CLITOPHON’S CHALLENGE:

DIALECTIC IN PLATO’S MENO, PHAEDO, AND REPUBLIC

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“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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Chapter 1
Cleitophon’s Challenge

Introduction

Cleitophon concludes his eponymous dialogue by addressing Socrates 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 Cleitophon 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. [Cleitophon 410C8-E8; Gonzalez trans.]

Cleitophon here offers a challenge to Socrates with which I, at least, am quite sympathetic - especially insofar as one takes Socrates to be committed to intellectualism, the view that knowledge is in some way essentially connected with virtue. For, like Cleitophon, I have felt the

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1 Throughout this volume ‘Socrates’ refers to the character depicted in Plato’s dialogues. (For the sake of brevity, I will sometimes 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 both by what he is 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 2008:19–25) understands it. See pp. 10-14 below.

2 I will be typically using the translations of Plato’s dialogues found in (Cooper and Hutchinson 1997). Those translations not otherwise noted are my own.

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), (Vlastos 1991:200–235), (Brickhouse and Smith 1994:71), (Irwin 1995:75–76), (Nehamas 1987), (Penner 1990), (Penner 1991), (Penner 1996), (Penner 1997), (Santas 1979:181–217), (Kahn 1996:73) (Rickless 1998), (Segvic 2000), (Sedley 2004:19), (Wolfsdorf 2008: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
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. But I, like many, perhaps most, Socratic scholars, take seriously Socrates’ professions of ignorance and so doubt that Socrates has the virtue-knowledge Clitophon challenges him to teach. So, Socrates can respond to Clitophon’s version of the challenge by simply denying that he has this virtue-knowledge Clitophon and assert, as he does often in the elenctic dialogues, that he is not a teacher. But that seems to me only a dodge. It only makes Clitophon’s more general challenge more salient. For those of us, like Socrates, Clitophon, and myself, who feel the force of Socrates’ exhortation to pursue the virtue-knowledge that we recognize that we lack, what comes

maintained, however, that outside the so-called elenctic dialogues (see n. 6 below), 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, 125-126 n. 17), (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 non-philosophers are capable of genuine virtue because non-philosophers 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 below, p. 14.
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 n. 1 above and pp. 10-14 below.
next? How do we go about acquiring 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. While I would not go as far as Clitophon in criticizing Socrates for getting in the way of my pursuit of the virtue-knowledge he has exhorted me to pursue, I am inclined to think that he has left me hanging - if this challenge goes unmet.⁷

I propose to take this challenge seriously. Throughout the Platonic dialogues Socrates is made to seek and encourage others to seek the knowledge and so virtue he and they lack. But how does Socrates or Plato propose that Socrates and his interlocutors 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 that are found in the dialogues.

In doing so, I approach the essence of Platonic philosophy. For Plato, philosophy is the search for the knowledge or wisdom⁸ one lacks as exemplified (most often in the dialogues) by Socrates.⁹ 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

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⁷Clitophon’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 1999:215-234) 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 & 184). See (Vasiliou 2008:1) for a slightly different interpretation of Clitophon’s challenge.

⁸Throughout 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 1969:135 n. 10), (Stokes 1986, 208), (Penner 1992:149 n 14), (Roochnik 1996:277), (Dancy 2004:90), (Fine 2004, 41 n 1), and (Wolfsdorf 2008, 103). Of course, certain contexts may favor the use of one of these words rather than the other. For example, when the object of the cognitive state is the good or ethical considerations in general, ‘wisdom’ is more likely to be employed. Nevertheless, each of these can be treated by Plato to refer to the same cognitive capacity. For an excellent discussion of some of the issues involved, see (Fine 2008).

⁹For a succinct statement of this connection between Platonic philosophy and knowledge acquisition see most recently (Wolfsdorf 2008:3–4). See also (Vlastos 1994:4), (Brickhouse and Smith 1994:5), and (Blondell 2002:13): “even the aporetic Sokrates is portrayed by Plato as striving towards positive knowledge.”
responding to this challenge, then, I seek the nature of Plato’s philosophical method.\textsuperscript{10} Put differently, I seek the nature of Platonic dialectic, as Plato’s philosophical method has come to be called.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{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 learning\textsuperscript{12} 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\textit{ Clitophon}, Clitophon is right to challenge him. Socrates may actually appear to impede those he has successfully encouraged to seek the virtue-knowledge they lack (see\textit{ Clitophon} 410E5-8). But, things begin to look differently in dialogues like the\textit{ Meno}, the\textit{ Phaedo}, and the\textit{ 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 approach of \textit{de novo} discovery or learning on one’s own will be more successful.\textsuperscript{13} But in the\textit{ Meno} a famous difficulty is presented for attempting to learn when no one who knows is present from whom one can learn

\textsuperscript{10}I use ‘method’ advisedly. (Brickhouse and Smith 2002) argue that a method requires a special expertise and that Socrates lacks expertise. I leave open at this stage whether the method of acquiring the knowledge recommended in the Platonic dialogues requires 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. Hence, I do not use the term ‘method’ as Brickhouse and Smith use the term. See also (Brickhouse and Smith 1994:10).

\textsuperscript{11}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.”

\textsuperscript{12}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’.

\textsuperscript{13}For these two approaches throughout the dialogues, see \textit{Alcibiades} I 106D4-9, \textit{Laches} 185C5-8, 186D8-187A1, \textit{Euthydemus} 285A8-B1,\textit{ Cratylus} 435D1-436A8, \textit{Phaedo} 85C7-8, 99C6-9, \textit{Parmenides} 135A7-B2, and\textit{ Timaeus} 51D3-E6. See also (Slings 1999:161 n 307), and pp. 29-32 below.
(Chapter 3). This difficulty, which I will refer to as Meno’s paradox, is taken seriously by Plato and 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 non-starter.

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. 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. After maintaining that the reasons for doubting Socrates’ sincerity are considerably weaker than they have often been taken to be (Chapter 4), I attempt to lay out the general structure of the method of hypothesis as described in three central passages (Chapter 5). I contend that the method consists of two stages. In the first, or proof, stage [1a] one seeks to identify a hypothesis from which an answer to the question one seeks to know can be derived, and then [1b] one shows how the hypothesis entails the answer to the question. In the second, or confirmation, stage one seeks to confirm the truth of the hypothesis, [2a] first by identifying a further hypothesis from which the original hypothesis can be derived and showing how this derivation advances until one

\[14\] To distinguish it from the paradox that Meno offers at Meno 80D5-8 and the one that Socrates offers at Meno 80E1-5.

\[15\] 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 1991:125 n. 74). 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.

\[16\] 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 deuterons plous, often translated as ‘second best’.

\[17\] Meno 86E6-87B2 and Phaedo 100A3-8 and 101D1-E3.
reaches ‘something adequate’, and then [2b] by testing the consequences of the hypothesis to see whether they agree with one another.

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 fill out Socrates’ otherwise sketchy descriptions.18

In the last third of the Meno, Plato provides a rather extended example of Socrates at work attempting to discover or acquire 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 derived and briefly describing how this derivation is to go, 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 derived (Meno 87C-89E). Next, Socrates sets out to confirm the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge by testing to see whether its consequences agree with one another (Meno 89D-96D). What is perhaps most remarkable about this example of Socrates at work is that while the first procedure serves to confirm the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge, the second procedure serves to disconfirm 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 though Socrates does apply the method, the application is frustratingly brief. He

18Here, 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’ classic papers (Santas 1971) and (Santas 1973).
identifies the hypothesis that Forms exist from which he derives an answer to his question concerning the *aitia* of generation and destruction. 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 the Kallipolis that Socrates has spent so much time developing throughout books 2 through 5 of the *Republic* is possible (*Republic* 5 471C - *Republic* 6 502C) (Chapter 8). 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 derived - the coincidence of philosophy and political power - and shows how this derivation can be seen to go (*Republic* 5 473B4-E4). 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 (474C8-487A8). Finally, he sets out to test the consequences of the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide and argues that they agree (487B1-502C7). Here, then, we have what appears to be a complete and so 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 what looks like 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* 6 and 7.

With all of this in the background, I turn 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. Throughout these key texts, Plato describes in some detail a method of learning, which has come to be known as dialectic, distinguishing it from its near cousin, dianoetic, much like in the elenctic dialogues Socrates is made to distinguish the elenchus from its near cousin, eristic. I maintain that the 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 ([2a]) must be pursued until one reaches ‘the unhypothetical first principle of everything,’ which I maintain is identified with the Form of the Good. Second, just as the contrast between the elenchus and eristic in the elenctic dialogues proves uniquely valuable in coming to terms with the true nature of the elenchus, so Plato’s extended contrast between dialectic and dianoetic (the method he describes as occupying the third section of the Divided Line) will prove equally fruitful in coming to terms with dialectic. Here, then, we have something like 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.

The final chapter (Chapter 10) is both retrospective and prospective. I look back over the preceding examination and summarize its results. In doing so, however, I highlight the challenges that remain for Plato’s dialectic. I expose those features of Plato’s response to Clitophon’s challenge - of his account of philosophical inquiry - that require further attention. And I conclude by speculating on where we might begin to look for responses to those challenges. I encourage an examination of Plato’s method of collection and division, perhaps first introduced in the Phaedrus, but not fully embraced and applied until dialogues like the Sophist, Statesman, and the Philebus. I also indicate, how Plato’s most famous student, Aristotle, may seem to be carrying on Plato’s project of attempting to offer a serious response to Clitophon’s challenge.

**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.¹⁹ 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 Vlastos²⁰ according to whom the philosophical views expressed in the elenctic dialogues could not have 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.²¹ Two features of this model are obviously 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

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¹⁹ N.b. I take the developmentalist/unitarian dispute to presuppose a doctrinal interpretation of the Plato. Consequently, I take the doctrinal/non-doctrinal dispute to be roughly orthogonal to the developmentalist/unitarian dispute. For supporters of a generally non-doctrinal approach see, for example, (Press 1995) (Gonzalez 1995), and (Gonzalez 1995). 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 2007) 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).

²⁰ See especially (Vlastos 1991). For more moderate, and to my mind more plausible, developmental approaches see, for example, (Nehamas 1985), (Nehamas 1987), (Nehamas 1992), (Penner 1992), (Brickhouse and Smith 1994), (Irwin 1995), and (Sedley 2004).

²¹ (Vlastos 1991:46).
obvious reasons, this character is typically identified with Socrates.\textsuperscript{22} Second, one must determine the compositional chronology of the dialogues. A mixture of philological, psychological, and philosophical considerations figure in this determination.\textsuperscript{23} 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,\textsuperscript{24} while the genuinely substantive differences fail to represent differences in Plato’s philosophical views. Rather, these latter differences reflect Plato’s pedagogical motivations and/or his method of presentation.\textsuperscript{25} 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 of theory until other portions are completely elucidated, exposing puzzles and problems that require resolution, and thereby facilitating a

\textsuperscript{22}Once again put perhaps most boldly by (Vlastos 1991:117 n. 50) 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.
\textsuperscript{23}For some excellent discussions see, for example, (Brandwood 1992), (Nails 1992), (Nails 1994), (Young 1994), and (Kahn 2002). (Brickhouse and Smith 2010:13–19) who explicitly defend a moderate developmentalist view against recent objections explicitly see themselves as defending two principles, the identity principle and the relevant dialogues assumption, which correspond very closely with my first two features.
\textsuperscript{24}See (Annas 1999) and (Annas 2002) who focuses on this aspect of the unitarian model.
\textsuperscript{25}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), (Cooper 1997), perhaps (Wolfsdorf 2008:207), and, of course, perhaps most famously (Shorey 1965) and (Shorey 1968).
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 plausibly be 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. 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

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26 This is, of course, not to say that there cannot be enormous philosophical differences between specific versions of the two models.
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 the dialogues.\(^{27}\) 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.\(^{28}\)

**The Nature of Knowledge**

Finally, two assumptions frame this study. They are

[a] Socrates is depicted as taking himself to lack knowledge,\(^{29}\) and

[b] Socrates is depicted as seeking and encouraging others to seek the knowledge he and they lack.\(^{30}\)

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\(^{27}\) 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.

\(^{28}\) See (Dancy 2004) who adopts a similar interpretative stance. See also (Blondell 2002:13).


