that

(8) Only sophists and καλοὶ κάγαθοί are potential teachers of virtue (96B6-8).³⁵

Consequently, there are no teachers or pupils of virtue (96C6-8).³⁶ And so, given the consequence of virtue's teachability that there should be teachers and pupils of virtue, it follows that virtue cannot be taught (96C10), and so, that virtue is not a kind of knowledge.³⁷

On its face, Plato has revealed a disagreement between a consequence of the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge, viz. that it is teachable and so that there are (or are likely to be) teachers and students of it, and what we might call the facts on the ground, viz. there are in fact no such teachers and students—a disagreement between a consequence of the hypothesis and the world. This disagreement reflects the empirical character of the passage,³⁸ a character that has

^{35.} It is not clear why the poets have dropped out. Perhaps, Theognis is meant to be standing in for a sophist who is hiding as a poet (see *Protagoras* 316D3–9) or to be standing in as another example of the $\kappa\alpha\lambda$ 0ì $\kappa\dot{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\theta$ 0í.

^{36.} The argument to this conclusion also relies on the thesis that (9) if there are no teachers of virtue then there are no pupils of virtue at 96C1 and 96C8.

^{37.} That virtue is not a kind of knowledge is not explicitly inferred, but that this is the hypothesis under consideration is indicated by the way Plato begins the next section of argument; see also 98E7–8. See pp. 175.

^{38.} See, for example, Scott (2006, 177–78).

often been associated with its weakness. But in noticing the empirical character of the passage we should be careful not to take Socrates (or Anytus or Meno) to be appealing merely to something like perceptual facts or uninterpreted observations (to risk anachronism). The appeals to, for example, the goodness of Themistocles, the absence of virtue in his sons, the presence of καλοὶ κἀγαθοί in Thessaly, or the disagreement among the sophists are hardly anything like straightforward perceptual observations. But, even if they were, Socrates also appeals to generalizations, popular opinion, or common sense—endoxa—in exhibiting this disagreement. It is not just the observational facts, if that is what they are, that Themistocles was good but that his sons were not that generate a disagreement with the consequence that there are teachers and students of virtue. In addition, Socrates needs to appeal to the common opinion that if anyone is a teacher of virtue, Themistocles was (1). Again, it is not just the observational facts, if that is what they are, that teachers of other disciplines do not disagree about its teachability, but that the καλοὶ κάγαθοί and the sophists do disagree that generate a disagreement. Socrates needs, in addition, that these two groups of individuals are the only potential teachers of virtue (8). My point in describing these additional "facts" as *endoxa* is not to suggest that Socrates does not believe them, but to underscore how far removed they are from anything like uninterpreted observational facts. There is, indeed, an empirical character to the arguments in this passage, but the notion of empirical here is rather loose. Indeed, one is reminded of Owen's classic paper, "Tithenai ta Phainomena," according to which Aristotle's use of phainomena is ambiguous between empirical observations and things that humans "are inclined or accustomed to say on the subject" (endoxa and legomena). 39 Aristotle may have inherited his ambiguity from passages like this one in the Meno. The empirical character of the passage is evident, but the notion of empirical is ambiguous and loose or inclusive. 40

Furthermore, it is easy to see why this portion of the Meno might be associated with the method of *elenchos*. ⁴¹ The *elenchos*, too, appears to proceed

^{39.} Owen (1975, 114-15).

^{40.} See also Nussbaum (1982, 274), who rightly corrects Owen's claim that phainomena is ambiguous by maintaining instead that phainomena is "a loose and inclusive notion of 'experience', or the way(s) a human observer sees or 'takes' the world, using his cognitive faculties. . . . "In agreeing with Nussbaum here, I should not be thought to be agreeing with her view that Aristotle, by calling *phainomena* his *paradeigmata*, is explicitly contrasting his method with Plato's. Indeed, the current passage from the Meno suggests more similarity than difference between the methods.

^{41.} See, for example, Bluck (1964, 54–55).

by investigating whether a given claim or consequence of a claim agrees or disagrees with a variety of other observations, beliefs, or *endoxa*.⁴² But at least two differences between the *elenchos* as it is practiced in the elenctic dialogues and the procedure of the current passage are critical. First, in an *elenchos*, the initial claim—what I have labeled elsewhere as the apparent refutand—is always put forward as a knowledge claim.⁴³ But this is not the case here in the *Meno*. No one here claims to know that virtue is a kind of knowledge. Certainly neither Meno nor Socrates does.⁴⁴ Thus, while the *elenchos* is a test of knowledge, the method of hypothesis is not. The method of hypothesis is an attempt to acquire the knowledge one recognizes one lacks.⁴⁵

But, this first difference leads to the second. In order for the interlocutor's knowledge to be tested, it is vital that the interlocutor's beliefs get on the table, so to speak. It is only in this way that the *elenchos* can test the interlocutor's knowledge (given Socrates' own ignorance). According to Socrates, if the interlocutor has the knowledge he claims to have, his relevant beliefs will be consistent. Consequently, a necessary and sufficient condition for a premise to be accepted into an *elenchos* is that the premise is believed by the interlocutor. But, Socrates is not focused on Anytus' and Meno's beliefs here in the *Meno*. The issue is not whether they believe there are no teachers of virtue. Indeed, on the contrary, they believe that there are, or at least Anytus clearly does. The issue is that, despite what they believe, no such teachers are to be found. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons Plato has Anytus take part in the discussion. It underscores the fact that one can engage in this procedure with more than one interlocutor at a time—something that cannot be done given the requirements of premise

^{42.} This is true on any of the accounts of the *elenchos* mentioned in chapter 2 earlier. The difference among those accounts depends on what constraints, if any, Socrates places on those other "observations, beliefs, or *endoxa*," and on what Socrates can and/or does conclude from the agreement or disagreement. For the claim that the premises of the Socratic *elenchos* must be *endoxa*, see Bolton (1993).

^{43.} Benson (2000, 54-55; 2011b), and pp. 41-43.

^{44.} Perhaps, Anytus does, but if so, not explicitly.

^{45.} See Kanayama (2000, 93).

^{46.} More properly, the interlocutor will exhibit doxastic coherence; see Benson (2011b).

^{47.} Benson (2000, 37–53) and for a more nuanced, and hence more precise, view see Benson (2011b). For an argument against such a constraint on premise acceptability in the *elenchos*, see, for example, Beversluis (2000, ch. 2).

^{48.} For other, compatible reasons, see Scott (2006, 165–75).

acceptability in the elenchos. What is required is not that the premises are believed by Anytus and/or Meno, but that they are in some way independently plausible.49

If, then, this reading of *Meno* 89C5–96D4 is correct and it corresponds to the downward path of the confirmation stage of the method of hypothesis [Ca], we can begin to see what that path amounts to. Plato offers the following application of testing the hormêthenta of a hypothesis to see if they agree or disagree with one another. A hormêthen of the hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge, viz. that there are teachers and pupils of virtue, is tested against a variety of other claims concerning virtue and its teachability—in short, that only the sophists and καλοὶ κάγαθοί are potential teachers of virtue, and yet neither the sophists nor the καλοὶ κἀγαθοί actually are teachers of virtue. And they are found to disagree with each other. But why should Plato think that these last claims (more accurately, (1) through (8)) and the claim that there are teachers and pupils of virtue are all *hormêthenta* of the hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge? We have already seen that the sense in which the view that there are teachers and students of virtue is a *hormêthen* of virtue is teachable is less than logically rigorous. The idea is something like that there are teachers and students of virtue is an exemplification of virtue's teachability, or perhaps more Platonically, that there are teachers and students of virtue is an image of virtue's teachability.⁵⁰ But that is a very different kind of hormêthen than the hormêthen of virtue's being knowledge that virtue is teachable. Nevertheless, if Plato does think that virtue's teachability has as hormêthenta its exemplifications or images, the other claims involved in the argument may be related to the hypothesis in a similar way. They may be understood as exemplifications or images of virtue, knowledge, and teachability (and/ or their inter-relations or inter-weavings), and the hormêthenta of the hypothesis

^{49.} Bluck (1964, 90-91) suggests that the Platonic method of hypothesis is a combination of the method of hypothesis used by the geometers (which represents the procedure I have described as the proof stage and the upward path of the confirmation stage) and the Socratic elenchos (which represents the downward path of the confirmation stage). Such a view is compatible with the view I defend here provided one recognizes that the phrase "the Socratic elenchos" is being used rather loosely. It is not the method of examining the interlocutor's doxastic coherence, but some more general method of examining the coherence of a set of claims or propositions. Moreover, the Socratic elenchos so understood is a component of Plato's recommended method of acquiring knowledge, the method of hypothesis. It is no longer—if it ever was—an independent procedure for acquiring knowledge, but a component of a more complex procedure. The Socratic elenchos, as method for testing the interlocutor's doxastic coherence, and so knowledge, is a preliminary procedure employed prior to the application of the method of hypothesis.

^{50.} See Rowe (1992, 64n9), who writes "The 'consequences' of the hypothesis are its applications to particular cases." See also Bedu-Addo (1979, 120).

include not just those *hormêthenta* which follow in a vaguely logical way from the hypothesis, but also all those observations, sayings, or common opinions (*endoxa*)—*phainomena*—appropriately associated with virtue and knowledge, the component forms or concepts of the hypothesis.⁵¹

Of course, as it stands, understanding the downward path of the confirmation stage of Plato's method of hypothesis in this way remains speculative. Nothing in the current passage explicitly indicates such a view. But Plato, in providing us with an application of the downward path of the confirmation stage, appears to think that he is exhibiting "the disagreement of the *hormêthenta*" of the hypothesis that virtue is some sort of knowledge. Moreover, Plato's application has both a vaguely empirical character and a roughly elenctic structure. Taken together the suggestion is that the downward path of the confirmation stage is an elenctic-like test of the consistency of the *phainomena* associated with the hypothesis. We will need to keep this application in mind as we continue to try to thicken the rough sketch of the structure of the method of hypothesis outlined in chapter 5.

Schematically, *Meno* 87B–96D indicates the following application of the method of hypothesis:

Q1: Is virtue teachable?

Bi-conditional: Virtue is teachable just in case virtue is knowledge.

Q2: Is virtue knowledge?

P2 (87D2-89C4): Look for a higher hypothesis from which A2/H1 can be obtained

Conditional²: If something is good, then it is knowledge; this is explained, rather than asserted without defense.

^{51.} I recognize the obscurity and vagueness of the assertion that these observations, sayings, or common opinions are in someway appropriately associated with virtue and knowledge, the two component forms or concepts of the hypothesis. I have tried to clarify this notion elsewhere; see, for example, Benson (1992; 2000, 99–163, 250–55). And, I will have more to say about it in the pages which follow. The essential point is that what it is for the *horméthenta* of a hypothesis to disagree with each other is what takes place at *Meno* 89C5–96D4. Our task as commentators is to exploit this passage to thicken the thin description of the downward path of the confirmation stage at *Phaedo* 101D1–E3. Others who may understand this description similarly, although by no means identically, include Bostock (1986, 171) and Gonzalez (1998a, 197).

^{52.} We will see (pp. 229–232) that *Republic* 6.487B–502C suggests that the application in the *Meno* is in some way defective, either because the disagreement is between merely apparent *hormêthenta* or because the *hormêthenta* merely apparently disagree. Whether Plato was aware of this defect at the time of composing the *Meno* depends on issues I have earlier set aside (pp. 8–11).

Q3: Is virtue good?

A3/H2: Virtue is good; this answers stands firm.

A2/H1: Virtue is knowledge.

P1 (89C5-96D4): The disagreement of the hormêthenta of A2/H1.

A1: Virtue is teachable.

A Reconsideration of the Upward Path of the Confirmation Stage (96D5–100B4)

That Socrates and Meno have been proceeding still within the confines of the method of hypothesis is reinforced by the introduction to the next portion of the dialogue. For, having confirmed by means of the upward path the hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge, immediately followed by the failure to confirm, effectively the falsification of, that same hypothesis by the downward path, Socrates returns to the argument of the upward path. Socrates professes to doubt the soundness of that argument. He says that he does not doubt that good men are beneficial (96E7–97A1),53 or that right guidance is necessary for something to be beneficial (97A3-4), but he doubts that they were right to agree earlier that knowledge is necessary for right use (97A6-7).⁵⁴ The idea seems to be that when the outcomes of the two confirmation procedures conflict—when, that is, one procedure confirms the hypothesis and the other does not confirm or falsifies it—one should reexamine those arguments. Upon re-examination, Socrates professes to have found a flaw in the first argument. It incorrectly assumed that knowledge was necessary for right use. The argument that confirmed the hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge—the upward path of the confirmation stage [Cb]— was flawed.

This much is relatively clear. But what follows is not. The concluding passage falls roughly into three sections. First, Socrates begins with a short argument to the effect that true belief, as well as knowledge, is sufficient for right use (97A9–C10).

^{53.} See 87E1–2. This was introduced as a premise to the conclusion that virtue is beneficial (87E3–4). The other premise of this brief argument was that good men are good by (or in virtue of) virtue.

^{54.} Both Bluck (1964, 403–404) and Sharples (1985, 182) are right to point out that neither of these last two assertions were agreed to in so many words. At 88A3–5 and 88D4–E2, Meno and Socrates do agree that when right use leads the physical qualities they are beneficial and when not they are harmful. And at 88E3–4, they agree that the wise soul leads correctly and the unwise soul leads mistakenly. This, of course, is not quite the same as knowledge is necessary for right use, but it is close and the logic of the argument at 88D–89A seems to require that Plato is taking them as roughly equivalent. The assertions at 88A3–5, 88D4–E2, and 88E3–4 appear to be focused on the relationship among, knowledge, right use, and the physical qualities, as opposed to the psychological qualities, although 88D6–7 may indicate the same relationship with the psychological properties.

True belief, as Socrates puts it, "is no less beneficial than knowledge" (97C4–5). This is followed by Socrates' well-known explanation of why knowledge nevertheless is more valuable than true belief (97C11–98B6). According to Socrates, knowledge is more valuable than true belief because, unlike true belief, it is stable (μόνιμοι), having been tied down by working out the reason (τις αὐτὰς δήση αἰτίας λογισμῷ). And finally, Socrates presents a longer argument to the effect that virtue, now understood as true belief, is acquired by divine dispensation (98B7–100B4).

This concluding passage is so puzzling because it is far from clear whether Plato seriously endorses these arguments. To my knowledge, no one doubts Plato's sincerity about the difference between knowledge and true belief. This is, in part, a result of the following rare Socratic knowledge claim.

... I certainly do not think I am guessing that true belief is a different thing from knowledge. If I claim to know anything else—and I would make that claim about few things—I would put this down as one of the things I know. (*Meno* 98B1–5)

But Plato's sincerity in the remainder of the passage has had many doubters.⁵⁶ The apparent Platonic endorsements that are difficult to abide include

55. The argument goes roughly as follows:

- (1) If something is beneficial, then it is accompanied either by knowledge or true belief (97A9-C10 and 98B7-C3).
- (2) The good are beneficial (98C5-6).
- (3) So, the good either have knowledge or true belief (98C7–10).
- (4) Neither knowledge nor true belief are possessed by nature (98C10-D2).
- (5) So, virtue is not acquired by nature (98D4–5).
- (6) Something is teachable just in case it is knowledge (98D10–12).
- (7) Something is teachable just in case there are teachers of it (98E1–2).
- (8) There are no teachers of virtue (98E4-5).
- (9) So, virtue is not teachable (98E7).
- (10) And, so virtue is not knowledge (98E7-8 and 99A7-9).
- (11) Virtue is good (98E10).
- (12) If one is (or possesses what is) good and useful, then one leads correctly (98E12).
- (13) If one leads correctly, then one is (or possesses) knowledge or true belief (99A1-6).
- (14) The good do not guide correctly in public affairs by knowledge (99B1-4).
- (15) So, the καλοὶ κἀγαθοί do not guide correctly by knowledge (99B5-9).
- (16) So, the καλοὶ κἀγαθοί guide correctly by true belief (99B11–C5).(17) So, the good have true belief (supplied).
- (18) So, they are divine like soothsayers, prophets, and poets (99C7–D6).
- (19) So, they possess their true belief by divine dispensation (supplied).
- (20) So, virtue is acquired by divine dispensation (99E3-100B4).

56. See, for example, Bedu-Addo (1984, 10–14), Cornford (n.d., 245; 1952, 59–60), Irwin (1977, 317n22), Desjardins (1985, 272n14), Devereux (1978, 122–23), Gonzalez (1998a, 180), Seeskin (1993, 48–49), Sharples (1985, 162), and Wilkes (1979, 152–53).

the assertion that knowledge, though it may be sufficient, is not necessary for correct use or for virtue;⁵⁷ that the Athenian political leaders (the καλοὶ κάγαθοί)—Themistocles, Aristides, Pericles, and Thucydides—are virtuous and good;⁵⁸ and that virtue is acquired by divine dispensation.⁵⁹ Indeed, Dominic Scott, in perhaps the best book devoted to the Meno in many decades, correctly devotes almost nine full pages to an explicit discussion of whether we should take this passage seriously or not. 60 In the end, Scott defends an intermediate position, pointing out that one can take Plato to be endorsing parts of this passage without taking him to be endorsing all of it. Scott apparently doubts that Plato endorses the claim that virtue is true belief, full stop.

^{57.} See Socratic intellectualism and the unity of virtues (note 3, chapter 1) and Euthydemus 281A1-B6. Even Plato's alleged abandonment of the unity of virtues and the denial of synchronic akrasia at the end of Republic 4 need not be understood as a denial of the necessity of knowledge for virtue.

^{58.} See, especially, Gorgias 515C-516E. Scott (2006, 189n21) cites the following as being skeptical about Plato's endorsement of these individuals: Klein (1965, 238), Bluck (1964, 38-39, 368), Sharples (1985, 15), Kraut (1984, 302n82), and Weiss (2001, 168); and the following as not: Gomperz (1905, 2:375), Hackforth (1952, 149n3), Dodds (1959, 360), Calvert (1984, 11), and Vlastos (1991, 125n75). It is noteworthy that in the downward path argument Socrates appears to allow these καλοὶ κἀγαθοί are both good and possess virtue (see, e.g., 93A5-C5), but in the argument that virtue comes by divine dispensation he tends to only describe them as good. This might allow for the distinction between being good (for which true belief might be sufficient) and being virtuous (which might require knowledge); see Brickhouse and Smith (2000, 123-34). Of course, for the argument to succeed, Socrates must allow that what makes these καλοὶ κάγαθοί good is the possession of virtue, since he appears to think that their goodness derives from the possession of true belief which comes by divine dispensation and so that virtue comes by divine dispensation.

^{59.} Notice that if Plato seriously endorses the view that virtue comes by divine dispensation, Clitophon's challenge loses much of its force. For while, Plato still intends to encourage us to acquire virtue—it being the most valuable thing we can possess—he no longer thinks that acquiring knowledge is necessary for acquiring virtue, and so longer needs to encourage us to seek to acquire knowledge. Indeed, if virtue comes by divine dispensation, Clitophon's challenge looks to be rather straightforwardly met: petition the gods and hope they grant you virtue! Scott (2006, 177-78) proposes what he calls a "disjunctive approach" which allows that virtue is either knowledge or true belief in which case Plato might still plausibly encourage us to seek knowledge in order to acquire virtue. The idea might be that the pursuit of knowledge is perhaps the most reliable way of acquiring virtue; petitioning the gods relies too much on their whim. But I do not see how the disjunctive approach is compatible with taking Plato to be endorsing the argument of the downward path. According to this argument, if virtue is knowledge then there are teachers of it, but there are not teachers of virtue, so virtue is not knowledge. But if we do not take Plato to be endorsing the argument of the downward path, we no longer have good reason to take Plato to be endorsing the argument that proposes to have uncovered a flaw in the argument of the upward path.

^{60.} Scott (2006, 185-93). The next chapter devoted to the relationship between the Meno and Gorgias is also related to the seriousness of the final passage; Scott (2006, 194–208).

Rather, according to Scott, Plato distinguishes between two kinds of virtue: a genuine virtue, which does require knowledge, and a shadow virtue, which only requires true belief. Scott correctly appeals to a passage at the end of the argument in which Plato indicates that a $\kappa\alpha\lambda\delta\varsigma$ $\kappa\dot{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\theta\delta\varsigma$ who could teach his virtue to others⁶¹ would be like Homer's

Tiresias was among the dead, namely, that "he alone retained his wits while the others flitted about like shadows." In the same manner such a man would, as far as virtue is concerned, here also be the only true reality compared, as it were, with shadows. (*Meno* 100A3–5)

Such a counter-factual $\kappa\alpha\lambda\delta\varsigma$ $\kappa\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\delta\varsigma$ would possess genuine virtue compared to the shadow-virtue of the actual $\kappa\alpha\lambda\delta$ 0 $\kappa\alpha\alpha\theta\delta$ 0. Scott, however, argues persuasively that Plato does endorse the claim that the actual $\kappa\alpha\lambda\delta$ 0 $\kappa\alpha\alpha\theta\delta$ 0 are virtuous (at least in the shadow sense) and that their virtue (at least their shadow-virtue) comes by divine dispensation.

I doubt that Plato would endorse the view that shadow-virtue is really a kind of virtue at all. Among other reasons, I take that to be the point of the Tiresias passage above. ⁶² But Plato's denial that shadow-virtue is genuine virtue is the key to the rest of the argument. For, in that case, Plato does not mean to endorse the view that the actual καλοὶ κἀγαθοί are virtuous. They appear to be virtuous. They have a kind of shadow-virtue. They may even have managed to do good things. But they are not really virtuous. Nor does Plato mean to endorse that virtue—that is, genuine virtue (what other kind is there?) ⁶³ comes by divine dispensation. The appearance of virtue, shadow-virtue, may come by divine dispensation and the good things that the actual καλοὶ κἀγαθοί managed to pull off can be attributed to divine dispensation, but genuine virtue does not arise in that way. Indeed, we might even think that Plato's appeal to divine dispensation to explain the good works of the καλοὶ κἀγαθοί is a consequence of his commitment to the necessity of knowledge for

^{62.} Pace Kraut (1984, 301-302n82).

^{63.} It is hard not to hear the Socrates of *Meno* 72A–73C saying: "I am not asking what a man's virtue, and a woman's virtue, a shadow-virtue and a genuine virtue is. What I want to know is what *virtue* is—what genuinely virtuous things have in common. And we all agree, even Scott, that the actual $\kappa \alpha \lambda o i \kappa \dot{\alpha} \gamma \alpha \theta o i$ don't have that."

correct use, benefit, and virtue. Since the actual καλοὶ κἀγαθοί did manage to do good things on behalf of the Athenians, they must have been led by the knowledge of the gods, since they themselves lacked such knowledge. Nor does Plato mean to endorse that true belief is virtue—that is, genuine virtue (again, what other kind is there?). It may be a kind of shadow-virtue, but it is not genuine virtue. But if Plato does not intend to endorse these assertions, then one suspects that Plato has failed to sincerely or accurately identify the flaw in the upward path of the confirmation stage. For, it is Socrates' claim to have identified a flaw in the upward path that lead to these apparently disingenuous claims. Rather, the flaw, according to Plato must really reside in the downward path.

But this is a tremendous amount of weight to put on the Tiresias passage, one might suppose. A full-scale defense that the argument of this concluding passage is not meant to be serious, and that the flaw in the preceding argument is not in fact where Socrates proposes, but rather in the downward path, would lead us far astray into the details of Plato's virtue theory and moral psychology. But, however we understand this concluding passage in the Meno, one thing is clear: we appear to have left the method of hypothesis behind. Plato has displayed the proof stage and both paths of the confirmation stage in attempt to come to know whether virtue is teachable. As it turns out, the results of the upward and downward paths of the confirmation stage conflict. Plato suggests that when they do one should re-examine the arguments involved in each path. But what Plato thinks one should do after that remains difficult to determine. Part of the difficulty here results from the uncertainty of Plato's endorsement of this part of the argument, an uncertainty I have just been detailing. But another part of the difficulty results from the failure of the current passage to correspond to anything in the descriptions of the method of hypothesis we examined in the previous chapter. One would have thought that having discovered a flaw in the upward path, one would go back to the original question—whether virtue is teachable—and pursue an upward confirmation path on the now compelling answer that virtue is not teachable, obtaining that answer from a higher hypothesis until one came to something acceptable and then testing that higher hypothesis to see whether its "hormêthenta agree or disagree with each other." But this is not what Plato does here in the Meno. Rather, the method of hypothesis looks abandoned. Of course, the point of this concluding passage may be to display an additional stage or procedure of the method. When one has conflicting confirmation results, Plato does not recommend returning to the original question and starting over from a different compelling answer. Instead, he recommends something like a synthetic procedure that somehow combines what can be preserved from the two

conflicting paths.⁶⁴ If this concluding passage is meant to represent a stage or procedure of the method of hypothesis, it is not a stage or procedure that Plato has prepared us for in his descriptions of the method.

I do not think that Plato does intend to make such a recommendation here. But, my reasons for this depend upon two considerations which cannot be presently defended. First, as I suggested above, I doubt Plato's sincerity in this concluding passage, a doubt which I concede has not been defended and to do so would lead us too far astray. Second, I maintain in later chapters that the more detailed account of the method of hypothesis we find displayed and described in the *Republic* indicates that the conflict in the confirmation paths here in the *Meno* reveals a defect in the latter's application. ⁶⁵ For now I simply propose to conclude our examination of the application of the method of hypothesis in the last third of the *Meno* by reviewing what we have learned about Plato's method of hypothesis and what questions and issues remain open.

Conclusion

In the last third of the *Meno*, then, we have found Plato exhibiting an application of the method of hypothesis described rather obscurely by a geometrical example at *Meno* 86E6–87B2 and only a bit less obscurely at *Phaedo* 100A3–8 and 101D1–E3. He begins with a brief application of the proof stage (87B2–D1), disclosing how in an attempt to answer the original question whether virtue can be taught (Q1) one identifies a second question (the reduced question)—whether virtue is knowledge (Q2)—whose answer (A2/H1) will provide an answer to the original question (A1), and then showing how the answer to the reduced question answers the original question. Most of the remainder of the passage represents an application of the confirmation stage. Plato first exhibits what we have called the upward path of the confirmation stage (87D2–89C4) [Cb]: identifying a second reduced question (whether virtue is good (Q3)) from whose most compelling answer (a higher hypothesis (A3/H2)) an answer to the reduced question (whether virtue is knowledge) can be obtained, showing how the answer to the reduced question (q2/H1) can be obtained

^{64.} If one scans the argument of this passage as I present it in note 55, this chapter, (1) through (6) and (11) capture what remains of the argument of the upward path from 87D2–89C4, when the alleged flaw in the argument has been repaired, and (7) through (10) reiterate the central claims of the downward path from 89C5–96D4, with the remainder of the argument appearing to be a synthesis of these two arguments appropriately revised.

^{65.} See note 52, this chapter.

from the answer to the second reduced question (A3/H2) (87D4-89A4), and continuing this process until one reaches something adequate (hikanon), as Socrates puts it: "this hypothesis, that virtue is something good, stands firm for us" (87D2-3). Next, Plato exhibits the downward path of the confirmation stage (89C5-96D4) [Ca]: testing the hormethenta of the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge (A2/H1) to see "whether they agree or disagree with each other." Socrates contends that the hormêthen of the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge, viz. that there are teachers of virtue, is at odds with the fact that there are no such teachers. Finally, Socrates resolves this conflict between the results of the two confirmation procedures by suggesting that the argument of the upward path contained a flaw and synthesizing what can be preserved from the two confirmation procedures into an argument that virtue is true belief that is acquired by divine dispensation (96D5-100B4). It is uncertain, however, whether 96D5-100B4 is meant to be part of Plato's recommended procedure for *de novo* learning, viz. the method of hypothesis, both because no similar procedure was indicated in the description passages from the Meno and Phaedo and because it is uncertain whether Plato means to be endorsing the argument of 96D5-100B4.

In the course of unraveling this application we have learned that Socrates continues to appeal to both the bi-conditional (or conditional) and the answer to the reduced question in executing the proof stage of the method. While it continues to be unclear which of these Socrates designates as the hypothesis, the application of the proof stage in the Meno indicates that both are essential to its execution. Moreover, in explicitly labeling the answer to the second reduced question in the application of the upward path of the confirmation stage—that is, that virtue is good—as a hypothesis, Socrates is at least sometimes willing to designate the answer to the reduced question as a hypothesis. Plato has also indicated that what it is for a hypothesis to be "adequate" (hikanon) is at least for it to "stand firm for us," and given the connection to the description of the statues of Daedalus at the end of the dialogue, this suggests some sort of cognitive security, reliability, or justification. We have also learned that Plato does not expect the argument from the answer to the reduced question (A2/H1) to the answer to the original question (A1) to be immediate or logically rigorous. Plato's representation of this procedure—the downward path of the proof stage [Pb]—at 87B2-D1 was fairly immediate and rigorous, but the corresponding procedure in the upward path of the confirmation stage [Cb] at 87D4-89A4 was considerably messier, requiring a variety of additional premises requiring their own confirmation and employing less than logically rigorous inferences. Finally, we saw that in depicting the downward path of the confirmation stage [Ca], Plato presented Socrates employing a broadly empirical and elenctic test of the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge. This indicated that Plato might understand the *hormêthenta* of the hypothesis as not only including its vaguely logical consequences but also its exemplifications, instantiations, or images. But in any case, the application of this downward procedure could be characterized roughly as an elenctic-like test of the *phainomena* (broadly construed) associated with the hypothesis.

Of course, many questions remain before anything like a complete account of Plato's method of hypothesis can be offered. We should like to know what the features are of a hypothesis that stands firm for us in virtue of which it serves as a stopping point in the upward path of the confirmation stage. We should like to know how messy the downward path of the proof stage can get and still be within the constraints of the method of hypothesis. Further, we would like to know much more about this elenctic-like test of the *phainomena* associated with the hypothesis. And, perhaps most intensely, we should like to know what to make of the last portion of the *Meno*—whether Plato takes it to represent a part of his recommended method of inquiry. But for now we should perhaps conclude this chapter where we began, with the penultimate sentence of the dialogue. Socrates draws to a conclusion the final argument of the dialogue as follows:

We shall have clear knowledge of this [that virtue is acquired by divine dispensation] when, before we investigate how it comes to be present in men, we first try to find out what virtue in itself is. (Meno 100B4-6)⁶⁶

Whatever else we are to say about the method of hypothesis, its application here in the *Meno* has failed to achieve its goal of acquiring knowledge concerning the teachability of virtue. Socrates suggests in his concluding remark that its failure results from not yet acquiring the knowledge of the nature of virtue itself. While some will think that Socrates is objecting to the employment of the method of hypothesis at all, we might instead think that Socrates is indicating that the upward path of the confirmation procedure proved to be incomplete.

