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## SENSE-EXPERIENCE AND RECOLLECTION IN PLATO'S *MENO*

Perhaps the most striking feature of the slave-boy experiment (82B–85C), the purpose of which is to demonstrate the truth of the theory of recollection,<sup>1</sup> is the manner in which Socrates makes conspicuous use of sensible diagrams without telling us whether we are to think of sense-experience as an important element in the process of recollection or not. Nor, indeed, does he tell us what the objects of recollection are, though he does suggest that “forms”—εἶδη (72C)—or realities—οὐσίαι (72B)—are the objects of definition. However, in the *Phaedo*, which was probably written not long after the *Meno*,<sup>2</sup> we are explicitly told that the objects of recollection are the separately existing Forms; and there the importance of sense-experience in the process of recollection is duly stressed. For these reasons some scholars have maintained that at the time of writing the *Meno*, Plato had not formulated his metaphysical theory of Forms. As Norman Gulley<sup>3</sup> puts it:

There is . . . no explicit association between recollection and “forms,” and no evidence in the dialogue that Plato had given any consideration to the question of the metaphysical status of “forms” as contrasted with particulars.

On the other hand, Malcolm Brown,<sup>4</sup> who rightly draws attention

<sup>1</sup> For the view that what is envisaged in the *Meno* is the recollection of things learned in previous incarnations, see Klara Buchmann, *Die Stellung des Menon in der platonischen Philosophie* (Leipzig 1936) 60, note 142, 65, 70; and Charles Mugler, *Platon et la recherche mathématique de son époque* (Strasbourg 1948) 302–3, 368, 370, 373. Against this view see esp. H. Cherniss, *AJP* 58 (1937) 498, and *Rev. of Metaphysics* 4 (1951) 421; N. Gulley, “Plato’s Theory of Recollection,” *CQ* n.s. iv (1954) 196–97, referred to hereafter as Gulley (1), *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge* (London 1962) 17–18, referred to hereafter as Gulley (2); and R. S. Bluck, *Plato’s Meno* (Cambridge 1964) 9–10.

<sup>2</sup> See R. S. Bluck (note 1 above) 108–20.

<sup>3</sup> Gulley (2), 19. Cf. also R. E. Allen, “Anamnesis in Plato’s *Meno* and *Phaedo*,” *Rev. of Metaphysics* 13 (1959) 174, where he says, “. . . in the *Phaedo*, Anamnesis solves epistemological problems generated by a χωρισμός between Forms and particulars which Plato, when he wrote the *Meno* was perhaps groping for, but had not yet clearly formulated.”

<sup>4</sup> Malcolm S. Brown, “Plato Disapproves of the Slave-boy’s Answer,” *Rev. of Metaphysics* 21 (1967) esp. 57–77. I do not, however, think he is right in maintaining that

to the precise parallelism between Socrates' dialogue with the slave and his dialogue with Meno, has argued that since Socrates says at the beginning of the dialogue that *ti esti* questions must be settled before the consideration of *poion* questions, the emphasis on sensible diagrams in the second part of the experiment (i.e., after the interruption occasioned by the *aporia* of the boy), which contains a preponderance of *poion* questions, indicates that Plato means us to see that Socrates is conducting the enquiry improperly.<sup>5</sup>

I think that both of these views on Socrates' conspicuous use of sensible diagrams in the slave-boy experiment derive from failure to appreciate that Plato's way of writing philosophy is essentially maieutic. Unlike Aristotle, Plato does not set out to state his views plainly and systematically, believing that knowledge is not something that can be handed over from one person to another and that the proper method of teaching and writing philosophy is to offer the reader hints and reminders. Thus, he is not always as explicit as we would like him to be, and a good deal of elaborate artistry goes into the writing of his dialogues.<sup>6</sup> In this paper, I propose to show that Plato was consciously aware of the importance of sense-experience in the process of recollec-

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the slave-boy experiment "is a model of the dialogue as a whole" (p. 65). As I shall argue, it is a model of Socrates' dialogue with Meno, but only up to the end of the argument "from a hypothesis," i.e. 89C, at which stage Meno attains true opinion about virtue namely "virtue is knowledge," corresponding with the true opinion attained by his slave at the end of the experiment. See note 21 below.

<sup>5</sup> Brown (note 4 above) 63. As he says: "Plato presents Expt. II [i.e., the second part of the experiment] critically, as a sophistic counterfeit of geometry, a kind of ocular geometry." He also suggests that at 84D what Socrates and the boy ought to be talking about is "the square itself": "It is the ἡμῖν which is noteworthy. It introduces a relativizing suggestion, to the effect that it makes some difference whether the square in question is sensibly present to the men working out the argument. Such a consideration is foreign to the mathematical argument as such; 'the square itself' is what is being argued about, not this or that square 'present to us'" (p. 66).

<sup>6</sup> It is in the *Theaetetus* that Plato makes Socrates liken his technique of cross-examination to the art of a midwife (148E–151D). For the view that this maieutic art or Socratic midwifery is based on the belief in the theory of recollection, see my unpublished PhD. thesis, "Plato's Theory of Knowledge: A New Interpretation of the *Theaetetus*," submitted to the University of London in January 1969, pp. 387–91. On Plato's conception of the nature of philosophical writing, see *Phaedrus* 276C–D and *Epistle* VII, 344C; and cf. my articles "A Theory of Mental Development: Plato's *Republic* V–VII," Pts. I & II, *Platon* 28 (1976) 288–300 and 29 (1977) 212–24, and "On the Alleged Abandonment of the Good in the *Phaedo*," *Apeiron* 13 (1979) 104–14. Hereafter I shall refer to these articles as BA(1) and BA(2), respectively.

tion, and that at the time of writing the *Meno*, he had already formulated his metaphysical theory of Forms. I shall argue (1) that Plato thinks of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) as being essentially *knowledge by acquaintance*, in Russell's sense,<sup>7</sup> with *non-sensible realities*; (2) that he means that though one cannot know *what a thing is like* (ποῖόν τι) who does not know *what it is* (τί ἐστι), the actual process of recollecting what a thing is begins with the "stirring up" of *innate* true opinions about what it is like (ποῖόν τι); (3) that the summary of the *Meno* theory of recollection at *Phaedo* 73A–B indicates that Plato was aware of the importance of sensible diagrams in the slave-boy experiment; and finally (4) that Plato's choice of the problem of doubling the square rather than that of quadrupling it suggests that his conception of the nature of knowledge in the *Meno* is substantially the same as that stated in the middle dialogues.