\(^{30}\) 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* 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 profess 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), (Brickhouse and Smith 1994:17), (Smith 1997:xvii), (Matthews 1999:29), (Woolf 2002:243), (Sedley 2003:63), and (Sedley 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 & 180–185).
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.\(^{31}\) Others have found a distinction between ordinary and expert knowledge,\(^ {32}\) between knowledge that and knowledge how or why,\(^ {33}\) or even between human and divine knowledge.\(^ {34}\) We might generalize these accounts into a distinction between ordinary and robust knowledge.\(^ {35}\) 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?\(^ {36}\) Is the method of learning that we are seeking a method of learning 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 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,

\(^{31}\)See, especially, (Vlastos 1985).
\(^{32}\)See, for example, (Nehamas 1992:293–294).
\(^{33}\)(Woodruff 1987), (Brickhouse and Smith 1994), and perhaps Aristotle Posterior Analytics 1.13.
\(^{34}\)Perhaps (Sedley 2004:111–113).
\(^{35}\)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 75 n 47).
\(^{36}\)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), (Smith 1979), (Bedu-Addo 1983),) and discursive/non-discursive knowledge (see, for example, (Gonzalez 1996), (Gonzalez 1998), and (Gonzalez 1998)).
like, sculpture, or ta erotika, 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 does appear 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 κἀγαθὸν εἰδεναί), 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; adapted from Grube trans.] 38

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 virtue-knowledge. But he leaves open his knowledge of other (perhaps 39

37 See Symposium 177D8. For other knowledge professions on Socrates part see especially Apology 29A4-B9, 37B2-8, Euthydemus 293B7-8, 296E3-297A2, Republic 1 351A4-5, Phaedo 74A9-B3, Phaedrus 235C-D, perhaps Philebus 12C4.
38 For an excellent discussion of this passage (and related ones in the Apology) see (Fine 2008).
39 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.”
trivial, relative to kalon kagathon) things.\textsuperscript{40} 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 might best be filled out as follows:

[a′] Socrates takes himself to lack (at least) robust\textsuperscript{41} virtue-knowledge.\textsuperscript{42}

How, then, are we to understand the second assumption? \textit{Prima facie} the answer to this question is straightforward. [b] assumes that Socrates seeks the knowledge he lacks.\textsuperscript{43} [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 \textit{Socrates} is made to attempt to acquire the knowledge he lacked. I am also interested in determining how Plato thinks the knowledge Socrates’ interlocutors lacked 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’ lack of knowledge to be fully general. At \textit{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, \textit{ta}...

\textsuperscript{40}I leave open for the purposes of this study how to understand Socrates claim at \textit{Apology} 21B4-5 to be wise concerning nothing large or small. See also \textit{Apology} 21D1. For more detailed accounts of Socrates’ various knowledge avowals and disavowals see (Vlastos 1985), (Brickhouse and Smith 1994:30–72), (Benson 2000:223–238), (Wolfsdorf 2004), (Forster 2007), (Fine 2008), and (Wolfsdorf 2008:131–145).

\textsuperscript{41}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).

\textsuperscript{42}See also (Fine 2008) and (Wolfsdorf 2008:ch. 3, esp. 145).

\textsuperscript{43}See, e.g., \textit{Gorgias} 505E4-6, \textit{pace} (Peterson 2011:56–57 n 80).
megista, which they did not. Further, there is little reason to suppose that the sort of knowledge Socrates takes himself to have shown his interlocutors lack is ordinary. In fact, that the knowledge that Socrates takes himself to have shown they lack is robust is indicated in a variety of ways.

The method by which Socrates attempts to lead his interlocutors to the recognition that they lack the knowledge they think they have cannot establish that specific individual beliefs of the interlocutor are false. 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 also 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 is a necessary condition for knowledge that prosecuting his father is pious. Socrates’ commitment to such a necessary condition of

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44See (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 2008:141 n. 157).
45For somewhat a longer defense of this general point see (Benson 2000:180-185), pace (Vlastos 1994:62) and (Vlastos 1994:74). See also (Wolfsdorf 2008:183): “I believe that inquiry into the aitia of ordinary knowledge is misguided. The early dialogues are not interested in developing a theory of ordinary knowledge.” See also (Charles 2006:121).
46Or at least so I have argued in (Benson 2000:ch. 1–3) and (Benson 2011), contra, et al., (Vlastos 1983) and (Santana 2007).
47For a defense of this idea see (Benson 1990), and more recently (Prior 1998), (Wolfsdorf 2004), (Wolfsdorf 2008:121–131), and (Benson forthcoming).
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.\(^{48}\) 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.\(^{49}\) Ordinary knowledge may be more plausibly thought to be necessary for virtue, but clearly robust knowledge would appear required to be thought plausibly sufficient for virtue.\(^{50}\) 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 wil-o’-wisp,\(^{51}\) thinks that in the middle dialogues Plato’s conception of knowledge is robust.\(^{52}\) 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 birth (*Phaedo* 64C-66A) and the *Republic*’s elaborate educational scheme, which reserves final knowledge acquisition to the ripe old age of

\(^{48}\)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 2011) and (Benson forthcoming).

\(^{49}\)See n. 3 above.

\(^{50}\) (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 (δυναµις) Socrates indicates it has in the *Protagoras*.

\(^{51}\)See n. 54 below.

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 (Επίστασθαι ... ἀπλῶς) (and not in the sophistical way, incidentally) when we think we know of the explanation (τὴν ... αἰτίαν) because of which the object holds that it is its explanation, and also that it is not possible for it to be otherwise (μὴ ἐνδεχεσθαι τοῦτο άλλως ἔχειν). 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 (ὅτι 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, 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 I.2 71b9-25; Barnes trans.]53

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.54 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.55 Socrates’ human wisdom, then, does not merely consist in his

53 (Barnes 1994) chooses to translate ἐπιστήμη and its cognates as ‘understanding’ precisely to highlight the robust nature of Aristotelian knowledge. See also (Burnyeat 1981).
54 (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 1994:60 n. 49). 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.
55 See, for example, (Hawtrey 1972:4), (Brickhouse and Smith 1994:sec. 2.1), (Reeve 1989:33-37), (Weiss 2001:180), (McPherran 2002:126 n 34), and, most recently, (Peterson 2011:17–58). Against this reading see (Fine 2008:77 ff.). See also (Scott 2006:90) for a sober statement of the issue.
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.\textsuperscript{56} Since it is unobtainable and 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.\textsuperscript{57}

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:

\begin{enumerate}
  \item If Socrates takes robust virtue-knowledge to be restricted to the gods, then he neither seeks nor encourages others to seek robust virtue-knowledge.
  \item Socrates takes robust virtue-knowledge to be restricted to the gods.
  \item Thus, Socrates neither seeks nor encourages others to seek robust virtue-knowledge.
\end{enumerate}

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

\begin{enumerate}
  \item If Socrates takes robust virtue-knowledge to be restricted to the gods, then he neither seeks nor encourages others to seek robust virtue-knowledge.
  \item Socrates seeks and encourages others to seek robust virtue-knowledge.
  \item Thus, Socrates does not take robust virtue-knowledge to be restricted to the gods.
\end{enumerate}

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

\textsuperscript{56}See (Kraut 1984:291) and (Vlastos 1994:63). The unobtainability of divine knowledge is more difficult to sustain in the middle classical dialogues in light of Plato’s apparent commitment to the theory of recollection, see \textit{Meno} 81A-D, \textit{Phaedo} 72E-78B, \textit{Phaedrus} 246A-257B, and pp. 81-95 below. Indeed, at \textit{Timaeus} 51E5-6 Plato explicitly recognizes that robust knowledge (\nuouũς), 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, \textit{Theaetetus} 176A8-B2 and (Sedley 1990:380), (Annas 1999:54, 57, 58, n 21, 66 n 43), and (Carone 1998:283–284 & n 24).

\textsuperscript{57}It is interesting that the same argument is not applied to Plato in the middle 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).
seeks and encourages others to seek what he recognizes cannot be acquired.\(^{58}\) 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 them to seek robust virtue-knowledge, and when he claims that all of us, including himself, ought to be ‘contentiously eager’ to know the truth concerning how we ought to live,\(^{59}\) 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, is Socrates made to proceed? What strategy is Socrates made to recommend for escaping this robust ethical ignorance?\(^{60}\) Clitophon intimates that he has none to recommend. How, if at all, can Plato respond to Clitophon’s challenge?\(^{61}\)

\(^{58}\)\textit{Pace} (Scolnicov 1988:13–14), (Gentzler 1996:259), and (Peterson 2011:34 n 39). 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. 23-26 below.

\(^{59}\)See \textit{Gorgias} 505E4-5.

\(^{60}\)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 n. 3 above. 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. For an informative discussion of Sophistic teaching of virtue, see (Corey 2002) and (Corey 2005).

\(^{61}\)Those who deny premise \([1]\) above, i.e., who allow that Socrates seeks and encourages others to seek what he recognizes cannot be acquired, will have an easier time finding a Platonic response to Clitophon’s challenge. Plato will need a strategy for how to proceed once one’s ignorance has been recognized, but it need (indeed will) not be a strategy that can successfully acquire knowledge. See pp. 24-26 below. It is noteworthy that in at least two of the dialogues Plato comes very close to taking up Clitophon’s challenge directly. In the \textit{Laches}, he has Socrates consider whether the virtue of courage can be acquired by learning the art of fighting in armor from Stesilaus and the \textit{Meno} begins with Meno asking Socrates whether virtue can be acquired by being taught, or by practice, or by nature, or in some other way. In neither of these dialogues is Socrates made to give anything like a direct answer to this challenge. Nevertheless, we will be looking at both dialogues to see whether anything like an indirect answer can be found. Finally, at \textit{Theaetetus} 175C4-8, Socrates is made to say that the philosopher is concerned with the question ‘What is the proper method (τρόπον) by which human happiness can be attained?’ Assuming that acquiring robust
Chapter 2

Learning from Others in the Elenctic Dialogues

Introduction

Let us turn first to the so-called 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 lead 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.\(^1\) 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.\(^2\) 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\(^3\) propositions.\(^4\)

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 virtue-knowledge is in some way related to attaining human happiness, the philosopher is concerned to respond to Clitophon’s challenge.

\(^1\)For the classic defense of this account see (Vlastos 1983) and (Vlastos 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, denouncing it as a will-o’-wisp.

\(^2\)My reading of (Jenks 2001:ch. 1) drove home for me this motivation of the constructivist interpretation. Recall also that (Vlastos 1985) and (Vlastos 1994:ch. 2)’s ‘elenctic knowledge’ is introduced as precisely the kind of knowledge that the elenchos is capable of yielding. See also (Gentzler 1995:227): “It has often been noted that Socratic cross-examination is problematic as a method of inquiry, i.e., as a method for acquiring knowledge” (her emphasis).

\(^3\)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’ ‘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 (Jackson 1990:393): “The Socratic elenchus, on the other hand, is a method of discovery, for coming to know what is true.” Contra (Wolfsdorf 2008:179), who writes “... there is no such thing as the elenchus or elenctic method, as it is commonly conceived;” see also (Brickhouse and Smith 2002).
prove or otherwise establish individual atomic propositions and Socrates is not made to indicate that it can. I will not rehearse those arguments here.

A second, to my mind more plausible, but less common response to this question is to agree that the *elenchos* cannot prove or otherwise establish individual atomic propositions, but maintain that, nevertheless, it can lead to the epistemic improvement of Socrates’ interlocutors. This alone does not suffice to respond to the question how elenctic engagement leads to the virtue-knowledge one has been lead to seek. We are still left wondering how this knowledge is to be acquired. But according to this second line of argument, Socrates is depicted as maintaining that such knowledge cannot be acquired. Such knowledge is, according to Socrates, on this line of argument, 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

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5 For the complete argument see (Benson 2000:ch. 3 & 4), and now more recently (Benson 2011). 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 1875:420–421), (Vlastos 1956), (Allen 1970:46–48), (White 2008), perhaps also (Tarrant 2002), and (MacKenzie 1988:331–332). White’s version of non-constructivism is importantly different than 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 non-constructivism 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 difficult to deny; see *Sophist* 230a5-e4. Before closing this note I should point out that 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 Notice, that like Vlastos (see n. 1 above), this line of response 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. Among those who might be thought to recommend this latter, more moderate response, are (Brickhouse and Smith 1994:41–42), (McPherran 1996:292–297), (May 1997), (Weiss 2001:10 & 57–63), and perhaps (Gonzalez 1998) and (McCabe 2006:44).
they improve themselves ethically. So Socrates in striving to acquire and encouraging others to strive to acquire knowledge that 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.

Again, I am skeptical of this line of response to Clitophon’s challenge. This time, however, my skepticism does not result from any specific text or bundle of texts that appear to rule out this response. To my knowledge there are no such texts (at least in the elenctic dialogues). Rather my skepticism arises from a worry about the philosophical (or psychological) plausibility of seeking to achieve what one believes one cannot achieve. Unfortunately, I suspect that there is little to be said on behalf of my worry. One either shares it or one does not. Nevertheless, it is clear that in non-elenctic dialogues Plato thinks robust virtue-knowledge can be learned. 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

7I owe this example and much of my understanding to this second line of argument to correspondence and conversations with Nick Smith.
8See ch. 1 n. 12 above.
9Especially in the Greek context. One might, for example, take Aristotle to be assuming the implausibility of seeking or desiring what one recognizes cannot be acquired in his argument for the highest good at *Nicomachean Ethics* I.2 1094A18-22. On the other hand, one might take ancient skepticism as encouraging the search for knowledge despite the recognition that it cannot be acquired. In their case, however, the goal seems importantly different than epistemic improvement.
10One 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*. Brickhouse and Smith to their credit recognize this consequence and deny that Socrates identifies virtue with *eudaemonia*. See (Brickhouse and Smith 1994:112–136). For their more recent view about the relationship between virtue and *eudaemonia* see (Brickhouse and Smith 2010:185 n. 24).
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; Grube trans.]