^{66.} The last sentence of the dialogue "But now the time has come for me to go. You convince your guest friend Anytus here of these very things of which you have yourself been convinced, in order that he may be more amenable. If you succeed, you will also confer a benefit upon the Athenians" (*Meno* 100B7–C2) makes clear that in addition to the methodological theme of the dialogue, it also has important moral and political themes, which I have largely ignored.

7

SOCRATES AT WORK IN THE PHAEDO

Plato concludes Socrates' initial description of the method of hypothesis in the *Phaedo* as follows:

But I want to put my meaning more clearly for I do not think that you understand me now. No, by Zeus, said Cebes, not very well. (*Phaedo* 100A7–9)

We might be quite sympathetic with Cebes' failure to understand the method in light of what we have seen in the previous chapters. Nevertheless, we might expect Socrates in what follows to provide further guidance in coming to understand Plato's recommended method of *de novo* learning or inquiry. As it turns out, however, what follows hardly looks like a description of this method, but, rather, an application—although even that is controversial. But it is difficult to imagine how what follows is supposed to provide Cebes with a better understanding of the method, if it is not intended to be an application. In the current chapter I maintain that what takes place following 100A7–9 is indeed an application of Plato's method of hypothesis. In the course of this argument, our understanding of the proof stage of Plato's method will be advanced.

But before turning to this argument, I need to say a bit about the rather narrow focus of this chapter. As it turns out, the application we will be examining occupies very little of Plato's attention in the *Phaedo*—not much more than a Stephanus page or two. One of the virtues of the *Meno* is that once Plato introduces his method of *de novo* inquiry, viz. the method of hypothesis, he sticks with it. We may be unsure about what to do with the concluding passage, in which Socrates purports to resolve the tension between the two paths of the confirmation stage from 96D5 to 100B4, and, of course, it was rather disappointing that Plato's initial depiction of the method at work had these conflicting results, but once the method is introduced at *Meno* 86E, Plato sticks with it for almost ten Stephanus pages, even if we don't count the concluding passage. One might

expect, then, that once the method has been introduced in the *Meno*, it would occupy the majority of the dialogues thereafter. Of course, such an expectation relies on a compositional ordering and development which I have generally tried to avoid. Nevertheless, one might expect that at least once the method of hypothesis is explicitly mentioned in a dialogue, its application should occupy much of the remainder of that dialogue, as in the *Meno*. Even this expectation, I believe, will be disappointed. Our first task in this chapter, then, is to explain its rather narrow focus.

Paradigmatic Applications of the Method of Hypothesis

At the beginning of chapter 5, I indicated that unraveling Plato's method of philosophical inquiry was a bootstrapping enterprise. I proposed to begin with Plato's descriptions of his recommended method for learning on one's own rather than with his depictions of applications of that method. I also proposed to examine those descriptions austerely or conservatively, preferring under-interpretation to over-interpretation. As a result we were able to sketch a general structure of Plato's method of hypothesis which we saw depicted in most of the last third of the *Meno*. But two features of this approach should be underscored.

First, the structure of the method of hypothesis I have presented so far is intentionally thin. The goal was to arrive at a structure that would enable us to identify applications and then thicken the structure by examining those applications. Second, the method we have been trying to uncover is Plato's recommended method of *de novo* learning, of discovery, of acquiring knowledge on one's own, of philosophical *inquiry*. It is not Plato's entire philosophical method. A philosophical method, plausibly, consists in more than inquiry. It also consists in, for example, justification, teaching or persuasion, and perhaps demonstration.² The point is that in depicting Socrates (or other interlocutors) at work philosophically in the dialogues, Plato is not always depicting him (or them) as engaging in inquiry. To repeat some fairly uncontroversial examples, Socrates is not engaging in philosophical *inquiry* in his defense speech in the *Apology*, or in his introductory conversation with Lysimachus, Melesias, Laches, and Nicias in the *Laches* (178A–189B), or in the myths with which he concludes the *Gorgias*,

^{1.} See, for example, Kahn (1996, 315), who takes "the bulk of the *Phaedo*, like the last half of the *Meno*, [to be] a systematic exercise in the method of hypothesis, with the difference that here the *hupothesis* is provided by the doctrine of Forms."

^{2.} I have in mind here Barnes's interpretation of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*; Barnes (1975/1994, xii).

Phaedo, and Republic, even if Socrates and his interlocutors are engaging in philosophical activity.3

These two features of our approach present challenges. The second feature recommends that in looking for applications of Plato's method of hypothesis we seek out those passages in which Plato is depicting Socrates and/or his interlocutors as engaging in philosophical inquiry. Plato may recommend employing the method of hypothesis for other philosophical purposes.⁴ Nevertheless, I maintain that he recommends it at least for philosophical inquiry. Consequently, we should expect to find it employed in those passages in which Socrates and/or his interlocutors are engaging in such inquiry.⁵ But which passages those are—that is, which passages are Platonic depictions of inquiry as opposed to other aspects of the philosophical enterprise—is often controversial and difficult to determine. One of the virtues of Plato's presentation in the Meno, as I mentioned, is that following the methodological digression (80A-86C),6 Socrates and Meno are explicitly engaged in inquiry. They are explicitly engaged in the attempt to come to know whether virtue is teachable on their own, and not by attempting to learn it from others. But the Platonic texts are seldom so explicit. One might hope that one could appeal to the structure of the method of hypothesis to help identify Platonic depictions of inquiry, but it is at this point that the thinness of the structure contributes to the challenge of the text. The structure we have uncovered so far may be so thin that virtually any passage can be interpreted as accommodating it. I have offered an account of the structure based on Platonic

^{3.} Other passages need to be treated in different ways. For example, it is difficult to believe that Apollodorus and the friend are engaging in any sort of philosophical activity at all in the introductory scene of the Symposium (172A1-174A2). This is, of course, not to say that the scene is not philosophically significant. More controversially, the speech of the Laws in the Crito may be a depiction of philosophical or practical inquiry, or, alternatively, a depiction of philosophical persuasion or teaching. For my preference for the latter, see pp. 34.

^{4.} The application of the method of hypothesis we will be examining in the next chapter is not obviously, at least, an application of philosophical inquiry.

^{5.} I leave open for the present whether the method of hypothesis is Plato's only recommended method of inquiry. I maintain that in three central dialogues—the Meno, the Phaedo, and the Republic—Plato recommends the method of hypothesis as a method of inquiry, whether he always depicts his interlocutors as employing the method of hypothesis when engaged in such inquiry, whether he allows that other methods might be useful as well, or whether he recommends the method of hypothesis in other dialogues besides these three. Much of this will depend on how the method of collection and division is integrated into Plato's philosophical method; see, for example, Moravcsik (1973), Cohen (1973), Menn (1998), Benson (2010a), Patterson (2010), L. Brown (2010), and Gill (2010a, 2010b). The present point is simply that we should expect Plato to depict the method of hypothesis when he is depicting philosophical inquiry, even if our expectations are sometimes disappointed.

^{6.} See note 45, chapter 3.

descriptions of the method which I believe rules out some passages as applications of the method and confirms others. It also makes some Platonic depictions more plausible candidates and some less plausible. But the thinness or underinterpretation of the structure of the method presented so far risks the possibility that the method can be seen to occur in every (even non-Platonic) text. Such a possibility would thwart my contention that the method of hypothesis (or at least its philosophical adaptation) is a Platonic innovation offered as a response to Clitophon's challenge. Consequently, in looking for applications of the method, we must proceed with care. Objective constraints are difficult to come by. Again, I propose to proceed conservatively.

These concerns are especially salient when looking at the arguments that precede Socrates' intellectual autobiography. I mentioned a few paragraphs back that once the method of hypothesis has been introduced as Plato's recommended method of inquiry or *de novo* learning in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, we might expect it to be employed throughout the *Phaedo*. But this would be a mistake.

Following the initial outer frame (57A–59C), the stage setting (59C–61B), and the statement of the initial tension (61B–63E)⁸ that generates Cebes' skepticism that philosophers should willingly die (62C9–E7), Socrates proceeds to offer what he describes as a second *apologia*, one which he hopes will be more successful than the official one depicted in Plato's *Apology*. As Socrates puts it

I want to make my argument before you, my judges (ἀλλ'... βούλομαι ἤδη τὸν λόγον ἀποδοῦναι), as to why I think that a man who has truly spent his life in philosophy is probably right to be of good cheer in the face of death and to be very hopeful that after death he will attain the greatest blessings yonder. I will try to tell you (πειράσομαι φράσαι), Simmias and Cebes, how this may be so. (*Phaedo* 63E8–64A3)

Socrates here proposes to give a *logos* how it seems to him and to tell Simmias and Cebes how things hold. He is not proposing to examine or to seek to come to know how it holds that philosophers should willingly die. He is proposing to defend his life as a philosopher—something he has done before. And lest we miss that this is what he is doing, Plato reminds us of it at the end of the passage.

^{7.} See note 30, chapter 4, concerning the issues surrounding "Socrates' intellectual autobiography."

^{8.} Again, in setting these initial passages aside, I do not mean to suggest that they are philosophically insignificant, especially to the reader. My point is rather that they, especially the first two, do not depict philosophical activity or philosophical method.

This is my defense (ἀπολογοῦμαι), Simmias and Cebes, that I am likely to be right to leave you and my masters here without resentment or complaint, believing that there, as here, I shall find good masters and good friends. If my defense $(\alpha \pi \sigma \lambda \sigma \gamma(\alpha))$ is more convincing to you than to the Athenian jury, it will be well. (*Phaedo* 69D7–E4)

No one, I assume, would want to maintain in the intervening discussion among Socrates, Cebes, and Simmias (64A3-69D6), that Socrates fails to engage in philosophical argumentation. Socrates is proposing and defending substantive philosophical theses on the basis of other substantive philosophical commitments. We meet with the theory of Forms, a critique of sense-perception for acquiring knowledge, and the denunciation of the body and its pleasures and pains, among other things. Socrates is evidently engaged in philosophical activity and Plato is depicting an application of philosophical method. But Plato is not depicting an application of philosophical inquiry. Socrates is not seeking to come to know why philosophers should willing die. He is seeking to defend, explain, or persuade Cebes and Simmias that this is so. Consequently, we should not expect *Phaedo* 63E-69E to present an application of Plato's method of hypothesis. If we want to find the method of hypothesis applied in the *Phaedo* we will need to look elsewhere.

When we turn to the next stretch of text, matters become more difficult. The stretch of text I have in mind begins immediately following the passage above and extends to the beginning of Socrates' intellectual autobiography at 95A. Socrates' intellectual autobiography contains the application of the method of hypothesis which will occupy most of our attention in this chapter. But 69E-95A is chock full of philosophical argumentation. It consists of the cyclical argument, the recollection argument, the affinity argument, Simmias' and Cebes' objections, and various digressions and transitions. It begins with Cebes correctly pointing out that Socrates' argument that philosophers should willingly die depends on the claim that the soul continues to exist after a person dies and that it continues to have power and knowledge. Cebes speaks for us all when he points out that such a presupposition is not easily accepted, and Socrates responds as follows:

What you say is true, Cebes, ... but what shall we do? Do you want to discuss (διαμυθολογῶμεν)⁹ whether this is likely to be true or not? Personally, said Cebes, I should like to hear your opinion (δόξαν) on the subject.

^{9.} διαμυθολογῶμεν and its cognates are only used three times by Plato and in no case does it mean "seek to acquire knowledge" or "inquire."

I do not think, said Socrates, that anyone who heard me now, not even a comic poet, could say that I am babbling and discussing things that do not concern me, so we must examine the question thoroughly ($\chi \rho \dot{\eta}$ διασκοπεῖσθαι), ¹⁰ if you think we should do so. (*Phaedo* 70B5–C3)

Socrates' last sentence suggests that the discussion to follow will be an investigation, examination, inquiry aimed at coming to know whether the soul continues to exist with power and knowledge after a person dies. But it is noteworthy that Cebes explicitly requests to hear Socrates' opinion on the subject, 11 suggesting that what follows might be less an inquiry aimed at coming to know whether the soul continues to exist than a philosophical lesson or persuasive defense aimed at justifying or explaining Socrates' belief that the soul continues to exist. 12 These two projects—philosophical inquiry and philosophical justification—may be related and they may even be identical, but it is not obvious that they are, and an argument that they are should be forthcoming before supposing that 69E–95A contains an application or applications of Plato's method of inquiry. 13 So, as I suggested, determining whether the discussion that follows is meant to depict philosophical inquiry or philosophical explanation, justification, or defense is difficult. On the face of it, Socrates hardly looks to be inquiring whether the soul continues to exist, but to be arguing that it does. 14

^{10.} διασκοπεῖσθαι or its cognates are used only six times by Plato. At *Protagoras* 361D6, it appears to mean something like "seek to acquire knowledge" or "inquire."

^{11.} Compare Socrates' response to Cebes' request to hear Socrates' doxa here to Socrates' response to Glaucon's similar request at *Republic* 6.506B5–D1.

^{12.} Bedu-Addo (1979, 111), for example, in commenting on *Phaedo* 95D3–E1, thinks "we may safely assume that he thinks he knows that the soul is immortal, and can give an account of this." If Socrates thinks he knows that the soul is immortal, then he is evidently not seeking to learn that the soul is immortal. Of course, that Socrates would profess to know that the soul is immortal is difficult to square with Socrates' repeated professions of ignorance even in the so-called middle dialogues (for example, *Symposium* 207C, *Phaedrus* 229C–230B, and *Theaetetus* 210C) and with what Socrates says at 99C6–D3, which suggests that his final argument for the soul's immortality depends on an answer to the question "what is the *aitia* of generation and destruction?" which he would not profess to know. See pp. 107 and 202–203.

^{13.} What I am doing in this manuscript, viz. attempting to defend my belief that Plato's recommended method of inquiry is the method of hypothesis, is distinct from the process I engaged in while seeking to answer the question what Plato's recommended method of inquiry is, although they are related—or at least so it seems to me.

^{14.} This point is captured by the common refrain that the *Phaedo* appears more positive or constructive than the so-called elenctic dialogues.

Even so, applications of the method of hypothesis may yet be found prior to Socrates' intellectual autobiography. Indeed, in the next chapter we will be examining an application of the method in the middle books of *Republic* which may not be an example of philosophical inquiry. Moreover, a variety of commentators have maintained that Socrates applies the method of hypothesis in various places between 69E and 95A. 15 Nevertheless, the conservative approach I have adopted requires care in identifying the applications by which we hope to better understand the nature of Plato's method of hypothesis. The understanding of the method we have in hand is incomplete, and we are hoping to thicken our account by looking to the applications. Consequently, the applications we use in this way should be paradigmatic in some way—applications identified not only by their similarity to an under-interpreted structure but also by features independent of that structure. It is for this reason that we began with the application in the Meno. Whatever else one thinks about the text that follows Plato's obscure geometrical example by which he introduces the method of hypothesis, that text is meant to be an application of the method so introduced. ¹⁶ The same, however, cannot be said about the texts between *Phaedo* 69E and 95A, in which the method of hypothesis is allegedly applied. The identification of those applications depends on an already fairly thick conception of the method itself, and so it would be inappropriate to begin with them. ¹⁷ I argue that what follows *Phaedo* 100A7–9 is meant to be an application of the method of hypothesis, however, in a way that does not depend on such a thick conception of the method. Consequently, this application can serve as our second paradigmatic application of the method of hypothesis, and so focusing on it for the remainder of this chapter will thicken our understanding of the method.

The Application of the Method of Hypothesis in the Phaedo

At 100A7-9, Socrates explicitly proposes to clarify his rather compressed initial description of the method described therein. But before looking at that clarification we should step back and view the context of this clarification.

^{15.} See, for example, Weiss (2001, 187n10), Huby (1959, 13), Gallop (1975, 146-47), Rowe (1993c, 176), and Kahn (1996, 315).

^{16.} Of course, where the application ends is less clear. But the reasons provided for thinking the application extended beyond Meno 89D did not depend on a thick understanding of the method. See pp. 166-175.

^{17.} Although returning to them following the adoption of a fairly thick conception may prove fruitful.

At 95A4–6, having responded to Simmias' objection, Socrates turns to Cebes. Following a review of his objection, Plato writes

Socrates paused for a long time, deep in thought. He then said: "This is no unimportant problem that you raise, Cebes, for it requires a thorough investigation of the $\it aitia$ of generation and destruction (öλως γὰρ δεῖ περὶ γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς τὴν αἰτίαν διαπραγματεύσασθαι). I will, if you wish, give you an account of my experience in these matters. Then if something I say seems useful to you, make use of it to persuade us of your position." (Phaedo 95E7–96A4)

Two things about this passage require notice. First, Socrates maintains that a proper response to Cebes' objection requires "a thorough investigation of the *aitia* of generation and destruction." In order to adequately respond to Cebes' objection they must come to know the answer to the question "What is the *aitia* of generation and destruction?" Let us call this "the *aitia* question." Second, and for our present purposes more importantly, Socrates offers to reveal how he pursued this investigation. That is, Socrates offers to relate his own attempt to acquire this knowledge. Here, then, we can be confident that at least part of what follows 95E7–96A4 represents an application of inquiry. Socrates is about to rehearse his own inquiry concerning the *aitia* question.

Of course, as we know from chapter 4, Socrates does not immediately turn to describing an application of the method of hypothesis. Rather, Socrates begins by describing as part of his initial attempt to pursue this investigation his association with those who seek wisdom concerning the science of nature (φύσεως ίστορίαν). Unfortunately, Plato fails to make clear precisely what method of inquiry he pursued during this association. At 99D4–100A3, Socrates describes the method of the natural scientists as investigating things (τὰ όντα σκοπῶν) by means of facts (ἐν ἔργοις) in contrast to investigating things by means of logoi (ἐν λόγοις), the latter evidently referring to his method of hypothesis whose initial description immediately follows (100A3–8). Moreover, this method of the natural scientists appears to be in some way intimately tied up in the use of sense perception, as we might expect given its association with natural science, but

^{18.} The question is almost immediately broadened to "What are 'the *aitiai* of everything, why it comes to be, why it perishes and why it exists?" at *Phaedo* 96A9–10; see also 97C6–D1. For the significance of this broadening both for Plato's theory of *aitia* (or explanation) and for Plato's final argument for the immortality of the soul, see, for example, Politis (2010, 64ff.). Since my concern here is with the method applied in seeking to answer these questions, and not with Plato's theory of *aitia* nor his final argument for immortality, I will be setting these and many other details aside. Thus, the *aitia* question refers most accurately to the broadened question, although I will not be focused on that in what follows.

Plato does not explain how.¹⁹ Indeed, he seems especially concerned to maintain that as a method for investigating τὰ ὄντα it is no more indirect than the method of hypothesis or investigating by means of logoi. 20 In fact, despite devoting more than a full page to this episode in Socrates' intellectual autobiography, Plato spends most of it detailing Socrates' inability to achieve any results, rather than describing the method of inquiry itself.²¹ Whatever the method was, it led Socrates to "become blind and to unlearn what [he] thought [he] knew before" (96C5-7).22

Following his description of the failed inquiry of natural science, Socrates relates that he took up the books of Anaxagoras, which as it turns out were equally disappointing.²³ After expressing his excitement upon hearing someone reading from a book of Anaxagoras that Mind (nous) was the aitia for everything, Socrates explains that he eagerly acquired Anaxagoras' books and read them "in order to know the best and the worst as soon as possible" (98B5-6).24 Unfortunately, as it turned out, Socrates' hopes were dashed when he discovered that Anaxagoras

^{19.} See Sedley (2004, 108): "in context, [the move from investigating things by means of facts to investigating things by means of *logoi*] is naturally read as a move from empirical science to dialectic." But we should not be misled by this into thinking that there is no role for perception in Plato's preferred method. See note 63, chapter 4, and pp. 250-263.

^{20.} Pace Kanayama (2000, 47).

^{21.} In fact, it is not obvious that Socrates is depicted as employing the method of the natural scientists as opposed to just learning from them their results. That he applied the method himself is suggested at 99D4–100A3. But when at 97B3–7, Socrates distinguishes between the "manner of method" (κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον τῆς μεθόδου) which is employed by the natural scientists and which he no longer accepts and his own confused manner (τιν' ἄλλον τρόπον αὐτὸς εἰκῆ φύρω), he does not appear to be distinguishing between two distinct methods of inquiry, but between two theories of aitia (i.e., between two substantive ways of answering "why" questions). This conflation of methods of inquiry with theories of aitia, in my view, pervades the literature devoted to this portion of the *Phaedo*. Both Archer-Hind (1884, 90-91) and Burnet (1911, 103) take Socrates' description of his own method as confused to be ironic, while the former provides a good example of the above conflation. He takes Socrates' method of *logoi* at 99D4–100A3 to be opposed to Plato's theory of Forms, while the text suggests that Socrates' method of *logoi* is opposed to the method of facts practiced by the natural scientists and the theory of Forms is arrived at by Socrates' method of *logoi*—i.e., the method of hypothesis, and opposed to the natural scientists' theory of aitia.

^{22.} More specifically, Socrates comes to be at a loss or in aporia about the aitia of human growth (96C8-D7), of one thing's being taller than another (96D8-E1), of a number's being larger than another (96D1–E5), and of one thing's becoming two (96E6–97B3). See Gallop (1975, 172), who takes Socrates' expression of aporia here to be ironic.

^{23.} See note 30, chapter 4, for whether this is meant to represent a chronological sequence.

^{24.} N.b. that Socrates here explicitly distinguishes between the method of learning the theory of aitia—i.e., reading the books of Anaxagoras—and the theory of aitia itself, about which Socrates' great expectations were dashed.

failed to use Mind at all in answering the *aitia* question, but instead merely referred to a necessary condition of an *aitia* (99B3-4). This leads Socrates to say

I would gladly become the disciple of any man who taught the workings of that kind of *aitia*. However, since I was deprived and could neither discover it myself nor learn it from another, do you wish me to give you an explanation of how, as a second best (δεύτερον πλοῦν), I busied myself (πεπραγμάτευμαι) with the search for the *aitia* (ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς αἰτίας ζήτησιν), Cebes? . . . (*Phaedo* 99C6–D3)

the passage with which Plato introduces his initial description of the method of hypothesis in the *Phaedo*.²⁵

Given this context, then, we should readily expect that what follows 100A7–9 to be an application of the method of inquiry described at 100A3–7. The passage is part of a long passage in which Socrates professes to describe his inquiry concerning the *aitia* question. He has rehearsed his failed attempts at answering this question by associating with the natural scientists and by reading the books of Anaxagoras. He has just described a new method which he proposed to use to answer the *aitia* question, and now he resolves to explain that method more clearly by describing how he applied it to the *aitia* question. We should expect what follows 100A7–9, then, to be an application of Socrates' method of hypothesis aimed at answering the *aitia* question.

I have devoted this time to rehearsing the context of 100A7–9 and what follows because it has been often denied that an application of the method of hypothesis is to be found following 100A7–9.²⁶ But such a denial results from approaching these passages with a specific understanding of Plato's method of hypothesis already in hand. Given that understanding, one either fails to see the method applied anywhere in what follows or sees it being applied much later in the dialogue.²⁷ But if

^{25.} See pp. 103-106.

^{26.} See, for example, Bluck (1955, 164), who writes "Nor is there any indication that a *general* statement of method described at 100A is now being *applied* at 100B." Really? Bostock (1986, 166), too, doubts that the method of hypothesis is applied in the *Phaedo*.

^{27.} See, for example, van Eck (1996, 218), who thinks the method is not employed until 102A8 (but see note 47, this chapter). One way to see what motivates the Gallop-Rowe view is that they begin with the assumption that the hypothesis must entail its consequences (and higher hypotheses must entail lower ones), and since the Form hypothesis does not entail the *aitia* thesis, these two together must constitute the hypothesis referred to following 100A3–7; at least this seems to be true of Rowe (1993a); Rowe (1996, 234) may abandon this motivation. On the conservative approach I offer here, we should try to understand the relationship between the hypothesis and its consequences (and higher hypotheses and lower ones) based on the relationship between the Form hypothesis and its consequence, the *aitia* thesis. See pp. 198-204.

one approaches this text conservatively, as I have been promoting, without a fully worked out interpretation of the method of hypothesis already in hand, but, rather, as part of one's attempt to get a clear understanding of the method, the context demands that an application of the method so briefly described at 100A3-7 (and perhaps described and applied in the *Meno*) is about to follow. Consequently, we should take whatever follows (whether it fits our preconceived understanding of the method of hypothesis or not) to inform our understanding of Plato's method of hypothesis. We should expect what follows to be an application of the method given its context, and so our understanding of the method should accommodate the application that follows—at least according to the conservative approach I have adopted here. How, then, does what follows Socrates' proposal to explain more clearly the method he has just so briefly described inform our understanding of that method?

Here is how Socrates begins his explanation:

[a] This, he said, is what I mean. It is nothing new, but what I have never stopped talking about, both elsewhere and in the earlier part of our conversation. I am going to try to show you the kind of aitia with which I have concerned myself (ἔρχομαι γὰρ δὴ ἐπιχειρῶν σοι ἐπιδείξασθαι τῆς αἰτίας τὸ εἶδος ὁ πεπραγμάτευμαι). [b] I turn back to those oft-mentioned things and proceed from them (ἄρχομαι ἀπ' ἐκείνων). I assume the existence of a Beautiful, itself by itself, of a Good and a Great and all the rest (ύποθέμενος εἶναί τι καλὸν αὐτὸ καθ' αύτὸ καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ μέγα καὶ τἆλλα πάντα). [c] If you grant me these and agree that they exist, I hope [i] to show you the *aitia* as a result, and [ii] so to find the soul to be immortal (å εἴ μοι δίδως τε καὶ συγχωρεῖς εἶναι ταῦτα, ἐλπίζω σοι ἐκ τούτων τὴν αἰτίαν ἐπιδείξειν καὶ ἀνευρήσειν ὡς ἀθάνατον ἡ ψυχή). (Phaedo 100B1-9)²⁸

In [a] Socrates makes clear that he is going to display to Cebes the results of his own investigation concerning the aitia question. Socrates' use of πεπραγμάτευμαι at 100B4 looks back to his use of διαπραγματεύσασθαι at 95E9-96A1, the beginning of his intellectual autobiography, and to πεπραγμάτευμαι at 99D1, following the discussion of Anaxagoras.²⁹ And in [b] and [c], he immediately tells

^{28.} On the translation of this passage, see Sharma (2014).

^{29. &}quot;Investigation" may seem like a question-beggingly loose translation of πεπραγμάτευμαι, if not διαπραγματεύσασθαι, but it is clear both here and at 95E7-96A4 that his final argument for the immortality of the soul depends upon answering the "What is the aitia of generation and destruction?" question and what he is describing is how he busied himself in answering that question. Whether we want to call this effort an investigation or not, it suffices for my purposes that he is describing his effort to answer this question.

us how he achieved those results. In [b] he tells us that he assumed ($\dot{\nu}\pi o\theta \dot{\epsilon}\mu\epsilon\nu o\varsigma$) the being or existence³⁰ of the beautiful itself, the good itself, the great itself, and all other (such) things. And, in [c], he tells us that he hopes to [i] show Cebes the *aitia* (of generation and destruction) "from such things" ($\dot{\epsilon}\kappa$ το $\dot{\nu}\tau\omega\nu$), and thereby [ii] discover that the soul is immortal. The context of this passage makes clear, then, that Socrates has arrived at an answer to the *aitia* question whose pursuit or investigation he has been describing since 95E7 by hypothesizing the being of Forms.

While it is true that the language of question and answer is absent from this description,³¹ Socrates' introductory explanation of his (at least partially)³² successful investigation concerning the *aitia* question fits quite well the brief description of his method of hypothesis at 100A3–7. He describes himself as being able to answer the original question ("What is the *aitia* of generation and destruction?"— the *aitia* question), whose answer is necessary to respond to Cebes' objection and so to show that the soul is immortal, by hypothesizing an answer to another question which will reveal the answer to the original question. What this other question is is not mentioned, but its answer is explicit. The hypothesized answer or hypothesis—the answer to what we have been calling the reduced question—is the being of Forms, what we will call "the Form hypothesis."³³ And Socrates, is explicit that from this answer (ἐκ τούτων) he can answer the original question—that is, the *aitia* question.

Lest one think I am reading too much into this introductory description of his pursuit, consider how Socrates continues, following Cebes' approval of the Form hypothesis.

^{30.} For our purposes of investigating the nature of Plato's method of hypothesis, nothing important hangs on determining whether the εἶναί in this clause should be understood existentially.

^{31.} Although, see ἀποκρίναιο at 101D3 and 101D4.

^{32.} Socrates suggests he would not claim to know the answer to his *aitia* question, and at 107B4–10 he suggests what obtaining such knowledge will require. I will argue in chapter 9 that Plato maintains in *Republic* 6 and 7 that to successfully acquire this knowledge one must apply the upward path of the confirmation stage all the way to the unhypothetical first principle of everything, which Plato identifies with the Form of the Good. If this is correct, then we can see how Plato connects his confused and as yet merely hypothetical answer to the *aitia* question to the answer he had hoped to acquire from reading Anaxagoras. But all of this looks ahead to the *Republic* and is not required (or perhaps even hinted at) here in the *Phaedo*.

^{33.} Kanayama (2000, 62-63) calls this the "Existence Proposition"; Dancy (2004, 301) calls it the "fundamental hypotheiss (HF)."