## I

When Meno asks Socrates at the beginning of the dialogue whether virtue (ἀρετή) can be taught or is acquired by practice or is present by nature, Socrates protests that he does not know what virtue is and hence cannot know whether it is teachable or not. He explains that in general if one does not know what a thing is (τί ἐστι) one cannot know what it is like (ὅποῖον) (71B):

ὁ δὲ μὴ οἶδα τί ἐστι, πῶς ἂν ὁποῖόν γέ τι εἰδείην;

Thus if, for example, one does not know (γινώσκει) Meno at all, one cannot know (εἰδέναι) what sort of person he is (71B):

ἢ δοκεῖ σοι οἶόν τε εἶναι, ὅστις Μένονα μὴ γινώσκει τὸ παράπαν ὅστις ἐστί, τοῦτον εἰδέναι εἴτε κάλος εἴτε πλούσιος εἴτε καὶ γενναῖός ἐστιν, εἴτε καὶ τάναντία τούτων;

There are two main problems connected with the interpretation of this passage: (i) Does Plato mean to suggest that if one does not know Meno in the sense of being acquainted with him (γινώσκειν) *one cannot say*

<sup>7</sup> In his "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description," reprinted in his *Mysticism and Logic* (New York 1929) 220–21, Bertrand Russell says: "Whenever a relation of judging or supposing occurs, the terms to which the supposing or judging mind is related by the relation of supposing or judging must be terms with which the mind in question is acquainted."

truly what sort of person he is? (ii) Are we meant to see in this example that "knowing Meno" is a typical instance of knowledge in this dialogue?

(i) Admittedly this assertion of the impossibility of knowing what a thing is like (ποιόν τι) without knowing what it is (τί ἐστι) sounds rather paradoxical, and some scholars have suggested that what Socrates is saying here is that if one does not know (γινώσκει) Meno one cannot say what sort of person he is.<sup>8</sup> But surely, if Plato had wanted to say something of this sort, he could have written . . . οἶόν τε εἶναι, ὅστις Μένονα μὴ γινώσκει . . . τοῦτον λέγειν (or εἶπειν) . . . ; rather, in both places he uses the verb *to know*—γινώσκειν, εἰδέναι. It is, of course, quite possible for one who does not know (γινώσκει) Meno to say quite truly what sort of person Meno is from hearsay, but it would seem that to Plato this is only an opinion which, however true it may be, does not constitute knowledge (εἰδέναι). And this is precisely how he distinguishes between knowledge and true opinion of the road to Larisa (97A ff.).

Indeed, the fact that throughout the dialogue Plato is operating with a conception of knowledge which distinguishes it sharply from true opinion<sup>9</sup> makes it rather unlikely that he means to suggest that if one does not know Meno<sup>10</sup> one cannot say, or entertain a true opinion about, what sort of person he is. Thus, the boy who at the end of the geometry lesson is said not to know the answer to the problem of

<sup>8</sup> Thus I. M. Crombie, commenting on this paradox, says: "It is defended in this place by an unfortunate, not to say sophistical, analogy—namely that *I cannot say* what sort of person Meno is if I do not know who he is." (*An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* [London 1963] vol. 2, 532). The emphasis is mine. Cf. also R. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* (Oxford 1953) 51–2, where apparently ignoring the possibility of having "true opinions" about matters of which one has no knowledge, he observes: "A twentieth century philosopher would reply that it is a matter of experience that we can and do make useful statements about X without being able to say what X is in the way Socrates desires; and therefore the above argument must conceal some false premise or fallacious inference."

<sup>9</sup> As he makes Socrates say: "That there is a difference between correct opinion [ὀρθὴ δόξα] and knowledge [ἐπιστήμη] is not at all a conjecture with me, but something I would particularly assert that I knew. There are not many things of which I would say that, but this one, at any rate, I will include among those that I know" (98B).

<sup>10</sup> It is perhaps necessary to point out here that there is a sense in which one may know who Mr. X is without really knowing him. If I can identify or recognize him, I know him in the first sense. To know him in the second sense, I need to have considerable insight into his character. It seems unnecessary to suppose that Plato was unaware of this distinction, for he must have known that he knew Socrates whereas many a man in Athens who could recognize him did not really know him.

doubling the square whose side is 2 feet can say, or entertain a true opinion about, what sort of line is the required length (85B). Significantly, Socrates explains here that one can have true opinions about matters of which one has no knowledge, when he observes (85B):

Do you see then that he who does not have knowledge has true opinions about the things of which he has no knowledge?<sup>11</sup>

(ii) As we have seen, in his statement of the paradox, Plato uses the verb γινώσκειν for knowing Meno, whereas he uses εἰδέναι for knowing facts about Meno. Γινώσκειν is regularly used, like the French *connaître*, in the sense of knowing *objects*, and εἰδέναι may also be used in this sense (as in the previous statement of the paradox; ὁ δὲ μὴ οἶδα τί ἐστίν, πῶς ἂν ὁποῖόν γέ τι εἰδείην;), but it is regularly used, like the French *savoir*, in the sense of knowing *that something is the case*. I submit that in this statement of the paradox Plato uses γινώσκειν and εἰδέναι the way he does advisedly. He wants to convey the idea that any claim to knowledge that something is the case must involve acquaintance with the object about which the claim is made.<sup>12</sup> In some languages it is a misuse of the verb *to know* (in everyday speech) to assert that you know *that* X is, for example, handsome or rich when you are not acquainted with X.<sup>13</sup> It is significant that Meno admits that it is not

<sup>11</sup> This passage makes it clear that when Socrates says that if one does not know X, one cannot know what sort of thing X is, he is conscious of the fact that he is enunciating a paradox which requires for its resolution a clear distinction between knowledge and true opinion.

<sup>12</sup> I cannot understand why R. S. Bluck, who rightly says that “it is interesting that γινώσκειν is used here of ‘knowing Meno,’ whereas εἰδέναι is used of knowing facts about him,” still maintains that we do not have in our present passage “a deliberate distinction between γινώσκειν and εἰδέναι” (note 1 above, p. 213).