Consequently, from Plato’s perspective in dialogues like the Meno, Republic, Phaedo, Theaetetus, and Timaeus this moderate constructivist 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 as it is employed by Socrates in the elenctic dialogues are inadequate as a response to Clitophon’s challenge.

Nevertheless, I do not deny that Socrates is made to seek 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, as the strict constructivists would have it, or to thinking that the knowledge he seeks is unobtainable, as the more modest constructivists would have it?

11See also Republic I.337D3-5, Phaedo 72E-78B, the elaborate description of ‘the greatest mathema’ in Republic VI-VII, 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 A 6, 987a29-b8; M 4, 1078b12-32, and M 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).

12An 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 Socrates’ at least with respect to the human obtainability of robust knowledge may not be as radical as Vlastos’s schizophrenic (see p. 11 above), but one would like some explanation for the change. That said, however, my view also is committed to a difference between the two Socrates’. 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. 10-14 above) 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 I suspect 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.

In the present chapter, I answer these questions by quoting 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 (καταληψοµένος ἐµαυτόν ἁµαθέστερον ἑκεῖνον ἄντω). 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. (ιν’ ἀµα τι καὶ µανθάνοιµ παρ’ αўτῶν.) [*Apology* 22A8-B5; Grube trans.; emphasis added]

That is, I contend that Socrates is depicted in the elenctic dialogues as attempting to learn (and encouraging 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. Rather he employs it as a means of learning from one who already knows. Nevertheless, I maintain that Socrates is also depicted at least twice in these same dialogues as raising serious difficulties for such a method of learning. At the beginning of the *Protagoras*, Socrates is made to worry 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 is 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

¹⁴Like moderate constructivism, then, I too take Socrates as depicted 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 I argue for below, 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 is depicted in the so-called middle dialogues as employing and recommending a different method for acquiring such knowledge, hopefully 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 Socrates is depicted in the middle dialogues as now taking 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.
The Conceptual Possibility of Learning from One who Knows

This will come as a bit of a shock for some. How can Socrates, who is famously depicted as distrusting hearsay and the unquestioned authority of others, recommend learning from others? We can begin to answer this question by noticing that Socrates is explicitly depicted as recognizing 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 has neither had a teacher (διδάσκαλος) of the technê ‘concerning the care for the soul’ (τεχνικὸς περὶ ψυχῆς θεραπείαν; Laches 185e4) nor has he been able to discover this technê on his own (αὐτὸς δ’ αὐτὸ εὑρεῖν τὴν τέχνην ἀδύνατο ἐτι νυνὶ), despite seeking it from his youth, he is made to say

If Nicias or Laches had discovered it or learned it (ηὐρήκεν ἢ μεμάθηκεν), I would not be surprised, because they are richer than I and so may have learned (μάθειν) it from others, and also older, so they may have discovered (ηὐρίσκειν) it already. [Laches 186C5-8; Sprague trans.]

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

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. 10-14 above.

15See (White 1976:3–4), (Welbourne 1986:233) (despite their differences), et al. See also Crito 46B4-6.
16See 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 have learned from another or discovered on their 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.
Indeed, Plato’s acceptance of the conceptual possibility of learning from one who knows should come as no surprise. The Platonic dialogues advocate a rejection of the “paternalistic/authoritarian tradition” which, despite 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.”\(^{17}\) 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 will be objected, rejects the traditional model of learning according to which knowledge is transmitted from teacher to pupil.\(^{18}\) 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, i.e., 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

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\(^{17}\) As (Blondell 2002:95-96) has persuasively argued.

\(^{18}\) See, especially, Republic 518B-D.

\(^{19}\) Something like this seems to be what Polemarchus fails to understand in the first book of the Republic. 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).
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 ‘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 ‘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 her student seeks to acquire.

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 in acquiring the knowledge as well. Socrates and Plato, I think, 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 student, the one 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, question, and otherwise annoy the one who knows in an attempt to acquire their knowledge.20

20My university’s president likes to discourage first semester freshmen from adopting the student’s perspective of the traditional pedagogical model by telling them a story about hand-clapping. The student’s perspective of the traditional model is like trying to make the clapping sound with only one hand. It takes both hands (the student and the professor) to make the thunderous clap, so my university’s president likes to assert. However, given this president’s bottom-line, I am quite confident that he does not mean to be suggesting that students can successfully engage in this educational hand-clapping with anyone they happen to meet. The knowledge of the faculty is
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. And so, in rejecting the transmission model of learning Plato is not rejecting the possibility of learning from another altogether.

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

Socratic Recommendations

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

[i] What method is Socrates made to recommend in the elenctic dialogues to others for learning the robust virtue-knowledge they lack?

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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 2008:161) who takes the claim that knowledge is teachable to be analytically true at least for Plato.

(Devereux 1978:118–120) would object to the conjunction that Plato thinks knowledge can be taught and that knowledge can be learned from one 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 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 1961:21–25)’s distinction between sophistic and maieutic teaching, and more recently (Vlastos 1991:32), (Scott 1995:42–46), and (Scott 2006:142–144). These issues will occupy our attention throughout this chapter, but part of my point a few paragraphs back is 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 one 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.

See also *Meno* 92E7-93A4 and the first sentence of Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics* I.1 71a1-2.
What method is Socrates made to 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 these questions (and so insofar as it suggests any answer at all to Clitophon’s 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 ζητῆσαι ἂν ἡδέως οὐκ εἰδότως), 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? (Οἶει οὖν ἂν αὐτὸν πρῶτον ἑπιχειρήσαι ζητεῖν ἢ μαθάνειν τὸ ὕπο
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 portrayed as so concerned to bring about this result? At least one explanation for this obsession is a concern to lead the interlocutors to recognize their ignorance so that they will seek the knowledge they lack. 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 wiser than Socrates. 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 that he did not have the wisdom he thought he had, thereby incurring the politician’s and the bystanders’ wrath. 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 is depicted as engaging 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.

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24 Concerning this passage (Slings 1999:140–141) writes: “Aporia is a necessary and sufficient condition for ‘attempting to search or learn’ (84C4-5); in other words, one who is ‘thrown into aporia’ will automatically ‘feel a desire to know’ (cf. 84C5-6). With aporia, therefore, the aim of implicit protreptic has been reached; what follows is not protreptic any longer, but (philosophical) investigation.” 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. 24-26 above.
26 *Apology* 21C7-D1; see also *Apology* 23B6-C1.
ignorance and thereby to remove 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 so-called ‘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 ἐγωγε ὅπως σοι εἶπω ὅ νοον); for whatever proposition we put forward goes around and refuses to stay put where we establish it (περιερχεται γάρ πως ἡμιν ἂει ὅ ἂν προθόμεθα καὶ οὐκ ἔθελει μένειν ὅποι ἂν ἱδρυσόμεθα αὐτῷ). [Euthyphro 11B6-8; adapted from Grube trans.] 28

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

27See (Woolf 2002:243); see also (Scolnicov 1988:17), (Sedley 2003:63), and (Smith 1997:xviii). Here then is an answer to (Wolfsdorf 2008:149)’s 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.

28Translating ὅ νοον 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 (α νοο μὴ οἶός τ ἐξελεί) and yet immediately follows this with the claim “I still think I know what courage is, but I can't persuade the interlocutor of this lack of knowledge.

29See also Lysis 218A2-B5. See (Woolf 2008:7) concerning Apology 23B1-4.
out Socrates is generally a failure at benefiting his interlocutors in the way he benefits the slave at *Meno* 84B10-C6.\(^{30}\) Of the 23 elenctic interlocutors\(^{31}\) in the elenctic dialogues only 5 - 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 case 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 relative 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 (θειὰ μοίρα; cf. *Meno* 99E4-100B4). Ion, foregoing 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 (μη τεχνικόν), that you are a singer of Homer's praises.” [*Ion* 542B3-4; Woodruff trans.]

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

\(^{30}\) See, for example, (Woolf 2008:8 n 16): “one would in fact be hard pressed to find a single unequivocal example in the dialogues of an interlocutor brought to self-awareness by an encounter with Socrates.” See also (Blondell 2002:125).

\(^{31}\) Meletus, Charmides, Critias, Crito, Dionysodorus, Euthydemus, Cleinias, Euthyphro, Gorgias, Polus, Callicles, 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 below, 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 which 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 n. 28 above), 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; Lombardo & Bell trans.].
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 with Socrates everyday, 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. 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 pp. 39-40 below), there is no reason for Socrates to object to Critias’ and Charmides’ proposal. 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. Socrates, thereupon, provides a 33 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.

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

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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 1992:126–127) 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. 49-50 below.

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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 at last 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 (ἲσως γάρ τοι ὁφελεῖ τὴν μεγίστην ὁφελίαν; 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 (ὁποῖς χρή σοφίας τε καὶ ἀρετῆς ἐπιμελήθηναι; 278D2-3) and then later that the wisdom he ought to seek is not just any wisdom but a particular sort (282E2-4). 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 virtue-knowledge - at least by implication. He offers no objection to Socrates’ argument at *Crito* 47A-48A that the only

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35 The sort of wisdom to be sought is at least the robust virtue-knowledge introduced in the previous chapter. See also the knowledge required of the philosopher ruler in the *Republic*; chapters 8 and 9 below.
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, Socrates. I do not know (οὐ γὰρ ἐννοῶ).” [Grube trans.] 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; Grube trans.). 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 who have inspired Socrates to give the speech.36

36Obviously, I prefer the second of these two options given my commitment to the sincerity of Socratic ignorance (assumption [a] from the previous chapter). 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. (Ταῦτα, ὃ φιλὲ ἔταρχε Κρῖτων, εὐ ἂνθ᾽ ὃτι ἐγὼ δοκῶ ἄκουειν, ἦσπερ οἱ κορυβαντιῶντες τῶν αὐλῶν δοκοῦσιν ἄκουειν, καὶ ἐν ἐμοὶ αὐτῇ ἡ ἡχὴ τούτων τῶν λόγων βομβεῖ καὶ ποιεῖ μὴ δύνασθαι τῶν ἄλλων ἄκουειν)” [54d2-5; Grube trans.] But this is certainly not definitive. Indeed, (Harte 1999:118–119) takes this passage to suggest that Plato does not endorse the speech of 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.
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; Sprague trans.]

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 fathers to invite Laches and Nicias to a display of fighting in armor, as advisors 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 (κοινὴ πάντως 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 (συμβουλεύω) is that we remain as we are.” [Laches 201A3-7; Sprague trans.]
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.

**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.\(^{38}\) Unfortunately, in both cases our evidence for the manner in which Socrates attempts to learn is not much better than our evidence

\(^{37}\)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 1992:286–287) and n. 20 above.

\(^{38}\)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 through 8 I attempt to modify this approach to the middle dialogues.
for the manner in 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 passages, however, Socrates explicitly connects this practice of examining the knowledge claims of others with his learning strategy.

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 (καταληψομένος ἐμαυτόν ἁμαθέστερον ἐκείνων ὄντα). 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**. (ἀν ἴμα τι καὶ μανθάνοιμι παρ’ αὐτῶν.) [Apology 22A8-B5; Grube trans.; 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, he does not approach them in a traditional way. He takes up their poems and questions them concerning their meaning. He does this for at least two

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39 See, esp., Socrates’ description of his examination of the the Delphic Oracle at Apology 21B-23B and the statement of his divine mission at Apology 29D2-30B2. See also (Benson 2000:18–29).
40 See, for example, (Blondell 2002:96) for the tradition of poets as teachers.
41 See a similar approach suggested by Protagoras at Protagoras 338E-339A.
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 correctly 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. Nevertheless, it appears that, at least at the time of the response from the Delphic Oracle, the (or at least one) method for acquiring virtue-knowledge that Socrates himself pursues is to learn from those who have it.

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 (σε εἶναι σοφῶτερον ἢ ἐμὲ), 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 δοκῇ 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 ὁτι 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 μάθων τι ὁφεληθῶ). [Hippias Minor 369D1-E2; Smith trans.] (See also Hippias Minor 372A-C)

[42] 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 below pp. 50-52.

[43] 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.” [Grube trans.]
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.44

Notice, again, the presumption of knowledge and the desire to learn is followed by careful questioning of what the teacher means - by thorough questioning (διαπυνθανομαι), examination (ἐπανασκοπῶ), and reconciliation (συμβιβάζω) of what is said. This trio of verbs calls to mind 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 (ἐρήσομαι), examine[s] him (ἐξετάσω) and test[s] him (ἐλέγξω)” [Apology 29E4-5; Grube trans.] 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 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,45 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.46 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

44See Theaetetus 145C7-D5.
45Socrates 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).
46See (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.”
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. 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. And this irony is thick. Without it Hippias is likely to discontinue 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/authoritarian model of education represented by Hippias. 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

47 I owe this objection to my student Shyam Patwardhan, 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 οίῳσαι σοφον εἶπα). 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; Grube trans.] We will see below that the depiction of Socrates’ practice in the elenctic dialogues matches this description.