Consider then ... whether you share my opinion as to what follows (τὰ έξῆς ἐκείνοις), for I think that if there is anything beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that beautiful, and I say so with everything. Do you agree to this sort of aitia? — I do. (Phaedo 100C3-8)

Socrates here makes explicit that an answer to the *aitia* question follows from or comes after (τὰ ἑξῆς ἐκείνοις) his Form hypothesis, and the answer goes roughly as follows: the Forms are the aitia of generation and destruction. As Socrates puts it "beautiful things are beautiful for no other reason than because (διότι) they participate in the beautiful itself." We might put this more formally and more generally³⁴ as "the F itself is the *aitia* of x's being F." Let us call this the *aitia* thesis. ³⁶ So, the answer to the original question—that is, the *aitia* thesis is obtained from the Form hypothesis, or the being of Forms. And we have a straightforward application of the method Socrates has so briefly described at 100A3-7—to repeat with modifications:

However, I started in this manner: taking as my hypothesis (ὑποθέμενος) in [the case of the aitia question] the logos [i.e., the being of Forms] that seemed to me the most compelling (κρίνω ἐρρωμενέστατον),³⁷ I would consider as true, about *aitia* . . . , whatever agreed (συμφωνεῖν) with this [i.e., the aitia thesis] and as untrue whatever did not so agree [i.e., other answers to the *aitia* question]. (*Phaedo* 100A3–7)

We can put this schematically as follows:

Q1: What is the aitia of generation and destruction? (the aitia question)

Conditional: If Forms are, then Forms are the aitia of generation and destruction.38

^{34.} See "and I say so with everything" (καὶ πάντα δὴ οὕτως λέγω) at 100C6.

^{35.} Because the text seems to require that the aitia thesis—i.e., Socrates' answer to the aitia question—follows from or comes after the Form hypothesis, I cannot agreed with David Sedley's view that Plato takes the *aitia* thesis to be self-evident; Sedley (1998, 117–18).

^{36.} Kanayama (2000, 52-53) calls this the "Aitia Proposition."

^{37.} Perhaps indicated by the fact that Socrates never stops talking about them (100B1-3).

^{38.} For more on this conditional (or perhaps bi-conditional), see the discussion concerning "inseparability" at pp. 200-201 and note 67, this chapter.

Q2: What things are?³⁹

H1: Forms are. (the Form hypothesis)

A1: Forms are the *aitia* of generation and destruction. (the *aitia* thesis)

Indeed, following his answer to the aitia question at 100C3-8, he goes on to detail those answers to this question that do not "agree" with his Form hypothesis the answers he learned while employing the method of natural science. He explains he no longer understands or recognizes (ἔτι μανθάνω οὐδὲ δύναμαι . . . γιγνώσκειν), indeed rejects (χαίρειν έω) other aitiai like color or shape, presumably, for something's being beautiful (100C9-D3), like a head for a person's being taller or shorter (100E8-101B2; see 96D8-E5), like two for something's being greater (101B4-7; see 96D1-E5), or like addition or division for something's being two (101B9-C2; see 96E6-97B3). He does not explain why these answers do not "agree" with the Form hypothesis. It appears to be simply because thinking that the beautiful itself is the aitia of x's being beautiful is in some way at odds with thinking that color and shape are the *aitiai* of x's being beautiful.⁴⁰ Importantly, however, Socrates does not indicate that the answer he had hoped to learn from reading Anaxagoras, viz. that Mind is the aitia of generation and destruction, "disagrees" with the Form hypothesis. This answer to the aitia question evidently remains a viable candidate.

Having revealed which answers to the *aitia* question "agree" with the Form hypothesis and which do not, Socrates offers the second of his two descriptions of the method of hypothesis, which we have examined at length in a previous chapter. He encourages Cebes to hold on to the *aitia* thesis and answer the *aitia* question accordingly, but not to hold on to and answer whatever question it is that the Form hypothesis answers (let us call this question "the Form question") until one has confirmed the Form hypothesis by the two procedures we identified earlier. Evidently, the Form hypothesis needs to be subject to the upward

^{39.} Or perhaps "What are τὰ όντα?" (see τὰ όντα σκοπῶν at 99D5) or even "Are there Forms?"

^{40.} *Pace* van Eck (1996, 217–18), who maintains that Socrates' reasons for dismissing these other *aitiai* have nothing to do with the Form hypothesis; see also Kanayama (2000, 53–66). But the only other reason I can find in this passage is at 101A7–B1. That this reason is seriously intended must be at least open to question in light of Cebes' laughter; see Rowe (1993b, 244). It may be that Socrates understands the hypothesis which answers the *aitia* question to include Kanayama's three laws of *aitia* and so the passage at 101A7–B1 is seriously intended (see also Gallop 1975, 186; Bostock 1986, 137; and Sedley 1998, 121). If so, then it is by appealing to both the Form hypothesis and the three laws of *aitia* that he concludes that the Forms as *aitia* agrees with the hypothesis and the other *aitia* do not; but if this is Socrates' procedure, it is not explicit. What is explicit is that having assumed the Form hypothesis, he holds on to the *aitia* thesis and "says good-bye" to the other *aitia*; see Rowe 1996, 232n17. See pp. 204–206 for the notion of "agreement" involved here.

path of the confirmation stage, searching for higher hypotheses from which the Form hypothesis can be obtained (or alternatively reducing the Form question to another question whose answer reveals the answer to the Form question) until one reaches something "adequate" (hikanon). And the Form hypothesis also needs to be subject to the downward path of the confirmation stage, testing its hormêthenta to see whether they agree with each other or not. Socrates, however, does not pursue this confirmation procedure here. Rather, Plato concludes Socrates' intellectual autobiography as follows.

ECHECRATES: Yes, by Zeus, Phaedo, and they were right, 41 I think he made these things wonderfully clear to anyone of even small intelligence. PHAEDO: Yes indeed, Echecrates, and all those present thought so too. ECHECRATES: And so do we who were not present but hear of it now. What was said after that? (Phaedo 102A3-9)

Two things about this passage are striking. First, the intrusion of the dialogue's outer frame into its inner frame is jolting. We might have reasonably forgotten that the dialogue among Socrates and Cebes and Simmias is in fact being reported by Phaedo to Echecrates. 42 And, our current passage is the second and last reminder of this relatively unusual⁴³ feature of the dialogue until the concluding scene at 117B2.44 It is, of course, difficult to know what to make out of these frame intrusions, but that they mark an important feature of the dialogue is likely. Perhaps, Plato wants us to see that the description of Socrates' investigation concerning the aitia question has come to an end, and that what follows is a return to Cebes' objection and Socrates' response, now that Socrates has the account of the aitia of generation and destruction which he explained was needed in order to respond to Cebes' objection. Whether or not this is the point of the outer frame's intrusion, it is what occurs following the intrusion. Phaedo goes on to recount to Echecrates how Socrates employed his aitia thesis in response to Cebes' objection and on behalf of Socrates' final argument for the immortality of the soul.

^{41.} Referring back to Cebes' and Simmias' assertion at 102A2 that what Socrates had said in the second description passage at 101D1-102A1 was very true (Ἀληθέστατα).

^{42.} See Phaedo 57A-59C.

^{43.} See, for example, McCabe (2006, 41).

^{44.} The other one is at 88C8-89A8 and follows immediately upon the full statements of Simmias' and Cebes' objections.

Second, some commentators have been troubled that Plato should make Phaedo and Echecrates assert how clear the previous discussion had been when to those commentators the discussion had been rather obscure. Plato, of course, may be being ironic—winking at the reader, so to speak, and indicating that he recognizes that the previous discussion has been rather rough sledding. ⁴⁵ But if the reading of the passage I have suggested is generally accurate, then there is nothing odd about what Phaedo and Echecrates assert in this passage. Socrates has been remarkably clear about his answer to the aitia question and the method by which he obtained it. Indeed, Christopher Rowe has suggested that 102A3-9 might well imply an adequacy condition on any interpretation of the method Socrates is describing in these passages of the *Phaedo*, viz. the interpretation ought to be intelligible from the context of the *Phaedo* alone, since at 102A3-9, Cebes and Echecrates explain how wonderfully clear Socrates' account has been. 46 Nothing I have said about Socrates' application of the method of hypothesis requires us to appeal to anything other than Socrates' first description of that method at 100A3-7, although it is compatible with Socrates' description at Meno 86E6-87B2 and his application in the last third of the *Meno* (especially 87B5–C7).

The Conjunction Account

Nevertheless, a number of commentators would dispute my interpretation of this application.⁴⁷ In particular, David Gallop and Christopher Rowe take the hypothesis to which Socrates is appealing in this application to be not only the Form hypothesis, as I have suggested, but also the *aitia* thesis—a conjunction

^{45.} See Rowe (1993a, 50–51) for the claim that what has proceeded is one of "the obscurest parts of the dialogue (and perhaps even Plato)" and for doubting that Plato is being ironic.

^{46.} Rowe (1992, 96; 1993a, 50–51). This is, of course, quite in keeping with my more general conservative approach.

^{47.} Among those who would agree in general with the application of the method of hypothesis as I have presented it above are Bedu-Addo (1979, 115–19) and Dancy (2004, 300–301). My objections to the Gallop-Rowe interpretation owe much to van Eck's interpretation (in van Eck 1994 and 1996), but I suspect he would not agree with my interpretation, either. He says, for example, "it is clear that [100B5–7] and [100C4–6] are differentiated as items that have different roles in the method: [100B5–7] is the hypothesis, [100C5–7] the αἰτία statement that is 'in accord with' it"; van Eck (1996, 216). See also van Eck (1994, 22, 29, 31). All of this sounds like the application as I understand it. But, he also appears to deny that there is an application of the method of hypothesis prior to 102A10; see van Eck (1994, 26, 29; 1996, 218). See Rowe (1996, 230n11), who also understands van Eck as restricting the application of the method to after 102A10. In fact, however, I suspect that van Eck takes what happens after 102A10 to be an application of Socrates' theory of aitia or explanation, rather than his

which Gallop calls "the Form-Reason hypothesis." Because of the adequacy condition which Rowe thinks is demanded by 102A3-9, Rowe goes on to identify the higher hypotheses from which the Form-Reason hypothesis can be obtained in order to explain Socrates' talk of seeking higher hypotheses to account for the original hypothesis at 101D1-E3. He finds these higher hypotheses at 100D5-6, where Socrates contends that Forms are the aitia of F-things being F either in virtue of the Form's presence in F-things or the F-things' participation in the Forms or whatever the nature of the relationship happens to be.⁴⁹ As a result the application of the method of hypothesis on Rowe's account⁵⁰ goes roughly as follows. Socrates chooses or hypothesizes one of these relationships (perhaps the one he judges most compelling at the moment) and lays it down as the hypothesis that, for example, the presence of the Form F-ness in x is the *aitia* of x's being F. It follows from this hypothesis, then, that Forms exist (the Form hypothesis) and that the F itself is the aitia of x's being F (the aitia thesis), which together compose the conjunctive Form-Reason hypothesis. From the Form-Reason hypothesis it, then, follows that the soul is immortal.

Rowe's understanding of the application of the method of hypothesis, if I have represented it correctly, fails to do justice to the context of the passage. The investigation in whose service Socrates applies the method of hypothesis after the failure of his association with the natural scientists and reading of Anaxagoras is not on behalf of the immortality of the soul, but on behalf of the aitia question. That is the only investigation to which Socrates has explicitly referred and an answer to the aitia question ought to be the result of its

method of hypothesis. Indeed, van Eck (1996, 223) takes the method of hypothesis to be an element of Socrates' theory of explanation, as well as Socrates' logoi "approach" introduced at 99D4-100A3. I do not see, however, why he maintains that the method of hypothesis described at 100A3-7 does not get applied until 102A10, in light of what we have seen taking place between 100A7 and 102A10, even if he does want to restrict an application of the full theory of explanation until after 102A10; see van Eck (1994, 29; 1996, 215-18) and Rowe (1996, 228n4, 230). In the end, I fail to understand how van Eck integrates what he calls the elements of Socrates' theory of explanation. See note 21, this chapter for the difficulty of keeping straight Socrates' method of hypothesis and his answer to the aitia question.

^{48.} See Gallop (1975, 179).

^{49.} See, especially, Rowe (1993a, 55–57, 61–62).

^{50.} What follows represents Rowe's interpretation of the application, at least as I understand him. I am less certain how Gallop understands the application. But they both take the primary hypothesis in the application to be the conjunctive Form-Reason hypothesis and that I will argue is a mistake. Consequently, I will be considering them together.

application. It is true, of course, that Socrates engages in this investigation in order to argue for the immortality of the soul. But what Socrates is recounting in this portion of the text is how he inquired into the aitia question in order to use the results of that (past) inquiry to respond to Cebes' objection. Plato may think that the entire passage from 95B through 107B represents an inquiry that is, an application of a method for learning the immortality of the soul. He may think, that is, that the entire passage represents an application of the method of hypothesis. But this is not what he says. What he does say is that the passage from 99C through 101D represents his (at least partially) successful investigation concerning the aitia question. Consequently, whatever else we think about the application of the method here in the *Phaedo*, we should expect it to end (at least initially) with the aitia thesis and not with what we might call the immortality thesis. Since Gallop and Rowe think the hypothesis Socrates is appealing to here includes the *aitia* thesis, they must take the application of the method to end elsewhere.⁵¹ Why, then, do they take the hypothesis Socrates is appealing here to be the conjunctive Form-Reason hypothesis?

A variety considerations are suggested.⁵² First, as we have seen, the second description passage at 101D1–E3 indicated that the object of ἐχόμενος should be understood as referring to the safe part of the hypothesis in order to explain the contrast in the passage without being forced to translate ἔχοιτο as "attack." As a result, Rowe reasonably understands the hypothesis as composed of parts, viz. the Form hypothesis and the *aitia* thesis.⁵³ But I have provided an alternative reading, according to which the safe part of the hypothesis should be understood as the safe *consequent of* the hypothesis, which bypasses the necessity of the conjunctive Form-Reason hypothesis.⁵⁴

Second, following Gallop, Rowe emphasizes the "inseparability" of the Form hypothesis and the *aitia* thesis.⁵⁵ But their inseparability should come as

^{51.} See Rowe (1993a, 54), who writes "What is required is some way of understanding 101D which still allows the original hypothesis, about the existence of Forms and the participation of particulars in them, to be treated as *the* starting-point of the method as a whole" (his emphasis).

^{52.} In addition, Gallop (1975, 179) offers the consideration that since the *aitia* thesis is safe, conjoining it to the Form hypothesis will provide an explanation for the claim that the hypothesis is the *logos* judged most compelling at 100A3–7. I have already offered a rather deflationary reading of "judged most compelling."

^{53.} Rowe (1996, 235). As a result Rowe must understands the contrast at 101D2-4 as holding on to part of the hypothesis but not to the hypothesis as a whole. On my reading, the contrast is between holding on to what is obtained from the hypothesis and the hypothesis itself.

^{54.} See pp. 139-144 above.

^{55.} Rowe (1996, 236); see also Gallop (1975, 179).

no surprise even on the interpretation of the application I propose. Plato's point is precisely that the aitia thesis "agrees" with the Form hypothesis, the latter somehow reveals the former, and other answers to the aitia question do not "agree" with it. Such an "agreement" provides an integral connection between the Form hypothesis and the aitia thesis. Similarly, the "agreement" between virtue's being knowledge and virtue's being teachable and the "disagreement" between virtue's being knowledge and other answers to the teachability question indicates an integral, perhaps inseparable (in some relevant sense) relation between those two propositions.⁵⁶ But that does not commit Plato to thinking that the hypothesis in the *Meno* is the conjunction of virtue is knowledge and virtue is teachable. Moreover, as we have seen above, Socrates explicitly distinguishes between the Form hypothesis and the aitia thesis, professing that the latter "comes from" or "comes after" (ἐκ τούτων and τὰ ἑξῆς ἐκείνοις) the former, and only the former is explicitly designated as being hypothesized.⁵⁷ Consequently, the "inseparability" of the Form hypothesis and the *aitia* thesis is perfectly compatible with taking the former to be the hypothesis (which is how Socrates describes it) and the latter as what agrees with or comes from the Form hypothesis (which is how Socrates describes it), as my account of the application would suggest.

Third, Rowe appeals to the beginning of Socrates' final argument for the immortality of the soul at 102A10-B3.58 Plato writes

PHAEDO: As I recall it, when the above had been accepted, and it was agreed that [a] each of the Forms existed, and that [b] other things acquired their name by having a share in them, he followed this up by asking...(*Phaedo* 102A10–B3)

Here, Socrates refers to both the Form hypothesis in [a] and the *aitia* thesis in [b] at the beginning of his argument. But there is nothing here that requires us to think that [a] and [b] are parts of a single hypothesis, as opposed to the hypothesis itself and its safe consequent.

^{56.} I concede, however, that the entailment from the aitia thesis to the Form hypothesis is immediate (Forms cannot be aitia, if there are no Forms), while the entailment from virtue's teachability to virtue's being knowledge requires the assumption that all knowledge is teachable. But Plato seems clearly committed to this assumption. It is interesting that this direction of the knowledge-teachable bi-conditional is otiose in the *Meno* application.

^{57.} At least, between 100A7 and 102A10. I will discuss 107B5-9 in a moment.

^{58.} See, for example, Gallop (1975, 192) and Rowe (1993b, 249) for the argument beginning here.

Finally, Socrates concludes his final argument for the immortality of the soul as follows:⁵⁹

You are not only right to say this, Simmias,⁶⁰ Socrates said, but our first hypotheses require clearer examination, even though we find them convincing. And if you analyze them adequately, you will, I think, follow the argument as far as a man can and if the conclusion is clear, you will look no further.—That is true. (*Phaedo* 107B4–10)

Rowe takes Socrates' mention of "hypotheses" here to refer back to the beginning of the argument at 102A10-B3, and the plural "hypotheses" to refer to both the Form hypothesis and the aitia thesis mentioned there. Thus, on the Gallop-Rowe interpretation, Socrates here concludes his argument for the immorality of the soul and hence his response to Cebes' objection by referring to the dual hypotheses—the conjunctive Form-Reason hypothesis—with which he began the argument. But here I think we have been deceived by our need for clarity and brevity. Socrates never really refers to the Form hypothesis or even the being of Forms as his hypothesis (or even one of his hypotheses). What he hypothesized back at 100B1-C2 was the "existence of a Beautiful, itself by itself, of a Good and a Great and all the rest (ὑποθέμενος εἶναί τι καλὸν αὐτὸ καθ' αὑτὸ καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ μέγα καὶ τἄλλα πάντα). If you grant me these and agree that they exist, I hope to show you the aitia as a result (ἐκ τούτων), and so to find the soul to be immortal" (100B5-9). It is from these (note the plural) that he arrived at the aitia thesis, and not from anything he calls "the Form hypothesis." That he should refer to his initial hypothesizing in the plural at 107B5, then, should come as no surprise, and does not require appealing to a conjunctive Form-Reason hypothesis. And so, at the end of the argument he rightly enjoins Simmias and Cebes (as well as all of us) to examine or investigate more clearly his hypothesizing the being of such things (and presumably anything else he needed to hypothesize in reaching the aitia thesis and so the immortality of the soul from the aitia thesis)⁶¹ before holding on to the hypothesis itself and answering

^{59.} For important discussions of this final argument and its validity see, for example, Keyt (1963), M. Reeve (1975), and Kanayama (2000).

^{60.} Simmias has just confessed to some private doubts despite apparently having no grounds for them.

^{61.} Thus, I concede that Plato may have other hypotheses in mind here at the end of the *Phaedo* in addition to what we have been calling the Form hypothesis, but that does not require that we understand the governing hypothesis in the argument for the immortality of the soul to be the conjunctive Form-Reason hypothesis of the Gallop-Rowe interpretation. For what it is worth the plural "hypotheses" at 107B5 does not really help the Gallop-Rowe

the Form question safely. What Socrates enjoins us to do here at the end of his immortality argument is to confirm these hypotheses by means of the two confirmation stages he describes at 101D1-E3, but does not apply anywhere in the Phaedo.

Consequently, while alternate interpretations of the application of the method of hypothesis at *Phaedo* 100A8–101D1 are possible, ⁶² the interpretation I have proposed is compatible with all of the evidence. It can account for the difficulty surrounding the appropriate translation of exorto at 101D1-E3, the alleged "inseparability" of the Form hypothesis and the aitia thesis, 63 Socrates' reference to both of these positions at 102A10-B3, and his use of the plural "hypotheses" at 107B4-10. Moreover, the interpretation I have offered nicely fits the context of Plato's introduction of the method of hypothesis at this stage of the Phaedo. Socrates is made to recount his investigation concerning the aitia question beginning at 95E7 and he concludes his intellectual autobiography by exhibiting how he employed his method of hypothesis in order to (at least partially) successfully answer that question. He hypothesized the being of Forms which in some way "agreed" with the answer that the F is the aitia of F-things

view, either. As Rowe concedes, they must take the two parts of the Form-Reason hypothesis to be hypotheses (despite the fact that the aitia thesis is never called a hypothesis until here at 107B5). Rowe points out that the context determines whether we should treat the two parts individually as hypotheses or together as a single composite hypothesis; Rowe (1996, 234n22). I would agree that the context of 107B5 determines how we should understand the plural "hypotheses," but I do not think that context requires taking the aitia thesis to be a hypothesis. The only occurrence of ὑπόθεσις or its cognates in 100A8–102A10 is at 101D2 and 101D7, in the second description of the method in general.

^{62.} Rowe also thinks that the application of the method of hypothesis here in the *Phaedo* suggests a restricted account of the method. That is, Rowe does not think that Plato describes it as method to be employed in other inquiries but only for those inquiries which begin with the Form-Reason hypothesis. I am not clear what the relationship is between Rowe's commitment to this view and his commitment to the Form-Reason hypothesis. If the conjunctive hypothesis view is thought to follow from the restricted method view, then my arguments against the Form-Reason hypothesis will suffice against the restricted method view. If, as is more probable, the Form-Reason hypothesis view either entails or lends support to the restricted method view, then while my arguments against the Form-Reason hypothesis view will have removed some support for the restricted method view, the latter view remains standing. In response to Rowe's charity argument (Rowe 1996, 237) let me very briefly say that I do not find the fact that Socrates offers to explain his method of hypothesis by citing the specific example which led him to introduce his discussion of this method in the dialogue to begin with a particularly rough transition. And, I have already suggested how one can understand the method as being fully general and abide by Rowe's principle of adequacy suggested by 102A3-9. For others who see the method as fully general, see, for example, Gallop (1975, 180), Bostock (1986, 157), and van Eck (1996, 219).

^{63.} Although I will have more to say about this later.

being F (the *aitia* thesis), and "disagreed" with the *aitia* answers that led to his blindness when practicing the method of natural science. Further, the interpretation I have proposed proceeds conservatively, embracing Rowe's adequacy condition of eschewing evidence from outside the *Phaedo* for understanding the method described and applied here in the *Phaedo*. And finally, it does so in a way that remains compatible with Plato's description and depiction of the same method of hypothesis in the *Meno*. To be clear, I do not take the Gallop-Rowe interpretation (or any other interpretation, for that matter) to be debunked. My goal all along has been more modest. My goal has been to uncover a plausible response to Clitophon's challenge. Understanding Socrates' application of the method of hypothesis at *Phaedo* 100A8–101D1 as I have proposed allows us to use the evidence of the *Phaedo* together with the evidence of the *Meno* to piece together such a response. And nothing in the *Phaedo*, I maintain, precludes this project and response.

Conclusion

If, then, something like the interpretation of Socrates' application of the method of hypothesis at *Phaedo* 100A8–101D1 that I have proposed is correct, what if anything do we learn about the nature of that method from this application? Does this understanding of Socrates' application enrich our understanding of Plato's method beyond confirming the general structure of the proof stage?

We should not, of course, discount this last point. Understanding Socrates' application of the method of hypothesis as I have does support the recommendation we have seen Plato make in the *Meno*. When one is seeking to come to know the answer to a question one fails to know, one should look for a different (reduced) question whose answer will in some way determine the answer to the original question. While Socrates does not explicitly speak in terms of questions and answers here in the *Phaedo*, he does indicate that the Form hypothesis (which evidently answers some question) in some way provides an answer to the *aitia* question. But, here is one place where the application in the *Phaedo* enriches our understanding of the method of hypothesis. The relationship between

^{64.} Notice that even if one takes the explicit appearance of the theory of Forms in the *Phaedo* to be incompatible with various features of the *Meno*, it does not preclude using the *Phaedo* to understand the method of hypothesis introduced in the *Meno*. Plato's use of the theory of Forms in an application of the method of hypothesis in the *Phaedo* is compatible with a more general conception of the method of hypothesis which does not require a commitment to the theory of Forms. See note 62, this chapter.

the answer to the reduced question and the answer to the original question is not (or not any longer)⁶⁵ the relatively simple and rigorous relationship of strict logical entailment. Rather, the relationship appears more indeterminate, looser, or contextually sensitive.66

We can, if we want, imagine a strict logical entailment from the Form hypothesis to the *aitia* thesis. The content of the Form hypothesis—whether we think of it as the being of Forms or even the theory of Forms—is rather elusive. We might, for example, take it to amount to the claim that abstract, separate, unchangeable aitiai of the properties of ordinary objects exist, or something to that effect. In that case, the aitia thesis is an immediate and strict logical consequence. But, we might also take the content of the Form hypothesis to be somewhat thinner, even if only marginally so—for example, that abstract, separate, immutable objects of some kind exist. In this case, to strictly derive the aitia thesis, we will need to appeal to an additional hypothesis or background belief to the effect that if there are such objects, then they would be or could serve as the aitia of the properties of ordinary objects, for example.67

But all of this is what we have suspected for some time. It is true that *Meno's* obscure geometrical example at 86E6-87B2 and the application of the upward path of the proof stage at 87B5-D1, indicated a fairly strict reduction of the original question to the other (reduced) question, even asserting a bi-conditional relationship between the two answers. But we were suspicious about the salience of the bi-conditional in the application at 87B5-D1 and once Plato began to depict the upward path of the confirmation stage on the answer to the reduced question, viz. that virtue is knowledge, which appeared to represent the same relationship between answers, things got immediately messier. Indeed, we anticipated that things would get messier given that Socrates appeared to be

^{65.} I think some of the considerations I mention here tell against a developmental approach from the *Meno* to the *Phaedo*, but I have long ago put aside these sorts of questions.

^{66.} By contextually sensitive I have in mind sensitivity to background beliefs and/or salience.

^{67.} Indeed, Plato may be committed to the following bi-conditional: the Forms exist just in case the F is the aitia of x's being F, just as he appeared committed to the bi-conditionals x has the application property just in case it has the inscription property, and virtue is knowledge just in case virtue is teachable. Of course, there is no indication in the text that he is committed to such a bi-conditional here in the *Phaedo*, unlike the relevant passages in the Meno, other than the parallel structure of this passage in the Phaedo with the corresponding passages in the Meno. That is precisely the point. We should be looking at Plato's applications and descriptions to determine the relationship between the hypothesis and its consequences, rather than to some pre-conceived notion of logical consequence, perhaps derived from geometry.

recommending applying this method, borrowed from geometry and perhaps the other so-called exact sciences, on questions like the teachability of virtue and the immortality of the soul. Finally, Plato's use of "agreement" and "disagreement" in his descriptions of the method in the *Phaedo* almost seemed designed to allow for a relatively loose, rather than strict, understanding of the relationship.

The looseness of the relationship, if that is the best way to describe it, does not in any way spoil the general structure of the method of inquiry that Plato is recommending. When one seeks to know the answer to some specific question (the original question), Plato recommends looking for another question (the reduced question) whose most compelling answer (the hypothesis) will provide, or help⁶⁸ to provide an answer to the original question. If this seems insufficiently informative or rigorous for some of us, Plato might respond that it is the best he can do.⁶⁹ We should remember that we are searching for answers to questions from (robust) ignorance of anything about the subject matter in question.⁷⁰ As Socrates puts it in the *Meno* "we do not know either what [virtue] is or what qualities it possesses" (87B3). It is not as though we can simply somehow view the answer to the question directly, at least not as long as we remain embodied.

But, of course, this is not all there is to the method of hypothesis in any case. Plato also recommends that having arrived at this hypothesis (and perhaps having shown how the hypothesis helps in answering the original question⁷¹), if

^{68.} Recall that Socrates describes the geometers in the obscure example as saying "I don't yet know whether this [area] is such [as to make the construction possible], but I think I have as it were a hypothesis that would *help* towards the question, as follows . . ." (87A3–4; Menn 2002, 209; emphasis added).

^{69.} Part of my goal is to recommend that if we want to do better the way to begin is not by assuming a specific interpretation of "agreement" or "consequent," but by looking at the examples Plato gives. That is, begin by asking what the relationship is between the inscription property and the application property, between virtue is teachable and virtue is knowledge, between virtue is knowledge and virtue is good, between virtue is knowledge and there are teachers of virtue and there are no teachers of virtue, between the being of Forms and the *aitia* thesis, and more to come. It may be that there is no common way to represent these relationships, and to that extent Plato's response to Clitophon's challenge is flawed. Alternatively, Plato may be on to something. Even Aristotle, who one might suppose strives to straighten out some of these issues in works like the *Prior Analytics* and *Posterior Analytics*, among other places, packs a lot into his use of ắpxai, or so I hope to argue in the future.

^{70.} If Socrates had known the nature of the *aitia* of generation and destruction, I suspect the account of his intellectual autobiography would have been considerably shorter. Again, if the *aitia* thesis had been self-evident to Socrates, as Sedley suggests (see note 35, this chapter), it is difficult to explain why it took him so long to discover it or why he needed to postulate the being of Forms in order to answer it.

^{71.} The downward path of the proof stage takes on added importance once the relationship between the hypothesis and the answer to the original question has become less rigorous.

one should hold on to it, one should resist answering the question to which it is an answer confidently (safely?) until one confirms that hypothesis by two procedures. On the one hand, one needs to look for a higher hypothesis which will in some way provide or help with the answer to the reduced question; and on the other hand, one needs to test the hormêthenta of the answer to the reduced question to see whether they agree with one another or not. Indeed, as we have seen, Plato reminds us of the necessity of this confirmation at the end of his argument for the immortality of the soul at 107B4-10. But this signals the second way in which the depiction of the method of hypothesis here in the *Phaedo* enriches our understanding of his method.

Plato indicates that one need not perform all of the method's steps or procedures in order to employ the method correctly. Plato depicts Socrates applying the method sufficiently, at least for his purposes here in the *Phaedo*, without depicting an application of the confirmation stage, and yet he underscores that such a stage is necessary for the completion of the investigation. Thus, Plato reveals that the method of hypothesis is a process which one can properly engage in without completing all of its stages. It is not a method that one can be said to employ only to the extent that one has succeeded in acquiring the knowledge one seeks. Rather, it is a method which has preliminary results—results which may be sufficient for the inquiry at hand, if not for the primary goal of acquiring the knowledge one seeks. What is key for Plato is not that one has completed the process, although that is its ultimate goal and one should never be satisfied until that goal has been achieved, but that one recognize where one is in the process toward that goal. It is essential that one not hold on to the answer to a question that has not been confirmed by obtaining it from an answer to a higher question and by testing its *hormêthenta* for consistency. It is essential, that is, that one not mix up those answers which require further confirmation with those answers that are "safe" as the debaters (ἀντιλογικοί) do (101D1-102A2). That Socrates is a philosopher and not a debater is made clear at the end of the argument for the immortality of the soul, where he professes that the answer to the reduced question (the Form hypothesis) on the basis of which he answered the *aitia* question in order to argue for the immortality of the soul, requires further confirmation.