<sup>13</sup> In languages with a long history of writing, it seems quite natural to make knowledge claims of things about which one has read but has no personal experience. Presumably, however, this was not always so (see note 14 below). For instance, in Akan, the language of the Akan people of Ghana, it is, strictly speaking, a misuse of the verb to know (*nim* or *nyim*, the root of which is the same as that of the word for “eye” [*eni* or *enyi(wa)*]) to say *me nyim de Meno no ho ye few, oye sikafo*, etc. (I know that Meno is handsome, he is rich, etc.) when one is not acquainted with Meno. The correct thing to say is: *maatse de . . .* (I have heard that . . .) or *me gye dzi de* (I believe that . . .). In much the same way, in Yoruba, the language of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, it is a misuse of the verb to know (*mo*) for one to claim to *mo* something, or *mo* that something is the case when one has no direct experience of that thing. See Barry Hallen and J. O. Sodipo, “An African Epistemology: The Knowledge-Belief Distinction and Yoruba Thought” (paper read at the International Symposium on Philosophy in Africa, February 15, 1981, University of Ibadan, Nigeria) esp. 38 ff.

possible for one who is not acquainted with him (or cannot recognize him) to know (εἰδέναι) whether he is handsome or rich or not; and this would seem to suggest that in everyday Greek the verb εἰδέναι connoted acquaintance with the object about which the knowledge claim was made.<sup>14</sup>

Now, since we are explicitly told in this dialogue that all knowledge is the result of the recollection of things known in a previous *discarnate* existence (81C–D), it is almost certainly a misunderstanding to see in this analogy with “knowing Meno” an instance of what Plato means by knowledge in this dialogue. However, some scholars seem to find this analogy rather disturbing. As R. S. Bluck<sup>15</sup> observes:

This example looks at first sight strange, in view of the fact that according to Aristotle Plato posited Forms precisely because he believed that there could be no knowledge of transient sensibles, but agreed with Socrates that the *universal* is the object of knowledge. . . . Surely there could be no definition of anything that was not an object of knowledge.

Indeed, this analogy is of a piece with “knowledge” of the road to Larisa (97A ff.). In both analogies Plato is making use of the Greek conception of knowledge in everyday speech to illustrate the nature of knowledge that is the result of recollection. Thus, if, as it is generally recognized, Plato, by pointing out a correspondence between the stages in the slave-boy’s progress at recollection and the stages in that of Meno (80A ff. and 84A ff.), makes it clear that the theory of recollection is introduced as a foundation for the Socratic search for definitions, then it is reasonable to suppose that Plato has in mind οὐσία (72B) and εἶδη (72C) as the objects of recollection.

Failure to recognize that the examples of knowing Meno and knowing the road to Larisa, which involve acquaintance with objects, are being used as examples from everyday life to illustrate the nature of knowledge properly so called (i.e., the result of recollection) naturally leads to the view that in the *Meno* Plato is not clear in his mind as regards the objects of knowledge. Thus, after several attempts to explain why the man who is acquainted with the road to Larisa can, within the context of the *Meno*, be said to possess knowledge, especially as we are

<sup>14</sup> The verb to know εἰδέναι is from the verb to see εἶδω (no active present in use). The aorist εἶδον is always used in the sense of “see”; cf. Latin *vidēre* with ἔ(F)ιδον. See also note 13 above.

<sup>15</sup> Bluck (note 1 above) 211.

explicitly told that true opinions can be converted into knowledge “by reasoning out the cause” (αἰτίας λογισμῷ [97E–98A]), Crombie observes:

This catholicity is perhaps a little puzzling, for if the typical instance of knowledge, and of insight into necessity, is given by the understanding of a geometrical theorem, one wonders how it is possible to know the road to Larisa. . . . *But we shall still have to say* that in this dialogue the notion of insight into necessity which is used to characterize knowledge is a very wide notion embracing the understanding of theorems and the understanding of terrain.<sup>16</sup>

However, it would seem that from the distinction drawn at 97A–B between “knowledge” and true opinion of the road to Larisa, to convert one’s true opinion of the road into “knowledge” one only has to walk there; it does not involve “reasoning out the cause” (αἰτίας λογισμός).<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps the clearest evidence in the dialogue that Plato does not consider that acquaintance with sensible particulars constitutes knowledge is to be found in the slave-boy experiment. By the end of the

<sup>16</sup> Crombie (note 8 above) 52. My emphasis. We should expect Plato to use the phrase αἰτίας λογισμός in connection with the conversion of the slave-boy’s true opinion (which is the result of recollection) into knowledge. However, there, Plato merely says that the boy’s true opinion can be converted into knowledge by further questioning (85C). This is one of the methods by which Plato offers his readers reminders while at the same time confusing the unwary. As Bluck, (note 1 above) 31, points out, “In view of the suggestion that αἰτίας λογισμός is recollection ‘as we agreed before’ we may assume that although the expression αἰτίας λογισμός was not used earlier on, we may gloss with these words what was said at 85C about the possibility of converting true opinions into knowledge by further questioning.”

<sup>17</sup> Cf. also the “eyewitness” knowledge of *Theaetetus* 201A ff. which, like the “knowledge of the road to Larisa” in the *Meno*, has been held to be an instance of knowledge properly so called in the *Theaetetus*. See, for instance, John McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus* (Oxford 1973) 227, where he says, “. . . it is implied that an eyewitness can know the truth about, say, a robbery. On the face of it, this contradicts the most characteristic expositions of the Theory of Forms, which indicates that the title ‘knowledge’ should be reserved for a relation between the mind and the Forms untainted by any reliance on perception.” However, in view of the refutation of the thesis that knowledge is perception, and the suggestion that follows the refutation, namely, that “we have progressed so far at least as not to look for knowledge in perception *at all* [τὸ παράπαν], but in some function of the mind . . . when it alone and by itself is engaged with realities”—ὅταν αὐτὴ καθ’ αὐτὴν πραγματεύηται περὶ τὰ ὄντα (187A), this view is almost certainly mistaken. On this notorious “eyewitness knowledge,” see my doctoral dissertation (note 6 above) 289–98 for the view that this argument, in which Plato is using the verb εἰδέναι in the everyday sense, is in effect a *reductio ad absurdum* of the thesis that true opinion constitutes knowledge.



experiment Socrates has drawn no less than sixteen different squares.<sup>18</sup> In spite of the fact that the boy has seen them all and answered questions about them, Socrates' language and behaviour seem to indicate quite clearly that he thinks the boy does not yet know what the square and the diagonal are. He only has a number of true opinions about what they look like, "stirred up in him like a dream" (85C), not only by Socrates' skillful and systematic questioning, but also by actually being made to see what the square and the diagonal look like. For example, at the beginning of the experiment, Socrates draws a square and asks (82B):

Tell me, boy, do you *know* [γινώσκεις] that a square figure is like this [τοιοῦτον]?

When the boy replies that he does, Socrates says (82C):

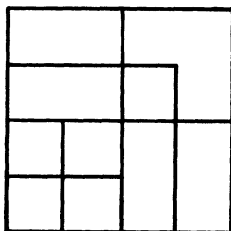
A square figure, then, has all these lines equal being four in number.