48 See also the Callias story Socrates is made to tell at *Apology* 20A-C 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.

49 (Blondell 2002:116–164). She writes Hippias is “portrayed as steeped in Athenian literary and educational culture, ... as embodied in Homeric epic. His agonistic spirit accords with the epic tradition as well as the sophistic enterprise. He shows a faith in both Homeric character models and passive memorization that aligns him with traditional educational methods, ... His failures will reveal the common defects - from a Platonic perspective - of these two interconnected traditions, especially their joint reliance on the passive, unthinking modes of education that underlie mimetic pedagogy” (Blondell 2002:128).
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 (ἐλέγχειν) him rather than pursuing the nature of temperance (περὶ οὗ ὁ λόγος ἔστιν), 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 of my own statements (διερευνῶμην τι λέγω) - the fear of unconsciously thinking that I know something when I do not (φοβοῦμενός μή ποτε λάθος οἰόμενος μὲν τι εἰδέναι, εἰδῶς δὲ μὴ). And this is what I claim to be doing now, examining the argument for my own sake primarily (τὸν λόγον σκοπεῖν μάλιστα μὲν ἐμαυτοῦ ἐνεκά), 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; Sprague trans.]

This passage has often been taken as indicating Socratic self-examination. In examining others’ claims to virtue-knowledge, Socrates also is examining his own. 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 amount to avoiding thinking he knows something he does not. 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*

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50See (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.

51Another answer is that Critias is saying something that Socrates himself believes. See, for example, (Woodruff 1988:104) and (Rappe 1995:9 and 14). (Woolf 2008:14 n 25) 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.
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. Euthyphro, for example, claims to know what piety is, and Socrates, thereupon, sets out to become his pupil on this matter.

> It is because I realize this that I am eager to become your pupil (μαθητης), 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

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52 Charmides (Charmides 154E5-155A1), Crito (Crito 45A3 & 46A7-8 together with the argument at 47A-48A), Critias 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 281A-C, 286D-287B), Hippias (Hippias Minor 364A-B), Ion (Ion 530C1-D3), Laches (Laches 184E11-187A1, 190C4-5), Nicias (Laches 184E11-187A1, 196C), Menexenus (Lysis 211B6-D4), Meno (Meno 71D5-8, 71E1-72A2), the slave (Meno 82E5-6), Hippocrates (Protagoras 311A8-B2, 312C4-5), Protagoras (Protagoras 316C-317C, 320C-D), Polemarchus (Republic 1 331E7-8, 335E1-4), and Thrasymachus (Republic 1 338A1, 344D-E). See (Nehamas 1992:300–302) and (Benson 2000:26–29), pace (Wolfsdorf 2008:150) 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.
Zeus, what you just now maintained you clearly knew ... [Euthyphro 5c4-9; Grube trans.]
(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.\(^53\) Again, in the Laches, both Laches and Nicias claim knowledge which 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,\(^54\) 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.\(^55\)

The only elenctic interlocutors who do not claim to possess knowledge which Socrates professes to lack are Lysis in the dialogue named for him, and Clinias with whom we have met before. In neither case, however, is there any suggestion that their respective examinations are intended as some kind of joint strategy for acquiring the knowledge Socrates and his unconceited interlocutors recognize they lack. Rather, Socrates is explicitly made to claim 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 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 his descriptions of his own method. Insofar as Socrates

\(^{53}\)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.”

\(^{54}\)Although see Laches 181D6.

\(^{55}\)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.
is depicted as doing anything to acquire the virtue-knowledge 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, nothing in the text suggests that this joint pursuit consists in anything 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 any kind of answer to Clitophon’s challenge - any kind of 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 (ἡπιστῶσαντο) things I did not know (ἡπιστῶσαμην), and to that extent they were wiser (σοφῶτεροι) than I. [Apology 22D3-4; Grube trans.]

But he goes on to indicate that these craftsmen because of this knowledge took themselves to have knowledge of other greatest things (τὰ ἄλλα τὰ μέγιστα) which they did not have. Moreover,  

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56 How Socrates is able to recognize this is a difficult question in light of his argument in the *Charmides* to be discussed below.
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 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.  

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” (ὁ σοφιστής τυγχάνει ὃν ἐμποροὺς τις ἥ κάπηλος τῶν ἀγωγίμων, ἄφ’ ὃν ψυχή τρέφεται) [Protagoras 313C4-6; Lombardo/Bell trans.], 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 trainer or doctor” (ἐὰν μὴ τις τύχῃ γυμναστικὸς ἢ ἰατρὸς ὃν) [Protagoras 313D4; Lombardo/Bell trans.].

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57 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.

58 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 2000:169–172); 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, there remains the chance that his learning strategy could succeed, even for Socrates.
trans]. 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” (ἐὰν μὴ τις τύχῃ περί τὴν ψυχὴν αὖ ἰατρικὸς ἔοι) [Protagoras 313E2; Lombardo/Bell trans.].

So if you are a knowledgeable (ἐπιστήμων) consumer, you can buy teachings (μαθήματα) 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 teachings than in buying foods. [Protagoras 313E2-314A1: Lombardo/Bell trans.]

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 teachings (μαθήματα) they must be ingested on the spot and there is no opportunity for further examination. The suggestion here is that given the enormous risk involved in ingesting bad teachings, i.e., teachings that are bad for one’s soul, one should not seek to acquire virtue-knowledge from another unless one knows which teachings are good for one and which are not, unless, that is, one is an expert concerning the care of the soul.60 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 teachings 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, but the passage that is of immediate concern for our purposes begins at Charmides 170D5-E3.61 Socrates there

59 Μαθήματα here are probably best understood as whatever it is one learns - whether knowledge or belief or true belief - from the sophist, not necessarily knowledge.

60 See (Nehamas 1985, 13) and (Nehamas 1987:297–298).

61 For a longer discussion of this passage see (Benson 2003).
appears to maintain that an individual who only possesses knowledge of knowledge will lack the ability to recognize first order knowledge in another. Socrates continues by offering the argument for this view, which after some confusion, goes rather straightforwardly as follows:

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

[2] If B knows Φ, then what B says concerning Φ is true and what B does concerning Φ is done correctly (supplied).

[3] So, A will seek to determine whether what B says concerning Φ is true and what B does concerning Φ is done correctly (*Charmides* 171B7-10).

[4] But only the one who has knowledge of Φ will be able to determine whether the things said concerning Φ are true or the things done concerning Φ are done correctly (*Charmides* 171B11-C3).

[5] So, if A lacks knowledge of Φ, then A cannot recognize that B has knowledge of Φ (*Charmides* 171C4-10).

Socrates concludes that the knower of knowledge, lacking first order knowledge of a specific subject matter, health, justice, music, housebuilding, 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.

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62 “Nor, when another claims to know something, will our friend be able to find out whether he knows what he says he knows or does not know it. But he will only know this much, it seems, that the man has some knowledge; yes, but of what, temperance will fail to inform him.” "Apparently so." “So neither will he be able to distinguish the man who pretends to be a doctor, but is not, from the man who really is one, nor will he be able to make this distinction for any of the other experts.” [*Charmides* 170D5-E3; adapted from Sprague trans.] *Pace* (Schmid 1998:108–113), 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.

63 The passsage begins with the phrase σκεψω µεθα δε εκ των δε 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).

64 So much so that (Schofield 1973) advocates altering the text.

65 See (Gentzler 1995:228): “... the *technê* requirement on discrimination:’ TD: In order to discriminate (*diakrinein*) between the person who knows and the person who does not know the subject matter covered by a particular discipline (*technê*), one must have mastered that discipline.”
And so, knowledge of knowledge does not suffice for knowledge of what one knows and does not know.\textsuperscript{66}

Notice that as long as \([2]\) in the argument above is understood simply as supplying a necessary condition for knowledge of a specific subject matter, i.e., for the possession of a \textit{technê},\textsuperscript{67} 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 above argument requires truth and correctness to be sufficient for knowledge or expertise. Consequently, nothing in the above argument indicates that lacking first order knowledge one cannot 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, i.e., 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.

\textsuperscript{66}Socrates nevertheless does maintain that knowledge of knowledge does suffice 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 cannot say. 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 \textit{Charmides} appears to indicate that that is impossible.

\textsuperscript{67}All that this requires is that Plato would be prepared to recognize a distinction between knowledge and true belief. That Plato is prepared to recognize such a distinction even in the elenctic dialogues see, for example, (Benson 2000:93–94), (Fine 1992:209), (Irwin 1995:27–28 & 141–143), \textit{Charmides} 162D-E and \textit{Gorgias} 454C-455A; \textit{pace} (Beversluis 1974:331–336), (Kahn 1988:87–88), (Nehamas 1987:282), (Woodruff 1992:102), (Penner 1992:151 n 18), (Nehamas 1992:290). Of course, that Plato recognizes this distinction in post-\textit{Meno} dialogues is uncontroversial. I here put to one side worries about deception and insufficient resources. For the former see \textit{Hippias Minor} 376A-B; for the latter see \textit{Euthydemus} 279C-280B.
Conclusion

It would seem, then, that we would do well 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.68 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.69 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: adapted from Gonzalez trans.]. Perhaps, Plato has a better response to offer elsewhere.

68 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.
69 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.”
Chapter 3

Meno’s Paradox & the Theory of Recollection

Introduction

Meno abruptly\(^1\) 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? [\textit{Meno} 70A1-4; Grube trans.]\(^2\)

We might anticipate, then, that here in Plato’s \textit{Meno} we will get an 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 \textit{Meno} will know that our expectations are likely to be frustrated. The \textit{Meno} concludes by apparently denying that knowledge is necessary (although it may perhaps be sufficient) for virtue and maintaining that virtue is acquired by divine dispensation (θεία μοίρα). If we take the conclusion of the \textit{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, two features of classical Platonism are introduced in Plato’s \textit{Meno}: the theory of recollection and the method of hypothesis.\(^4\) These two features - especially the first -

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\(^1\)See (Scott 2006:12–13) for an interpretation of the significance of this abrupt beginning. As will be obvious from the previous chapter, I suspect that Scott is overdoing Plato’s focus on the distinction between \textit{sophistic} and \textit{Socratic} teaching.

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

\(^3\)See (Bedu-Addo 1984, 14), who writes “It would seem, then, that the \textit{Meno} is primarily an enquiry into the nature of knowledge and the manner whereby it may be acquired, and that the nature of virtue and how we acquire it are discussed only for the sake of example.”

\(^4\)In claiming that these two features are ‘introduced’ I do not mean to presuppose a developmentalist interpretation of the dialogues; see pp. 10-14 above. 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 \textit{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.
have seemed philosophically embarrassing. Consequently, charity has encouraged a reading of the *Meno* that diminishes their philosophical efficacy. Insofar as these features can be seen as philosophically otiose, they can be dismissed as flights of fancy. I believe that such an understanding of the theory of recollection and the method of hypothesis - however well intentioned - is misguided. I will maintain that these two features of classical Platonism are introduced as the initial stages of a response to Clitophon’s challenge.\(^5\)

The theory of recollection and the method of hypothesis are evidently motivated by the puzzle that Meno puts forward and Socrates repeats at *Meno* 80D-E, often referred to as Meno’s paradox.\(^6\) This paradox raises a problem for the acquisition of knowledge or learning. As we have seen in the previous chapter, 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

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\(^5\)Again, I am not presupposing a developmentalist interpretation. Plato may have had this response in mind when he composed the elenctic dialogues or he may have come to recognize the need for a different response after composing those dialogues. The point I am concerned to make is that there is a problem of knowledge acquisition or learning just below the surface in the elenctic dialogues and the theory of recollection and the method of hypothesis are offered as a first approximation for resolving this problem. This point does not depend in any way on determining the order of composition of the dialogues.

\(^6\)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.
need to discover it on his own. 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. In the *Meno*, however, Plato has Socrates introduce the theory of recollection and the method of hypothesis in order to show that the latter method of learning, at least, can indeed succeed. Consequently, it is these two features of classical Platonism to which we must turn to begin to find a satisfactory solution to Clitophon’s challenge.

Nevertheless, a variety of commentators would disagree. According to these commentators the problem presented by Meno’s paradox is 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 simply by noticing an elementary equivocation or some other obvious logical fallacy.

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7 See (Dimas 1996:12). For the recognition in the dialogues of these two modes of knowledge acquisition see pp. 26-31 above. 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 begin with Meno as 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.

8 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 all eager to acquire.

9 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.”

10 (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 1995:135–136).