This, of course, raises further difficulties for our project of identifying applications and so filling out the details of Plato's method of hypothesis, for we can no longer expect such applications to depict all of its stages or procedures. But our difficulty is Plato's genius. Philosophical inquiry is a messy, partial, and ad hoc business, even if its final product is not. An adequate response to Clitophon's challenge does not require, and probably should not provide, an algorithm for acquiring knowledge; and Plato does not give us one. But it should provide us with a strategy for acquiring that knowledge, and Plato does give us that.

THE METHOD OF HYPOTHESIS

SOCRATES AT WORK IN THE REPUBLIC

In the previous two chapters we identified two applications of Plato's method of inquiry in the dialogues. We were able to identify these arguments as applications of inquiry in part because Plato tells us that they are. Having identified these applications of inquiry in the *Meno* and in the *Phaedo*, we were able to confirm the general structure of Plato's method of hypothesis as a method of inquiry. In addition, these applications enriched our understanding of that structure. The *Meno* furnished a way of understanding the downward path of the confirmation stage that went beyond the rather obtuse description of it at *Phaedo* 101D1–E3, while the *Phaedo*'s application encouraged a way of understanding the proof stage that did not rely on a strict sense of entailment or derivation which has caused scholars so much trouble.

Unfortunately, these two applications also posed problems for an account of the method of hypothesis. The *Meno* provided an application that failed to have even partially successful results. The conflict in the confirmation procedures—the upward path confirming the hypothesis, the downward path disconfirming it—left us wondering what to make of the conclusion of the *Meno*. And the *Phaedo* gave us a very incomplete application of the method, providing only an application of the upward path of the proof stage and leaving the downward path of the proof stage and the entire confirmation stage to the reader's imagination.

In the present chapter I present an application that does not have these faults. I sketch an argument in the *Republic* which is an application of the method of hypothesis in its full glory. The argument I have in mind is Plato's argument for the possibility of Kallipolis in *Republic* 5 and 6, specifically *Republic* 5.471C–6.502C ("the Kallipolis argument"). The argument is familiar enough, in part because it is replete with difficulties and controversies. What is not familiar is the proposal that it represents an extended application of the method

^{1.} The current chapter is a substantial revision of, and so supersedes, Benson (2011a).

of hypothesis.² The goal of the present chapter is to defend this proposal, and to consider how the application enriches our understanding of the method.

I maintain that in response to the question whether Kallipolis is possible, Socrates employs the method of hypothesis as we have seen it developed in the Meno and the Phaedo. Just as in the Meno where the question whether virtue is teachable is reduced to the question whether virtue is knowledge, so in the Republic the question whether Kallipolis is possible is reduced to the question whether philosophy and political power coincide (5.473B-E). Next, again just as in the Meno,³ Socrates sets out to confirm the truth of the most compelling answer to this reduced question, viz. the hypothesis that philosophy and political power do in fact coincide. First, again as in the Meno, he provides an argument representing the upward path of the confirmation stage; he searches for and finds a higher hypothesis, that philosophy is knowledge of Forms, and then argues that, so understood, philosophers have the necessary and sufficient characteristics for ruling (5.474C-6.487A)—that is, that philosophy and political power coincide. Next, yet again as in the Meno, he provides an argument representing the downward path of the confirmation stage; he tests the most compelling answer to the reduced question, viz. the hypothesis that philosophy (so understood) and political power coincide, against experience, *endoxa*, and other ordinary beliefs (6.487B-497A).⁴ At this point, however, and finally, the parallel between the argument in the Republic and the last third of the Meno breaks down. In the Meno, the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge is discredited or disconfirmed by the downward path of the confirmation stage. As we put it when looking at the Meno, the hypothesis had the hormêthen that there are teachers of virtue, but in fact, there are no such teachers. In the Republic, however, the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide has the hormêthen that philosophers are virtuous and beneficial, and while that *hormêthen* appears to be

^{2.} Nettleship (1925, 184–211) is one of the few treatments of the entire stretch of argument from 5.471C to 6.502C; see more recently, Pappas (1995, 114). Many scholars focus on the arguments at the end of *Republic* 5 and then refocus at 6.502C, and especially on the images of the Sun, Line, and Cave. My reading of the structure of the argument over this stretch of text is in general sympathy with Nettleship's. He does not, however, see (or at least maintain) the parallel with the last third of the *Meno* nor the application of the method of hypothesis.

^{3.} As I explain later, the parallel with the *Meno* underwrites seeing the Kallipolis argument in the *Republic* as an application of the method of hypothesis.

^{4.} From 6.497A to 6.502C, Plato takes up two subsidiary issues. From 6.497A to 6.499A, Plato explains that the virtuous and useful philosophers are more likely to arise and flourish in cities like Kallipolis, rather than current cities. And from 6.499A to 6.502C, Plato explains how it is not impossible for such philosophers to arise even in current cities through, for example, divine dispensation.

at odds with the facts on the ground—that is, with the fact avowed by Adeimantus that philosophers are vicious and useless—Socrates explains why in fact the *horméthenta* of the hypothesis do not disagree with each other. Consequently, the hypothesis in the *Republic* is further confirmed by the downward path of the confirmation stage. In being confirmed by both procedures in the *Republic*, unlike the *Meno*, progress along the longer road to the unhypothetical first principle of everything, has been made.⁵

Schematically the Kallipolis argument goes as follows:

Q1: Is Kallipolis possible?

Bi-conditional (5.473B–E): Kallipolis is possible just in case philosophy and political power coincide.

Q2: Do philosophy and political power coincide?

P2: Look for a higher hypothesis from which A2/H1 can be obtained. (5.474C-6.487A)

Conditional²: If philosophy is knowledge of Forms, then philosophy and political power coincide; this is explained at 6.484A1–487A8, rather than asserted without defense.

Q3: Is philosophy knowledge of Forms?

A3/H2: Philosophy is knowledge of Forms.

A2/H1: Philosophy and political power coincide.

P1: The agreement of the *horméthenta* of A2/H1. (6.487B-497A)

A1: Kallipolis is possible.

The Context of the Passage

Before turning to the Kallipolis argument itself, we must briefly consider its context. Socrates begins *Republic* 5 as about to relate four kinds of bad cities and souls, when Adeimantus, with Polemarchus' encouragement, interrupts. They want Socrates to give a *logos* of his proposal to hold women and children in common. Socrates had mentioned this almost in passing at 4.423E5–424A3 in

^{5.} For the longer and shorter road, see *Republic* 6.504A4–D3, and for the unhypothetical first principle, see *Republic* 6.510B6–7, 6.511B5–6, and 7.533C8–D1, as well as chapter 9, this volume.

^{6.} See 5.449C7–8, as well as Adeimantus' assertion at 5.449D6–450A2 that Socrates has not discussed this point sufficiently and so urges him to do so now. Throughout, I will be referring to Adeimantus' request to give an account of Socrates' proposal that women and children are held in common as the *koinonia* thesis, even though in fact Adeimantus asks two apparently distinct questions at 5.449D1–4, as does Glaucon at 5.450C1–2.

describing the nature of Kallipolis in the lead-up to the argument for the nature of justice at the end of Book 4. Let us call this proposal "the koinonia thesis." Socrates hesitates to respond to Adeimantus, first on the grounds that it will take too long. But, when Glaucon supports Adeimantus by encouraging Socrates to "tell us at length what your thoughts are on the topic [Adeimantus] inquired about" (5.450B9-C1), Socrates hesitates because he fears that he will harm his interlocutor-friends by misleading them. As Socrates puts it

Your encouragement would be fine, if I could be sure I was speaking with knowledge (πιστεύοντος μὲν γὰρ ἐμοῦ ἐμοὶ εἰδέναι ἃ λέγω), for one can feel both secure and confident when one knows the truth $(\tau \dot{\alpha} \lambda \eta \theta \tilde{\eta} \epsilon i \delta \delta \tau \alpha)$ about the dearest and most important things and speaks about them among those who are themselves wise and dear friends. But to speak, as I'm doing, at a time when one is unsure of oneself and searching for the truth (ἀπιστοῦντα δὲ καὶ ζητοῦντα), is a frightening and insecure thing to do. I'm not afraid of being laughed at - that would be childish indeed. But I am afraid that, if I slip from the truth, just where it's most important not to, I'll not only fall myself but drag my friends down as well. (Republic 5.450D8-451A4)⁷

Nevertheless, Socrates is ultimately persuaded and embarks upon the ostensible digression of the central books (5 through 7) of the *Republic*. 8 Socrates describes his defense of the koinonia thesis as coming in three waves (or more accurately, as consisting in a defense against three waves of objections): the first wave that men and women guardians ought share tasks and so be trained or educated in common (education koinonia; 5.451C-457B), the second wave that women and children should be held in common (family koinonia; 5.457D-471C), and the third wave that Kallipolis is possible (5.471C-6.502C). It is not until the beginning of Book 8 that Socrates resumes the argument concerning the bad cities and souls that he sets aside here at the beginning of *Republic* 5.9

Notice that Socrates introduces the digression of the central books of the Republic by explicitly disavowing his knowledge of the koinonia thesis, and testifying to his continued search for or inquiry after this knowledge. It is precisely

^{7.} Compare this passage with the end of the Laches at 200E1-201A7 (pp. 35), Phaedo 70B5-C3 (pp. 187–188), and Republic 6.506B5–E7 (p. 239).

^{8.} See Annas (1981, 170), for example, who correctly maintains that Plato insists that the discussion beginning with Book 5 is a digression and "we would be wrong to ignore it." See also Pappas (1995, 102). Pace N. White (1979, 20) and Adam (1902, 274), for example.

^{9.} See Republic 8.543C4-544B3.

because he recognizes his ignorance about these matters that he fears harming his interlocutor-friends by misleading them.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Socrates also indicates that what follows will be more an explication and defense of his thesis than an account of the method by which he arrived at this thesis. Socrates is not engaging in a joint inquiry from mutual ignorance with Glaucon and Adeimantus in order to answer the question how women and children are to be held in common as he is, for example, in the Meno. 11 Nor is he recounting his intellectual autobiography in pursuit of an answer to this question as he is, for example, in the *Phaedo*. Rather, Socrates is explaining, justifying, or defending to Glaucon and Adeimantus his logos, the koinonia thesis that women and children should be held in common—a thesis, the knowledge of which he readily admits he lacks and continues to seek. As a result, while Socrates is clearly still in the process of learning or seeking knowledge concerning the koinonia thesis, it remains unlikely that what follows is meant to represent that inquiry as opposed to reveal the results (or the defense of the results) of that inquiry to date. The distinction between defense and inquiry may be slippery, and these two philosophical enterprises may elide into one another, but our conservative approach requires clear applications of inquiry as evidence for coming to understand Plato's recommended method.¹² Consequently, we should not expect to find a useful application of the method of hypothesis in the digression of *Republic* 5 through 7.

The Structure of Republic 5.471E-6.502C

Introduction

In what follows I outline the argument structure of Socrates' response to the third wave, and in doing so highlight substantial parallels and pointed allusions to the application of the method of hypothesis in the last third of the *Meno*. These parallels and allusions encourage seeing Socrates' response as an application of the

^{10.} Compare Socrates worrying about learning from the sophists at *Protagoras* 313C–314A (pp. 44–45).

^{11.} Plato highlights in the *Meno* the similarity of Meno's and Socrates' cognitive positions vis-à-vis the question "What is virtue?" and so the question "Is virtue teachable?" from 80A on. But if we are to see that Socrates and Cebes and Simmias in the *Phaedo* and Socrates and Glaucon and Adeimantus in the *Republic* are in similar cognitive positions vis-à-vis their respective questions, Plato certainly does not highlight it. Moreover, Socrates expresses no concern with harming Meno in pursuing their joint inquiry concerning the teachability of virtue. Perhaps such a concern is appropriate only in the case of defending a thesis, not in the case of joint inquiry.

^{12.} Conversely, objections to the interpretation of the method of hypothesis I am promoting should rely on clear cases of depicted inquiry as well in order to be successful.

method of hypothesis and invite comparison to the application in the *Meno*. This comparison both highlights the general structure of the method of hypothesis as we have seen it described and applied in the Meno and Phaedo, and enriches our understanding. Specifically, it enriches our understanding of the downward path of the confirmation stage by providing an example of such a path that is consistent with the results of the upward path of the same stage, something that we found lacking and consequently especially troubling in the Meno. The parallels with and allusions to the last third of the Meno justify taking the argument for the possibility of Kallipolis as an application of the method of hypothesis. Or, at least so I contend in what follows.

Before doing so, two caveats are in order. First, the Kallipolis argument is long and complex, covering over twenty-five pages of text. I have no hope of examining the argument in the detail it deserves in the course of a single chapter. Consequently, I discuss the argument at some distance, displaying its general structure rather than its specific details. This is appropriate given my concern to highlight the structural similarities with the last third of the Meno and the evidence it therefore provides for the nature of Plato's method of hypothesis. But, I do not suppose that the details do not matter. I maintain, but do not defend, that the details of the argument fit the general structure I sketch, but to the extent that they do not, the evidence of the current passage is impugned.

Second, in maintaining that Socrates' response to the third wave should be read in light of the last third of the Meno, I do not mean to suggest that Socrates' response to the third wave cannot be understood on its own. The argument of the third wave is fully contained within the pages of the *Republic*, and a proper understanding of that response is available from those pages alone. Plato's focus in Republic 5 is on a defense of his koinonia thesis and his response to Glaucon's challenge from Book 2 more generally. He is not focused on detailing the nature of inquiry, or philosophical method more generally—issues which do rise to the surface in much of the Meno and later in Republic 6 and 7. Nevertheless, the parallels and allusions to the *Meno* in the third wave do indicate a fairly self-conscious reference back to the *Meno* passage. And to the extent that one is interested in the method Socrates employs at this point in the Republic, Plato appears to be indicating that comparison to the Meno passage will prove helpful (although not necessary).

The Proof Stage: Identifying the Hypothesis (Republic 5.471E2-473E)

At Republic 5.471E2-472B2, Glaucon suddenly challenges Socrates to answer whether and in what way Kallipolis (as it has been described) is possible (ἀλλὰ τοῦτο αὐτὸ ἤδη πειρώμεθα ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς πείθειν, ὡς δυνατὸν καὶ ἤ δυνατόν, τὰ δ' ἄλλα χαίρειν ἑῶμεν; 5.471E2-4). Why Socrates should describe this question as a sudden attack against his *logos* (ἐπὶ τὸν λόγον μου; 5.472A2) is difficult to fathom. Socrates raised the possibility question himself way back at 5.450C6-D2, and he appears to have been studiously trying to avoid it ever since. The question evidently is one Socrates would prefer not to pursue.

Before agreeing to pursue the question, Socrates extracts a concession from Glaucon (5.472B3–473B3). He reminds Glaucon that they began their discussion by seeking the nature of justice in order to determine whether the just individual was happiest. Their goal was not to prove that, should the nature of justice be found, an individual resembling that nature in every respect was happiest but, rather, an individual who closely approximates it was happiest (5.472B3–C3). Similarly, as Socrates puts it,

Then don't compel me to show that what we've described in theory $(\tau\tilde{\phi} \lambda \delta \gamma \phi)$ can come into being $(\tau\tilde{\phi} \xi \gamma \phi)$ in every respect as we've described it. Rather, if we're able to discover how a city could come to be governed in a way that most closely approximates our description, let's say that we've shown what you ordered us to show, namely, that it's possible for our city to come to be. (*Republic* 5.473A5–B2)

Plato here introduces for the first time the *logos/ergon* distinction which will be reiterated throughout the course of the argument, ¹⁴ but it is not clear what role Glaucon's concession has in what follows. Socrates is never made to refer back to this concession, as far as I can tell. ¹⁵

^{13.} See the earlier concession in the second wave at 5.457E–458B to examine the benefit of the family *koinonia* law on the assumption that it is possible. When he does turn to the possibility of this law at 5.466D5–8, what he proposes is not particularly salient to the question. See Schofield (2006, 235), who suggests that the possibility of this law has been "dropped from view."

^{14.} For the recurrence of the logos/ergon distinction, see note 31, this chapter.

^{15.} Schofield (2006, 239–40) takes this concession passage (5.472B3–473B3) to be "fundamentally important" but only to make "it crystal clear that the issue of possibility or impossibility is not in the end what we should be concentrating on" (his emphasis), despite the fact that Socrates spends the next roughly 25 pages devoted to establishing the possibility. Marshall (2008, 76) takes the passage to adjust, but not cancel the possibility requirement (viz. that a city built in speech is not the best city unless it is possible), roughly—a polis built in speech is not the best city unless a close approximation to it is possible. But neither explain how the approximation point is followed up on in the argument that follows. Halliwell (1993, 198) simply writes that Plato's "contention here is a source of difficulty."

Finally, having secured Glaucon's concession for approximation, Socrates immediately reduces the question whether Kallipolis is possible to the question whether philosophy and political power coincide. He begins by indicating that there is one change—neither small nor easy—that would bring about the change to Kallipolis in existing cities (5.473B4-C4) and follows this up by maintaining that unless this change takes place Kallipolis will never become possible (5.473C11-E4). In the former passage Socrates testifies to the sufficiency of the change, while in the latter passage Socrates testifies to its necessity. The change that is neither small nor easy is variously described in the latter passage as "philosophers ruling as kings" (οἱ φιλόσοφοι βασιλεύσωσιν), "those now called kings and rulers philosophizing genuinely and adequately" (οί βασιλής τε νῦν λεγόμενοι καὶ δυνάσται φιλοσοφήσωσι γνησίως τε καὶ ίκανῶς), and "political power and philosophy coinciding" (καὶ τοῦτο εἰς ταὐτὸν συμπέσῃ, δύναμίς τε πολιτική καὶ φιλοσοφία). I will follow the lead of the last description and refer to the change necessary and sufficient for the possibility of Kallipolis as political power and philosophy coinciding.¹⁶

We will return to the coincidence of philosophy and political power in a moment, but first notice that the introduction of the question whether Kallipolis is possible closely parallels the introduction of the question whether virtue can be taught in the last third of the Meno. 17 First, just as in the Meno, Socrates is portrayed as being forced to follow the lead of the interlocutor. Meno compels Socrates to pursue the question whether virtue can be taught against Socrates' better judgment, just as Glaucon compels Socrates to pursue the question whether Kallipolis is possible. The language of compulsion is evident in both passages. 18 Second, as a result of being compelled to pursue a question against his better judgment, Socrates extracts a concession from Glaucon, just as he had extracted a concession from Meno for being compelled to pursue the question whether virtue is teachable. The concession in the Meno is to be permitted to employ the method of hypothesis; here in the *Republic* the concession is to only require the possibility of an approximation. Unlike the Meno, the Republic's concession seems to be dropped as soon as it is granted. Finally, and most significantly, Socrates reduces the question whether Kallipolis is possible to the question whether political power and philosophy coincide, just as in

^{16.} See Nettleship (1925, 186), who writes: "the union of political power and philosophical insight."

^{17.} Although I do not deny that it is introduced as Socrates' logos requiring defense, as opposed to a genuine question requiring an answer in the Meno.

^{18.} The Meno passage contains five occurrences of cognates of ἄρχειν in ten lines, while the Republic passage contains δεῖ at 5.472E7, ἀνάγκαζέ at 5.473A5, and ἐπιτάττεις at 5.473B1.

the Meno he had reduced the question whether virtue is teachable to the question whether virtue is knowledge. In the Meno the answer to the latter question is necessary and sufficient for the answer to the former; so here in the Republic the answer to the question whether political power and philosophy coincide is necessary and sufficient for the answer to the question whether Kallipolis is possible. If political power and philosophy coincide, Kallipolis is possible; if not, not. Moreover, this reduction raises two distinct questions: why should we think that Kallipolis is possible just in case philosophy and political power coincide, and why should we think that philosophy and political power coincide, just as in the Meno two theses competed for the title of "hypothesis"—the bi-conditional that virtue is knowledge just in case virtue is teachable and the thesis that virtue is knowledge. And again, just as in the *Meno* the latter thesis receives the bulk of the attention in the remainder of the dialogue, so here in the *Republic* the latter thesis— that political power and philosophy coincide receives the bulk of Plato's attention in what follows. Indeed, the reduction of the possibility of Kallipolis to the coincidence of philosophy and political power is so thorough that the third wave of objection to Socrates' koinonia thesis is not the alleged impossibility of Kallipolis as it initially appears to be (5.472A1-B2) but the alleged impossibility of philosophy and political power coinciding.¹⁹ Thus, the structure of this passage resembles the proof stage of the method of hypothesis as we have been developing it. The thesis that philosophy and political power coincide serves as the hypothesis on the basis of which the question concerning Kallipolis' possibility is to be answered. And the parallels with the *Meno* underscore that resemblance.

Before turning to the next portion of the argument we need to briefly consider the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide. What precisely does it mean and how does it help with the question concerning the possibility of Kallipolis?²⁰ The discussion by which Plato introduces the hypothesis indicates what might be described as a practical focus. Socrates describes it as the single change needed for a (presumably current²¹) city to acquire the constitution of Kallipolis (5.473B7). Make this change in Athens and Athens will become Kallipolis (at least in time). Moreover, the phrases by which he introduces the

^{19.} See 5.473E1–4, and Sedley (2005, 205) and Schofield (2006, 238), for example. Why Plato fails to take the bi-conditional in the *Republic* to require explanation and defense is, however, less clear than in the *Meno*.

^{20.} This question deserves more attention than I can afford to give it here. In a sense it is the key to Plato's political philosophy. But I will only touch on it as it affects matters of method.

^{21.} See, for example, the vvv's at 5.473B5, D1, and D3.

hypothesis support this suggestion. Socrates proposes making current philosophers into rulers, or current rulers into philosophers, or political power and philosophy coincide in the same person. Of course, if this is supposed to answer the possibility of Kallipolis question, we should expect Socrates to go on to argue that making this change or bringing these things about is possible. But this is not what Socrates goes on to argue, at least primarily. Rather, the bulk of the argument that follows is concerned to show that it is possible for the same individual to possess both a philosophical and a political nature—that the natures or capacities coincide. That is, Socrates' focus tends to be more conceptual than practical, despite his introductory comments. It is not until Republic 6.499A-502C that Socrates returns to the possibility of actually making the change of putting people with such natures in charge.²²

I do not mean to suggest that Plato's procedure here is in any way inappropriate. A positive answer to what I described as the practical question— "Is it possible for people with such natures to come to be in charge of actual cities?" depends on a positive answer to the more conceptual question, "Is it possible for people to have such natures, the capacity for both philosophy and politics?" Nor do I mean to suggest that this latter question is purely or strictly a conceptual question. Rather, the latter question consists of two questions, only one of which looks conceptual. The first, more conceptual question is whether the natures or capacities of philosophy and politics are compatible; Plato's answer is that they are identical (or at least materially equivalent), and so a fortiori compatible. The second, less conceptual question is whether individuals with such natures can arise in the present circumstances; Plato's answer is again affirmative, at least when they are made to do so by divine dispensation. But it is important to keep these two questions distinct from the question whether individuals with such natures can somehow take charge of current cities. Answering these first two questions—which I will henceforth characterize together as the question whether philosophy and political power coincide—occupies the bulk of Plato's attention in responding to the third wave. When he finally turns to the so-called practical question at 6.499A, Plato answers it with little more than the assertion that we have no reason to think it is impossible that such individuals could take charge, once the possibility of their existence has been secured. A positive answer to the question whether philosophy and political power coincide, understood as consisting of these first two questions, is the hypothesis that will serve to (help) answer whether Kallipolis is possible and which Plato goes on to confirm from 5.473E-6.499A, as I now attempt to show.

^{22.} See pp. 229.

The Confirmation Stage: The Upward Path (Republic 5.473E-6.487A)

Glaucon immediately focuses on the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide (casting doubt perhaps on the advisability of holding on to it²³) as follows:

Socrates, after hurling a speech and statement like that at us, you must expect that a great many people (and not undistinguished ones either) will cast off their cloaks and, stripped for action, snatch any available weapon, and make a determined rush at you, ready to do terrible things. So, unless you can hold them off by argument and escape, you really will pay the penalty of general derision. (*Republic* 5.473E5–474A4)

It is not immediately clear whether Glaucon is objecting to the bi-conditional that Kallipolis is possible just in case political power and philosophy coincide or the hypothesis that political power and philosophy coincide, but Socrates' subsequent description of the argument to follow indicates that he takes Glaucon to be objecting to the latter. After securing Glaucon's promise to assist him in the argument that follows, Socrates lays out the structure of the argument.

I must try it, then, especially since you agree to be so great an ally. If we're to escape from the people you mention, I think [a] we need to define for them who the philosophers are that we dare to say must rule. And once that's clear, [b] we should be able to defend ourselves by showing that the people we mean are fitted by nature both to engage in philosophy and to rule in a city, while the rest are naturally fitted to leave philosophy alone and follow their leader.

This would be a good time to give that definition.

Come, then, follow me, and we'll see whether or not there's some way to set it out adequately ($i\kappa\alpha\nu\tilde{\omega}\varsigma$).

Lead on. (Republic 5.474B3-C7)

Here, Plato makes clear that the argument that follows consists of two parts—first, an attempt to delineate the nature of genuine philosophy (5.474C8–480A13); and second, an argument that philosophy so understood includes the characteristics necessary and sufficient for genuine political power (6.484A1–487A8). Thus, the argument that follows is aimed at confirming the truth of the hypothesis that

^{23.} See the discussion concerning ἔχοιτο at *Phaedo* 101D3, pp. 139-144.

political power and philosophy coincide, and its two parts conform to the two parts of the upward path of the confirmation stage, the upward path to a higher hypothesis and the downward path from that higher hypothesis to the lower hypothesis. (This is the upward and downward paths of the proof stage applied to the hypothesis.) Thus, in what follows, Socrates, first, argues up to a hypothesis concerning the nature of philosophy that is adequate²⁴ (5.474C8-480A13); and then, second, argues from that hypothesis back down to the original hypothesis that political power and philosophy coincide (6.484A1-487A8).

While the portion of the argument concerned with the nature of philosophy has seldom (indeed, never to my knowledge) been recognized as the first portion of the upward path of the confirmation stage of Plato's method of hypothesis, it has, nevertheless, received considerable attention in the literature, and I will not presume to add to it.²⁵ But, I will briefly sketch its argument structure.

Socrates begins to confirm the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide by providing a definition of the nature of philosophy, according to which philosophy is understood as the love or desire of all wisdom ($\sigma o \phi(\alpha)$) and learning (μαθήματα) at 475B8-C8 by means of a frequently belittled *epagoge* from 5.474C8 to 5.475B7. According to this argument, the lover of youths loves all youths (5.474D1-475A4); the lover of wine loves all wine (5.475A5-8); the lover of honor loves all honor (5.475A9–B3); so the lover of any kind Φ loves all Φ's. Since philosophy (as its name implies) is the love of wisdom, then philosophy is the love of all wisdom (5.475B8-C8).²⁶ The argument recalls a similar epagogic argument at Meno 87D-89A during which Socrates proposed that knowledge is what makes good things good. The latter argument was also part of the upward path of the confirmation stage of an application of the method of hypothesis. Socrates was in the middle of confirming the lower hypothesis that virtue is knowledge from a higher hypothesis that virtue is good. The parallel, however, is not exact. The epagogic argument in the Meno is aimed at obtaining the lower hypothesis from the higher hypothesis, or perhaps better at explaining the conditional from which the hypothesizing of the antecedent allows one to

^{24.} See also Republic 6.485A5.

^{25.} The literature devoted to the end of *Republic* 5 is, of course, enormous. See, for example, Gosling (1960, 1968), Cross and Woozley (1971), F. White (1977), Fine (1978), F. White (1984), Fine (1990), Baltzly (1997), N. Smith (2000), Wrenn (2000), and Hestir (2000).

^{26.} See note 28, this chapter, for the move from "lovers of Φ " to "love of Φ ." The *epagôgê* to this conclusion is seldom disparaged for its weak inductive base (if that is the correct way to characterize the argument). In this respect, it is no worse than many other such arguments in the Platonic corpus. Rather, the truth of the premises is most often disparaged, and in my experience, especially by wine-lovers.

hold on to the consequent arriving at a second higher hypothesis to the effect that knowledge is what makes good things good—that is, the conditional "if something is good, then it is knowledge" from which together with the higher hypothesis that virtue is good Socrates obtains the lower hypothesis that virtue is knowledge. The epagogic argument here in the *Republic* is aimed at arriving at the higher hypothesis that philosophy is the love of all wisdom. The argument that explains the conditional from which, together with the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide is obtained must await the beginning of *Republic* 6. Nevertheless, the epagogic structure of 5.474C8 to 5.475B7 of the Kallipolis argument continues to recall the argument of the last third of the *Meno*.

Having provided an adequate account of the nature of philosophy at 5.475B8-C8 to the effect that philosophy is the desire for all wisdom and learning, Glaucon appears to again focus on this higher hypothesis, wondering that "many strange people will be philosophers" (5.475D1-2). In what follows, Socrates appears to resist holding on to this higher hypothesis in light of Glaucon's worry until it has been confirmed by a yet higher hypothesis concerning the nature of knowledge or wisdom employed in his account of philosophy. But, however we are meant to understand Glaucon's worry and Socrates' response, Socrates goes on to offer two arguments (5.476A1-D6 and 5.476D7-480A13) aimed at providing an account of the knowledge employed in his account of philosophy. These last two arguments (especially, the second) are among the most difficult, and hence most discussed, arguments in the Platonic corpus. However they are ultimately understood, by the beginning of *Republic* 6, Plato appears to have taken himself to have offered an adequate account of the nature of philosophy which fails to include these strange people and from which the lower hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide can be obtained. It is to this argument that I now turn.