If Socrates really thought that the boy knew what the square is like he would not feel it necessary to give him one of the principal properties of the square. Plainly, Socrates is only "stirring up" true opinions in him (cf. 85C).

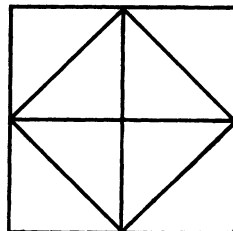
By the end of the experiment, the boy has attained true opinions about what sort of things the square and the diagonal are; but he does not yet know what they really are. Thus, when he points to the diagonal as the length of the side of the square twice the size of the given square, Socrates describes this as a true opinion and not knowledge (85C); for, as Socrates has already explained, if one does not know what a thing is one cannot know what it is like. We are meant to understand that the

<sup>18</sup> These are as follows:

A



B



In A we have ten square figures drawn by the end of the first part of the experiment (82B–84A). In B we have six more square figures drawn by the end of the second part of the experiment (84D–85B).

boy does not yet *know* that the square of the diagonal is twice the size of the given square precisely because he does not know what the square is.<sup>19</sup>

## II

The slave-boy experiment is intended to demonstrate the truth of the theory of recollection. It is, however, something more than that; it shows us the process whereby the mind can begin to recollect its prenatal knowledge. Socrates, as we have seen, gets the boy to recollect (up to the stage of true opinion) how to construct a square twice the size of a given square making conspicuous use of sensible diagrams and systematic questioning. Thus, if, as I have argued, Plato does not mean us to think that acquaintance with sensible particulars constitutes knowledge properly so called, then it seems reasonable to suppose that he wants us to see in this conspicuous use of sensible diagrams that sense-experience is an important element in the process of recollection.

As in the case of the impossibility of knowing what sort of person Meno is when one does not know who he is, when Socrates protests that he does not know what virtue is and hence cannot know whether it is teachable or not, he does not really mean to suggest that he and Meno cannot say or entertain a true opinion about what sort of thing virtue is. In his dialogue with Meno up to 89C, Socrates proceeds exactly on the model of the slave-boy experiment. As Malcolm Brown points out, whereas in the first part of the experiment (82B–84A) Socrates' question is in the *ti esti* form, implying that he wants a number for an answer, in

<sup>19</sup> This knowledge can only be attained αἰτίας λογισμῷ. See note 16 above. As J. Gould rightly says, the αἰτίας λογισμὸς “consists in elevating the object of cognition from particulars to Forms” (*The Development of Plato's Ethics* [Cambridge 1955] 139). This, as we are told in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, can be achieved only by “true philosophers.” See BA(1) pt. 1, 296 ff. For the view that the dianoietic mathematician cannot attain knowledge of Mathematical Forms, because the hypothetical treatment of the propositions (or hypotheses) of dianoietic mathematics belongs to philosophical dialectic, see my “Mathematics, Dialectic and the Good in the *Republic* VI–VII,” *Platon* 30 (1978), hereafter referred to as BA(3), esp. 120 ff. In the *Meno* Plato only says that the boy's true opinion can be converted into knowledge by a further course of questioning; but it is almost certainly a misunderstanding of Plato's procedure to suppose that at the time of writing the *Meno* he thought that complete recollection of “the square itself,” i.e., the Form, can be achieved in a day or two by a boy. See BA(1), pt. 1, 292 ff., and pt. 2, 221–24.

the second part (84D–85B) he puts his principal question in terms of *poion* (85B1) instead of *ti*.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, whereas in the first part of Socrates' dialogue with Meno (70A–79E), his principal question is in the *ti esti* form, in the second part, that is, in the argument "from a hypothesis" (86E–89C), he puts his question in the *poion* form.

It is significant that in both dialogues the interlocutors reach the stage of *aporia* at the end of the first part when the question is in the *ti esti* form. It is at the end of the second part in which Socrates puts his question in the *poion* form that the slave-boy attains true opinion. However, it does not seem to be generally recognized that, in the same way, Meno attains true opinion about the nature of virtue, namely that it is knowledge, at the end of the argument from a hypothesis (89C). This is mainly due to the fact that when at 86E Socrates says that he is yielding to Meno's request to settle the *poion* question of whether virtue is teachable or not, leaving the *ti esti* question unsettled, it is not recognized that he is merely pretending to yield to Meno and that the introduction of the argument "from a hypothesis" is really a subterfuge on the part of Socrates to facilitate Meno's recollection of the nature of virtue. Indeed, as F. M. Cornford<sup>21</sup> rightly says:

The Socratic definition of virtue as knowledge is actually reached about half-way through [89A], and yet the conversation ends with the remark that we shall never be sure how virtue is acquired until we have found out what virtue is. The concealment is so cunningly effected that many readers of the *Meno* do not realize that we have found out what virtue is. . . .

<sup>20</sup> Brown (note 4 above) 60.

<sup>21</sup> F. M. Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides* (London 1939) 245. Failure to recognize that the argument "from a hypothesis" ends at 89C, and that by the end of the argument the proposition that virtue is knowledge has been proved, and hence that Meno attains true opinion corresponding with that attained by his slave at the end of the experiment, leads to the view that the introduction of this argument "from a hypothesis" marks the abandonment of the enquiry into the nature of virtue. This seems to be the reason why Malcolm Brown considers that (1) in the argument "from a hypothesis" Socrates "is operating in flat contradiction to the rule which he himself had enunciated in 71B" (note 4 above, 64), and (2) "the characteristic of the hypothetical method is simply to assume an answer to the *ti esti* question, and then proceed (in the manner of geometers) to a *poion* question" (note 4 above, 65). Cf. also R. E. Allen, *Plato's Euthyphro and the Earlier Theory of Forms* (London 1970) 96, where he says: "Socrates and Meno have tried to settle the question of whether virtue can be taught without first finding out what virtue is. They end in bewilderment, and even the new method of hypothesis . . . borrowed from the geometers, cannot save them." I discuss this method in some detail in "Recollection and the Argument 'From a Hypothesis' in Plato's *Meno*," *JHS* (forthcoming).

I submit that Plato means us to see that though one cannot know what virtue is like who does not know what virtue is, the actual process of acquiring knowledge of what virtue is *begins* (as in the slave-boy experiment) with the “stirring up” of innate true opinions about what virtue is like. Thus, having given the geometrical illustration of the argument “from a hypothesis,” Socrates says (87B):

In the same way concerning virtue [περὶ ἀρετῆς] since we know neither what it is nor what sort of thing it is, let us make a hypothesis and consider whether it is teachable or not, saying as follows: if virtue were *what sort of thing* [ποῖόν τι] concerning the soul would it be teachable or not teachable? In the first place, if it were other than knowledge, is it teachable or not . . . ?