11 See, for example, (Taylor 1956:135–136), (Bluck 1964:8), (Shorey 1965:157), (Klein 1965:92), (Phillips 1965:78), (Eckstein 1968:29–30), (Grube 1980:12), and most recently (Weiss 2001:49–76). A second group of commentators take the paradox seriously, but think the problem can be resolved through resources already available in the elenctic dialogues (viz. the distinction between knowledge and true belief) and so also do not see the theory of recollection or the method of hypothesis as playing a philosophically substantial role in the solution to Meno’s paradox; see, for example (Fine 1992:212–213), (Irwin 1995:131–132), and perhaps (Jenks 1992:328–329). I will respond to this group of interpreters later in the chapter when discussing how Plato’s theory of recollection is meant to resolve Meno’s paradox.
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 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 paradox is presented by Plato as a serious philosophical problem, whose solution requires substantive philosophical thinking resulting initially in the theory of recollection and the method of hypothesis. The chapter will fall into three parts. First, I will lay out the paradox as it is propounded at *Meno* 80D-E. I will 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 will argue that the paradox so presented cannot be resolved by noticing an elementary equivocation. It requires a serious philosophical response. Third, I consider how the theory of recollection is meant to provide that serious philosophical response. We will see, however, that as such it leaves Clitophon’s challenge unaddressed. 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, Plato offers more guidance when we turn to the second feature of classical Platonism introduced in the *Meno* - the method of hypothesis - the subject of the next chapter.

*Meno’s Paradox*

Let us begin, then, by considering 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 ἐиδὼς 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 proven 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 (τι φής ἁρετήν εἶναι)? Speak and do not begrudge us, so that I may have spoken a most unfortunate falsehood, in claiming never to have met anyone who knows [what virtue is], when you and Gorgias are shown to know (ίνα εὐπρόσωπον μεγάλην ἐνευμασίαν ἔχετε καὶ Γοργίας, εγὼ δὲ εἰρήκως μηδενὶ πόσοτε εἰδότε ἐνευμασίαν). [Meno 71D5-8; adapted from Grube trans.]

In the previous chapter 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. 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 both Socrates and Meno himself (79E7-80B4). Nevertheless, Socrates does not abandon his attempt to learn what virtue is nor does he turn to another 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 is now made to encourage Meno to join him in the attempt to discover it:

Nevertheless I wish to examine with you and seek in common what [virtue] is (οὕς δὲ εἴδελον μετὰ σοῦ σκέψασθαι καὶ συζητήσων ὅτι ποτὲ ἐστὶν). [Meno 80D3-4]

One method of learning - acquiring knowledge from one who knows - has come to an end. Another method of learning - acquiring knowledge on one’s own - has come to an end.

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12 See (Scott 2006:12–13) who correctly sees this opening passage as indicating Meno’s commitment to what we called in the previous chapter 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 It must be admitted, however, that this is not explicit in the Meno, although as mentioned in the previous note, he does recognize the possibility.

14 See (Weiss 2001:50 n. 3) 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:138 n. 28). 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. 31-48 above, pace (Gentzler 1996:272 & n 38).

16 See (Scott 2006:71). For the distinction between learning from another and learning on one’s own see pp. 26-31 above. The latter method of learning - what I will frequently refer to as de novo inquiry or de novo learning - does not presuppose another who has the knowledge one seeks. Indeed, I do not see any evidence that Plato is committed even 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 [Lombardo/Bell trans.]. But the context of this passage is not one in which
The Text

It is at this point that 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, ὦ Σώκρατες, τούτῳ ὃ μὴ οἴσθα τὸ παράπαν ὃτι ἐστίν; ποῖον γὰρ ἄν οὐκ οἴσθα προθέμενος ζητήσεις; ἢ εἰ καὶ ὅτι μάλιστα ἐντύχους αὕτῳ, πῶς εἰσή ὃτι τούτῳ ἐστιν ὃ σὺ οὐκ ἠδήσθα;)  [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 οἶνοι βούλει λέγειν, ὦ Μένος, ὅρας τῶν ὡς ἐρημικῶν λόγων κατάγεις, ὡς οὐκ ἀρα ἐστίν ζητήσεις αὐτῶς ὁμοθέτῳ οὔτε ὃ οἴδε οὔτε ὃ μὴ οἴδε; οὔτε γὰρ ἄν ὃ γε οἴδεν ζητῶν οὐδὲν γάρ, καὶ οὐδὲν δεῖ τῷ γε τοιοῦτῳ ζητήσεις ὃς οὔτε ὃ μὴ οἴδεν οὐδὲν γάρ οἴδεν ὃτι ζητήσει.)  [Meno 80E1-5.19]

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

[1] Either A knows what x is or A does not know what x is 20 (supplied)

both interlocutors recognize their ignorance. Socrates is still professing to learn from Protagoras.

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’.

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. 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 the 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 1996:1 n. 1)). But I need not argue the point here. Nothing in the argument that follows will depend on it.

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[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])

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 for ending it. I will refer to these two problems as ‘the beginning problem’ and ‘the ending problem’, 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” alter Meno’s paradox in such a way that it

21To 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 n. 11 above) can be understood as denying [-a], at least when the first what-clause in [4a] and [-a] are understood interrogatively. (See pp. 92-93 below.)


24See (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.
becomes easier to resolve. 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). 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]).

Socrates’ second horn - [5] - is obviously different than Meno’s [5’]. Meno’s [5’] makes the claim 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], i.e., [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. Given these two differences,

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25 See, for example (Thomas 1980:123), (Moravcsik 1970:57), and (Weiss 2001:ch. 2).
27 This difference too is mentioned by (Moravesik 1970:57).
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. 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.

Targeting 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, 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 (παραπαν) 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

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 I do not think that these differences are ones that affect the solution (nor it should be noted does Weiss). (Scott 2006:78) correctly notes a fifth difference: Socrates adds [2] and [3]. More recently (McCabe 2009) offers an interpretation of the two versions of the paradox according to which they differ. According to McCabe, Meno’s version is externalist, while Socrates’ version is internalist. As a result the true belief resolution 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.
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.\footnote{See, for example, (Scolnicov 1988:53).}

Targeting 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, i.e., the beginning problem ([4a’]), might be resolved, and yet Meno’s other consideration, i.e., the ending problem ([4b’]), go unmet. For example, one might suppose one’s beliefs (or non-robust knowledge states\footnote{Remember that throughout ‘knowledge’ is ‘robust knowledge’ and so lack of knowledge or ignorance (see n. 35 below) is compatible with true belief, justified true belief, or non-robust knowledge.}) 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\footnote{(Scott 2006:76–87) offers a variant of this strategy. He maintains that there is an interpretation of [4b’] which 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’] which cannot be so easily resolved. See also (Weiss 2001:57–58).}

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 than Socrates’ second horn. Consequently, in going on to resolve Socrates’ puzzle Plato has left Meno’s puzzle unresolved.

That the Differences Are Not Philosophically Significant

I maintain, however, 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.”\footnote{(White 1976:56 n. 17) and (White 1974:290 n. 4.)} But, more positive reasons can be offered for doubting that Plato took either of these two

\footnote{See, for example, (Scolnicov 1988:53).}

\footnote{Remember that throughout ‘knowledge’ is ‘robust knowledge’ and so lack of knowledge or ignorance (see n. 35 below) is compatible with true belief, justified true belief, or non-robust knowledge.}

\footnote{(Scott 2006:76–87) offers a variant of this strategy. He maintains that there is an interpretation of [4b’] which 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’] which cannot be so easily resolved. See also (Weiss 2001:57–58).}

\footnote{(White 1976:56 n. 17) and (White 1974:290 n. 4.)}
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 (παράπαν) lack of knowledge, while Socrates’ does not. The ‘παράπαν’ in Meno’s version of the paradox does not come ex nihilo. Rather it refers back to the ‘παράπαν’ in Meno’s expression of his ignorance at 80B4-5. After professing to being completely at a loss (μεστὸν ἀπορίας), benumbed in both his soul and tongue (ἐγροτ ἀν τὴν ψυχὴν κἀ τὸ στῶμα ναρκῶ), Meno professes to be unable to say at all what virtue is (νῦν δὲ νῦν ἐστίν τὸ παράπαν ἔχω εἰπεῖν).  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. 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 ποτὲ ἐστὶ τὸ παράπαν ἄρετή τυγχάνω εἰδῶς), for

[i]f I do not know what something is, how could I know what qualities it possesses? (ὁ δὲ μὴ οἶδα τί ἐστιν, πῶς ὁ δα τί εἰδεῖν) [Meno 71B3-4; Grube trans.].

Here we have perhaps the clearest statement in the dialogues of Socrates’ commitment to the priority of definitional knowledge. Socrates here testifies to complete and utter ignorance of virtue resulting from his ignorance of what virtue is. More generally, Socrates assumes that

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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 ἀπορίας, 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).

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.
failing to know what F-ness is, one fails to know anything else about F-ness.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{37} Socrates’ version of the paradox simply leaves out a step.

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

Given Plato’s philosophical commitments, viz. his commitment to the priority of definitional knowledge, the absence of the ‘παραπαν’ in Socrates’ version of the 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.\textsuperscript{39} Given the epistemological commitment to the priority of definitional knowledge any successful response to

\[\text{____________________________________________________________________________}_\]

\textsuperscript{36}For an extended argument that Socrates in the elenctic dialogues is committed to the priority of definitional knowledge see (Benson 1990b) and (Benson 2000:ch. 6). See also (Kahn 1996:160–161), (Irwin 1995:25–26), (Prior 1998), (Dancy 2004:35–64), (Wolfsdorf 2004), (Sedley 2004:26–27), (Fine 2004:57), (Scott 2006:85–87), (Forster 2006), and (Wolfsdorf 2008:183). Others have argued against this commitment; see (Nehamas 1987:277–293), (Beversluis 1987), (Vlastos 1990) and (Brickhouse and Smith 1994:45–60). (Dancy 2004:209–241) maintains that Plato abandons the priority of definitional knowledge (his (IA\textsubscript{1})) 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 354C, 505A-506A, 534B-C, Symposium 199C, and Theaetetus 146C-147C. 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 2011:197–198).

\textsuperscript{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; Grube trans.).

\textsuperscript{38}See (Irwin 1995:131) for a similar expansion.

\textsuperscript{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.
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 was 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? (ποῖον γὰρ ὃν οὐκ ὁίσθεα προθέμενος ζητήσας;)”, while Socrates puts it: one who does not know what he or she is searching for “does not know what to search for (οὐδὲ γὰρ ὁδὲν ὅτι ζητήσα).” The idea appears to be that setting 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. My search for fenestration cannot even begin. Such a search is - for many of us at least - impossible. Thus, Dominic Scott has dubbed the beginning problem ‘the paradox of inquiry’ because as he puts it is a problem

40My 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 than my complete ignorance vis-à-vis fenestration. Socrates and Meno simply lack any robust knowledge of virtue. (See nn. 30 and 35 above.) 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. For this reason the Fine-Irwin interpretation of Meno’s paradox (see n. 11 above and pp. 92-93 below) 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) takes 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) and (Scott 2006:76–87).) My present purposes, however, are simply to motivate the distinction between the two problems.
about inquiry \textit{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.\footnote{Scott 1995:30. See also (Weiss 2001:53). (Matthews 1999:58) calls this problem the ‘the Targeting Objection’.}

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? (ἳ ἐι καὶ ὅτι μάλιστα ἐντύχοις αὐτῷ, πῶς εἶσῃ ὅτι τούτῳ ἐστιν ὅ σὺ οὐκ ἠδησθα;)”. This is not a problem about the possibility of searching for what one does not know, but 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 \textit{per se}, but ... a problem about successful inquiry, i.e. discovery.”\footnote{Scott 1995:31. See also (Matthews 1999:58) who calls this the ‘the Recognition Objection.’ (Weiss 2001:53) objects to Scott’s name for this problem on the grounds that “Meno is not asking, although he is generally thought to be asking, how new discoveries can be made; he is asking how new discoveries are verified. What drives Meno to his second paradox is not that the inquiry in which he and Socrates were engaged made no discoveries - it did in fact yield several answers to the question of the nature of virtue - but that there seemed to be no way of knowing if any of the answers produced was the right one even if it was. The challenge to Socrates posed by Meno’s second paradox is therefore, how can one (you) know that what one has happened upon, what one has discovered, is what one was looking for - even if it is?” Weiss, therefore, renames “the second paradox ‘the paradox of knowing.’” Weiss is certainly correct that Meno does not use the word for discovery (ἐὑρίσκειν) 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 ἐὑρίσκειν. After a series of unsuccessful attempts to answer the ‘What is courage?’ question in the \textit{Laches}, Socrates is made to say that he and his interlocutors have failed to discover what courage is (Οὐκ ἄρα ἴηρήκαμεν, ὥ Νίκτα, ἀνδρεία ὅτι ἐστιν. [199E11]). 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 know 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).}

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 ambiguous 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 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 is made to conclude this entire methodological digression.\(^{45}\) Socrates is made to say

> 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 (ὅτι δ’ οἰόμενοι δεῖν ζητεῖν ἂ μὴ τις οἶδεν βελτιώσῃ ἂν εἴμεν καὶ ἀνδρικώτεροι καὶ ἦττον ἄργοι ἂ εἰ οἰόμεθα ἂ μὴ ἐπιστήμωθα μηδὲ δύνατον 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 *ought* not to search for it.