Socrates opens *Republic 6* by recapitulating the nature of philosophy adequately achieved in light of the arguments of the closing pages of Book 5. Philosophy, Socrates maintains, is the ability to grasp what is always the same in all respects (6.484B2–5). Philosophy, that is, is knowledge of Forms.²⁷ Socrates next asks whether philosophy so understood is the same as political power

^{27.} Burnyeat (2000, 36n51) maintains that "[t]he Theory of Forms makes its first appearance in the *Republic*... at 475e-476d." Precisely how we understand the relationship between the nature of philosophy as the love of the knowledge of Forms and as the love of all knowledge depends on how we understand the details of the two difficult arguments at 5.476A-476D and 5.476D-480A. I forgo entering into that difficult debate and so intend the interpretation of the structure of the argument that follows to be neutral with respect to it. There is also the difficulty that philosophy as understood at 5.475B8-C8 is the love of all knowledge, while by the beginning of Book 6 it appears to be the possession of all knowledge. But these are difficulties with Plato's argument, not with my account of the structure of the argument.

(6.484B6-7)—that is, whether the original hypothesis can be obtained from the higher hypothesis.²⁸ He first points out that philosophy so understood is necessary for political power on the grounds that the knowledge that the philosopher possesses is necessary to "establish here on earth conventions about what is fine or just or good, when they need to be established, or guard and preserve them, once they have been established" (Republic 6.484C8-D2).

And next, Socrates sets out to consider whether philosophy so understood is sufficient for the other necessary features of political power. As Socrates puts it

Should we, then, make these blind people our guardians or rather those who know each thing that is and who are not inferior to the others, either in experience or in any other part of virtue? . . . Then shouldn't we explain how it is possible for someone to have both these sorts of qualities? (Republic 6.484D4-485A2)

Plato here indicates that there are two necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for (genuine) political power: knowledge and virtue. He has already maintained that philosophy as delineated by means of the higher hypothesis is sufficient for the knowledge required for political power. So if he can show that philosophy is sufficient for virtue, he will have confirmed the original hypothesis (that political power and philosophy coincide) by obtaining it from something adequate. And that is precisely what he goes on to do. After rehearsing yet again the nature of philosophy (6.485A10-C2), Socrates argues that philosophy so understood entails (a) love of truth (6.485C3-D5); (b) moderation (6.485D6-E6); (c) liberality (6.486A1-7); (d) courage (6.486A8-B5); (e) justice, reliability, gentleness (6.486B6-13); (f) fast-learning (6.486C1-6); (g) memory (6.486C7-D3); and (h) measure and calm (6.486D4-12). Socrates concludes

Well, then, don't you think the properties we've enumerated are compatible with one another and that each is necessary to a soul that is to have an adequate and complete grasp of that which is (τῆ μελλούση τοῦ ὄντος ίκανῶς τε καὶ τελέως ψυχῆ μεταλήψεσθαι)?

They're all completely necessary.

Is there any objection you can find, then, to a way of life that no one can adequately follow unless he's by nature good at remembering, quick to

^{28.} Throughout these pages Socrates is made to put the argument in terms of the nature of a philosopher, rather than philosophy, but we have seen since 5.473C11-E4 that the question at issue during these pages in the Republic is variously (and presumably, equivalently) put as whether philosophers are rulers or whether philosophy and political power coincide.

learn, high-minded, graceful, and a friend and relative of truth, justice, courage, and moderation?

Not even Momus could find one.

When such people have reached maturity in age and education, wouldn't you entrust the city to them and to them alone? (*Republic* 6.486E1–487A8)²⁹

At this point, then, Socrates has reduced the question whether Kallipolis is possible to the question whether philosophy and political power coincide and has confirmed a positive answer to the latter question by obtaining it from a higher adequate hypothesis concerning the nature of philosophy. The structure of the argument during this stretch of the *Republic* then nicely parallels the argument structure of *Meno* 87B2–89C4, which reduced the question whether virtue is teachable to the question whether virtue is knowledge and then went on to obtain a positive answer to the latter question from the higher adequate hypothesis that virtue is good. But before we turn to the next portion of the argument in the *Republic*, we should notice that it is not merely the structure of the present argument that parallels the argument in the *Meno* but the substance of the argument as well.

Remember that the argument in the *Meno* at 87D2–89C4 was aimed at establishing that knowledge of some sort (knowledge of the good or perhaps the knowledge possessed by the philosopher) is virtue, and so necessary and sufficient for virtue. The knowledge discussed here in *Republic 6*, the knowledge of the philosopher, is purported to be both necessary and sufficient for virtue as well.³⁰

^{29.} We can put the structure of this argument as follows:

^[1] Philosophy \Leftrightarrow sophia (5.474B-480A)

^[2] Political power (PP) ⇔ sophia and virtue (6.484D-485A)

^[3] $PP \Rightarrow sophia (from [2])$

^[4] Sophia ⇒ philosophy (from [1])

^[5] PP \Rightarrow philosophy (from [3] & [4])

^[6] Philosophy ⇒ sophia (from [1])

^[7] Sophia \Rightarrow virtue (6.485A-486D)

^[8] Philosophy \Rightarrow sophia and virtue (from [6] & [7])

^[9] Sophia and virtue \Rightarrow PP (from [2])

^[10] Philosophy \Rightarrow PP (from [8] & [9])

^[11] Philosophy \Leftrightarrow PP (from [5] & [10])

^{30.} Both passages also allude to a distinction between genuine or complete virtue and demotic or imperfect virtue. See note 19, chapter 6, and *Republic* 6.485D6–487A8. Many of the virtues discussed in the latter passage look to be possessed since youth and so prior to the acquisition of philosophical knowledge. For more on this general distinction, see Bobonich (2002, 42–45), Irwin (1995), Kamtekar (1998), and Scott (2006, 146–53).

It is difficult to imagine that Plato does not have the last third of the Meno in mind as he composes this portion of the *Republic*. And so we would do well to have it in mind as well, especially as we turn to the next portion of the argument in the *Republic*.

The Second Stage: The Downward Path of the Confirmation Stage (Republic 6.487B-502C)

Having confirmed the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide by the upward path of the confirmation stage, Socrates is confronted by Adeimantus, as follows:

No one would be able to contradict the things you've said, Socrates, but on each occasion that you say them, your hearers are affected in some such way as this. They think that, because they're inexperienced in asking and answering questions, they're led astray a little bit by the *logos* at every question and that, when these little bits are added together at the end of the discussion, great is their fall, as the opposite of what they said at the outset comes to light. . . . Yet the truth isn't affected by this outcome. I say this with a view to the present case, for someone might well say now that (λόγω μὲν) he's unable to oppose you as you ask each of your questions, yet he sees $(\xi \rho \gamma \omega \delta \dot{\epsilon})$ that of all those who take up philosophy—not those who merely dabble in it while still young in order to complete their upbringing and then drop it, but those who continue in it for a longer time—the greatest number become cranks, not to say completely vicious, while those who seem completely decent are rendered useless to the city because of the way of life you recommend. (Republic 6.487B1-D5)

Adeimantus does not here object to the preceding argument. Indeed, he grants that he is unable to oppose it. But he denies that the conclusion is true. The conclusion that philosophy and political power coincide is simply contradicted by the facts on the ground. Counter-examples, he suggests, are almost too numerous to mention. Most philosophers are vicious and so not genuine political rulers. The rest are useless. Adeimantus is not here reiterating Glaucon's worry at 5.475D1-E1. He is not holding on to the account of philosophy purposed by Socrates and misunderstanding it and so as a result misidentifying who the philosophers are. Rather, he maintains that the philosophers, as Socrates understands them, are in fact either vicious or useless, not genuine rulers. The empirical nature of the Adeimantus' argument is underscored by the logos/ergon distinction at 6.487C5-6 which is reiterated throughout the remainder of the passage.³¹ Adeimantus does not dispute the *logos* on behalf of the conclusion that philosophy and political power coincide, but he does take the conclusion to be inconsistent with the *ergon*. The empirical nature of Adeimantus' challenge recalls the empirical nature of the argument that discredited the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge at *Meno* 89C–96D. There, Socrates maintained that the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge was refuted by the fact that there were no teachers of virtue. Here, Adeimantus maintains that the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide is refuted by the fact that philosophers are either vicious or useless, not genuine rulers. Here in the *Republic*, then, begins that portion of the argument in the *Meno* that we called the downward path of the confirmation stage.

The parallel with the *Meno* continues. In the *Meno*, Socrates accepts the facts on the ground that evidently contravene the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge. Indeed, he is the one who puts them forward. Here in the *Republic*, Socrates also accepts the facts on the ground that evidently contravene the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide. He concedes that philosophers, as he has defined them, are useless and vicious. He immediately responds to Adeimantus' challenge by conceding that what Adeimantus has said is true (ἔμοιγε φαίνονται τἀληθῆ λέγειν) (*Republic* 6.487D9), and reiterates this concession at least two more times (6.489B3 and 6.489D6).³² Nevertheless, he does not concede that the truth of the claim that philosophers are vicious or useless contravenes the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide. He does not concede that the *hormêthenta* of the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide disagree with one another.

The parallel with the *Meno* finally collapses. In the *Meno*, Socrates accepts the fact that there are no teachers of virtue and agrees that this fact contravenes the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge. Here in the *Republic*, Socrates accepts the fact that philosophers are vicious or useless but denies that this fact contravenes the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide. How can this be?

^{31.} See 6.490D1-2, 6.492D5, 6.494E3-5, 6.498E4, and 6.501E3-4.

^{32.} See also *Republic* 6.495C8 and Nettleship (1925, 203). While Socrates does appear to explicitly concede that philosophers are in truth useless and vicious (the claim at 6.489B3 only concedes their uselessness, but 6.487D10, 6.489D6, and 6.495C8 all appear to concede both uselessness and viciousness), he cannot quite mean what he says. As we will see he does literally concede the truth of the claim that philosophers as he understands them are useless in current cities, but he does not literally concede the truth of the claim that philosophers as he understands them are vicious. Rather, he concedes the truth of this claim only understood in one of two ways: (1) those with the natural abilities necessary for philosophers are vicious in current cities and (2) those who imitate philosophers in current cities are vicious. The claim is false, however, understood as genuine philosophers (i.e., philosophers as he understands them) are vicious.

How can Socrates accept the fact that philosophers are either vicious or useless and the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide?

Space does not permit a detailed analysis of the argument that follows. Nevertheless, the argument falls roughly into three distinct parts: first, an account of why the decent philosophers are useless (6.487D-489D); second, an account of why most philosophers are vicious (6.489D-496E); and third, an account of how it nevertheless remains possible even given these facts for philosophy and political power to coincide (6.497A-502C).

Let us first look briefly at the account of why the decent philosophers are useless. Socrates appeals to the image of the ship. We are to think of Athens (or any other Greek polis in which philosophers are either useless or vicious) as a ship with the ship's owner standing for the Demos.³³ The ship's owner, who is described as bigger and stronger than everyone on board, but hard of hearing, short-sighted, and ignorant of seafaring, is continuously implored by individual sailors to be permitted to steer and rule the ship. The sailors are described as quarreling with each other, each thinking he or she should rule, never having learned the technê of steering, nor being able to point to anyone who taught them the technê, nor to a time at which they learned it. Indeed, they claim it is not teachable and are ready to kill anyone who maintains that it is. Moreover, they call those who are clever at persuading the ship's owner to let them rule "navigators," "captains." and "ones who know ships" (ἐπιστάμενον τὰ κατὰ ναῦν); dismiss anyone else as useless; and do not understand what a true captain should care about—that is, the seasons, the sky, the stars, the winds, and everything else appropriate for her technê. Finally, they call the true captain a stargazer, a babbler, and useless.

Having described the sailors on the ship in terms that cannot fail to recall Anytus to a contemporary Athenian audience, and so the Meno to modern readers, Socrates recounts how the image of the ship explains the uselessness of philosophers. It is true, he repeats (6.489B3), that the philosophers are useless in current cities, just as the genuine captain is useless on the ship. But philosophy is not to blame (αἰτιᾶσθαι) for the philosophers' uselessness. Rather, it is "those who don't make use of the philosophers" who are to blame—the Demos and/or the demagogues. The Demos, which is already short-sighted, is blinded by the demagogues to the utility of philosophy. It is not the nature (φύσιν) of a genuine captain to beg

^{33.} See Adam (1907, 9), Nettleship (1925, 204), and Keyt (2006), pace C. Reeve (2013, 175– 83). Keyt's essay devoted to Plato's ship-of-state image is the most complete treatment of the image that I am aware of. I am very much in sympathy with Keyt's goal of establishing this image alongside the more famous images of the Sun, Line, and Cave that immediately follow upon the conclusion of the current argument. I also found much in Keyt's interpretation of the image with which to agree, although my current concerns will lead me to focus on different aspects of the image than he does.

the sailors to rule, nor of the genuine ruler, nor philosopher, to beg the Demos to rule. The Consequently, it is not easy for the genuine philosopher to rule in current cities. Indeed, it would be surprising if he or she did. Socrates is made to conclude this portion of the argument as follows: "And haven't we explained why $(\tau \eta \nu \, \alpha i \tau (a \nu \, \delta \iota \lambda))$ the decent ones are useless?" (Republic 6.489D8–9).

Before moving on to the next portion of the argument, we should note how the current argument is supposed to go. Socrates does not deny the truth of the claim that in current cities philosophers are useless. He does not object that Adeimantus has misunderstood what he means by philosophy or philosophers. Rather, he explains by means of the image of the ship that philosophy is not the *aitia* of this truth. It does not result from the nature of philosophy that philosophers in current cities are useless. Instead, it results from the blindness of the Demos and the obfuscating practices of the demagogues. As a result, evidently, Plato thinks the hypothesis escapes refutation. The hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide is compatible with philosophers being useless in current cities because the nature of philosophy is not the *aitia* of philosophers' uselessness.

A similar point appears to be the theme of the next portion of the argument; as Socrates puts it:

Then, do you next want us to discuss why it's inevitable that the greater number are vicious and to try to show, if we can, that philosophy isn't responsible (aitía) for this either? (*Republic* 6.489D11–E2)

Again, Socrates concedes the facts on the ground (viz. that the majority of philosophers are vicious), although this time not literally in the way that Adeimantus presents them,³⁵ but denies that this shows that the *hormêthenta* of the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide disagree with each other because philosophy is not the *aitia* of philosophers' viciousness. The argument begins with a recapitulation of the nature of philosophy or the philosophic nature³⁶ (6.489E4–490D7), followed by a description of the argument to follow.

We must now look at the ways in which this nature $(\tau \tilde{\eta} \varsigma \ \phi \acute{\upsilon} \sigma \epsilon \omega \varsigma)$ is corrupted, how it's destroyed in many people, while a small number (the ones that are called useless rather than bad) escape. After that, we must look

^{34.} See also τὸ δὲ ἀληθὲς πέφυκεν at 6.489B8.

^{35.} See note 32, this chapter.

^{36.} Forms of $\phi \dot{\omega} \sigma c$ occur regularly throughout this section of the text. It is essential, however, to keep distinct the nature of philosophy (i.e., what philosophy is) from the natural abilities necessary for philosophy.

in turn at the natures ($\phi \dot{v} \sigma \epsilon \iota \varsigma$) of the souls that imitate the philosophic nature and establish themselves in its way of life, so as to see what the people are like who thereby arrive at a way of life they are unworthy of and that is beyond them and who, because they often strike false notes, bring upon philosophy the reputation that you said it has with everyone everywhere.

In what ways are they corrupted? (*Republic* 6.490E1–491A6)

Socrates here distinguishes two parts of the subsequent argument: a part devoted to how genuine philosophy or the philosophic nature is corrupted (6.491A7-495B7), and a part devoted to explaining how those who do not have a genuine philosophic nature appear to be philosophers and provide a false reputation to genuine philosophy (6.495B8-496A10). The longer part can be summarized as follows.

The passage begins with Socrates maintaining that the qualities or natural abilities that he had argued were necessary for philosophy back at 6.485C-D are rare and when combined with a good education lead to complete virtue, but when combined with a bad education lead to vice "unless some god happens to come to its rescue" (6.491A7-492A5).37 Socrates next explains how traditional education corrupts those with the necessary qualities for philosophy (6.492A5-493A5) and then how sophistic education corrupts those with this nature as well (6.493A6-494A9). This is followed with an account of the corruptive influence of family, friends, and other flatters (6.494A10-495A3).38 The argument concludes

Do you see, then, that we weren't wrong to say that, when someone with a philosophic nature (τῆς φιλοσόφου φύσεως) is badly brought up, the very components of his nature—together with the other so-called goods, such

^{37.} See also θεοῦ μοῖραν at 6.493A1-2. Indeed, the entire passage from 6.492E2 to 493A3 evidently alludes to Meno 99B5-100B4, as Adam (1907, 22) recognizes. Notice that divine dispensation plays two roles in the current passage. As in the Meno, it explains how genuine philosophers can arise in current cities. But it also explains how genuine philosophers can become rulers in current cities; see 6.499B1-C6.

^{38.} Alcibiades is often thought to be alluded to in this passage depicting the corruptive influence of family, friends, and flatterers on natural abilities; see, e.g., Adam (1907, 25), Nettleship (1925, 207), Ferrari (2000, 198n12), Pappas (1995, 119), and Scott (2006, 167), pace Annas (1981, 186-87). But Plato may also have Meno in mind, especially given the description of the one corrupted as "rich, well-born, good-looking, and tall" (πλούσιός τε καὶ γενναῖος, καὶ ἔτι εὐειδης καὶ μέγας; 6.494C6); see Meno 71B4-8 "Or do you think that it is possible for someone who does not know at all who Meno is to know whether he is fine or wealthy or well-born or the opposite of these?" (εἴτε καλὸς εἴτε πλούσιος εἴτε καὶ γενναῖός).

as wealth and other similar advantages—are themselves in a way the cause of his falling away from the philosophic way of life (αἴτια τρόπον τινὰ τοῦ ἐκπεσεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ἐπιτηδεύματος)? (Republic 6.495A4–8)

Thus, like the downward path of the confirmation stage in the *Meno*, Socrates goes through the traditional modes of education—one's elders and the sophists³⁹—and finds them wanting. In fact, here in the *Republic* they are not simply unsuccessful, they are positively harmful.⁴⁰ But unlike the argument in the *Meno*, Socrates does not concede that these facts contravene the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide. Rather, he argues that the qualities and natural abilities necessary for philosophy when combined with traditional forms of education are the *aitiai* of the viciousness of philosophers. The nature of philosophy, itself, is not the *aitia*.

Next, Socrates explains that in circumstances like these philosophy is left deserted and those lacking the qualities and natural abilities necessary for philosophy move in and take up philosophy. These are the ones, Socrates says,

who are responsible for the reproaches that you say are cast upon philosophy by those who revile her, namely, that some of those who consort with her are useless, while the majority deserve to suffer many bad things. ($Republic\ 6.495C4-6$)

This is because their thoughts and beliefs (διανοήματά τε καὶ δόξας)

are properly called sophisms, things that have nothing genuine about them or worthy of being called true wisdom ($\phi \rho o \nu \dot{\eta} \sigma \epsilon \omega \varsigma \dots \dot{\alpha} \lambda \eta \theta \iota \nu \ddot{\eta} \varsigma$). (*Republic* 6.496A7–9)

Again, Socrates concedes that the majority of those who practice philosophy in existing cities are vicious, but this time he denies that those who practice philosophy in existing cities are genuine philosophers, for they lack the qualities and

^{39.} The *Meno* also considers the poets at 95C9–96A5, however briefly, which do not get considered in the *Republic* at this point, although they certainly do earlier and later on in the *Republic*.

^{40.} Actually, Anytus maintains that sophistic education is harmful as well, but the argument against sophistry that appears to receive Platonic endorsement is the one presented at 95B9–C8 after Anytus leaves the conversation. Indeed, Plato's attitude with respect to sophistry is somewhat ambivalent in both dialogues. Both dialogues begin by defending sophistry against the charges leveled at it by traditionalists (*Meno* 91C6–92C7 and *Republic* 6.492A6–493A5) and then go on to find fault with sophistry (*Meno* 95B9–C8 and *Republic* 6.493A6–494A9).

natural abilities necessary for genuine philosophy. Again, the aitia of the viciousness of philosophers is not philosophy, but traditional education: on the one hand, corrupting those who possess the qualities and natural abilities necessary for the genuine philosophical life, and leaving room for those who fail to possess these qualities to take up the genuine philosophical life, on the other. Socrates concludes this portion of the argument by explaining that the few decent and useless ones who escape the corrupting influence of traditional education do so roughly by escaping notice (6.496A11–E3).

Having established that the corrupting influence of traditional education is the *aitia* of the viciousness of most philosophers, that the blindness of the Demos and/or the demagogues is the aitia of the uselessness of the rest, and that the nature of philosophy is the aitia of neither, it remains for Socrates to show that in current cities it is possible for philosophy and political power to coincide. First (6.497A3– 498C4), Socrates explains the changes in traditional education that would mitigate its corrupting influence. The key change is reserving genuine philosophical study for old age. Socrates elaborates the nature of this education—the kind that would lead to philosophy and political power coinciding—throughout the rest of Books 6 and 7 (esp. 7.521C-540C).⁴¹ Consequently, genuine philosophy is more likely to arise and flourish in cities like Kallipolis. In cities like Athens, however, we must depend on chance (ἐκ τύχης) or divine inspiration (ἔκ τινος θείας ἐπιπνοίας) for the coincidence of philosophy and political power (6.499A11–C6). While such a coincidence is rare indeed, Socrates maintains "it cannot be reasonably maintained, ... that either of these things is impossible" (6.499C1-3). The remainder of the passage is devoted to explaining that the rarity of this coincidence, as well as the consequent failure of the majority to understand the genuine nature of philosophy, accounts for the difficulty of persuading the majority of the value of the coincidence of philosophy and political power. And so, Socrates draws the argument aimed at addressing the third wave begun back at 5.471C to a close as follows: "Then we can now conclude that this legislation is best, if only it is possible, and that, while it is hard for it to come about, it is not impossible" (6.502C5-7).

Comparison with the Meno

The parallels between Republic 5.471C-6.502C and Meno 87B-100B are striking.⁴² Both passages begin with Socrates being compelled to pursue a question

^{41.} See chapter 9, this volume.

^{42.} Scott (2006, 218n5): "Republic VII 501C4-502A4 contains some striking similarities to the ending of the Meno. Socrates talks of the need to persuade the demos, and to replace their anger with mildness."

apparently against his will. In both passages Socrates accedes to this compulsion after extracting a concession from his interlocutor. Both passages make meaningful use of "divine dispensation." Anytus is alluded to in the description of the sailors who manage to gain control of the ship of state despite their lack of expertise. And even Meno may be alluded to in the description of those with the natural abilities necessary for philosophy who get corrupted by traditional education. And, of course, both passages are concerned with similar subject matter: the relationship among knowledge (or wisdom or philosophy), virtue (or political power), and education.

These similarities are reinforced by a parallel argument structure—a structure which conforms to the method of hypothesis uncovered in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*. Both passages begin by reducing the question Socrates is compelled to pursue to another question from which the answer to the original question can be determined. In the *Meno*, Socrates reduces the question whether virtue is teachable to the question whether virtue is a kind of knowledge; and in the *Republic*, Socrates reduces the question whether Kallipolis is possible to the question whether philosophy and political power coincide. These portions of the arguments correspond to the first stage of the method of hypothesis—the proof stage—in which one [a] seeks to identify a hypothesis from which an answer to the original question can be obtained and [b] shows how the answer to the original question can be obtained from the hypothesis. Indeed, both dialogues focus on the first of these procedures, taking the second procedure to be relatively straightforward.

Again, in both passages, Socrates turns next to the second or confirmation stage of the method of hypothesis: pursuing the upward path of the confirmation stage first. In the Meno, Socrates confirms the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge by obtaining it from the higher hypothesis that virtue is good; and in the Republic, Socrates confirms the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide by obtaining it from the higher hypothesis that philosophy is the knowledge of the Forms. Having confirmed the respective hypotheses by means of a roughly theoretical argument $(\tau \tilde{\psi} \lambda \acute{o} \gamma \psi)$, both dialogues turn to the confirmation process concerned with the *phainomena* $(\tau \tilde{\psi} \ \tilde{\epsilon} \rho \gamma \psi)$ —the downward path. In the *Meno*, the hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge is discredited on the grounds that its hormêthen that there are teachers (and learners) of virtue disagrees with the fact that there are no teachers of virtue. In the Republic, the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide appeared to be discredited on the grounds that its hormêthen that philosophers are useful and virtuous disagreed with the fact that philosophers are useless or vicious. But Socrates defends his hypothesis in the Republic against this apparent disagreement on the grounds that philosophy is not the cause ($\alpha i \tau i \alpha$) of the uselessness and/or viciousness of philosophers.

I will return to this difference between the two passages in moment. Its existence is significant. But at present I want to focus on the similarity between

the two passages. The similarity is significant as well. It encourages reading the Republic's Kallipolis argument as an application of the method of hypothesis. It is true that the argument is not presented as an application of de novo discovery, of learning from mutual ignorance, or of inquiry. We fail to get an application of that anywhere in the Republic, to my knowledge. Nevertheless, the strong parallel structure, the frequent allusions to the Meno, and the similarity of subject matter encourage employing the Kallipolis argument in an attempt to understand the method of hypothesis. Plato appears to have had the last third of the *Meno* in mind as he composed the Kallipolis argument. And when we see this, the difference between the Kallipolis argument and the last third of the Meno becomes significant.

Recall that one of the difficulties we faced when examining the application of the method of hypothesis in the last third of Meno (in chapter 6) was what to make of the conflicting results of the confirmation stage. On the one hand, the upward path of the confirmation stage appeared to confirm the hypothesis that virtue was a kind of knowledge by means of relatively familiar Socratic/Platonic arguments; and on the other hand, the downward path of the confirmation stage appeared to discredit the hypothesis by means of some dubious (yet elenctic) empirical arguments. As a result, we were left wondering about Plato's endorsement of the concluding section in which he finds fault with the upward path of the confirmation stage and maintains that true belief is sufficient for virtue and that it comes by divine dispensation. The difference between this last third of the Meno and the Kallipolis argument indicates that before one takes the apparent disagreement among the hormêthenta of the hypothesis as sufficient for discrediting it, and looking for a flaw in the upward path of the confirmation stage, one should check to make sure that the disagreement is a disagreement among what might be thought of as the genuine *hormêthenta* of the hypothesis—that is, those *hormêthenta* that are caused by (αἰτία) the natures involved in the hypothesis. In the case of the Meno, one should check to make sure that the natures of virtue or knowledge are responsible (αἰτία) for the fact that there are no teachers of virtue in Athens or anywhere else in fifth-century Greece. One suspects that had Socrates done this in the Meno, that something like the argument we find at *Republic* 6.487D–496E could have been uncovered to the effect that the natures of virtue and knowledge are not responsible for the lack of teachers. Rather, the lack of teachers of virtue is to be blamed on traditional education or some other corrupting influence of current cities. Consequently, the hormêthenta of the hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge do not in fact disagree with each other. Whether the Meno should be read in this way depends on a variety of issues, some of which (including compositional chronology and development) I have explicitly set aside for the purposes of this study. But, recognizing the parallels between the Kallipolis argument in the Republic and the last third of the *Meno* may encourage such a reading and the rejection of what, for some at least, is Plato's unwelcome commitment to the conclusion of *Meno* 98B–99E.

Conclusion

However we ultimately come to understand the conclusion of the Meno in light of the parallels with the Kallipolis argument in the Republic, that the Kallipolis argument presents us with a fully-formed application of the method of hypothesis looks secure. It begins with a proof stage, reducing the question whether Kallipolis is possible to the question whether philosophy and political power coincide, and answering the original question in light of the most compelling answer to the reduced question, the hypothesis. Next, it turns to the confirmation stage of this hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide. First, it pursues the upward path of the confirmation stage—seeking a higher hypothesis, roughly that philosophy is the love or possession of knowledge of the Forms—and showing how it follows from that higher hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide. Next, it pursues the downward path of the confirmation stage—testing the hormêthenta of the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide—to determine whether they agree or disagree with each other. Despite initial appearances, it turns out that the hormêthenta of the hypothesis do not disagree with each other and so the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide has been confirmed, and the answer to the original question which it supports—that Kallipolis is possible—is safe. Schematically, it presents as:

Q1: Is Kallipolis possible?

Bi-conditional (5.473B–E): Kallipolis is possible just in case philosophy and political power coincide.

Q2: Do philosophy and political power coincide?

P2: Look for a higher hypothesis from which A2/H1 can be obtained. (5.474C–6.487A)

Conditional²: If philosophy is knowledge of Forms, then philosophy and political power coincide; this is explained at 6.484A1–487A8, rather than asserted without defense.

Q3: Is philosophy knowledge of Forms?

A3/H2: Philosophy is knowledge of Forms.

A2/H1: Philosophy and political power coincide.

P1: The agreement of the *horméthenta* of A2/H1. (6.487B–497A)

A1: Kallipolis is possible.

If, then, understanding the Kallipolis argument as an application of the method of hypothesis is correct, what if anything do we learn about the nature of that method from this application? Does this understanding of Socrates' application enrich our understanding of Plato's method in any important way?

We should not take the structure of the Kallipolis argument to confirm the interpretation of the structure of the method of hypothesis that I have been promoting over the last three chapters. The parallels and allusions to the Meno passage do provide reason for reading the two passages together, but on their own they give us little reason to read the Kallipolis argument as an application of the method of hypothesis. My argument proceeded not by providing evidence that the Kallipolis argument was an application of the method of hypothesis independent of its structure; if it had, evidence of the parallel structure would support our understanding of the structure of the method of hypothesis. Rather, the argument proceeded by maintaining that the structure of the Kallipolis argument paralleled the structure of the method of hypothesis identified in previous chapters, and so we had reason to take the argument as an application of the method. Consequently, we cannot take the similarity in structure to confirm our understanding of the structure of the method of hypothesis. It is the similarity in structure that promotes our identification of the Kallipolis argument as an application of the method; nevertheless, given this parallel structure, together with the other similarities between the two passages, we have good reason to view the Kallipolis passage as such an application, and as a result our understanding of the method is enriched in other ways.