We do not know what virtue is, nor do we know what sort of thing it is, but we do have opinions about what sort of thing it is, by the consideration of which opinions we may attain true opinion about what virtue is; and this will enable us to answer the subsequent question of whether it is teachable or not. However, until we are able to convert this true opinion into knowledge “by reasoning out the cause” (αἰτίας λογισμῷ), our answer to the subsequent question will only be a true opinion—a very unstable thing (cf. 97E–98A)—and not knowledge.

It seems clear then that in both the slave-boy experiment and the dialogue with Meno, Plato wants his readers to see the importance of proceeding from the consideration of the ποῖον question towards the settlement of the τί ἐστι question. Plato seems to be hinting at this when he makes Socrates begin the slave-boy experiment by drawing a square and asking the boy whether he knows (γινώσκει) that a square figure is like this (τοιοῦτον [82B]), for τοιοῦτος is the demonstrative pronoun correlative with ποῖος.<sup>22</sup> It is thus almost certainly a misunderstanding to say with Malcolm Brown that in the first part of the slave-boy experiment Socrates could have dispensed completely with sensible diagrams; for Socrates seems to consider that, untutored as the boy is, sensible diagrams are an indispensable aid in the boy’s recollection of what the enquiry is about, that is, “the square itself.” Indeed, “The imagery of the moving and visible order” and the “discrimination

<sup>22</sup> But see Allen (note 3 above) 70–1, where he argues against the view that in his use of τοιοῦτος and οἷος, which are respectively demonstrative and indefinite pronouns correlative with ποῖος, in the early dialogues, Plato may well have had the relationship of resemblance between Forms and particulars at the back of his mind.

between *gignesthai* and *einai*''<sup>23</sup> do not first occur in the second part of the experiment. At 83A in the first part, Socrates says:

Well, this line *becomes* [γίνεται] double, if we add [προσθῶμεν] here another of the same length?

And again, the phrase ἀπὸ ποίας (γραμμῆς) is not confined to the second part of the experiment.<sup>24</sup> This phrase first occurs at 83C in the first part, where Socrates asks the boy:

What line will give us a space of eight feet?  
ὁκτώπους δ' ἀπὸ ποίας γραμμῆς;

Similarly, in the first part of the dialogue with Meno, Socrates and Meno do not dispense with what each of them supposes to be instances or cases of what virtue is like. If, as I believe, Malcolm Brown is right in pointing out that the slave-boy experiment is a precise model of Socrates' dialogue with Meno,<sup>25</sup> then we are meant to understand that Meno, in his attempts at defining virtue, and Socrates, in his examination of Meno's definitions, are drawing upon their previous experience of what each of them supposes to be instances or cases of what virtue is like. In the case of Socrates himself, it seems fairly obvious that he considers that all instances of virtue involve knowledge of what is good and what is bad. Later on, in the *Phaedrus*, Plato explains that few people are capable of achieving complete recollection. He goes on to say that in the earthly copies (ἐν τοῖς τῇδε ὁμοιώμασιν) of Value Forms like justice and temperance which are precious to souls there is no light (φέγγος οὐδέν), and that few people can discern in these images (εἰκόνας) through dull organs (δι' ἄμυδρῶν ὀργάνων) the nature of the reality they imitate (*Phdr.* 205A–D). Plato, however, does not suggest that in the process of achieving recollection of Value Forms we can dispense with previous experience of such images.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, far from meaning that in the process of acquiring knowledge of the essential nature (οὐσία) of anything we should eschew all considerations of what sort of thing it is (ποῖόν τι), Plato means us to

<sup>23</sup> See Brown (note 4 above) 66, 67–9.

<sup>24</sup> Brown (note 4 above) 60–1.

<sup>25</sup> But see notes 4 and 21 above.

<sup>26</sup> Gulley (1) p. 200 ff. argues that what Plato says at *Phaedrus* 250A–D (and *Politicus* 285D–286B) suggests that the formula of *Phaedrus* 249B, which recommends the use of sense-experience in recollection, does not apply to the recollection of Value Forms. Against this view, cf. Bluck (note 1 above) 55–7.

see in both the slave-boy experiment and Socrates' dialogue with Meno that the process of acquiring knowledge or recollection of the essential nature of anything begins with precisely these considerations of what the reality in question looks like. Thus, it would seem that in the slave-boy experiment, Plato, by the conspicuous use of sensible diagrams, is deliberately preparing his readers' minds for what is to come in the *Phaedo*, namely that sensible particulars are images of Forms, and that we obtain all our conceptions of Forms from no other source than from sense-experience (*Phd.* 75A ff.).<sup>27</sup>

### III

I shall now proceed to show that the manner in which Plato introduces his discussion of the theory of Recollection in the *Phaedo* indicates that he has the *Meno* presentation in mind, and that he is conscious of the importance of sense-experience in the slave-boy's progress at recollection.

At *Phaedo* 72E ff., Cebes says that the view which Socrates often expresses, namely, that what we call learning is nothing but recollection, supports Socrates' argument for the immortality of the soul. To remind Simmias, who says he does not quite remember Socrates' theory, Cebes explains that when people are properly questioned they answer correctly about everything, though they would not be able to do so if they did not possess within themselves knowledge and right reason, and that besides, if one introduces diagrams or some other thing of that nature, this theory is very clearly shown to be true (*Phd.* 73A–B):

ἐρωτώμενοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ἔάν τις καλῶς ἐρωτᾷ, αὐτοὶ λέγουσιν πάντα ἢ ἔχει· καίτοι εἰ μὴ ἐτύγχανεν αὐτοῖς ἐπιστήμη ἐνοῦσα καὶ ὀρθὸς λόγος, οὐκ ἂν οἱοί τ' ἦσαν τοῦτο ποιῆσαι. ἔπειτα ἔάν τις ἐπὶ τὰ διαγράμματα ἄγῃ ἢ ἄλλο τι τῶν τοιούτων, ἐνταῦθα σαφέστατα κατηγορεῖ, ὅτι οὕτως ἔχει.

As the *Meno* is the first dialogue in which Plato introduces the theory of recollection, it seems reasonable to suppose that this passage is a summary of the theory as presented in the *Meno*, and that since in the *Phaedo* Plato stresses the importance of sense-experience in the process of recollection,<sup>28</sup> the passage indicates that Plato was aware of

<sup>27</sup> See BA(2), pp. 108–10, and my "The Role of the Hypothetical Method in the *Phaedo*," *Phronesis* 24 (1979) 111–27, referred to hereafter as BA(4).