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 have been calling the ending problem. He explicitly maintains that, whatever else he may have shown, he has shown that one ought to think that one can discover, i.e., hit upon and recognize, what one

\(^{43}\text{(Dimas 1996:19–20).}\)

\(^{44}\text{(Scott 1995:30–31).}\)

\(^{45}\text{It has been common to see the *Meno* as falling into three parts: (1) an attempt to answer the ‘What is virtue?’ question (70A-79E), (2) a methodological digression, containing *Meno*’s paradox, the theory of recollection, the conversation with the slave, and an argument for the immortality of the soul (80A-86C), and (3) the discussion concerning the teachability of virtue (86C-100A). In describing the middle portion of the dialogue (80A-86C) as a methodological digression I do not here mean to suggest that it is irrelevant to the dialogue’s main questions, i.e. ‘What is virtue?’ and ‘How is virtue obtained?’ For those who think the passage contains the answer to at least this last question see, for example (Bluck 1964:320–321), and perhaps (Devereux 1978). At the surface level, however, it is presented as a digression.}\)
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 paradox of discovery 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]. In either case for Plato there is no philosophical significance to this second difference between the two versions of the puzzle. 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:

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[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])
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Having said this, however, we are a long way from understanding what Plato thinks is at stake in presenting the paradox so stated. It is to that task that I turn next.

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46 See (White 1976:56 n. 17). 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.
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" (παιδιαν) 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; Sprague trans.]

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

The Puzzles

At Euthydemus 276A-277C two arguments are put forward whose conclusions might plausibly be thought to be that learning (µανθανείν) is impossible. So understood the structures of the two arguments are as follows:

First Argument (276A1-C7):
- [EI1] 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)

Second Argument (276D7-277C7):
- [EII1] 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

47See 80E2 and 81D6.
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 (from [1])
[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. 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’ 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. [*Euthydemus* 277E4-278B2; Sprague trans.]

The idea here seems clear enough. Socrates explains to Cleinias that the first *Euthydemus* argument depends on an equivocation of ‘learn’ (µανθανειν). 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.⁴⁹

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⁴⁸See ‘tripping them up and overturning them by means of the distinctions in words’ at *Euthydemus* 278B6-7. See also *Theaetetus* 167E5-6.
⁴⁹See (McCabe 1993:80) for an alternative account of Socrates’ diagnosis based not on different senses of µανθανειν, but different tenses or aspects of µανθανειν. 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.
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 learn₁, but [EI3] is not. On the other hand, [EI3] is true for learn₂ or understand, but [EI2] is not. The only way to understand both [EI2] and [EI3] as true would then be 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 [EI2] is true for learn₂ or understand, but not [EI3], while [EI3] is true for learn₁, but [EI2] is not. The question, then, is can the dilemma in the 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 (μανθανειν) - does not occur in the *Meno* puzzle. But perhaps it can be solved in a way that has an analogous structure. For perhaps ‘search’ (ζητειν) is subject to a similar equivocation.

Perhaps, that is, one can be said to search₁ when one has no knowledge of the object of the search₁ at the beginning but acquires it later, and one can be said to search₂ when one has the knowledge of the object of the search₂ at the beginning and uses that knowledge to inspect the thing one knows. One might even propose that ‘ζητειν’ in the sense of search₂ would be better translated as ‘examine’ or ‘investigate’, much as ‘μανθανειν’ in the sense of learn₂ would be better translated as ‘understand’. If so, then we might suppose that [M2] is true for search₁, but [M3] is not. That is, it is true that one does not search₁ - 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

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50 At 81D4-5 Socrates appears to identify μανθανειν with ζητειν 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 ζητειν, i.e., the kind of μανθανειν that amounts to discovering on one’s own or de novo inquiry. (See nn. 7, 12, and 16 above). The paradoxes in the *Euthydemus* apply to the kind of μανθανειν that requires teachers as well.
does indeed search\textsubscript{1} - in that same sense - for what one does not know. On the other hand, [M3] is true for search\textsubscript{2}, but [M2] is not. That is, one does not search\textsubscript{2} - 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.\textsuperscript{51} If it is used as learn\textsubscript{1}, then [EI3] and [EIi2] are false; if it is used as learn\textsubscript{2} or understand, then [EI2] and [EIi3] are false.

But this is not true of *Meno*’s paradox, at least when ‘ζητεῖν’ means search\textsubscript{1}, i.e., seeking to acquire the knowledge that one does not have. When ‘ζητεῖν’ means search\textsubscript{1}, it is true that searchers\textsubscript{1} do not search\textsubscript{1} for what they know, i.e., [M2]. But [M3] so understood is not obviously false. That is, it may remain true that searchers\textsubscript{1} do not search\textsubscript{1} for what they do not know, i.e., [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\textsubscript{1}. 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\textsubscript{1}, rather than investigate or examine, does not resolve this problem. Even if ‘ζητεῖν’ is understood as search\textsubscript{1}, it remains problematic how one is to begin searching\textsubscript{1} for what one does not know at all. The beginning problem does not arise simply for search\textsubscript{2}. The beginning problem is a more obvious problem for search\textsubscript{2} - since one cannot begin the kind of search that requires knowledge in order to perform it, if one fails to have that knowledge. But the beginning problem is also a problem for search\textsubscript{1} - the kind of search that does not explicitly require knowledge in order to perform.

\textsuperscript{51}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 ‘ζητεῖν’ here means search₁, not 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 ‘ζητεῖν’ is ambiguous much like ‘μανθάνειν’, the puzzle in the *Meno* cannot as a matter of fact be resolved simply by pointing to this ambiguity. *Meno*’s paradox remains even when ‘ζητεῖν’ is used unambiguously throughout - at least when it used in the sense of search₁.⁵²

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 one is searching for (since that would be search₂, not search₁) and when one does not know what one is searching for (since one can neither begin nor successfully end a search₁). But, there is another sense of search - search₂, examine, or investigate - which is possible. While search₂ remains impossible when the searcher fails to know what he or she is searching for, search₂ is possible when the searcher knows what he or she 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 searching₂ for or examining.⁵³

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

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⁵² A similar objection to the *Euthydemus* interpretation is offered by (Matthews 1999:57–59).
⁵³ 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, (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, take the resolution of the paradox to require the recognition of an equivocation.
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 search\textsubscript{2} 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 search\textsubscript{1}. Moreover, it will leave unexplained Socrates’ encouragement to search\textsubscript{1} for what neither he nor Meno know at all. If Plato intends to resolve Meno’s paradox by appealing to search\textsubscript{2}, 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\textsuperscript{54} 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 as a matter of fact be resolved simply by recognizing an ambiguity in ‘ζητειν’, and lacking explicit textual evidence to the contrary we should not suppose that Plato thought it could.

\textbf{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\textsuperscript{55}.

Something like this is what Roslyn Weiss has in mind, I think, when she writes that the paradox

\textsuperscript{54}Consequently, (White 1976:42)’s 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 previous note.

\textsuperscript{55}See (Chance 1992:229 n. 8) 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.”
has no philosophical bite. It exemplifies the sort of argument that Socrates easily dispenses with in the *Euthydemus*. (Weiss 2001:54)

But, Weiss does not take *Meno*’s paradox to be resolved by noticing an equivocation on ‘ζητεῖν’. Rather, following up on a suggestion by Ryle,⁵⁶ she takes the paradox to be 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.⁵⁷

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.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹ Thus, it might be supposed that while *Meno*’s paradox is not

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⁵⁶ (Ryle 1976:7–9).
⁵⁷ See (White 1976:58 n. 31).
⁵⁸ 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 to be resolved simply by noticing this potential equivocation.
⁵⁹ To see the equivocation explicitly, consider this portion of the paradox as follows:

[4a’] If A does not know what x is at all, then A does not know what to search for ([M2] & [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])
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 Plato was aware of this distinction. 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.

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. Given such a commitment, why should one

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

60 (Ryle 1976:7–9). As far as I can tell Weiss’ 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 (Moore 1959:144–145) and also (Thomas 1980:123 and 130–131) 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, I see nothing in the text that indicates that Plato would endorse this diagnosis.

61 See n. 36 above.
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) clearly requires more than simply recognizing an elementary equivocation.\(^62\) Consequently, merely recognizing the equivocation on the phrase ‘what one is searching for’ does not suffice to resolve the paradox.

Secondly, as Weiss would readily admit, resolving Meno’s paradox by appealing to the equivocation on the phrase ‘what one is searching for’ leaves completely 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?” 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 not disagree. 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 in which Socrates is made to conclude 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 - i.e. hit upon and recognize - what one has been searching for.\(^63\) Plato takes Socrates to have provided a solution to the ending problem.

\(^62\)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. 177 n. 15).

\(^63\)See (Dimas 1996:22) and (Scott 1995:31).
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 in recent years to Plato’s understanding of eristic, particularly as distinguished from the Socratic *elenchos*. No one to my knowledge has suggested, let alone shown, that according to Plato every eristic argument must consist in a deliberate use of fallacious argumentation. 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. 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

64 See, for example (Kerferd 1981:59–67), (Benson 1989), and (Nehamas 1990).
65 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* 75C-D, 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).
66 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).
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 it is this aspect of eristic argumentation that Plato has in mind when he has Socrates describe Meno’s puzzle as the second horn of an eristic argument. This is just the sort of obstructionist argument\(^{67}\) 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.\(^{68}\)

**Conclusion**

Thus, Plato presents *Meno*’s paradox as a serious philosophical puzzle that motivates serious philosophical reflection and theorizing.\(^{69}\) Plato does not take the paradox to be the result of some elementary equivocation. Plato clearly does not think that the paradox is sound. He is earnestly committed to the possibility of searching for and coming to know what one does not at present know. But we should not think that Plato takes the recognition of this possibility to be easily explained by discerning an elementary equivocation of some key term or clause in the paradox. Something more substantive is required. Indeed, Clitophon’s challenge continues to be pressing. To see precisely what Plato thinks is required to account for the possibility of successfully learning on one’s own and so for the resolution of *Meno*’s paradox we must turn to Plato’s theory of recollection.

**The Theory of Recollection**

**The Main Passage**

Immediately following Socrates’ version of the paradox, Meno asks Socrates whether he thinks the paradox is sound (καλως). Socrates’ negative reply provokes an explanation and the

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\(^{67}\) See (White 1974:289 n. 1) who maintains that the correct translation of eristikon logon is ‘contentious’ or ‘obstructionist argument’.

\(^{68}\) Commentators differ considerably over the sincerity and philosophical ability of Meno in the dialogue.

\(^{69}\) 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.
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 . . . (ἀκήκοα γὰρ ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ γυναικῶν σοφῶν περὶ τὰ θεῖα πράγματα)
M: What did they say?
S: What was, I thought, both true and beautiful.(Ἀληθῆ, ἔμοιγε δοκεῖν, καὶ καλῶν)
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 (όσοις μεμέλληκε περὶ ὧν μεταχειρίζονται λόγον οίος τ’ εἶναι διδόναι). 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 (σκόπει εἰ σοι δοκοῦσιν ἀληθῆ λέγειν): [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-B6]
[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. (Ἀτ ἐ εὖν ἡ ψυχὴ θανάτοις τε οὔδα καὶ πολλάκις γεγονόν, καὶ ἐφωρᾶκε καὶ τὰ ἐνθάδε καὶ τὰ ἐν Άιδοι καὶ πάντα χρήματα, οὐκ ἔστιν ὅτι οὐ μεμάθηκεν: ἃς οἱδὲν θαυμαστόν καὶ περὶ ἀρετῆς καὶ περὶ ἄλλων οἰνόν τ’ εἶναι αὐτὴν ἀναμνησθῆναι, ἃ γε καὶ πρότερον ἡπίστατο.) [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, (ατε γὰρ τῆς φύσεως ἀπάθεις συγγενοῦς οὐσίας, καὶ μεμαθηκοῦς τῆς ψυχὴς ἀπαντά, οὐδέν καὶ στετὸν ἐν μόνῳ ἀναμνησθέντα—ὁ δ’ μᾶθαις καλὸσιν ἀνθρωποι—τάλλα πάντα αὐτὸν ἀνευρεῖν, ἐὰν τις ἀνδρέας ἢ καὶ μὴ ἀποκάμυν ἔπιστων:) [81C9-D4]
[G] for searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection. (τὸ γὰρ ζητεῖν ἄρα καὶ τὸ μανθάνειν ἀναμνήσις ὄλον ἐστίν.) [81D4-5]
[H] We must, therefore, not believe that debater's argument (οὐκοῦν δεῖ πείθεσθαι τοῦτο τῷ ἐριστικῷ λόγῳ), 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 (ὁ ἐγὼ πιστεῦων ἀληθεῖ καὶ ἔθελο μετὰ σοῦ ζητεῖν ἀρετή ὅτι ἐστὶν). [81D5-E2; Grube trans.]

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,\textsuperscript{70} the summary of this methodological
digression at \textit{Meno} 85D9-86B5,\textsuperscript{71} Socrates’ identification of recollection with ‘working out the
reason’ (αιτίας λογισμώ) near the conclusion of the \textit{Meno} (98A3-5), and other dialogues\textsuperscript{72}) or to
doubt that Plato took this theory to be a serious resolution of the paradox.\textsuperscript{73} 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 would do well to look more carefully at this passage
before turning elsewhere or denying its seriousness.