First, it both confirms and enriches our understanding of the downward path of the confirmation stage as we have found it applied in the Meno and described in the *Phaedo*. Recall that the description of this procedure was vague and obscure. According to the *Phaedo*, the one seeking knowledge should test the hormêthenta of the hypothesis, which helped with the original question to see whether they agreed or disagreed with each other. The notion of hormêthenta here was left underdetermined, as well as the notion of agreement and disagreement. In the Meno, we came to see that Plato saw the theses that there were teachers of virtue and that there were no teachers of virtue as (in some sense) *hormêthenta* of the hypothesis that virtue was a kind of knowledge and that they disagreed with each other. Here in the *Republic*, we get a similar suggestion. Plato sees the theses that philosophers are useful and virtuous and that philosophers are useless and vicious as (in some sense) hormêthenta of the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide and that they disagree with each other (at least on first blush). In both applications, then, the notion of hormêthenta is roughly empirical. The *hormêthenta* are roughly the instantiations (or in Platonic terms perhaps, the images) of the natures or Forms in the hypothesis (or perhaps, instantiations or images of their interweaving). But even so, this is at best rough and ready because, as we noted when examining the *Meno*, the instantiation or image that represented the *horméthen* that there were teachers of virtue was not the same kind of instantiation that there were not teachers of virtue, and the argument that there were not appealed to other vaguely empirical observations and *endoxa* (*phaenomena*). Similarly, in the Kallipolis argument, the thesis that philosophers are useful and virtuous (which is not explicitly mentioned but must be presumed if Adeimantus' objection at 6.487B1–D5 is to make any sense at all) does not appear to be the same kind of *horméthen* as the (apparent?) *horméthen* that philosophers are useless and vicious (which evidently does not require the rather elaborate empirical argument found in the *Meno*, but is more obviously directly observable). Indeed, the force of the discussion which follows Adeimantus' objection is aimed at pointing out that the nature of philosophy is not responsible (αἰτία) for the latter *horméthen*, as it is presumably for the former.

We can, if we want, deny that the thesis that philosophers are useless and vicious is a genuine *hormêthen* of the hypothesis, and so the genuine *hormêthenta* do not disagree with each other. Alternatively, we can distinguish between two kinds of hormêthenta (perhaps, natural or formal or metaphysical hormêthenta vs. artificial or accidental or contingent hormêthenta),43 and deny that univocal *hormêthenta* of the hypothesis disagree with each other. How we decide this question has important implications concerning the metaphysics underlying Plato's point here, but the methodological point remains in either case. Plato appears to be advocating that the hypothesis has predictive power or empirical implications, and when the predictions or the implications fail to obtain, the inquirer must determine what is responsible for those failures. The inquirer must determine whether the hypothesis is in some sense responsible for the failures or whether accidental features of the world interfered in the natural realization of the hypothesis.⁴⁴ This continues to be rather vague and obscure, but the general point that Plato encourages the inquirer to test his or her hypothesis against the phainomena and determine whether the disagreement (if one arises) is a feature of the hypothesis or accidental features of the world looks secure.

^{43.} For a similar sort of distinction, see those who understand the three types of goods which Glaucon introduces at the beginning of Book 2 as relying on two kinds of consequences—for example, Foster (1937), N. White (1984), and Pappas (1995, 55). Of course, one can understand Plato to be distinguishing between two kinds of *hormêthenta* here in Book 6, without thinking that he is doing so at the beginning of Book 2.

^{44.} Consider, for example, Ptolemy who may be thought to sometimes revise his theoretical model in order to respond to conflicting observations, while at others not. See Lloyd (1983) for a sane discussion of this issue.

Second, Plato's use of the structure of the method of hypothesis here in the Kallipolis argument indicates that Plato permits, perhaps even advocates, the use of the method of hypothesis in contexts of defense or justification, in addition to contexts of discovery or inquiry. We have conceded early on that the distinction between defense and inquiry is vague, especially at the edges, but it is difficult to doubt that the context of the Kallipolis argument is one of defense. As we noted earlier, Plato begins the Kallipolis argument by having Socrates describe Glaucon's request to persuade ourselves (ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς πείθειν) that and how Kallipolis is possible as a sudden attack on his *logos* (τὸν λόγον μου). Moreover, the entire passage from 5.471C-6.502C reads more like a defense of a view Socrates is already committed to than as a genuine inquiry concerning what might be the case concerning Kallipolis' possibility. Indeed, Socrates introduces the next portion of the text by describing the Kallipolis argument as a difficulty having been concluded (Οὐκοῦν ἐπειδὴ τοῦτο μόγις τέλος ἔσχεν), not as answer having been discovered. As a result, other texts and arguments outside the context of inquiry throughout the Platonic corpus may provide evidence for a more complete understanding of Plato's method of hypothesis. Nevertheless, I continue to urge a conservative approach, letting those passages in which Plato is evidently displaying or describing an inquiry from mutual ignorance guide our understanding of the method, and appealing to passages outside this context in order to confirm or refute this understanding only to the extent that their credentials as applications of the method of hypothesis can be established. I leave it to the reader to decide whether the credentials of the Kallipolis passage have been sufficiently established to allow confirmation of the understanding we have been developing in the previous chapters.

Finally, Plato evidently fails to depict Socrates as coming to know the possibility of Kallipolis as a result of this argument (whether understood in the context of justification or the context of inquiry). As we have seen, Socrates begins Book 5 by hesitating to defend his koinonia thesis that culminates in the third wave, precisely on the grounds that he fails to know and consequently risks harming his interlocutor-friends. Indeed, when Socrates concludes the third wave by indicating that the difficulty it presented has been resolved, he immediately goes on to point out that other issues remain.

Now that this difficulty has been disposed of, we must deal with what remains, namely, how the saviors of our constitution will come to be in the city, what subjects and ways of life will cause them to come into being, and at what ages they'll take each of them up. (Republic 6.502c9-d2)

These remaining issues lead ultimately to a discussion of the greatest mathêma (μέγιστον μάθημα), which occupies Plato's attention in the rest of Books 6 and 7 and which introduces the next chapter. But for now we should notice that despite the detail and thoroughness of the Kallipolis argument by 6.502C, it nevertheless remains in some way incomplete.

As a result, if we are right to read the Kallipolis argument in the *Republic* as a successful application of the method of hypothesis, we should notice that, just as in the *Phaedo*, Plato appears to allow that one can correctly apply the method without bringing all of its stages to completion. Unlike the *Phaedo* and the *Meno*, though, Plato provides an application that presents all of the stages and procedures without any conflict—and yet something remains incomplete in terms of acquiring virtue-knowledge. Despite taking the upward path of the confirmation stage all the way to the hypothesis that philosophy is knowledge of the Forms⁴⁵ and confirming the hypothesis by testing its *hormêthenta* and seeing that they agree, *knowledge* that philosophy and political power coincide and so that Kallipolis is possible has yet to be acquired. We will begin to get a sense of what Plato thinks is missing when we turn to the discussion of dialectic and the greatest *mathêma* in the next chapter.

^{45.} See, for example, ἱκανῶς at 5.474c5, 5.477a2, and 6.485a5.

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Perhaps we should recall the question we have been trying to answer. How does Plato respond to Clitophon's challenge? How, that is, does Plato recommend that the knowledge that Socrates has shown that we lack, and is more valuable than anything else, is to be learned or acquired? What, that is, is Plato's method of philosophical inquiry or discovery?

One might wonder why the answer to this question is not obvious, at least now that we have turned to Plato's so-called middle dialogues. It is a commonplace that Plato's philosophical method (in these dialogues and later ones, at least) is dialectic, and the place to discover (or at least start to discover) the nature of Platonic dialectic (again, at least in the middle dialogues) is Plato's Republic.1 Following the argument for the possibility of Kallipolis, examined in the previous chapter, Socrates explains that the philosopher-rulers necessary for Kallipolis' existence must take the longer road all the way to the greatest mathêma.2 When asked what the greatest mathêma is, Socrates immediately replies that it is the Form of the Good, and after being urged to explain what he believes that Form is, Socrates resorts to three images, the Sun, the Line, and the Cave. These images, among Plato's most famous, are followed by a long description of the education of future philosopher-rulers, culminating, after ten years of mathematical training, in dialectic. Here, it might be supposed, is where we should look for an answer to Clitophon's challenge.

The descriptions of the dialectical method found throughout this passage—stretching from *Republic 6.*502C to 7.541B—are typically longer than the other descriptions of method found in the dialogues. But, once again they remain vague, obscure, and hardly

^{1.} Of the 27 instances of some form of διαλεκτικ* – in the Plato's works (there are three more in *Definitiones*), nine are found in the *Republic* and eight occur between 7.531D and 7.537C. Plato's use of διαλέγεσθαι to mean dialectic is more controversial and so harder to count. See Kahn (1996, ch. 10).

^{2.} The shorter road is apparently the one Socrates and his interlocutors had been traveling at the end of Book 4.

uncontroversial. Consequently, I examine these descriptions with the resources collected over the previous chapters. I maintain that the method of hypothesis as it is described in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo* and applied in the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic*, continues to be Plato's recommended method of philosophical inquiry and learning. Indeed, dialectic is the method of hypothesis, correctly employed. Seeing dialectic in this way resolves some of the vagueness and obscurities surrounding dialectic as it is described in the *Republic*, and helps to further thicken the account of Plato's method of hypothesis developed in the previous chapters.

The Structure of Republic 6.502C-7.541B

Let me begin with a brief description of the structure of this rather extended passage. At 6.502C8, Plato has Socrates bring to a close the argument for the possibility of Kallipolis. Socrates concludes his argument by explaining that it is neither impossible for a philosopher to emerge in fifth- and fourth-century Greek city-states, nor impossible for such an individual to rule in those states. But at 6.502C9 he turns to a different task. Socrates explains how such philosopher-rulers are produced *in Kallipolis*, where the question of their actually ruling is evidently less difficult to bring about.³

^{3.} The significance of the shift in argument at 6.502C9 is rightly highlighted by Weiss (2012), although she interprets the significance differently than I. Even in Kallipolis, however, the emergence of philosophers does not guarantee their rule. At 7.519D8–521B11, Plato famously points out that such individuals must be compelled to take up the task of ruling, even in Kallipolis. See the enormous literature devoted to making sense of the need to compel the philosopher-rulers to rule; for example, N. White (1979), Annas (1981, 267), N. White (1986), E. Brown (2000, 2004), C. Reeve (2006), N. Smith (2010), and most recently, Buckels (2013).

^{4.} Perhaps referring back to Republic 3.413B-414A.

before anything else can be known to be good (6.506A6-7), Socrates disavows knowledge concerning what it is (6.506B5-C3). When Glaucon presses him to say what he believes it is, he offers instead to say something about what he believes its offspring is like (6.506E2-3). This is followed by the image of the Sun (6.507A-509C),⁵ which concludes by indicating that just as the sun somehow provides visible things their ability to be seen, as well as their ability to come to be, grow, and be nourished, so the Good somehow provides knowable things their ability to be known and their ability to be (6.509B1-7).6 This image is followed by the Line (6 509C-511D), which will occupy much of our attention here, and the Cave (7.514A1-518B6), near the conclusion of which Socrates maintains that it must be somehow fitted with (προσαπτέον) what has been said before.7

Based upon the nature of the greatest mathêma promoted by these images,8 Socrates turns to a description of the education of the philosopher-rulers in Kallipolis. He begins with a description of the nature of education according to which education is the expertise of turning the soul toward being and truth. It is not the expertise of putting knowledge into the soul (7.518B8-D7). Thus, the future philosopher-rulers must be forced to discover on their own the knowledge necessary and sufficient for ruling Kallipolis. Next, he turns to a detailed description of the order and nature of the mathêmata these individuals will need to master in order to acquire this knowledge (7.521C-535A). And finally, he describes the distribution of these *mathêmata*—to whom, in what manner, and at what ages they will be introduced (7.535A-540C). Here ends the socalled digression begun back at the beginning of Book 5 and the thread of the argument allegedly abandoned at the end of Book 4 is resumed at the beginning of Book 8.

^{5.} I will follow the convention of using caps to name the three images: the Sun, the Line, and the Cave.

^{6.} The concluding phrase that the Good is not being but surpasses it in rank and power (οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ' ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος) continues to be a source of much controversy and speculation. I tend to favor a deflationary reading; see, e.g., Adam (1907, 62), but I do not pursue such a reading here.

^{7.} I propose an unorthodox interpretation of how this is to be done in keeping with the interpretation of this chapter in Benson (2013).

^{8.} See $\Delta ε \tilde{i} \delta \dot{\eta} ... \dot{\eta} μ \tilde{q} \zeta$ τοιόνδε νομίσαι περὶ αὐτῶν, εἰ ταῦτ' ἀληθῆ at 7.518B7–8.

^{9.} See Barney (2008, 2-4) and Weiss (2012, 107-12) for the numerous references to force that permeate the passage, although they take the significance of this talk differently than I do in (Benson 2013).

The Line

One of the more extended discussions of the nature of the philosophical method in this long passage is found in Plato's image of the Line. 10,11 Despite the attention commentators have devoted to the ontological divisions associated with the four sections of the Line, especially the third, 12 the primary division is one of method. The initial division of the Line into two parts indicates an ontological focus, 13 as does the subdivision of the first part. But when Plato turns to distinguishing the subsections of the second part, his focus becomes primarily a contrast in methodologies. 14 The method of the third section, which I call "the dianoetic method" because it is associated with *dianoia*, is distinct from the method of the fourth section, traditionally called dialectic, 16 which is associated with *epistêmê* or *noêsis*. These two methods are

^{10.} What follows revises and supersedes Benson (2010b).

^{11.} See Annas (1981, 277–78): "There are two passages which tell us essentially all we know about dialectic. One is the Line. . . . The other is 531-534, where the imagery of the Cave is used."

^{12.} See Burnyeat (1987, 217), who calls this "the great question." N. Smith (1996) offers an excellent discussion of the literature of the 20th century prior to 1996. Since 1996 see, especially, Burnyeat (2000), Netz (2003), Denyer (2007), Foley (2008), and Franklin (2012).

^{13.} Although we should note that even here the beings are distinguished in terms of our cognitive access.

^{14.} See Robinson (1953, 194), Cross and Woozley (1964, 226, 232), and Fine (1990, 100–105).

^{15.} I would like to put the contrast in terms of διανοητική and διαλεκτική, but Plato's only use of the former at *Timaeus* 89A2 is nearly interchangeable with διαλεκτική, and Aristotle's famous use in the introductory sentence of *Posterior Analytics* is plausibly translated by Barnes (1975/1994) as "intellectual." (Διανοητική and its cognates become more common in Aristotle, who uses it 25 times.) Consequently, my use of "dianoetic" as opposed to "dialectic" does not mirror Plato's nor Aristotle's use of διανοητική.

^{16.} Διαλεκτική and its cognates are not used in the Line passage. Nevertheless, Plato's use of τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι at 6.511B3 is frequently translated as "dialectic"; see also 7.533C8–D1. A potential difficulty here is Plato's equivocal use of διαλεκτική and its cognates. Plato appears to use these words in at least three different ways. Sometimes Plato uses διαλεκτική to refer to a discipline or science (a mathêma) analogous to arithmetic, geometry, stereometry, astronomy, harmonics, and so on. For example, this seems to be what Plato has in mind at 7.534E2–535A1, when he places dialectic as the coping stone above the other mathêmata he has just gone through. Sometimes Plato uses διαλεκτική as a fixed cognitive state, knowledge of the Form of the Good. For example, at 7.531E3–4 he describes those who are dialectical as those who have the capacity to give and receive an account and so know what the philosopherrulers need to know. Finally, Plato sometimes uses διαλεκτική as a method or procedure by which one acquires knowledge. For example, at 7.532B4 and 7.533C8–9, Plato calls dialectic

distinguished less by their formal features than by the manner in which they are employed. Both methods are described as utilizing the method of hypothesis. 17 When the method of hypothesis is used incorrectly, one can achieve only dianoia and is engaged in dianoetic. When the method of hypothesis is used correctly, one can achieve knowledge (epistêmê) and is engaged in dialectic. Or at least, so I argue.

A Brief Statement of the Line

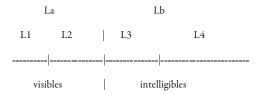
The image of the Line is familiar to the readers of Plato, so I only briefly present its basic features.

In response to Glaucon's request to continue his explanation of the similarity of the Form of the Good to the sun, Socrates reminds Glaucon of the two kinds of things, the visibles and the intelligibles, with which he introduced the Sun image (6.507B8-10). He encourages Glaucon to think of these things like a line divided into two unequal parts—La and Lb—which in turn are to be divided into two subsections, L1 and L2 of La and L3 and L4 of Lb, according to the same ratio as the original division. So we get the following image. 18

the journey (τὴν πορείαν) and inquiry that travels this road (μέθοδος μόνη ταύτη πορεύεται) to the knowledge for ruling Kallipolis. It is this latter sense of dialectic that Plato seems to be referring to in the Line by τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι at 6.511B3. (A similar ambiguity surrounds Plato's use of φιλοσοφία and its cognates; see Keyt 2006, 198–99 and Wolfsdorf 2008a, 4.) Throughout the course of this chapter I will be using "dialectic" primarily as the method or procedure of acquiring knowledge or learning—the method of philosophical inquiry—not as the skill or fixed state one acquires when one acquires knowledge (philosophy) itself. Less frequently, I will be using "dialectic" as the science or discipline (mathêma) analogous to arithmetic, etc. On the ambiguity of "dialectic," see, for example, Kahn (1996, 292-93) and McCabe (2000, 228–52, 281, esp. 228, 251n70).

^{17.} See Cross and Woozley (1964, 252-53), Moravcsik (1973, 159), perhaps N. Smith (1996, 33), and Bailey (2006, 102–103). Byrd (2007b, 141n1) cites the following who maintain that dialectic is (the correct use of) the method of hypothesis: Bedu-Addo (1979, 111-32, 122-24), Bluck (1955, 15–16, 24–25, 112), Archer-Hind (1884, 103), and A. Taylor (1956, 107). Among those who reject the identity, she cites Robinson (1953, 157), Rose (1966, 464–473, 466), Sayre (1969, 40-44, 4n3), Murphy (1936, 46), Gulley (1962, 53-54), and Gonzalez (1998a, 209), as well as herself.

^{18.} I here make at least the following assumptions in presenting the image in this way: (1) that the line should be displayed horizontally rather than vertically, (2) that the sections of the line increase in size from L1 to L4, and (3) the following ratios and equivalence hold: L1: L2 :: La : Lb; L3 : L4 :: La : Lb; L1 : L2 :: L3 : L4; and L2 = L3. While these assumptions may be salient for the overall interpretation of the Line (see, e.g., Cross and Woozley 1964, 204; Fogelin 1971, 375; N. Smith 1996, 27–28; and Foley 2008), only the third plays a part of the argument of this chapter; see note 26, this chapter.



The Initial Statement of the Divisions

After briefly explaining to Glaucon to place images in L1 and the original of these images in L2, Socrates offers the following introductory descriptions of L3 and L4. First, L3,

[A] In one subsection, the soul, [1] using as images the things that were imitated before (τοῖς τότε μιμηθεῖσιν ὡς εἰκόσιν χρωμένη), [2] is forced to investigate from hypotheses (ζητεῖν ἀναγκάζεται ἐξ ὑποθέσεων), [3] proceeding not to a first principle but to a conclusion (οὐκ ἐπ' ἀρχὴν πορευομένη ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τελευτήν); (6.510B4-6)

and then L4,

[B] In the other subsection, however, [the soul] [1] makes its way to a first principle that is not a hypothesis (τὸ ἐπ' ἀρχὴν ἀνυπόθετον), [2] proceeding from a hypothesis (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως ἰοῦσα) [3] but without the images used in the previous subsection, using Forms themselves and making its investigation through them (καὶ ἄνευ τῶν περὶ ἐκεῖνο εἰκόνων, αὐτοῖς εἴδεσι δι' αὐτῶν τὴν μέθοδον ποιουμένη). (6.510B6-8)

In response to this description of L3 and L4, Glaucon announces that he does not yet understand (6.510B10). To aid in Glaucon's understanding, Socrates offers a more detailed explanation of L3 at 6.510C1–511B2 and of L4 at 6.511B3–C2. The explanation is apparently successful, given Glaucon's ability to summarize the distinction at 6.511C3–D5, 19 which Socrates endorses 20 in his concluding statement associating a distinct cognitive state ($\pi\alpha\theta\eta\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$ èv $\tau\eta$ $\psi\nu\chi\eta$) with

^{19.} See Glaucon's repeated claims to understand at 6.511B1, 6.511C3, and 6.511E5.

^{20.} See Netz (2003, 303-304).

each section of the line—eikasia with L1, pistis with L2, dianoia with L3, and *epistêmê*²¹ with L4 (6.511D6–E5).

Notice, first, that the vast majority of the Line is devoted to distinguishing between L3 and L4. Of the 80 lines devoted to the image only 20 or so are devoted to the distinctions between La and Lb and L1 and L2. The remainder of the passage is devoted to explaining the difference between L3 and L4. The distinction between La and Lb that introduces the image is never mentioned again until Book 7, in a near doublet (7.533E3-534A5) of 6.511D6-E5.²² And L1 and L2 are never mentioned again except briefly in 6.511D6-E5. Virtually all of Plato's attention in the Line is devoted to the distinction between L3 and L4.

Second, the distinction on which Plato is focused is explicitly introduced as a distinction between two procedures or methods of the soul, dianoetic and dialectic. These two methods are characterized by three features. In dianoetic.

- [A1] the soul uses as images the things that were imitated before,
- [A2] the soul is forced to investigate from hypotheses (ἐξ ὑποθέσεων), and
- [A3] the soul proceeds not to a *archê*, but to a conclusion;

in dialectic.

- [B1] the soul makes its way to an unhypothetical archê,
- [B2] the soul proceeds from hypotheses (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως), and
- [B3] the soul does not use the images used in the previous section, but Forms themselves.

^{21.} See note 67, this chapter for Plato's apparent indifference concerning the name of the cognitive state associated with L4, noêsis or epistêmê. I stick with epistêmê throughout for consistency.

^{22.} These two passages are so puzzling that as least one scholar has suspected that the doublet passages are "late additions to the text, whether made by Plato or by someone else intervening at an early point in its transmission, but in any case not altogether well fitted to their immediate contexts"; see Schofield (2007, 217n5). See also Robinson (1953, 193-94). For the puzzling nature of these two passages, see note 66, this chapter.

Thus, [A1] corresponds to [B3], [A3] to [B1], and [A2] to [B2]. Both dianoetic and dialectic proceed from hypotheses ($\xi\xi$ $\dot{\nu}\pi o\theta\dot{\epsilon}\sigma\epsilon\omega\varsigma$). The surrounding features distinguish the ways in which the two methods proceed from hypotheses. Dianoetic proceeds from hypotheses not to an *archê* but to a conclusion, while dialectic proceeds from hypotheses to an *archê* that is unhypothetical. In addition, dianoetic in proceeding from hypotheses uses in some way the ordinary objects of L2, while dialectic does not. Dialectic only uses Forms in proceeding from hypotheses.

That Socrates should describe the methods in L3 and L4 as proceeding from hypotheses should perhaps not surprise us in light of the results of the previous chapters. We have seen that Socrates describes or employs a method proceeding from hypotheses in attempts to answer key questions in the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic*. Moreover, these chapters have provided a fairly detailed structure of what such a method looks like, although many questions remain. As we have seen, the method consists of two stages when seeking to answer some question (Q1), a proof stage that in turn consists of two procedures:

- [Pa] Identify a second question (Q2) from whose most compelling answer (the hypothesis (H1)) the answer (A1) to the initial question (Q1) can be obtained.
- [Pb] Show how A1 is obtained from H1; sometimes this will be immediate and trivial, sometimes not:

and a confirmation stage, which also consists of two procedures:

- [Ca] Test the things that start out from (*hormêthenta*) H1 for agreement or disagreement with each other.
- [Cb] Identify a second reduced question (Q3) from whose most compelling answer (a higher hypothesis (H2)) H1/A2 can be obtained, show how H1/A2 can be obtained from H2, and continue this process until one reaches something adequate (*hikanon*).

That Plato is attributing this structure to both dianoetic and dialectic is, of course, not required by 6.510B4-8, but our conservative strategy encourages

^{23. [}A2] differs from [B2] in three ways: (1) [A2] uses ζητεῖν while [B2] uses ἰοῦσα, (2) [A2] uses the plural ὑποθέσεων while [B2] uses the singular ὑποθέσεως, and (3) only dianeotic is said to be forced (ἀναγκάζεται) to proceed from hypotheses. The first two differences I take to be insignificant. The third difference has been thought to be more significant; see Burnyeat (1987, 219).

such an attribution lacking evidence to the contrary. Both methods are described as proceeding "from hypotheses." Nevertheless, Plato appears to distinguish two ways of employing the method of hypothesis—one represented in L3 and one represented in L4. Nothing has prepared us for this. We have encountered only a single form of the method of hypothesis. Perhaps, then, L4 is introducing a new method, not encountered before, and the ἐξ ὑποθέσεως at 6.510B7 does not refer to the method of hypothesis found in the Meno and Phaedo.

Notice, finally, that while the point is perhaps not explicit in 6.510B4-8, Plato views the first of these methods as in some way inferior to the second. Both at the beginning and at the conclusion of the Line, Plato maintains that the lengths of the sections of the line represent in some way degrees of clarity.²⁴ Dianoetic, then, is in some way less clear that dialectic. It is for this reason that Plato associates the cognitive state of dianoia with L3 and his most robust cognitive state—knowledge (epistêmê or noêsis)—with L4. L4, then, need not be seen as introducing a new method distinct from the method of hypothesis. Rather, it can be seen as representing a correct way to use the method of hypothesis, as opposed to an incorrect way represented in L3. We should expect, then, that the differences between L3 and L4—the soul's movement to a conclusion in dianoetic vs. its movement to an archê in dialectic, and the soul's use of ordinary sensible objects in dianoetic vs. its use of only Forms in dialectic²⁵—to account for the former's lack of clarity relative to the latter. These two differences are what distinguish dianoetic from dialectic, and so are what explain its inferiority. It is not in virtue of proceeding from hypotheses or employing the method of hypothesis that accounts for dianoetic's inferiority to dialectic; both dianoetic and dialectic do that. What accounts for dianoetic's inferiority to dialectic is the way they employ this method.

Read in this way, Plato's primary focus in the Line image is to represent the philosophical method, the method by which future philosopher-rulers will acquire on their own the knowledge necessary and sufficient for ruling Kallipolis. In the Sun image, Plato has represented the content of this knowledge—the

^{24.} See 6.509D9-10 and 6.511E2-4; see also 6.511C4-6. Plato also appears to associate degrees of clarity with degrees of truth; in addition to 6.511E2-4, see 6.510A8-10.

^{25.} Those who recognize something like these two differences include Murphy (1951, 168), Rose (1963-64, 434-435), Cross and Woozley (1964, 205), N. Cooper (1966, 65), N. White (1976, 96), Scolnicov (1988, 92), Mueller (1992, 184), N. Smith (1996, 33), Kahn (1996, 295), and C. Reeve (2003, 41–42), although they do not endorse my reading of the similarity.

Form of the Good—and in the Line image, he turns to representing the method by which this knowledge is to be acquired. He does this by contrasting it with a method that shares its structure and from which it may have originated. Consequently, the two methods may easily be confused. But only one of them can successfully acquire the robust knowledge needed for ruling. Focusing on how they differ is one way Plato hopes to describe the method he recommends. ²⁶ If, then, we are to understand Plato's recommended method for acquiring robust knowledge, the method for acquiring knowledge of the Form of the Good as represented in the Line, we need to look more closely at the differences between dianoetic and dialectic. In this way we will not only confirm our preliminary understanding of the structure of the method of hypothesis but also more fully understand its nature.

The Structure of the Fuller Account

The more detailed explanation of dianoetic begins with an elaboration of the first difference —the movement to a conclusion vs. the movement to an *archê* (6.510C2–D3)—and then an elaboration of the second difference, the use of ordinary objects vs. the use of only Forms (6.510D5–511A2). These two elaborations are followed by a concluding segment that recapitulates the original introductory description (6.511A4–B1). The briefer explanation of L4 consists of a short re-description of the first difference at 6.511B2–6 and then of the second difference at 6.511B6–C2.

^{26.} Similarly, in the Euthydemus, Plato explicates the method he recommends and has Socrates practice in the elenctic dialogues (the elenchos) by contrasting it with a method that shares the same form, from which it may have originated, and with which it may be easily confused, eristic. As I read the Line, then, Plato does not represent a continuous hierarchy of ontological types or cognitive states, but a disjunctive analogy according to which L1 stands to L2 as L3 stands to L4. He does not mean to compare L2 to L3. This is indicated in part by the equality of the lengths of L2 and L3, given that the lengths of the line represent degrees of clearness and truth. (See Foley 2008, who takes the equality of L2 and L3 together with Plato's commitment to a hierarchy of L1 through L4 as indicating an intentional inconsistency in the text, which he calls the "overdetermination problem" meant to motivate the reader to proceed through the four cognitive states represented in the Line.) Moreover, Plato never directly compares L2 and L3, either in the Line image or later. See especially, the doublet passage in Republic 7, where every section of the line is compared and contrasted, except L2 with L3. See Bluck (1961, 36-37), Robinson (1953, 194-95), and Morrison (1977, 226–27), who defend similar, though importantly different, readings of Plato's Line against the vast majority of scholars who find in it a continuous hierarchy; see, for example, Adam (1907), Malcolm (1981), Bedu-Addo (1977), N. Smith (1996), and many more.

The First Difference and the Upward Confirmation Path

According to Socrates, the practitioners of dianoetic (e.g., geometers, arithmeticians, and the like)²⁷ make hypotheses (e.g., the odd and the even, the various figures, and the like)²⁸ as though they knew them (ώς εἰδότες), not thinking it necessary to give a *logos* of them (6.510C6-7), as though they were clear to all (ώς παντι φανερῶν). Under these conditions, the dianoeticians begin from such hypotheses, validly²⁹ going through the steps until they reach the conclusion—that is, an answer to the question with which they began (6.510D1-3).

Plato contrasts the practice of dianoetic in this regard with dialectic at 6.511B2-6. According to Socrates, dialecticians make their hypotheses not as first principles (τὰς ὑποθέσεις ποιούμενος οὐκ ἀρχὰς), but as really hypotheses (τῷ ὄντι ὑποθέσεις), like stepping stones, in order to reach the unhypothetical archê. Having grasped this archê, dialectic comes down to a conclusion (πάλιν αὖ έχόμενος τῶν ἐκείνης ἐχομένων, οὕτως ἐπὶ τελευτὴν καταβαίνη; $6.511B6-C1^{30}$).