<sup>28</sup> See esp. *Phd.* 75A ff., where we are explicitly told that (1) we derive our notions or conceptions of the Form Equality "from no other source—to do so, indeed, would be

the importance of sense-experience in the slave-boy's recollection. However, some scholars have argued that the passage is not a good piece of evidence for the view that in the *Meno* Plato has the separately existing Forms in mind, for the following reasons: (1) Plato only says "they answer correctly about everything" (λέγουσιν πάντα ἢ ἔχει) without mentioning the Forms;<sup>29</sup> (2) since the word διάγραμμα sometimes means simply a geometrical demonstration or mathematical proof, we cannot be sure that διαγράμματα in this passage refers to sensible diagrams;<sup>30</sup> and (3) Plato is here only giving an example of how careful questioning can elicit correct answers, and hence, Burnet's argument that the process ἐπὶ τὰ διαγράμματα ἄγειν is opposed to, rather than included in the process καλῶς ἐρωτᾶν is mistaken.<sup>31</sup>

(1) In the *Meno* argument for recollection, Plato makes no mention of the separately existing Forms; thus, λέγουσιν πάντα ἢ ἔχει is only a faithful statement of the *Meno* argument. In the *Phaedo*, however, Socrates is arguing that the objects of recollection are the separately existing Forms. Thus, if Plato finds it appropriate to introduce his discussion of the theory of recollection in the *Phaedo* with a summary of the *Meno* argument, then he seems to be revealing that the ability to "answer correctly about everything" presupposes at least some recollection of Forms, and that in the *Meno* argument he had the separately existing Forms all along at the back of his mind.<sup>32</sup>

(2) It is true that the word διάγραμμα sometimes means simply a

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impossible—than from sight or touch or from some other one of the senses": καὶ τόδε ὁμολογοῦμεν, μὴ ἄλλοθεν αὐτὸ ἐννενοηκέναι μηδὲ δυνατόν εἶναι ἐννοῆσαι ἀλλ' ἢ ἐκ τοῦ ἰδεῖν ἢ ἄψασθαι ἢ ἐκ τινος ἄλλης τῶν αἰσθήσεων (75A5–8); (2) we acquired knowledge before we were born and lost it at birth; afterwards, however, by the use of our senses, we regain the knowledge we had previously possessed—ὕστερον δὲ ταῖς αἰσθήσεσι χρώμενοι, περὶ αὐτὰ ἐκείνας ἀναλαμβάνομεν τὰς ἐπιστήμας ἅς ποτε καὶ πρὶν εἶχομεν—which process is rightly called recollection (75B10–E7). On Cornford's view that in the *Phaedo*, "the fact that sensible experience may be the occasion of Recollection is lost sight of" (*Plato's Theory of Knowledge* [London 1935] 6), see BA(2) pp. 109–10.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Bluck (note 1 above) 46–7.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Gulley (1), p. 197.

<sup>31</sup> See Gulley (1), p. 197, where he says: "Since Plato is here giving an example of how careful questioning will elicit correct answers, it is obvious in any case that he is not referring to the role played by sense-experience in anamnesis, and thus anticipating what he goes on to introduce in 73C ff. as a new aspect of the doctrine. If taken in that sense, the reference would no longer be the kind of example the context requires. This is . . . a sufficient answer to Burnet's argument that the process ἐπὶ τὰ διαγράμματα ἄγειν is opposed to, rather than included in the process καλῶς ἐρωτᾶν." My emphasis.

<sup>32</sup> This presumably is why Plato makes Socrates mention εἶδος (72C) and οὐσία (72B) as the objects of definition.



geometrical demonstration or mathematical proof; but surely, if as it is generally agreed, the passage is an allusion to the *Meno* argument for recollection, διαγράμματα must refer to the sensible diagrams actually employed in the slave-boy experiment and not to a geometrical demonstration or mathematical proof. Besides, we are explicitly told in the *Meno* that the boy has never had any formal training in geometry (85E); thus we can hardly expect him to be capable of following a rigorous geometrical demonstration without the aid of sensible diagrams.

(3) According to Gulley, the role assigned to sense-experience in recollection in the *Phaedo* is a new aspect of the theory:

It is quite different from anything to be found in the *Meno*. What appears to be envisaged here is an immediate transition from the sensible to the intelligible world, the argument relying on a contrast between sensation and a conceptual level of apprehension. Plato is apparently saying that the fact that we attain this conceptual level in describing what is given in sense-experience constitutes recollection of Forms.<sup>35</sup>

On this view recollection of Forms in the *Phaedo* involves no method of reasoning.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Gulley's view, as he admits, implies that Plato in the *Phaedo* assumes the impossibility of false judgments.<sup>35</sup> This, as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>36</sup> reckons completely without the "philosopher's practice of death" and the hypothetical method described in the *Phaedo*.

Now, Burnet's argument is that if ἔπειτα means, "secondly," the process ἐπὶ τὰ διαγράμματα ἄγειν must be opposed to, rather than included in, the process καλῶς ἐρωτᾶν, and διαγράμματα will mean geometrical figures. Thus, the passage is divided into two parts, namely an "asking and answering" part and a part "based on diagrams." Malcolm Brown accepts this interpretation of the passage, which he describes as "a curious point about Plato's own summary of the slave-boy passage in the *Phaedo* 73A-B."<sup>37</sup> He argues, however, that the first

<sup>35</sup> Gulley (1) pp. 197-8.

<sup>34</sup> As he says in Gulley (2), p. 37, "He [Plato] interprets conceptual apprehension as being reminded of an archetypal Form by any *one* of its sensible copies. Perception of a single instance is assumed to be sufficient as a reminder, and the question of reflective comparison and progressive clarification does not enter the argument." Cf. also Ovidia Hansing, "The Theory of Recollection in Plato's Dialogues," *Monist* 38 (1928) 237. Against this view of "recollection" in the *Phaedo*, see H. D. Rankin, "Immediate Cognition of Forms in the *Phaedo*?" *Dialectica* 12 (1958) 81-6, and BA(2) pp. 109-10.

<sup>35</sup> Gulley (2), p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> BA(2) pp. 109-10, and BA(4) esp. pp. 120-1.

<sup>37</sup> Brown (note 4 above) 61.



part, namely the "asking and answering part," is an allusion to the arithmetical part of the slave-boy experiment in which, he says, "the diagrams could have been eliminated without essential loss [the numbers suffice]," while the second part (i.e., the part "based on diagrams") refers to the geometrical part in which the diagrams could not have been eliminated.<sup>38</sup>

As I have argued, the manner in which Socrates begins the slave-boy experiment indicates quite clearly that Plato himself considers that even in the arithmetical part of the experiment the untutored boy requires the aid of sensible diagrams to enable him to recognize a square figure and thus attain true opinion about what sort of thing the square is. Indeed, by the end of the arithmetical part of the experiment (84A), Socrates has drawn no less than ten different square figures out of a total of sixteen used in the entire experiment.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the "asking and answering" part of the *Phaedo* passage can hardly refer to the arithmetical part of the slave-boy experiment.