\textsuperscript{70}This is by far the most common strategy. See, for example, (Vlastos 1965), (Irwin 1973–1974), (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 (ἐνδειξαθαι) of the theory adumbrated in the main passage.

\textsuperscript{71}Again, I will be mining this passage as well 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 pp. 86-87 below.

\textsuperscript{72}See n. 105 below.

\textsuperscript{73}(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 \textit{Meno}’s paradox. (See also (Ebert 1973, 177), (Rohatyn
1980, 71), and (Jenks 1992, 328-329).) Weiss offers four signs that Plato does not take the theory seriously at least
as it is presented here in the \textit{Meno}. (She takes Plato to be more amenable to recollection in the \textit{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 self-serving 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’ careful and ingenious interpretation. I will simply note
that her interpretation depends in part on her interpretation of \textit{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 \textit{Meno}) Socrates
encourages moral inquiry despite recognizing the unobtainability 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 Chapter 1 and 2, I acknowledged the coherence of such an interpretation of Socratic/Platonic
philosophical method, but I proposed that acceptance of such an interpretation should await a thorough investigation
of the dialogues. While the investigation to this point may provide little reason to doubt such an interpretation (at
least in the elenctic dialogues, given the acknowledged difficulties of learning from someone who knows), the
investigation of the remainder of the \textit{Meno}, \textit{Phaedo}, and \textit{Republic} moves in a different direction. Plato’s response to
\textit{Meno}’s paradox is as good a place as any to note that transition (whether or not the transition is an indication of
Platonic development; cf. pp. 10-14 above). 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.
Those who take the theory of recollection as intended as a serious response to \textit{Meno}’s paradox, include (Hansing
& 56 n 18), (Nehamas 1985), (Dimas 1996), (Kahn 1996), (Dancy 2004), and (Scott 2006).
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 wrap things up, and [D] has been generally and rightly regarded as a digression.\(^{74}\) That leaves [C], [E], [F], and [G] - roughly 14 lines of text.\(^{75}\)

[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.\(^{76}\) [E] maintains in addition that

[ii] the soul has been born often, and

[iii] has seen (ἐωρακυία) all things here and in Hades\(^{77}\) and, so

[iv] there is nothing it has not learned (μεμάθηκεν).

Consequently (ὁστε),

[v] it is not surprising that the soul can recollect concerning virtue and other things what it knew (ἡπὶστατο) 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.\(^{78}\)

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\(^{74}\)See, for example, (Thompson 1901, 120), (Bluck 1961, 277), and (Klein 1965, 94–95).

\(^{75}\)See (Allen 1959:165) and (Gentzler 1996:273–274).

\(^{76}\)Empedocles is has been thought to be meant. See, for example, (Thompson 1901, 119) and (Bluck 1961, 276). (Scott 2006:95) takes the phrase ‘όσοι μεμάθηκε περί ὅν μεταχειρίζονται λόγον οἰος τε ἐναι 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.

\(^{77}\)See, for example, (Sharples 1985:147–149), (Weiss 2001:72 n 53), and (Scott 2006:96) for the debate concerning the phrase καὶ τὰ ἐνθάδε καὶ τὰ ἐν-Λιδόου 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.

\(^{78}\)See (Dancy 2004:222) who renders this as follows: “the whole of looking for something and learning it is recollection.”
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 than clear. Near the conclusion of the summary of the methodological digression at *Meno* 86B1-2 Socrates is made to indicate that the immortality of the soul ([i]) is a necessary condition for the truth of *ta onta* always being in our souls (ἀεὶ ἄλληθεα ἡμῖν τῶν ὄντων ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ). This latter is not precisely [iv], but it is close. 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 (perhaps in a non-modern way) 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). What is essential, however, for the theory of recollection (and so the response to *Meno*’s paradox) is not how it

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79At 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 1954:195–196) (Hackforth 1955:74), (Taylor 1956:130), (Bluck 1961:37 n 2), (Bedu-Addo 1983), (Bedu-Addo 1991:31 n 5), who take the theory of recollection to presuppose the theory of Forms, and (Ross 1951:18 and 22), (Ebert 1973:180 n 2), (Sharples 1985:12–13 & 147–148), and (Weiss 2001:74–75), who do not. Finally, see (Dancy 2004, 240–241) 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*.

80Difficulties 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 1992:223–224 n 40) and (Vlastos 1965:153 n 14), (Dancy 2006:225–226), 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 nn. 97-99 below.

81See n. 77 above.
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, that Plato derives the possibility that the soul can recollect concerning virtue and other things what it knew (ηπιστάμηντo) 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 pushes the problem back. But this sort of objection misses the force of the problem Plato is addressing and the resolution Plato proposes.

Meno’s paradox does not arise for learning in general, but for a specific sort of learning, what we might call directed learning on one’s own or de novo inquiry. The beginning and ending problems arise for the kind of learning that intentionally sets out to systematically come to know on one’s own some specific thing, for example, what virtue is. 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 the previous chapter there may be other - perhaps related - problems associated with this kind of learning). Nor does it raise problems for a kind of accidental learning - knowledge acquired by a kind of accidental, random, unintentional, or undirected acquaintance, viewing, or possession of a thing. Consequently, nothing prohibits Plato from appealing to one these kinds of learning to account for our previous possession of the

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 it this sort of learning associated with Clitophon’s challenge. Clitophon’s worry is not how knowledge can be acquired, but how the knowledge Socrates has made us seek can be acquired.

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 (White 1976:43), (Fine 1992:215–216 n 2), and (Dancy 2004:222–226).
knowledge required for our ability to learn (i.e., to purposively set out to systematically come to know on one’s own) what virtue is, for example.

This is reinforced by Plato’s apparently casual use of words for learning and teaching throughout the *Meno*’s methodological digression. Immediately following Socrates’ description of the theory of recollection at *Meno* 81A-E2, Meno asks Socrates whether he can teach him that this theory holds (ἐξεικ με τοῦτο διδάξαι ὡς οὕτως ἔχει). Socrates responds by (ironically?) accusing Meno of trying to catch him in a contradiction - asking whether he can teach when he has just maintained that there is no teaching, but only recollection (εἰ ἔχω σε διδάξαι, ὡς οὖ φημι διδαχὴν εἴναι ἀλλ’ ἀνάμνησιν). Of course, the reader will likely notice that this is not at all what Socrates has just maintained. What he has just maintained is that learning is recollection, not that teaching is recollection, and teaching and learning are not the same.

Perhaps, Plato means us to understand that learning and teaching are just two sides of the same coin. The theory of recollection, then, is more adequately expressed as learning and teaching are recollection. But that will not do either, for throughout the conversation with slave in which Socrates aims to illustrate or show (ἐνδειξασθαι) the theory of recollection Socrates continually contrasts what the slave is doing, i.e. recollecting, with learning and being taught (see, 82B6-7, 82E4-5, 84C11-D2, and 85D3-4). But this contrast would make no 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 uses ‘learned’ (µεµαθηκεν) in describing the soul as having learned everything prior to its seeking to acquire knowledge in its present incarnation, he need not be using ‘learned’ in the sense he is explaining. He appears to countenance at least two different senses of ‘learn’.⁸⁶

Indeed, that something like this must be the case, is indicated by the way in which Plato appears to argue for the immortality of the soul near the end of the methodological digression.  

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⁸⁵For a similar casualness concerning his use of ‘learn’ (µαθησις, µεµαθηκεν) in Cebes’ initial description of the theory of recollection in the *Phaedo* see 72E5-7.

⁸⁶But notice that these two senses of ‘learn’ are not used to generate *Meno*’s paradox.
The argument is difficult and its details are not important for our current purposes, but its basic structure is as follows. Socrates concludes that the soul is immortal (ἀθάνατος ἂν ἡ ψυχή εἶν) because the truth is always present in the soul (ἀεὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια ἦμιν τῶν ὑπνοῦ ἐστίν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ). This latter claim is a consequence of the claim that ‘the soul will have always learned’ (ἅπρ’ οὖν τὸν ἅεὶ χρόνον μεμαθηκοῦσα 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 (Ἀρ’ οὖν οὐ τὴν ἐπιστῆμην, ἢν νῦν οὔτος ἔχει, ἢτοι ἐξαξεν ποτε ἢ ἂεὶ 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 of them). 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 that 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 perhaps infelicitous 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 is not concerned with or even whether the slave acquired knowledge prior to his present incarnation.

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87 See, for example, (Sharples 1985:156–157) who takes the argument to be fallacious, while (Bluck 1961:317) and (Weiss 2001:120 n 90) deny that it is meant to be an argument for the immortality of the soul.

88 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.

89 See Phaedo 63E-69E and Phaedrus 247C-249D (and pp. 118-120 below) for the suggestion that the soul can acquire knowledge of the Forms during one’s disembodied prenatal existence.
systematically 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 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 (ἡπίστατο), not learning, that Plato appeals to in [v].

The Kinship of Nature

But this is only one of the two independent features on which the theory of recollection relies. The other is that [vi] all nature is akin. This claim is not a consequence of anything that proceeded it in the main passage. 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 type (whatever type 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 (ἐν μόνον) they can discover all other things (τὰ ἄλλα πάντα) - 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 is a consequence of) the recollected thing. In addition, Plato may here be alluding to his so-called interrelational or holistic model of knowledge. According

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90 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 1961:287–288). Nevertheless, Plato’s “adaptation” of this doctrine is not a consequence of it, nor anything else occurring in the main passage.

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

92 This reading has suggested the deductive or inference interpretation of the theory of recollection most famously defended by (Vlastos 1965); see also (Allen 1959:166–167). See (Moravcsik 1970:60–61) for some difficulties with this interpretation.

to this suggestion, Plato is alerting us to the notion that we do not learn, recollect, or discover one item or proposition at a time, but an entire field of elements or body of propositions.\textsuperscript{94}

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. [vi] does not add anything to the possibility of recollection itself. 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 recollectible. Given that all nature is akin, all knowledge (or knowledge of the whole of nature) is directly, indirectly, or wholly recollectible.

\textbf{The Conversation with the Slave}

Plato thinks, then, that prenatal knowledge, however this prenatal knowledge was initially acquired (if it was \textit{acquired} at all), is fundamental for resolving \textit{Meno}'s paradox.\textsuperscript{95} It is prenatal knowledge that allows for the possibility of recollection and so the possibility of directed \textit{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.\textsuperscript{96}

That prenatal knowledge is fundamental to the theory of recollection and so the resolution of \textit{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” \textit{[Meno} 85C10-11; Grube trans\textit{]}, Socrates is made to conclude his commentary as follows:

\textsuperscript{94}See, for example, (Scott 2006:97) and perhaps also (Moravcsik 1970:60).
\textsuperscript{95}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.
\textsuperscript{96}See the first sentence of Aristotle’s \textit{Posterior Analytics:} “All teaching and all learning of an intellectual kind proceed from pre-existent knowledge (Πᾶσα διδασκαλία καὶ πᾶσα μάθησις διανοητικὴ ἐκ προὸ παρχούσης γίνεται γνώσεως)” \textit{[Posterior Analytics I 1 71a1; Barnes trans.]}
And he will know it without having been taught but only questioned, and find the knowledge from himself? (Οὐκοῦν οὖδενός διδάξαντος ἄλλ' ἐρωτήσαντος ἐπιστήμησαι, ἀναλαμβάνων αὐτὸς ε ἔστιν τὴν ἐπιστήμην;) ... And is not finding knowledge within oneself recollection? — Certainly. (Τὸ δὲ ἀναλαμβάνειν αὐτὸν ἐν αὐτῷ ἐπιστήμην οὐκ ἀναμιμηλήσκεσθαι ἐστιν;) [Meno 85D3-8; adapted from Grube trans.]

Considerable debate surrounds the question whether the ‘knowledge from himself (ἔξ αὐτοῦ)’ or the ‘knowledge within oneself (ἐν αὐτῷ)’ has always tacitly or latently been in one’s soul97 or has at some point been in one’s soul but has been lost only to be remembered through the process of recollection.98 But which ever view one attributes to Plato’s theory of recollection, Plato does not seem concerned to highlight it. Rather, what Plato is concerned to highlight is 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 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.99 This is the key feature of the theory of recollection100 which accounts for its ability to resolve Meno’s paradox. Plato evidently takes the pre-existence of such knowledge to resolve Meno’s paradox. Of course, Plato follows this passage with an argument aimed to establish the immortality of the soul based on the possession of this prenatal 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?