Plato does not contrast dianoetic with dialectic on the grounds that the former does, while the latter does not, proceed from hypotheses, nor that the former does, while the latter does not, proceed to a conclusion. On the contrary, both methods proceed from hypotheses to conclusions.³¹ The contrast consists, rather, in how the two methods treat the hypotheses with which they begin their procedure to a conclusion. Dianoetic treats them as archai, 32 as already known,

^{27.} Plato's reference to the geometers here and at 6.511A10-B1 and 6.511D3 is significant. It supports our conservative strategy that he has in mind the same method which he introduced in the Meno as the method practiced by the geometers. It also supports taking the procedure of the propaedeutic mathêmata—beginning with arithmetic and ending in harmonics—to be the method of hypothesis as well. Nevertheless, we should not identify the propaideutic *mathêmata* with the mathematical *mathêmata* as they are currently practiced; see pp. 257–259 and note 62, this chapter. The former employ the method of hypothesis correctly; the latter incorrectly. This is the distinction Plato is representing by the distinction between L3 and L4. The distinction may be foreshadowed at *Phaedo* 92C11-E3.

^{28.} See note 19, chapter 5.

^{29. &}quot;Ομολογουμένως cannot be translated as "consistently," as Shorey does since the conclusion is not simply consistent with the hypothesis but is in some way obtained from the hypothesis, hence I translate "validly" following Grube/Reeve; pace Burnyeat 2000, 23n33. See the earlier discussion of συμφωνεῖν and διαφωνεῖν at *Phaedo* 100A3-8 and 101D1-E3, pp. 135-138 and pp. 144-145.

^{30.} The dual use of ἐχόμενος here echoes a similar dual use at *Phaedo* 101D1-E3 which occupied much of our attention.

^{31.} That is, both methods [Pa] go up to a hypothesis and then [Pb] down (see καταβαίνη) to the answer to the original question; contra Cornford (1965, 72), who apparently takes the dianoetic method to represent the downward path and dialectic to represent the upward path.

^{32.} See 6.511C6-7 in Glaucon's summary.

as not needing a *logos*, as already clear to all, ³³ when they are not. Dialectic does not. Dialectic treats them as genuine $(\tau\tilde{\phi}\ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \)$ hypotheses—as unknown starting points from which one can obtain the conclusion, but which in order to be known require confirmation up to the genuine $arch\hat{e}$ of everything. That is, dianoetic does not treat its hypotheses as requiring confirmation as it should. Dialectic does.

Put in terms of the model of the method of hypothesis we have been developing, dianoetic embraces the proof stage, while dialectic embraces both the proof and the confirmation stages (replacing the "something adequate" in [Cb] with the unhypothetical $arch\acute{e}$). Dialecticians recognize, as Plato puts it later, that no "mechanism could possibly turn any agreement (ὁμολογίαν) into knowledge when it begins (ἀρχὴ) with something unknown and puts together the conclusion and the steps in between from what is unknown" (7.533C5–7). So the first difference between dianoetic and dialectic that partially accounts for the former's inferiority is dianoetic's failure to confirm its hypotheses, as it should. It takes them to be archai and not requiring confirmation from higher hypotheses.

But we should be careful here. The specific contrast between dianoetic and dialectic that Plato is drawing need not be that the former fails to employ the upward path of the confirmation procedure at all, although in some extreme cases it may. Rather, the specific failure of the dianoetic method that Plato is underscoring lies in its failure to employ the upward path of the confirmation stage to the extent it should. Most geometers and mathematicians, especially those of the proto-Euclidean sort around the Academy at the time, but even those who are less accomplished, propose to confirm their initial hypotheses by obtaining them from higher hypotheses³⁵ concerning the nature of the odd and the even, for example. But, according to Plato, they fail to practice dialectic (the correct application of the method of hypothesis) if, at some point in their inquiry, they take as known, as an *archê*, as not needing confirmation, what is in fact unknown, not

^{33.} See also 7.533C2-3.

^{34.} Burnyeat (2000, 23n33) takes the use of ὁμολογίαν here to indicate "that knowledge or understanding should not depend on an interlocutor's agreement; all relevant objections should have been rebutted." I agree that in the wider context (7.533–534), part of Plato's point is precisely this (cf. pp. 259–263), but at 7.533C5-7 this is not Plato's point. Rather, Plato's use of ὁμολογίαν here is an allusion back to 6.510D1-3, where the point is that knowledge cannot be acquired by a method whose starting points are unconfirmed—however that confirmation is to be accomplished.

^{35.} And by testing the agreement or disagreement of their *hormêthenta*, [Ca]. More on this second confirmation procedure later.

an archê and still in need of confirmation. Dianoeticians at some point take what is a hypothesis not to be a hypothesis. In doing so, their inquiry fails to acquire the knowledge they seek.

Plato's point is that the goal of philosophical inquiry is the acquisition of the knowledge one seeks-knowledge of the answer to the original question. To accomplish this goal one must find hypotheses from which the answer to the original question can be obtained and which are themselves obtainable from the unhypothetical archê. One cannot rightly claim to know the answer to the original question until this has been done. Short of confirmation from the unhypothetical archê, one's inquiry remains incomplete.³⁶ But the procedure employed by dianoetic and dialectic is the same. The difference lies not in the procedure but in how each treats its hypotheses. The former takes the hypotheses to be known and confirmed when they are not; the latter does not.³⁷ Consequently, the former takes itself to have acquired knowledge of the answer to the original question when it has not; the latter does not.

Consider, for example, Socrates' applications of the method of hypothesis in the Meno and Phaedo.³⁸ In both arguments, Socrates explicitly acknowledges that the hypotheses appealed to are unknown and in need of further logoi. 39 Socrates employs the method of hypothesis and yet does not treat his hypotheses as known, as archai, as not needing a logos, as clear to all. Socrates is not practicing the method represented in L3, dianoetic. He is practicing dialectic, although he has yet to obtain his hypotheses from the unhypothetical archê. They remain unknown. What makes these inquiries dialectical is Socrates' explicit recognition that more work is to be done. The key, according to this first difference between

^{36.} That Plato views dianoetic as an unsuccessful version of dialectic is strongly reinforced by Glaucon's suggestion in his summary of the distinction that the things which the dianoeticians fail to know are knowable once they are obtained from the unhypothetical archê (6.511D2).

^{37.} Consequently, insofar as Plato is critical of mathematicians, it is not because they use hypotheses. As Burnyeat (1987, 219) points out, Plato thinks that they are forced to. Rather, it is because at some point in the process at least some of them treat their hypotheses as archai. They take what requires confirmation as not requiring confirmation.

^{38.} Socrates' treatment of the hypotheses in the Kallipolis argument discussed in chapter 8, this volume, as unknown, as genuine hypotheses, as requiring confirmation from higher hypotheses is less explicit, in part because the language of the method of hypothesis is less explicit in this application. Nevertheless, Socrates' explicit recognition of his ignorance of the Form of the Good (6.505A5-6) and that knowledge of it is required for knowledge of any other good (6.505A6-B1) indicate Socrates' awareness that the hypotheses used in the Kallipolis argument are in need of further confirmation from the unhypothetical archê.

^{39.} See Meno 89C5-D6 and 100b4-6 and Phaedo 107b4-10.

dianoetic and dialectic, is not that the hypotheses used by dianoetic are unknown, but that, though unknown, they are treated as known. In dialectic, one's hypotheses are unknown as well, at least until obtained from the unhypothetical *archê*. But they are not treated as known and as *archai*, but as really hypotheses, just as Socrates treats them in the *Meno*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Republic* when employing the method of hypothesis himself.⁴⁰

The Second Difference and the Use of Ordinary Objects

Thus far, we have only addressed one of the ways that dianoetic differs from dialectic: the failure of the former but not the latter to treat its hypotheses as hypotheses until reaching the unhypothetical *archê*. But there is a second difference between them. Dianoetic uses ordinary sensible objects—the objects associated with *pistis* and L2— and dialectic does not. What are we to make of this second difference?

At 6.510D5–511A2, Plato tells us that the dianoetic geometers use and make logoi about $(\pi\epsilon\rho i)$ visible shapes, but they do not think about $(\pi\epsilon\rho i)$ them. Rather, they think about the things these visible shapes are like. That is, they make logoi for the sake of (Ενεκα) the square itself and the diagonal itself, not for the sake of the squares and diagonals that they draw. They use the drawn squares and diagonals seeking to see the square itself and diagonal itself, which cannot be seen except by thought (τῆ διανοία).

Notice that dianoeticians are described as making logoi (τοὺς λόγους ποιούμενοι) contrary to the suggestion just a few lines earlier that they failed to think it necessary to give (διδόναι) logoi. This reinforces the earlier suggestion that Plato allows that some dianoeticians do engage in the confirmation process. Some dianoeticians simply assume a hypothesis from which an answer to the original question can be obtained without seeing the need to provide any logos

^{40.} Thus, we must distinguish between dialectic, as the method of seeking the unhypothetical *archê*—the journey, road, or method—employed to acquired knowledge when the hypotheses are treated as hypotheses and not yet obtained from the unhypothetical *archê*, and dialectic, as the end of the journey or completion of this method, when the hypotheses have been destroyed and obtained from the unhyphothetical *archê*. See note 16, this chapter. Plato does not name the cognitive state corresponding to the process of making the dialectical journey. *Epistêmê* or *noêsis* is the name of the cognitive state at the end of the dianoetic journey. At 7.527B8–10, Plato calls the cognitive state produced by drawing the soul toward truth and directing the soul upwards (toward the Form of the Good or the unhypothetical *archê*) "*philosophical dianoia*" (φιλοσόφου διανοίας; my emphasis). For Plato's varied use of *dianoia* throughout *Republic* 6 and 7, see Benson 2013, app.) and note 65, this chapter.

^{41.} And later in the parallel passage in Book 7, those who are not dialectical are described as unable to either give or receive *logoi* (7.534B3-6).

concerning that hypothesis, but many (perhaps most) dianoeticians do not. Both dialecticians and dianoeticians (at least for the most part) provide *logoi* of their hypotheses. The difference lies in how they provide logoi. The first difference, as we have seen, indicates that dianoeticians fail to recognize that their logoi are incomplete, and so, they fail to complete the upward path of the confirmation stage all the way to the unhypothetical archê.

But Plato's talk of *logoi* in elaborating the second difference between dianoetic and dialectic indicates that the dianoeticians' confirmation process fails in yet another way—this time connected to the use of ordinary objects. Dianoetic makes its logoi about ordinary, sensible objects, while its logoi are for the sake of the Forms, and dialectic does not. Thus, the second difference between dianoetic and dialectic that partially accounts for the inferiority of the former also appears to concern the confirmation stage of the method of hypothesis. Given what we have seen so far, we should expect it to concern the downward path of the confirmation stage ([Ca]).

But when we turn to the more detailed explanation of L4, things appear otherwise. Plato writes that once dialecticians have confirmed their hypotheses up to the unhypothetical archê, they turn around, coming down to the conclusion "without making use of anything visible at all, but only of Forms themselves, moving on from Forms to Forms, and ending in Forms" (6.511C1-2). The contrast with dianoetic here suggests that dianoeticians use ordinary objects, not as part of the downward path of the confirmation stage ([Ca]), but as part of the downward path of the proof stage ([Pb]). Ordinary objects are used in proceeding from the hypothesis to the conclusion, while dialectic does not use ordinary objects during this procedure. This suggests that the second difference which accounts for the inferiority of dianoetic lies not in the confirmation stage but in some failure of the downward path of the proof stage. Thus, contrary to the conclusion of the previous paragraph, dianoetic somehow employs ordinary objects in the proof stage, while dialectic does not.

Plato has sometimes been understood here as appealing to geometry's use of diagrams in its proofs. 42 The idea seems to be that in using diagrams, geometry, and dianoetic in general, uses sense perception to examine or study things which should be studied by thought or reason. The geometer literally looks at or views the diagrams and draws conclusions about disembodied shapes and the like. And, in general, dianoetic uses sense perception as a way of studying the Forms. Dialectic does not. There is something to this understanding of the second difference, but in its current form at least two difficulties arise.

^{42.} See Mueller (1992, 184). Plato may even be supposed to have in mind geometry's practice of construction. For the latter see, for example, Mueller (1992, 175-77), and Menn (2002, 199).

First, it is difficult to see how understanding the second difference between dianoetic and dialectic in this way is sufficiently generalizable. Geometry's use of diagrams was thought to be salient in explaining the second difference because of geometry's dual-proof procedures: construction and (deductive) proof. But, it is hardly obvious how this particular use of diagrams is to be employed outside of geometry. Whatever else one thinks about the dianoetic method, it must be applicable to other mathematical disciplines besides geometry. Socrates begins his longer description of the method by ascribing it not only to practitioners of geometry but also to practitioners of "arithmetic and the like" (6.510C3).⁴³ The generalization difficulty becomes even worse, if one permits, as the interpretation I am encouraging does, dianoetic inquiries concerning things like virtue, its teachability, the immortality of the soul, and the possibility of Kallipolis. How does one use diagrams in the downward path of the proof stage to the conclusion that virtue is teachable or that Kallipolis is possible?⁴⁴

Perhaps the *Republic* itself suggests an answer to this last question. The analogue of geometric diagrams in an inquiry concerning the nature of justice goes as follows: construct, as a thought-experiment, an ideal city and then examine what justice is in it.⁴⁵ Once again, there is something to the idea that the constructed Kallipolis is analogous to geometric diagrams, but it does not support the current understanding of the second difference between dianoetic and dialectic. It is difficult to see how the constructed Kallipolis—the analogue to the geometric diagram—is employed in something analogous to the downward path of the proof stage ([Pb]). If anything, the inquiry appears to be going in the opposite direction at this stage in the *Republic* (Books 2–4). But more important, this response to the first difficulty points to a second difficulty.

Why is dianoetic's use of ordinary objects or geometry's use of diagrams problematic?⁴⁶ Plato's own use of the constructed Kallipolis and similar images

^{43.} See also 6.511A10-B1.

^{44.} This question will not impress those who restrict dianoetic and L3 to mathematical objects and the mathematical disciplines, of course.

^{45.} Indeed, the very passage we are discussing uses the philosophical analogue of geometric diagrams—the *image* of the Line. See Denyer (2007, 293–94) for a nice discussion of this self-referential use of the Line. See also Socrates' explicit use of the ship-of-state image (εἰκόν) at *Republic* 6.487E4–6 and Simmias' and Cebes' explicit use of images (εἰκόνες) in their objections to Socrates' affinity argument at *Phaedo* 85B10–88B8. Socrates nowhere complains that these objections employ images. Plato obviously does not object to the use of images as such.

^{46.} See also Burnyeat (1987), followed by Netz (2003, 306n22), according to whom the use of diagrams in geometry is essential and so can hardly be a criticism of geometry.

does not look problematic in Socrates' hands. So, why should dianoetic's analogous use of ordinary objects make it inferior to dialectic? Admittedly, Plato does repeatedly use vision terms in the description of the way in which dianoetic makes use of the things that were imitated in the previous subsection (τοῖς όρωμένοις εἴδεσι, ἰδεῖν, ἴδοι),⁴⁷ underscoring their sensible nature. Moreover, Plato does, as we have seen, disparage the use of sense perception at the beginning of the Phaedo. 48 Knowledge of the Forms is best acquired by a disembodied soul's direct apprehension. But for those of us with embodied souls, Plato appears to recognize a useful role for the perception of ordinary objects. In his account of the theory of recollection in the *Phaedo*, he explains that the perception of objects serves as a kind of necessary catalyst. Again, in his account of the education of the philosopher-rulers in *Republic* 7, he distinguishes between the features of ordinary sensible objects which do not turn the soul toward truth and knowledge, and those that do. 49 So Plato should not be objecting to the mere use of images or ordinary sensible objects.⁵⁰ Instead, he must be objecting to the way dianoetic uses them.51

^{47.} See αἰσθητῷ also at 6.511C1.

^{48.} See *Phaedo* 65E6–66A10 (and pp. 110–111, this volume), 79C2–8, and 82D9–83B4, among other places.

^{49.} The so-called summoners. See, for example, Byrd (2007a, 2007b), and Scott (2006, 129-130n2).

^{50.} Nevertheless, Plato highlights the non-empirical nature of dialectic at 7.532A1-B3 when he writes that the dialectician "tries through argument and apart from all sense perceptions (ἄνευ πασῶν τῶν αἰσθήσεων διὰ τοῦ λόγου) to find the being itself of each thing and doesn't give up until he grasps the good itself with understanding itself." Our task is to account for this apparent tension in Plato's philosophical method.

^{51.} Alternatively, dianoetic might be understood as a preliminary method to dialectic. Thus, Socrates' use of images and perception is not a reason for doubting that the mere use of images and perception is a defective feature of dianoetic, but, rather, a reason for thinking that Socrates is practicing dianoetic preliminarily to his practice of dialectic not depicted in the dialogue. See, for example, N. Cooper (1966, 67) and N. Smith (1999, 202-203). This reading, however, requires a hierarchical cognitive development reading of the Line image in general (pace note 26, this chapter) and taking the propaideutic mathemata of Republic 7 to be practicing the dianoetic method (pace note 27, this chapter and p. 257). It also makes it difficult to see what is methodological about the dialectical method; see p. 254-255, this chapter. Nevertheless, these challenges to reading dianoetic as preliminary to dialectic are not dispositive. In the end, one will need to judge the interpretation I offer here as opposed to this alternative reading against the entire account of Plato's philosophical method I have been presenting throughout these chapters. In particular, one will have to choose between seeing Plato as introducing a brand new method in the Republic distinct from the method he has been recommending in the Meno and Phaedo and seeing Plato as developing and adjusting the very same method he has been recommending in those dialogues.

Perhaps, then, we should look in another direction to understand this second difference between dianoetic and dialectic. The distinction between making logoi about $(\pi\epsilon\rho i)$ sensible objects and making logoi for the sake of $(\breve{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\kappa\alpha)$ Forms, mentioned earlier, may help. Plato may be employing this distinction to underscore the indirect nature of dianoetic. Dianoetic seeks knowledge of the Forms by in some way using or thinking about the things that are images of Forms. Dialectic seeks this knowledge by thinking about or viewing the Forms directly. The problem with dianoetic is not that it uses perception or sensible objects. It is that it uses them to indirectly study the Forms.

This reading of the second difference is supported in part by seeing the Line as representing a disjunctive analogy rather than a continuous hierarchy. According to the disjunctive analogy, L3 stands to L4 as L1 stands to L2 and as La stands to Lb. Given the focus on methodology, this suggests that the method of dianoetic stands to the method of dialectic as the method of studying shadows and reflections of originals for the sake of ($\xi\nu\kappa\alpha$) learning about those originals stands to the method of studying the originals themselves. Similarly, dianoetic stands to dialectic as the method of studying sensibles for the sake of ($\xi\nu\kappa\alpha$) learning about Forms stands to the method of studying the Forms themselves. That is, just as studying shadows and reflections to learn about originals is an indirect and so inferior way of studying the originals themselves, so dianoetic is in some way indirect and so inferior to dialectic. The point of the disjunctive analogy is to call attention to the indirect nature of dianoetic and to the direct nature of dialectic. Once again, there is something to this understanding of the second difference, but in its current form it is inadequate.

On this understanding of the second difference, we are left wondering what the methodology of dialectic is supposed to be. Dialectic looks more like the completion or the result of some methodology, rather than the methodology itself. As a result of some unspecified procedure or movement of the soul, the soul comes to (perhaps incorrigibly or intuitively)⁵⁴ view the Forms directly. But not only does this leave unexplained how the contrast between La and Lb differs from the contrast between dianoetic (L3) and dialectic (L4), but it also wrecks the parallelism between [A1] and [B3] suggested in the initial description of the

^{52.} See Robinson (1953, 190–91), Annas (1981, 280–82), N. Smith (1996, 43), and, perhaps, also McCabe (2000, 26n5).

^{53.} See note 26, this chapter.

^{54.} See, for example, Cornford (1965, 73–74), Robinson (1953, 172–76), Cross and Woozley (1964, 252–53), Santas (1980, 255), and most plausibly, Bailey (2006). Annas (1981, 281–82) does not explain the direct nature of dialectic in this way, but in my view she leaves it unexplained.

distinction between L3 and L4 at 6.510B4-8. Everything about this initial description indicated a difference in methodology (μέθοδον), inquiry (ζητεῖν), or procedure (πορευομένη, ἰοῦσα) of the soul. In both dianoetic and dialectic, the soul proceeds from hypotheses ([A2] and [B2]), which I have maintained indicates the method of hypothesis. [A3] and [B1] concern how far the soul carries out this procedure. And [A1] concerns the use of ordinary sensible objects in carrying it out. But, on the current understanding of the distinction between dianoetic and dialectic, [B3] concerns the end state—the incorrigible or intuitive direct viewing of the Forms. It is as though Plato's response to Clitophon's challenge concerning how to acquire the knowledge one lacks is "Look at Forms!" This hardly looks like an intentional repeatable strategy for learning.⁵⁵ Of course, nothing is impossible about such an understanding of the distinction (at least as far as the image of the Line is concerned) or such a response to the challenge,⁵⁶ but it is at least inelegant and unhelpful.⁵⁷ Consequently, I propose to look elsewhere to explain this second difference between dianoetic and dialectic.

Dialectic in Book 7 (Republic 7.531D-535A)

At 7.521C1, Socrates turns to a detailed description of how the philosopher-rulers will come to be in Kallipolis. He describes himself as seeking the *mathêma* "that draws the soul from the realm of becoming to the realm of what is" (7.521D4–5). It turns out that there are more than one. After ruling out physical training, music, and the technai (7.521D13-522B6) (although at least the first two may be necessary preliminaries), he describes a ten-year immersion⁵⁸ in the so-called propaedeutic mathêmata: arithmetic, geometry, stereometry, astronomy, and harmonics (7.522B7-531D5). This is followed by a five-year course in dialectic (7.531D6-535A2).⁵⁹

At 7.533B5-E2, Plato returns to the first difference between dianoetic and dialectic described in the Line image. He tells us that the mathêmata he has just gone through can only acquire a dreamlike vision of being, as opposed to a waking vision, as long as those mathêmata leave their hypotheses untouched and are unable to give a *logos* of them (ὑποθέσεσι χρώμεναι ταύτας ἀκινήτους ἐῶσι,

^{55.} See 7.533A10-B2.

^{56.} Although I do mention some reason to worry about the incorrigibility requirement later in Book 7 below. See note 69, this chapter.

^{57.} See pp. 110-111 and note 63, chapter 4.

^{58.} Beginning at the age of 20.

^{59.} This is followed by 15 years of practical experience and a second stint of dialectic at age 50.

μὴ δυνάμεναι λόγον διδόναι αὐτῶν; 7.533C2-3). To the extent that the current practitioners of these *mathêmata* take these hypotheses, which require confirmation and a *logos*, as not requiring confirmation or a *logos*, as known, and clear to all, they are employing the method of hypothesis incorrectly—that is, dianoetically. To the extent that the practitioners of these *mathêmata* recognize that their hypotheses require confirmation from higher hypotheses or a *logos* they are employing the method of hypothesis correctly—that is, dialectically. In either case, until they reach the unhypothetial *archê*, their grasp of being or truth is dreamlike and fails to amount to knowledge. But, it is only those who practice the *mathêmata* correctly—that is, those who practice the propaideutic *mathêmata*, who are on the road to acquiring the knowledge for ruling. ⁶⁰ As Plato puts it

Therefore, dialectic is the only inquiry that travels this road (ἡ διαλεκτικὴ μέθοδος μόνη ταύτη πορεύεται), destroying hypotheses (τὰς ὑποθέσεις ἀναιροῦσα)⁶¹ and proceeding to the *archê* itself, so as to be secure. And when the eye of the soul is really buried in a sort of barbaric bog, dialectic gently pulls it out and leads it upwards, using the *mathêmata* we described to help it and cooperate with it in turning the soul around. (*Republic* 7.533C8–D4)

Notice that the dialectical method or journey is described as using the propaideutic *mathêmata*. When used correctly, dialectically, these *mathêmata* do not take their hypotheses as known, as clear to all, as not needing a *logos*, and as a result they gently turn the soul around toward being, toward truth, and toward the unhypothetical *archê*. When used incorrectly, they leave the soul stuck in a barbaric bog.

That Plato means to be recalling the first difference between dianoetic and dialectic discussed in the Line image here in Book 7 is indicated by the completion of 7.533C8–D4. Plato recalls the Line image as follows:

From force of habit, we've often called these crafts *epistêmai*, but they need another name, clearer than *doxa*, darker than *epistêmê*. We called

^{60.} For the importance of the distinction between the practitioners of the *mathêmata* and the *mathêmata* themselves, see Benson (2012b) and *Euthydemus* 305A6–307C4.

^{61.} I here follow what Mueller (1992, 188) calls the "consensus that the only destruction Socrates has in mind is the destruction of the hypothetical character of mathematical hypotheses through subsumption under an unhypothetical starting point." See also, e.g., Robinson (1953, 161) and Annas (1981, 278). Against the consensus, see, e.g., McLarty (2005, 128–29). Most recently, Bailey (2006, 125) offers a reading in keeping with the consensus but which avoids reading ἀναιροῦσα as "destroying."

them dianoia somewhere before. But I presume that we won't dispute about a name when we have so many more important matters to investigate. (*Republic* 7.533D4–9)

This is followed by the doublet of the Line's 6.511D6–E4 at 7.533E3–534A8.

Recalling the Line image in this way has encouraged many scholars to locate Book 7's propaideutic *mathêmata* in L3 of the Line. As we have seen, Plato begins his longer description of the first difference between L3 and L4 by locating the "practitioners of geometry, arithmetic, and the like" (6.510C2-3) in L3, and the propaideutic mathêmata Plato has just gone through in Book 7 are those same mathêmata. But this is to miss a distinction Plato is at pains to make throughout his discussion of the propaideutic *mathêmata*. He repeatedly describes the mathêmata that make up the future philosopher-rulers' education as different from the mathematical *mathêmata* as they are currently practiced. ⁶² And he does so by indicating that the current practitioners of these mathêmata inappropriately use sense perception and fail to ascend to the unhypothetical archê. The mathematical *mathêmata* as they are currently practiced should be located in L3 of the Line, not the correctly practiced *mathêmata* that compose the early stages of the education of the future philosopher-rulers.⁶³

^{62.} See 7.523A1-3, 7.527A1-B1, 7.528B5-C7, 7.529A6-7, 7.530E5-531C4, 7.537E1-2. The only propaideutic mathêma Plato does not explicitly distinguish from the corresponding mathêma as it is currently practiced is stereometry. But in the context of the drama of the Republic, this mathêma has yet to be practiced at all. Notice that the last passage (7.537E1-2) even distinguishes dialectic (now understood as a discipline distinct from arithmetic and the like, not as a method; see note 16, this chapter) as it is currently practiced from dialectic as it ought to be practiced.

^{63.} For a longer defense of this general point, see Benson (2012b). According to the orthodox view, dianoetic (i.e., the method described in L3) is identical to the mathematical method. See, for example, Adam (1907, esp. 159-60), Joseph (1948, esp. 48-49), Cherniss (1951, esp. 415–16), Robinson (1953, esp. 155–57), Rose (1963–64, esp. 434–35), Cross and Woozley (1964, esp. 205–206), Sayre (1969, 4n3, 40–44), Santas (1980, esp. 252–53, 255), Annas (1981, esp. 282), Malcolm (1981, esp. 66), Scolnicov (1988, esp. 92–96), Mueller (1992, esp. 184-85), N. Smith (1996, esp. 33), C. Reeve (2003, esp. 41-42), Bailey (2006, esp. 101), Miller (2007, esp. 319), and Denyer (2007, esp. 303). But this is to ignore the distinction between the correct and incorrect practice of this method that Plato is at pains to draw throughout his description of the education of the philosopher-rulers in *Republic* 7 and in the Line. Myles Burnyeat (1987, 2000) has forcefully defended a reading of the Line and dialectic which accepts the orthodox view that dianoetic is identical to the mathematical method (correctly practiced), but maintains that dianoetic/mathematics shares the same method as dialectic. Consequently, Burnyeat argues the distinction between dianoetic and dialectic lies in their subject matter (not in their method as the orthodox view would have it, or in their incorrect and correct application of the same method as I would have it). Dialectic, on Burnyear's view, engages in an ontological inquiry not pursued by dianoetic/mathematics. But both dialectic and dianoetic/mathematics employ the same method.

Against this, Plato's use of dianoia at 7.533D6 might be thought to require locating the propaideutic *mathêmata* in L3. In naming the propaideutic *mathê*mata dianoiai, rather than epistêmai, isn't Plato explicitly locating these mathêmata in L3? Plato's general resistance to a technical vocabulary, 64 underscored by the concluding sentence of 7.533D4-9, tells against a positive answer to this question. Fifteen of the twenty uses of *dianoia* and its cognates in Books 6 and 7 are clearly not instances of the technical sense proposed at 6.511D8.65 Moreover, we have already seen the need for the name of a cognitive state corresponding to a soul employing the method of hypothesis correctly, not taking the hypotheses to be known, clear to all, and not in need of a logos, when they are unknown, not clear to all, and in need of a *logos*. The state of such a soul is dreamlike—at best a partial grasp of being and truth—just like the dreamlike state of the soul that has employed the method of hypothesis incorrectly and takes itself to have arrived at the end of its journey when it has not. Nevertheless, the former soul is making progress while the latter is stuck in a barbaric bog. Consequently, Plato is inclined—given his indifference to technical vocabulary—to call the states of both souls dianoia. As we have seen, however, at 7.527B8-10, Plato distinguished the former cognitive state from the latter with the distinguishing adjective "philosophical." It may be this earlier passage that Plato has in mind at 7.533D6-7.66

^{64.} See Shorey (1965, 516), who cites numerous examples, among which see, especially, *Charmides* 163E1–2, *Euthydemus* 285A3–6, *Theaetetus* 199A4–5, *Sophist* 220D4, *Politicus* 259C1–4, 261E5–7, and *Laws* 633A7–9, 644A6, and 864A8-B1. See also Cornford (1965, 62), especially, concerning *dianoia*.