It would seem that many scholars tacitly assume that recollection in the *Meno* is confined to the slave-boy experiment. As Malcolm Brown himself sees, the slave-boy experiment "is a model" of Socrates' dialogue with Meno. Thus, we are meant to understand that Meno, in the dialogue with Socrates, is gradually recollecting the nature of virtue. Diagrams are not required in the case of ethical enquiries; what is required here is previous experience of particular instances or cases of virtue. It would seem then that Burnet's interpretation of the *Phaedo* passage is correct, and that the "asking and answering" part of the passage refers to Socrates' dialogue with Meno, that is, the enquiry into the nature of virtue, while the part "based on diagrams" refers to the slave-boy experiment as a whole. Thus, what Plato is saying in the *Phaedo* passage is that careful questioning indicates that knowledge is innate and can be recollected, but that this is so is shown most clearly when visible aids are introduced to supplement such questioning. The *Phaedo* passage, then, seems to indicate that Plato in the *Meno* was conscious of the importance of sense-experience in the process of recollection.

In the *Phaedo* Plato does not mean to suggest that sense-experience is sufficient for the complete recollection of any Form. Presumably, he means that though we derive our opinions, which involve notions or conceptions of Forms, from no other source than from sense-experience, these opinions may be true or false, and that it is only by means of the

<sup>38</sup> Brown (note 4 above) 61, n. 5.

<sup>39</sup> See note 18 above.

hypothetical method that the mind can form true opinions about the essential nature of the things it perceives through the senses, and subsequently convert these true opinions into knowledge by means of the “upward path” of the method.<sup>40</sup> This process of attaining knowledge is in harmony with what Plato says in the *Symposium* about the process whereby knowledge of Beauty may be attained. There, it is particularly noteworthy that the process is said to begin in childhood with the experience of particular beautiful things. Knowledge of Beauty itself, which comes much later in life, is the result of a process of generalization repeated at progressively more abstract levels, while sense-experience gradually ceases to play a part (*Symp.* 210A–212A).

These are precisely the views about the nature of knowledge and the manner whereby it may be attained expressed in the central books of the *Republic*.<sup>41</sup> Here in the *Meno*, Plato means us to understand that the process of acquiring knowledge (or recollection) of what a thing is (τί ἐστὶ) begins with the consideration of what sort of thing it is—ποῖόν τι.<sup>42</sup>

#### IV

Another significant point about the slave-boy experiment is Plato's choice of the problem of doubling the square, rather than the much simpler problem of quadrupling it, to demonstrate the nature of recollection. I shall now proceed to show that this choice indicates that at the time of writing the *Meno*, Plato had already formulated his metaphysical theory of Forms.

<sup>40</sup> For an interpretation of the “upward path” of the hypothetical method, see BA(3), p. 124 ff. and BA(4) p. 112 ff.

<sup>41</sup> On Plato's awareness of the importance of the use of sensible images in the process of acquiring knowledge in the *Republic*, see BA(3) esp. p. 112 ff., and my “Διάνοια and the Images of Forms in Plato's *Republic* VI–VII,” *Platon* (1979), esp. 89–110.

<sup>42</sup> It is interesting to note that this is precisely the role assigned to τὸ ποῖόν τι (περὶ ἕκαστον) or “what the nature of each thing is like” in the process of acquiring knowledge of “the real nature of each thing”—τὸ ὄν ἐκάστου or τὸ τί at *Epistle* VII 342E and 343B. The genuineness of this letter is disputed. However, whoever wrote it must have considered that, according to Plato, situated as we are, we can only approach τὸ ὄν ἐκάστου or τὸ τί through the consideration of τὸ ποῖόν τι (περὶ ἕκαστον). In his dialogues, the nearest Plato comes to stating explicitly that the approach to knowledge of Forms must be indirect—starting with sensible images through verbal images—is Socrates' account of his “second voyage” (δεύτερος πλοῦς) in the *Phaedo*. See BA(2), esp. pp. 104–7, and BA(4), p. 112 ff. See also note 6 above.

Malcolm Brown suggests that if Plato's point was to stir in the slave-boy "a recollection for a piece of eternally true knowledge," he could have chosen the much simpler problem of quadrupling the square:

Indeed Socrates could have elicited from the boy equally naturally nearly identical incorrect answers (by "quadrupling the side" and by "tripling the side") to the ones which he elicits in the text. But in that case he could have proceeded to guide the boy to an answer which is both arithmetical in form and absolutely correct; by doubling the side.<sup>43</sup>

Now, this is precisely what Plato should not do if he wants to show in this dialogue not only that knowledge is attainable, but also that (1) true opinion is something quite different from knowledge; (2) the attainment of true opinion is a necessary stage in the process of acquiring knowledge (i.e., recollection); and (3) this true opinion can be converted into knowledge "by reasoning out the cause"—αἰτίας λογισμῷ.

Besides, if the slave-boy experiment is to serve as a model of Socrates' dialogue with Meno, Socrates has to produce *aporia* in the boy by the end of the first part of the experiment to correspond with Meno's *aporia* at the end of his dialogue with Meno;<sup>44</sup> and the problem of quadrupling the square is quite unsuited to this purpose. Surely, if Plato had chosen the problem of quadrupling the square, he would have been hard put to it to justify his claim that there is a world of difference between true opinion and knowledge, for the boy's "absolutely correct" answer would make it seem that he has indeed attained knowledge properly so called and not merely true opinion; and, of course, there would be no room here for "reasoning out the cause" (αἰτίας λογισμός).<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, contrary to what Socrates says about knowledge at the beginning of the *Meno*, Brown's view makes it possible for one who does not know (γινώσκει) what the square is to know (εἰδέναι) that the square of the length twice that of the side of a given square is quadruple the size of the given square. But why should Plato choose a problem that he must have known is, strictly speaking, insoluble for the demonstration of the theory of recollection?<sup>46</sup> I submit that if at the time of

<sup>43</sup> Brown (note 4 above) 77.

<sup>44</sup> See 84B ff. where Socrates points out the usefulness of producing *aporia* in the slave-boy, as well as the correspondence between the boy's stage and that of Meno (80A ff.) in almost identical words.

<sup>45</sup> See note 19 above.

<sup>46</sup> The problem of doubling the square is strictly speaking insoluble arithmetically. Cf. Aristotle, *Analytica Priora* 41a 26–30. As Malcolm Brown himself says, "Plato must

writing the *Meno* Plato thought that knowledge involved the mind's direct acquaintance with Forms, he would not consider it possible to stir up "a recollection of a piece of eternally true knowledge" in a boy, or indeed in anyone else, which could be recognized as such by any chance reader; for the recollection of the reality (οὐσία) of anything would be a matter of personal experience which cannot be adequately expressed in words. That is to say, for anyone operating with this conception of knowledge, a statement or proposition, however true it may be, does not by itself constitute knowledge. If this was Plato's conception of the nature of knowledge at the time of writing the *Meno*, then the problem of doubling the square is eminently suited to his purpose; for just as it is impossible for the boy or anyone else to give an absolutely accurate, arithmetically correct answer to the problem of doubling the square whose side is 2 feet, so it is impossible for Meno or anyone else to express the οὐσία of virtue in a definition.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, in Socrates' dialogue with Meno, though Socrates seems to be asking for the expression of the οὐσία of virtue, he is really thinking of the attempts at defining virtue only as an aid in the recollection of something that cannot be adequately expressed in words. As Bluck aptly puts it:

The vision resulting from recollection would transcend definition, but attempting to define a thing by reference to other things would aid recollection of it, and make possible agreement as to its nature.<sup>48</sup>

Socrates explains at the end of the slave-boy experiment that the boy's true opinion, namely, that the square of the diagonal of the given square is twice the size of the given square, can be converted into knowledge by a further course of questioning (85C). This process is

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have been familiar with the elementary fact about the technical difficulties (for the arithmetician) implied in this problem" (note 4 above, 60, n. 8). In this particular example the boy has to find a number which when multiplied by itself will give the number 8; but the square root of 8 is a surd—an irrational number, or what the Greeks called irrational line (ἄλογος γραμμή). Plainly, Plato deliberately chose a problem for which he knew the boy could not give an arithmetically accurate answer. Cf. *Theaetetus* 147E–148B, where Theaetetus says he and his friend, the young Socrates, listened to a demonstration by Theodorus that the sides of squares three and five square units in area are not commensurable in length with the unit itself, and that the same is true of other "non-square" numbers. On the discovery of the theorem on incommensurables, see Sir Thomas Heath, *A History of Greek Mathematics* (Oxford 1921) 1:155.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Bluck (note 1 above) 4–7.

<sup>48</sup> Bluck (note 1 above) 7.

later described as tying down the true opinion “by reasoning out the cause” (αἰτίας λογισμῶ), which process is said to be recollection “as we agreed before” (98A).<sup>49</sup>

But what precisely constitutes an αἰτίας λογισμός? This phrase occurs only here in the *Meno*, and Plato never uses it again in any of his subsequent dialogues. However, if, as I have argued, Plato means us to understand that the boy does not know that the square of the diagonal of the given square is twice the size of the given square precisely because he does not know what the square is, then whatever αἰτίας λογισμός is, it must culminate in the mind's complete recollection of “the square itself,” or the Form; and this is something that can be attained only by “true philosophers” as we are told in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*.<sup>50</sup> I submit, then, that αἰτίας λογισμός is identical with the “upward path” of the hypothetical method as described in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, and the “cause” (αἰτία) of the *Meno*, the “something adequate” (τὶ ἱκανόν) of the *Phaedo*, and the “beginning” (ἀρχή) of the *Republic* are one and the same thing, namely, a proposition that is adequate in the sense that it cannot itself be established by a “higher” hypothesis within the limits of the particular dialectical enquiry. It is at the end of this “upward path” that complete recollection is attainable.<sup>51</sup>

Now, Plato does offer us a good example of an αἰτίας λογισμός in the *Meno*. As Cherniss<sup>52</sup> has pointed out, in calling the proposition “virtue is good” a hypothesis (87D), Socrates is exemplifying the “upward path” of the hypothetical method as described in the *Phaedo* (101D):

And when you should have to give an account [διδόναι λόγον] of the hypothesis itself, you will do so in the same manner, hypothesizing another hypothesis which seemed best of those above, until you came to something adequate—τὶ ἱκανόν.

Thus, the proposition “virtue is good” functions as the “something adequate” in the argument “from a hypothesis”; and the entire proof which gives the account of the hypothesis “virtue is knowledge” as recommended at *Phaedo* 101D is to be seen as an instance of “tying

<sup>49</sup> See note 16 above.

<sup>50</sup> See BA(1), pt. 1, p. 296 ff. and BA(4), p. 127.

<sup>51</sup> See BA(3), p. 122 ff. and BA(4), pp. 121–4.

<sup>52</sup> Harold Cherniss, “Some War-Time Publications Concerning Plato,” *AJP* 67 (1947) 140.

down" the true opinion, namely, virtue is knowledge "by reasoning out the cause" (αἰτίας λογισμῷ). This, however, does not mean that Meno attains knowledge in respect of the propositions "virtue is good" and "virtue is knowledge"; for he has obviously not attained the level of thought or state of mind of the "true philosopher" at which alone knowledge properly so called is attainable.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, it would seem that the deduction of the proposition "virtue is knowledge" from the proposition "virtue is good," which is significantly said to stand (μένει) (87D),<sup>54</sup> is meant to be a hint that "virtue is knowledge of the Good" is a more satisfactory definition of virtue than simply "virtue is knowledge." Thus, since virtue and knowledge are not really Forms, but rather psychical endowments,<sup>55</sup> it would seem that Plato has in mind even here in the *Meno* the view of the *Republic*, namely, that virtue is the effect of knowledge of the Good on the soul.

### Conclusion

I conclude, then, that the aporetic conclusion of the *Meno* is not genuine, and that (1) at the time of writing it, Plato's conception of the nature of knowledge and the process of acquiring it was substantially the same as that stated in the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium*, and the *Republic*; and (2) in it, Plato is making use of the maieutic art of Socrates to prepare the minds of his readers for the major themes in his metaphysics, epistemology, and methodology, which he later develops in the middle dialogues.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See the articles cited in notes 50 and 51.

<sup>54</sup> This presumably means that the proposition "virtue is good" cannot be refuted.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *Meno* 87B and *Epistle* VII 342D.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. H. Erbes, "Über Platons Methode in den Sogenannten Jugenddialogen," *Hermes* 96 (1968) 21–40. Erbes argues convincingly that in the aporetic dialogues Plato was not merely experimenting, but was rather producing artistically framed teaching works designed to prepare his readers step by step towards his main philosophical doctrines which he had already developed to a considerable degree.