^{65.} Dianoia and its cognates are used in the sense of thinking or thought aimed at truth or being, often as opposed to perceiving or perception at Republic 6.486A8, 486D10, 500C1, 503C3, 508E3, 510D6-7, 511A2, 511C7, 7.526A6, and 529D4. Διανοήματα appears interchangeable with doxai at 6.496A6 and dianoiai is used on a par with technai and epistêmai at 6.522C2. At 6.511D3 and D5, it is Glaucon who proposes to call the cognitive state associated with L3 intermediate between doxa and nous dianoia.

^{66.} Of course, the doublet passage which follows is often taken as indicating that Plato must be referring back to 6.511D6–E4 and the technical sense of *dianoia* there stipulated. But there are anomalies in this doublet passage. The Book 7 passage gives names of the cognitive states corresponding to La and Lb, which are not found in the Book 6 passage, although Plato's does variously name La and Lb as ὁρατόν/νοητόν (6.509D4, 7.524C13) and τὸ δοξαστόν/τὸ γνωστόν (6.510A9), which suggests a correlation of La with *doxa* and Lb with *noêsis*. In addition, the Book 6 passage associates *noêsis* with L4, while the Book 7 passage associates *epistêmê* with L4. Moreover, no where previously had Plato placed *dianoia* between *doxa* and *epistêmê*. In the Book 6 passage, *dianoia* is located between *pistis* and *noêsis*, and in the Book 7 passage it is located between *pistis* and *epistêmê*. Perhaps the closest Plato comes to what he writes here at 7.533D4–6 is 6.511D4–5, where Glaucon is made to locate *dianoia* between *doxa* and *nous*. Perhaps Plato is referring back to this passage at 7.533D6–7. But Glaucon's use of *dianoia* at 6.511D4–5 precedes the technical sense introduced at 6.511D6–E4. Finally, Glaucon's response to 7.533D4–9 is "hopelessly corrupt" (Shorey 1956, 205ne) and may support taking the 7.533E3–534A8 doublet passage to be a later addition. See Schofield (2007, 217n5) and Robinson (1953, 193–94).

In any case, while Plato is clearly recalling the Line image at 7.533B-534A, we should resist taking Plato to be locating the propaideutic *mathêmata*, composing the first twenty years of the future philosopher-rulers' education, in L3 of the Line. Nothing at 7.533B–534A requires locating the propaideutic *mathêmata* in L3, and Plato's distinction between these *mathêmata* and their current practice tells against it.

Though Plato recalls the first difference between dianoetic and dialectic introduced in the Line at 7.533B-D, the second difference initially goes unmentioned.⁶⁷ But, it is adverted to when Plato returns to the dream metaphor following the doublet passage. Plato describes the acquisition of the knowledge of the Form of the Good as follows:

Unless someone can distinguish in an account the Form of the Good from everything else, can survive all refutation, as if in a battle (διὰ πάντων ἐλέγχων διεξιών), striving to judge things not in accordance with opinion but in accordance with being (μὴ κατὰ δόξαν ἀλλὰ κατ' οὐσίαν προθυμούμενος ἐλέγχειν), and can come through all this with his account still intact, you'll say that he doesn't know the good itself or any other good. And if he gets hold of some image of it, you'll say that it's through opinion, not knowledge, for he is dreaming and asleep throughout his present life, and, before he wakes up here, he will arrive in Hades and go to sleep forever. (Republic 7.534B8-D1)

We should recall that the Line image was explicitly introduced to explain further the similarity between the Sun and the Form of the Good. But, the Form of the Good is never explicitly mentioned in the Line passage. If it is be found anywhere, it must be identified with the unhypothetical archê. 68 Consequently, 7.534B8-D1 indicates that the unhypothetical archê—that is, the Form of the Good—is subject to an account $(\tau \tilde{\varphi} \lambda \delta \gamma \varphi)$. It must be subjected to refutation (ἐλέγχων) and tested (ἐλέγχειν), not according to opinion (κατὰ δόξαν) but according to being (κατ' οὐσίαν). One who fails to treat the unhypothetical archê in this way views it partially as though in a dream. Here, then, Plato provides a more detailed description of what it is to view or grasp the unhypothetical archê—what it is to acquire knowledge of the Form of the Good.

^{67.} At 7.532A5-B2 both differences appear to be referenced, although both are left unexplained.

^{68.} See, for example, Robinson (1953, 139), Baltzly (1996, 164–65n34), and Denyer (2007, 306); pace, for example, Bedu-Addo (1978, 124).

Two features of this description immediately stand out. First, grasping, viewing, or thinking about the unhypothetical *archê* does not guarantee its truth, but requires confirmation by avoiding refutation. To know the Form of the Good, it is not enough simply to ascend to the sight of it and somehow thereby know it. One must be able to successfully respond to all attempts to refute it. One must test it and give a *logos* of it.⁶⁹ Second, the confirmation process and the kind of *logos* referred to here is not the confirmation process consisting of looking for higher hypotheses from which the original hypothesis can be obtained. By hypothesis, no higher hypothesis exists from which the unhypothetical *archê* can be obtained. One has made the ascent all the way to the Form of the Good. Rather, the confirmation process referred to here looks more like the process of testing in some way the *hormêthenta* of the unhypothetical *archê*. That is, the confirmation process referred to looks like the downward path of the confirmation stage ([Ca]).

We have seen from the applications of the method of hypothesis in the argument of the last third of the Meno and the Kallipolis argument of Republic 5-6 that the downward path of the confirmation stage is an elenctic-like test of the consistency of the hormêthenta of the hypothesis. And Socrates' description of the confirmation process of the unhypothetical $\operatorname{arch}\hat{e}$ is explicitly associated with the elenchos. 70 But, Socrates' use of the elenchos in the so-called early elenctic dialogues is essentially a test for consistency of beliefs and *ad hominem*. ⁷¹ Socrates is concerned to test the interlocutor's knowledge of some definition (or hypothesis), not the definition (or hypothesis) itself. Consequently, Socrates tests the consistency of the interlocutor's beliefs. The method of hypothesis, however, is decidedly not ad hominem. That is why it is introduced when it is in the dialogues. As we have seen, Socrates introduces this method in the Meno precisely at the point in the dialogue when the object of inquiry is no longer Meno's knowledge but the nature (and/or teachability) of virtue.⁷² Consequently, the method of hypothesis must test something other than the interlocutors' beliefs for consistency. As we have seen, in the *Phaedo*, Plato advocates testing the consistency of the

^{69.} See C. Reeve's (2001, 221) "elenchus-proof." It is for this reason that one might worry about attributing to Plato the view that grasping the unhypothetical *archê* is incorrigible or intuitively certain. If such a grasp were incorrigible or intuitively certain, it is difficult to understand why it would require further confirmation. For others who reject understanding Plato as appealing to incorrigible or certain intuition, see, for example Annas (1981, 283–84), C. Reeve (1988, 77), and McCabe (2006).

^{70.} See, for example, Kahn (1996, 296).

^{71.} See Benson (2000, chs. 3 & 4; 2011), and note 5, chapter 2.

^{72.} See Benson (2003a) and chapters 3-4, this volume.

hormêthenta of the hypothesis. This is the downward path of the confirmation stage. Moreover, the applications in the *Meno* and the *Republic* suggest that this downward path has an empirical component. In the Meno, the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge could be understood as having inconsistent *hormêthenta* in virtue of the fact that a *hormêthen* of this hypothesis is that there are teachers of virtues, and yet there are, in fact, no teachers of virtues. In the Kallipolis argument, the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide could be understood as having inconsistent *hormêthenta*, as well, in virtue of the *hormêthen* that philosophers are useful and virtuous and yet they are, in fact, useless and vicious. Our examination of the Kallipolis argument indicated, however, that the appearance of inconsistent hormêthenta was insufficient for rejecting the hypothesis. Rather, the hypothesis should be rejected only if the inconsistent hormêthenta were both caused in some way by the salient formal components of the hypothesis. Both the Kallipolis argument and the Meno argument indicated that the hypotheses needed to be tested against the empirical evidence—the phaenomena or the instantiations of the component Forms. They needed to be tested for empirical adequacy. But the Kallipolis argument represented a correct way to carry out this test, while the Meno argument could be seen as representing an incorrect way, at least on one understanding of the Kallipolis argument.

Republic 7.534B8-D1 suggests a similar distinction in the elenctic test required for knowledge of the Form of the Good or the unhypothetical archê. Even the unhypothetical archê must be confirmed via the downward path of the confirmation stage. Given the model of the method of hypothesis we have been developing, this amounts to testing the consistency of the *hormêthenta* of the *archê*. To accomplish this one must examine all of the apparent *hormêthenta*—logical consequences, quasi-logical consequences, phainomena, instantiations of the salient Forms—for consistency. To perform this confirmation procedure correctly, one must test the hormêthenta κατ' οὐσίαν, not κατὰ δόξαν (7.534C2-3).⁷³ To the extent that one fails to be able to do this, one fails to have acquired the robust knowledge one seeks. This is either because the hypothesis turns out to be false as is evidenced by inconsistent genuine hormêthenta⁷⁴ or because one fails to grasp the salient Forms sufficiently in order to be able to distinguish the genuine hormêthenta from the contingent ones and so explain away the apparent inconsistency. To acquire the robust knowledge one seeks one must confirm its adequacy (empirical or otherwise). One must be able to exhibit the consistency of its genuine hormêthenta.

^{73.} See Fine (1990, 112n49).

^{74.} This will, of course, not be the case for the unhypothetical archê.

If this, or something like it, is right, then we have a way of understanding the second difference between dianoetic and dialectic with which we struggled while examining the Line. Both dianoetic and dialectic employ the downward path of the confirmation stage of the method of hypothesis, just as we saw they both employ the upward path of the confirmation stage. They both examine the apparent hormêthenta—logical consequences, quasi-logical consequences, phainomena, instantiations of the salient Forms—of their hypotheses for consistency. They both test something like the empirical adequacy of their hypotheses, even the unhypothetical archê. And so, they both employ images and senseexperience. Dianoetic, however, employs these images and sense-experience incorrectly. It takes what are only contingent or artificial hormêthenta hormêthenta of its hypotheses caused by contingent or artificial features of the world—to be genuine or essential hormêthenta, hormêthenta caused by the component Forms of the hypothesis. Consequently, dianoetic takes an inconsistency among these hormêthenta to suffice for rejecting the hypothesis, when it should not. That is, dianoetic ends up testing its hypotheses κατὰ δόξαν, rather than κατ' οὐσίαν.⁷⁵ For example, in the Meno argument, Socrates took the hormêthenta that there are teachers of virtue and that there are not teachers of virtue to be genuine hormêthenta—that is, hormêthenta caused by the formal components of the hypothesis. As a result, he rejected the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge. But one way to read the 6.487B-502C portion of the Kallipolis argument is that this was a mistake. Only the *hormêthen* that there are teachers of virtue is caused by the hypothesis. The other *hormêthen* (or instantiation) was caused by various contingent and artificial features of fifth-century Athens. On this reading, the Meno argument tested its hypothesis κατὰ δόξαν, rather than κατ' οὐσίαν, and is an instance of dianoetic.

Dialectic, on the other hand, does not mistake the artificial and contingent *hormêthenta* of its hypotheses for genuine or essential *hormêthenta*. It tests for the consistency of those *hormêthenta* which are in fact caused by the component Forms of the hypothesis. It succeeds in testing its hypotheses $\kappa\alpha\tau'$ oὐσίαν. This is what Plato has in mind when he describes dialectic as not "making use

^{75.} Jerry Santas has suggested to me in correspondence that no mathematician worth her salt would make this kind of mistake, would test her hypotheses κατὰ δόξαν, rather than κατ' οὐσίαν, and so the practitioners of geometry and the like referred to at 6.510C2–3 should not be thought to make this mistake. Burnyeat (1987, 219n18) also doubts that there are targets for Plato's critique. But, that such a mistake (even in mathematics) is not always simpleminded and easy to avoid is suggested by the "64=65 Geometry Paradox" (http://brainden.com/forum/index.php/topic/139-64-65-geometry-paradox/), which might be taken as providing conflicting *horméthenta* of the commutative principle. I owe this example to Jon Kvanvig.

of anything visible at all, but only of Forms themselves, moving on from Forms to Forms, and ending in Forms" (6.511C1-2). Consequently, inconsistencies among these genuine hormêthenta do suffice for rejecting the hypothesis, ⁷⁶ while the ability to explain how apparently contrary evidence (the artificial hormêthen which is at odds with the essential hormêthen) is not a genuine hormêthen of the hypothesis provides evidence of success in identifying genuine *hormêthenta*. Dialectic shows that an apparently inconsistent hormêthen is not caused by the component Forms of the hypothesis, but by various contingent or artificial features of the sensible world. Thus, Socrates explained how the apparently troubling hormêthen of the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide that philosopher-rulers are useless and vicious was not caused by the nature of philosophy but by the failure of the citizens of fifth-century Greek city-states to use them and the corrupting influence of fifth-century Greek education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we began this chapter wondering whether the answer to the question how Plato recommends robust knowledge is to be acquired had a more obvious answer than the one we had been struggling to uncover in the previous chapters. Dialectic as described in the Republic is the answer to Clitophon's challenge. It is the method for acquiring robust knowledge. Nevertheless, the nature of this method as described in the Republic was no less vague, obscure, and uncontroversial than was the nature of the method of hypothesis described in the Meno and the Phaedo. Consequently, we turned to an examination of the relevant passages in the Republic.77

In the Line image, Plato seemed primarily concerned to represent the method or procedure of the soul for acquiring knowledge of the Form of the Good, which Plato had described by analogy to the sun in the previous image. While Plato did not explicitly identify his preferred method in the Line image with dialectic, 78 he did describe it as the method by which the soul achieves knowledge (noêsis or epistêmê). Plato described his preferred method primarily by distinguishing it from an inferior method with which it might be confused and with which the

^{76.} Perhaps, see the applications of the method of hypothesis found in the *Parmenides*.

^{77.} See note 11, this chapter. I here happily admit to at best a preliminary discussion of dialectic in the Republic and the dialogues composed around the same time or thereafter, e.g., Symposium, Phaedrus, Theaetetus, Parmenides, Sophist, Politicus, and Philebus. There remains much work to be done. See pp. 268-269 below.

^{78.} Though, see τῆ τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι δυνάμει at 6.511B3 and 7.533C8-D4.

soul achieves *dianoia*. We called the inferior method dianoetic. When we looked at the distinction between Plato's preferred method (dialectic) and the inferior method (dianoetic), we noticed two things.

First, both methods were described as proceeding from hypotheses ($i\xi$ $i\pi o\theta i \sigma \epsilon \omega v/i\xi$ $i\pi o\theta i \sigma \epsilon \omega s$). Our conservative methodology—a methodology which fosters methodological unity over methodological diversity—permitted taking both dialectic and dianoetic as instances of the method of hypothesis introduced in the *Meno*, short of evidence to the contrary. Consequently, we took both methods to share the following general thin structure. When one seeks to acquire knowledge of some important question, whether virtue is teachable, what is the *aitia* of generation and destruction, whether Kallipolis is possible (Q1), one proceeds in two stages. First, the proof stage:

- [Pa] Identify a second question (Q2), from whose most compelling answer (the hypothesis (H1)) the answer (A1) to Q1 can be obtained.
- [Pb] Show how A1 is obtained from H1; sometimes this will be immediate and trivial, sometimes not.

Second, the confirmation stage:

- [Ca] Test the things that start from (*hormêthenta*) H1 for agreement or disagreement with each other.
- [Cb] Identify a second reduced question (Q3) from whose most compelling answer (a higher hypothesis (H2)) H1 can be obtained, show how H1 can be obtained from H2, and continue this process until one reaches something adequate.

Second, the two features by which the dianoetic and dialectic methods were distinguished paralleled differences in the way in which the two parts of the confirmation stage of the method of hypothesis were carried out. According to the first difference, dianoetic took the hypotheses identified in the upward path of the confirmation stage, [Cb], to be *archai*, known, and clear to all when they were not. Dialectic did not. According to the second difference, which required looking at Plato's account of dialectic in Book 7, dianoetic took contrary empirical evidence identified in the downward path of the confirmation stage, [Ca], to be a genuine *horméthen* of the hypothesis when it was not. Dialectic did not. Thus, not only did Plato's use of $\xi \xi \sin \theta \sin \psi \sin \theta \sin \psi$ permit taking dialectic as the method of hypothesis, but Plato's discussion of the difference between dianoetic and dialectic supported taking dialectic as the method of hypothesis. Dianoetic was represented in *Republic* 6 and 7 as an

incorrect version of the method of hypothesis and dialectic was represented as a correct version of the method.

Thus, our examination of dialectic as described in *Republic* 6 and 7 confirms our understanding of Plato's response to Clitophon's challenge. If one wants to acquire on one's own the robust knowledge Socrates has so successfully encouraged us to seek, both by extolling its value and by exhibiting our ignorance, one should employ the method of hypothesis *correctly*. This last bit—that there is a correct and incorrect way of employing the method of hypothesis—is the focus of Plato's discussion in *Republic* 6 and 7 and enables us to further thicken its structure. Indeed, together with the results of our examination of the applications of the method of hypothesis in the Meno, the Phaedo, and Republic 5 and 6, we can now return to some of the questions left unanswered at the end of chapter 5. Recall that the thin structure uncovered in Plato's descriptions of the method at Meno 86E6-87B2 and Phaedo 100A3-8 and 101D1-E3 left a number of questions open, among which we listed the following:

- 1. What is the nature of the relationship between the answers to the reduced questions and the answers to the original questions? (That is, what is the nature of the relationship between the hypothesis and the item whose knowledge one seeks?)
- 2. What is the relationship between the method of *de novo* learning that Plato is recommending and the mathematical method of Plato's time?
- 3. What are the *hormêthenta* and in what sense do they need to "agree" or "disagree" with each other?
- 4. How long does the progressive procedure in the second (upward path of the confirmation) stage ([Cb]) need to continue? (That is, what is it to reach something adequate?)

Let us take these questions in inverse order.

The Line image offers a fairly straightforward answer to the question how long the progressive procedure found in the upward path of the confirmation stage needs to continue. Knowledge has not been acquired until one reaches the unhypothetical archê of everything—the Form of the Good. Unfortunately, the nature of the Form of the Good goes under-described. We learn that it is neither pleasure nor knowledge (6.505B5-D10), and that knowledge of it is necessary for knowledge of any other good thing (6.506A6-7). Indeed, the Sun image indicates that it is necessary for the being and knowledge of anything else (6.508D10-E5). But Plato does not explain how one recognizes when one has reached it. Plato's discussion of the dianoeticians indicates that one can mistake what is really a hypothesis as an/the (unhypothetical) archê and 7.534B–D maintains that even when one ascends to the sight of the unhypothetical archê, one must confirm it by means of elenctic-like tests. These tests, however, cannot guarantee that one has reached the unhypothetical archê. 79 Nevertheless, Republic 6 and 7 does answer the question how long this progressive process must continue. According to Plato, until one has reached the unhypothetical archê or the Form of the Good and has tested it against *all* contrary evidence, successfully explaining away all of the apparently contrary evidence, one has yet to acquire the knowledge of the answer to the question one set out to answer. One has failed to acquire the robust knowledge one seeks. In the meantime, Plato allows that earlier stopping points are permitted, given various contextual constraints. We have seen Socrates depicted as stopping the upward path of the confirmation stage prior to reaching the unhypothetical archê in at least three places: Meno 87D2-4, Phaedo100B5-C2, and Republic 5.474C5-6.80 In each case, Socrates concludes the upward path with some hypothesis adequate (hikanon) for the context. What distinguishes Socrates' practice in these contexts from the dianoeticians is Socrates' explicit recognition that he has yet to acquire the knowledge he sought. Socrates does not mistake what are in fact hypotheses for archai. Socrates recognizes, as we might put it, that his results are preliminary.81

Our examination of the applications of the method of hypothesis in the *Meno* and the *Republic* also helps to thicken our account of the downward path of the confirmation stage by providing examples of *hormêthenta* of specific hypotheses and instances of their agreeing or disagreeing with each other. We have seen that examining the agreement or disagreement of the *hormêthenta* of one's hypothesis amounts to something like testing the empirical or predicative adequacy of the hypothesis. The hypothesis that virtue is teachable has the *hormêthen* that there are teachers of virtue but in fact there are no such teachers of virtue in 4th and 5th century Greece and the hypothesis that philosophers

^{79.} On the one hand, the example from the *Meno* indicates that one can take empirical facts to rule out a hypothesis (and presumably even the unhypothetical *archê*) when one should not. One might, that is, entertain the unhypothetical *archê* without fully grasping it and so fail to be able to explain away apparently contrary empirical evidence. On the other hand, one can presumably fail to uncover contrary evidence when one should. As Plato puts at 7.534C1–2, one must "survive *all elenchoi*."

^{80.} See also the propaideutic mathematicians at 7.522B7–531D5. One might devote one's life to geometery (correctly practiced), for example, and not move on to stereometry, astronomy, harmonics, and dialectic, and as a result stop one's upward path at the hypothetical axioms, definitions, and postulates of geometry. What distinguishes these geometers from the dianoetic ones is the explicit recognition that the former have yet to acquire knowledge of geometry. The dianoetic geometers mistakenly take themselves to know. (For the image of mathematicians handing over their results to dialecticians, see *Euthydemus* 290B7–C7.)

^{81.} See Republic 6.504C1-4.

and rulers coincide has the *hormêthen* that philosophers are useful and virtuous, but in fact they are not in fourth- and fifth-century Greece. The discussion of dialectic in the Republic 6 and 7 adds to this not only that this downward confirmation path must be applied even to the unhypothetical archê but also that it can be applied correctly or incorrectly. Not every piece of contrary evidence is sufficient for rejecting the hypothesis, or as Plato might put it, not every apparent hormêthen of the hypothesis is a genuine hormêthen of the hypothesis. Thus, Plato recommends examining the hormêthenta of the hypothesis (which includes a broad range of phainomena), determining which of those hormêthenta are genuine hormêthenta of the hypothesis (those hormêthenta which in some way are caused by the component Forms of the hypothesis), and determining the consistency or inconsistency of those genuine hormêthenta. Or, as Plato puts it at 7.534B-D, one needs to test the hypothesis κατ' οὐσίαν, not κατὰ δόξαν. How we are to recognize this distinction between genuine and artificial hormêthenta, however, Plato again leaves unexplained in these passages.

Next, the re-emergence of mathematics in Republic 6 and 7 helps to address the question of the relationship between Plato's recommended method of de novo learning and the mathematical method. Back at Meno 86E6-87B2 we saw Plato introduce his method of hypothesis (or, as he put it, "examining... from a hypothesis" (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως; 86Ε3) by appealing to the way geometers often examine a question (86E4-5) and then offering an obscure geometrical example. But geometry and mathematics in general disappear thereafter until their reemergence with a vengeance in the Line image in Book 6 and the description the philosopher-rulers' education in Book 7.82 These books suggest that the relationship between the mathematical method and Plato's recommended method for de novo learning—indeed, the method to be learned by future philosopher-rulers is subtle. On the one hand, it is the same method as, or perhaps better, shares the same general structure with (perhaps, even originated from) the method practiced by the geometers and the like. That is, just as the mathematical method consists of two stages—a proof stage and a confirmation stage, each consisting of an upward and downward path—so does Plato's recommended method of de novo learning, the method of hypothesis, or dialectic. But we should not identify the way in which contemporary mathematicians (or at least most them) apply this structure in particular cases with the correct application of this method. Plato does not appear to find specific fault with the way contemporary mathematicians apply the first stage of the method of hypothesis, but he does indicate that

^{82.} γεωμετρία and its cognates, for example, occur in the Republic only once prior to the Line image at 5.458D5 where it is used to distinguish between geometric necessity and the erotic necessity which drives individuals to have sex with one another.

they (or at least most of them) mistakenly apply the confirmation stage—either by mistaking a hypothesis for an *archê* or by mistaking an artificial *hormêthen* for a genuine one. As a result, the future philosopher-rulers must be immersed in the correct practice of this method for a period of ten years, so that when they seek to apply the same method to questions such as whether virtue is teachable or what the nature is of the Good they will not make those mistakes.

Finally, the first question concerning the nature of the relationship between the hypotheses and the answers to the original questions with which the hypotheses were introduced to help remains fairly obscure. The Meno and Republic applications suggested that the relationship between the first hypothesis and the answer to the original question was some sort of equivalence. But in the *Phaedo* application, the first hypothesis (the Form hypothesis) appeared compatible with both the answer that Plato uses in his argument for the immortality of the soul (the aitia thesis) and the answer Plato hoped to find in Anaxagoras. In addition, even the relationship between the Form hypothesis and the aitia thesis was under-determined, depending on how much was built into the nature of Forms. Similarly, Plato's use of "agreement" and "disagreement" to describe the relationship between the hypothesis and the answer to the original question, as well as the relationship between higher hypotheses and lower hypotheses, indicated that considerations of saliency, context, subsidiary hypotheses, and perhaps even likelihood may be appropriate. Plato's discussion of dialectic in *Republic* 6 and 7 has not helped to clarify these issues. If anything, Plato's evident commitment to a distinction in the kinds of hormêthenta, genuine or apparent, which must be tested for agreement or disagreement in the downward path of the confirmation stage has further muddied the waters.

Indeed, as the answer to this last question makes clear, considerable work remains to be done. While we have thickened the thinly described method of hypothesis found at *Meno* 86E6–87B2 and *Phaedo* 100A3–8 and 101D1–E3 into a strategy of knowledge acquisition that looks serviceable (perhaps even familiar), a number of features remain under-described. It leaves under-described the precise nature of the relationships among the questions and answers involved, even to the extent of leaving under-described the precise nature of the *relata* of those relationships.⁸³ It leaves under-described the nature of the distinction

^{83.} See note 19, chapter 5. A fuller account of the issues involved may be pursued in the *Sophist, Categories*, and *De Interpretatione. Parmenides* 137C–166C was once thought to pursue the general issues concerning the relations among propositions (if that is what the *relata* are), but more recently it has rightly been seen as directed at an examination of (some version of) the theory of Forms. See note 84, this chapter. Perhaps the most obvious place in which these issues are pursued is *Prior Analytics* and *Posterior Analytics* 1.

between genuine and artificial *hormêthenta* and the corresponding distinction between genuine and artificial causes (aitia) which underwrites the appropriate role for the empirical phainomena.84 It leaves under-described the nature of the unhypothetical archê whose recognition underwrites the success of the method, and it leaves under-described how one is to recognize when success has been achieved. 85 And, it leaves under-described the manner by which serviceable hypotheses are to be obtained.86

85. The nature of such an archê is further pursued, for example, at Symposium 209E5-212A7, and Metaphysics 1, 3, and 4. See, especially, Baltzly (1996, 1999), Sheffield (2001, 2006), and Bailey (2006).

86. This may be the role of Plato's method of collection and division described and applied in the Phaedrus, Sophist, Politicus, and Philebus. It has often been thought that collection and division introduced in these dialogues marks the abandonment of the method Plato recommends in the so-called middle dialogues, like the Meno, Phaedo, and Republic. See, for example, Stenzel (1973, 149-52), Robinson (1953, 280), and Kahn (1996, 298-99). One major difficulty for this view is that is requires a relatively late compositional date for the *Phaedrus* in which the method is evidently described (see 265C9-266C1, 273D8-E4, and 277B5-9). Rather than seeing collection and division as a new and distinct method pursued in the late dialogues, I read it as an amplification of the dialectical method we have been examining. As such it might be seen as a method for identifying the typically definitional hypotheses needed to pursue a correct application of the method of hypothesis. Of course, as stated this amounts to little more than speculation and requires a careful defense not offered here. (For the beginnings of a defense of an early version of this speculation, see Benson 2010a.) Unfortunately, the nature of the method of collection and division is no less obscure and controversial than the nature of the method of hypothesis and so requires a prolonged investigation. See also Posterior Analytics 2.

^{84.} The various places in the works of Plato and Aristotle in which they examine the nature of aitia are obvious places to pursue this issue. In addition, Plato's distinction between goods welcomed for their own sake (αύτοῦ χάριν) and those welcomed for their consequences (τῶν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ γιγνομένων) introduced at the beginning of Republic 2 also has important affinities to this issue. Finally, Parmenides 137C-166C requires further study. Indeed, a glaring absence in the account of the method of hypothesis I have offered here is the Parmenides. I have limited my account of the method to the Meno, Phaedo, and Republic primarily out of considerations of space. But I maintain nothing in the Parmenides tells against the account I have offered, although it does further thicken the account. A major innovation in the Parmenides is the requirement at 135E8-136A3 to examine/confirm both the hypothesis and the negation of the hypothesis. Nothing like this is found in the descriptions or applications of the method of hypothesis in the Meno, Phaedo, or Republic. This may be a reaction to the recognition that neither the upward nor downward paths of the confirmation stage suffice to guarantee the truth of the hypothesis or of the unhypothetical archê. Plato may be recommending an additional procedure in the confirmation stage. As I read the Parmenides, the second half of the dialogue (137C-166C) displays a detailed application of the downward path of the confirmation stage, but the controversies involved in this portion of the dialogue are so difficult that any attempt to include an investigation of this application in our current study would be absurd. For excellent, but widely diverging studies of this text. see Cornford (n.d.), Robinson (1953, ch. 13), Miller (1986), Meinwald (1991), Sayre (1996), Gill and Ryan (1996), Allen (1997), Peterson (2000, 2003), and Rickless (2007).

Nevertheless, after persuading us of our ignorance of the knowledge which we should value above everything else, and exhorting us to acquire this robust knowledge, Plato has not, in fact, left us hanging. He has proposed a repeatable and intentional, though not algorithmic nor indefeasible, strategy for acquiring this knowledge on our own. He has proposed a method of *de novo* learning. It is a method with a formal structure based on the most successful science of his day, but one which goes beyond its contemporary practice. It recommends testing its results against roughly empirical *phainomena*, and it proposes an endgame—the unhypothetical *archê*, although it neither guarantees success nor minimizes partial achievements.

Consequently, Plato's philosophical method or method of *de novo* learning remains vague, under-described, and incomplete. But that the Platonic dialogues contain the beginning of a response to Clitophon's challenge concerning how robust knowledge is to be acquired, which goes beyond the simple and perhaps impracticable recommendation to learn it from someone who already knows, to recollect it, to view it, or even to die and view it disembodied, should be clear. It should not surprise us that Plato devoted considerable energy to addressing this concern. That it should remain imprecise, messy, and non-algorithmic should perhaps not surprise us, either. Indeed, the history of accounts of philosophical method might indicate that it is yet another indication of Plato's genius.

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