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97 See, for example, (Bluck 1961:9 ff.), (Matthews 1999:61 ff.), and (Scott 2006:108–112).
98 See, for example, (Vlastos 1965:153 n 14) (Fine 1992:223–224 n 40), and (Dancy 2006:225–226).
99 It is for this reason that I cannot adopt the so-called true belief solution to Meno’s paradox (see pp. XXX below), 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 1990). The present chapter, however, supersedes that discussion, especially the appendix.
100 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.
At this 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.\(^{101}\) 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.\(^{102}\) 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 one is taking a philosophy final examination containing the question ‘What year was Socrates put to death?’ One can imagine at first being at a loss as to the correct answer, but having studied a variety of dates the previous evening. One searches one’s memory until the year 399 B.C.E ‘dawns’ on one with a feeling of familiarity and conviction - a familiarity and conviction which can best be explained by my knowledge the previous evening that Socrates died in 399 B.C.E and which accounts for the conclusion of my 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!’ interpretation at least accounts for

\(^{101}\) See, for example, (Hansing 1928:241–242), (Bluck 1961:12–13), (White 1976:51–52), (Dimas 1996:26), (Matthews 1999:63), and perhaps (Kahn 2006:122).

\(^{102}\) 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 ‘cognitive 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 nn. 40 above and 107 below.
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 might not have thought it did. 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. 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

103 See, for example, (White 1976:52–53) who immediately acknowledges the philosophical failure of this approach to the resolution of the ending problem.
104 For some reason to think that fallible recognition when combined with further testing may be sufficient at least in the Republic, see chapter 9 below.
105 See, for example, (Fine 1992), (Irwin 1995), and (Gentzler 1996).
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 his resolution. But what is most puzzling about this interpretation is that it
appears to simply 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 also 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?\footnote{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 1996:293–295) takes up the ending problem more directly.}

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 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 true beliefs

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which we possess at birth. Perhaps, he has something else in mind.\textsuperscript{107} 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.\textsuperscript{108} Given such a commitment, Plato has Socrates confidently assert that

\begin{quote}
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. [\textit{Meno} 86B6-C2; Grube trans.]
\end{quote}

**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 \textit{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 in order 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,\textsuperscript{109} the reader is faced with a question concerning the very possibility of such a search. Plato has responded to this question by

\textsuperscript{107}(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.

\textsuperscript{108}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.

\textsuperscript{109}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), (Taylor 1956:135), and (Bluck 1961:8).
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.\textsuperscript{110}

Of course, 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 to employ for acquiring the knowledge one lacks.\textsuperscript{111} But this underestimates the significance of the dialectical context that inspired the paradox. In the dialogues we examined in the previous chapter 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. It is 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 that inspires *Meno*’s paradox. The theory of recollection may suffice to resolve *Meno*’s paradox, but the conversation with the slave cannot suffice to meet Clitophon’s challenge in the case of inquiry or directed de novo learning.

\textsuperscript{110}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.”

Socrates is not searching in tandem with the slave to discover the length of the side of the square whose area is double the two foot 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. But this is precisely what we need to know in order to answer Clitophon’s challenge in the present context of the *Meno*. We need to know how to proceed to acquire the knowledge one lacks when no one who possesses that knowledge is currently available. And the conversation with slave simply does not illustrate such a procedure.

The kind of objection I am raising here is distinct from a more common objection to the conversation with the slave. I am not objecting that the conversation with the slave fails to illustrate the theory of recollection because of Socrates’ (occurent 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’ knowledgable 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

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112 I say difficult, not impossible, because one might imagine that if Socrates had been ignorant of the answer to the geometrical square 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.

113 See, for example, (Bluck 1961:13–14) and (Brown 1967:74).
Plato insists that the reader take care to see whether Socrates is merely asking the slave questions or teaching him something.\textsuperscript{114} If Socrates lacked the knowledge the slave sought, such a worry would not arise.\textsuperscript{115}

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 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 that 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 \textit{Meno} - the method of hypothesis - or at least so I will argue in the next chapter.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The \textit{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

\textsuperscript{114}See \textit{Meno} 82B6-7, 82E4-5, 84C11-D2, and 85D3-4.
\textsuperscript{115}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, mentioned above in passing; cf. pp. 29-30. 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. I owe the recognition of these two modes of teaching to a very helpful conversation with Fiona Leigh.
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 was made to encourage 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 so-called method of hypothesis. The method of hypothesis will occupy our attention in subsequent chapters.
Chapter 4

The Method of Hypothesis: Not A Mere Second Best

Introduction

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 so-called elenctic dialogues.¹ At *Meno* 80D-E, Plato has first Meno and then Socrates pose a question which 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 virtue-knowledge he has been shown to lack. But how is such a search to take place given Socrates’ repeated claims to be ignorant as well? 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 - as in the elenctic dialogues,² how is one to proceed? Indeed, is discovering on one’s own the knowledge one seeks even possible? This is the question - put in the form of a paradox - that Meno raises in response to Socrates’ encouragement to join him in the search for knowledge of the nature of virtue which both he and Meno have professed to lack.

In the pages that follow *Meno*’s paradox two features of classical Platonism are introduced: the theory of recollection and the method of hypothesis. The first - the theory of recollection - I have argued is Plato’s direct response to *Meno*’s paradox. It is possible, according to Plato, to discover on one’s own the knowledge one seeks in virtue of one’s prenatal

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¹Whether this break is interpreted as a developmental break or pedagogical break; see pp. 10-14 above.
²Putting aside the problem of recognizing those who possess the knowledge one seeks and the risks one runs if one gets this wrong. See pp. 49-53 above.
possession of this knowledge. The conversation with the slave, which immediately follows upon the introduction of the theory of recollection, is offered to illustrate (ἐπιδειξομαι) this theory. But, as we have seen, none of this indicates how to proceed. 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, at least so Socrates is made to profess. Nevertheless, what procedure or method one should employ in this attempt has been left unaddressed. Clitophon’s challenge has yet to be resolved. It is not until the Meno’s methodological digression has come to an end and the 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.

Even so, it must be conceded that 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 for Plato 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. Others have suggested

3See Meno 86B6-C2.
4For a similar view see, (Menn 2002:215–216 & 221)’s 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.
5I say ‘begins to address’ because I maintain that it is not until at least the Republic that something like a complete account of the method of hypothesis is fully expressed, again whether or not this reflects Plato’s philosophical development or his desire to present his views piecemeal in order to facilitate understanding.
6(Wolfsdorf 2008:179) 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. While I agree with Wolfsdorf that Socrates attempts to acquire knowledge in the elenctic dialogues by means of the elenchos, just as Socrates does in the Meno, Phaedo, and Republic by means of the method of hypothesis, I disagree with Wolfsdorf that the only difference between elenchos and hypothesis is the reduction difference. 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.
7See, for example (Gonzalez 1998:10), and (Seeskin 1993:44–47).
that it is a mere ruse to get Meno to search for the nature of virtue in spite of himself. 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 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 appear, the *Phaedo*. In the final argument for the immortality of the soul in *Phaedo*, Socrates appears to describe the method of hypothesis as a ‘second sailing’ (δευτερος πλος), which has almost universally been understood as meaning 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*.

In the present chapter, I maintain that it is a mistake to read Plato’s introduction of the method of hypothesis in this way. Plato does not maintain in these passages that the method is 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 will fall 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 here in the *Meno*, 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

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8See, for example, (Bedu-Addo 1984:3).  
9See (Robinson 1953:121); see also, (Robinson 1953:110).  
10The theory of recollection is discussed in the *Phaedo* at 72E-78B. The only other dialogue in the Platonic corpus in which the theory of recollection is fairly explicitly mentioned is *Phaedrus* 246A-252C.
knowledge of the *aitia* of generation and destruction, Plato is thereby recommending the method of hypothesis as a method for acquiring knowledge. If I am right that the method of hypothesis is introduced in these passages as a serious attempt to seek the knowledge one lacks on one’s own, then 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 once again encourages Meno to join 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 (σκεπτεόν εἶναι ποιόν τι ἦστιν ὁ μήποι ἰσμεν ὤτι ἦστιν). 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; Grube trans.]

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 second best method - second to inquiring into the nature of virtue.\(^{11}\) Meno, the argument goes, refuses to employ Plato’s preferred method according to which one first investigates the nature of the thing - what

\(^{11}\) 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 1953:114–122), (Crombie 1962:529–548), (Bluck 1964:23), (Brown 1967:63–65), (Allen 1970:96), (Rose 1970:1–8), and (Zyskind and Sternfeld 1976:130–134). Others who maintain that the method of hypothesis is not Plato’s preferred method include (Bostock 1986:166), (Seeskin 1993:45–47), (Gonzalez 1998:153–187), (Netz 2003:308–309), (Dancy 2004:296), and (Scott 2006:132).
the thing is (τι ἔστιν) - followed by an investigation of the thing’s qualities or properties - what sort the thing is (ποιὸν τι ἔστιν). Meno insists that they investigate the qualities of virtue - whether it is teachable - before they have completed an investigation of virtue’s nature. 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.¹²

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.¹³ But, he also may have chosen to depict Meno’s stubbornness as an excuse 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

¹²In describing Plato’s alleged preferred method of investigation as an investigation from the nature of a thing I have in mind the fact that the overriding investigation in the Meno is an investigation whether virtue is teachable. Plato’s alleged preferred method is to first investigate the nature of virtue and then use the results of this investigation to investigate whether it is teachable. Consequently, the investigation concerning virtue’s teachability is from the nature of virtue, as opposed to an investigation from a hypothesis concerning what sort of thing virtue is.

from the nature of the thing, and second, the second-best method of an investigation from a hypothesis.\(^{14}\) But this is not what Socrates is actually made to say. Socrates says he does not want to investigate the question how virtue is acquired until they first have investigated the question what virtue is. He does not claim to want to investigate the question how virtue is acquired by investigating what virtue is. It is true, of course, that the reason (or at least one of the reasons) Socrates would prefer to investigate what virtue is (sometimes referred to as the \textit{ti} question) prior to investigating how virtue is acquired (sometimes referred to as the \textit{poion} question) is that he believes that one cannot know the answer to the latter question without knowing the answer to the former;\(^{15}\) 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.\(^{16}\) 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 nature.\(^{17}\) So, we need not think that here at \textit{Meno} 86D3-E6 Socrates is objecting to Meno on the grounds that he is failing to follow his preferred method of investigating how virtue is acquired. Socrates may simply be objecting to Meno for failing to address a more important question - because it is epistemologically prior to Meno’s question and

\(^{14}\)This is often taken to be a hypothesis concerning the nature of \(x\), but as we will see this is not the method that Plato depicts Socrates as employing in the \textit{Meno}.  
\(^{15}\)See pp. 65-66 above.  
\(^{16}\)One might here think of Aristotle’s distinction between things more knowable in nature and things more knowable to us. See, for example, \textit{Posterior Analytics} I.2 71b33-72a5, and \textit{Physics} I.1 184a. See also (Menn 2002:216) on geometrical analysis.  
\(^{17}\)Indeed, at the beginning of the dialogue when the priority of the \textit{ti} question is first introduced, it is not introduced 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 which, as we all know, Meno fails.
any other question concerning virtue for that matter.\footnote{Brickhouse and Smith 1994:55–60} argue that many of the passages in the elenctic dialogues which have been cited on behalf of epistemological priority are really better understood as evidence for procedural or methodological priority. But I am not persuaded by their argument. For example: they cite \textit{Euthyphro} 6D9-11, \textit{Laches} 191E10-11, \textit{Laches} 192B5-8, and three passages from the \textit{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 \textit{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 claim to know, as is the case at this point in the \textit{Meno}. See also (Scott 2006:132) who takes our current passage to require a temporal, and so methodological priority.

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 - the ‘What is virtue?’ question. 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’.\footnote{Scott 2006:130} As we have seen, the method employed prior to Meno’s paradox is unavailable. As an investigation of the nature of virtue, the discussion prior to Meno’s paradox depended on Meno’s claim to know what virtue is. It was, in part, a method of learning from one who knows.\footnote{Or, at least, so I have argued. It also, of course, was a method of testing whether Meno did in fact know.} No one claiming such knowledge is any longer available at this point in \textit{Meno}. Indeed, if what I have argued in Chapter 2 is correct, the last third of the \textit{Meno} is one of the few passages (outside perhaps the so-called middle and late dialogues) where we could begin to answer how Socrates would have proceeded to answer the ‘What is virtue?’ question had Meno...
permitted him to pursue it. It is one of the few passages we have in which Socrates is depicted as investigating anything which neither he nor his interlocutor professes to know.

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?’ (perhaps, a *ti* question) and ‘Is virtue teachable?’ (perhaps, 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 his preferred method, the evidence for this must come from elsewhere.

Perhaps the passage which 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 has been the subject of much dispute,\(^{21}\) but 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 which is posed.\(^{22}\) 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 (Οὐπω οἶδα εἰ ἔστιν τοῦτο τοιοῦτον, ᾧ ὀσπερ μὲν τινα ὑπόθεσιν προφήτων οἴμαι ἐχειν πρός τὸ πρᾶγμα)” [87A1-3; Grube trans.]. There is no suggestion here that the geometers would prefer another method. They

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\(^{21}\) See ch. 5 n. 7.

\(^{22}\) Notice we have here an instance of a directed *de novo* inquiry. The geometers are attempting to acquire knowledge of the answer to a specific question on their own (not from another who knows).
would, no doubt, prefer to answer the question from knowledge, but in lieu of that, their preference is to answer it from a hypothesis. That is, given that to answer the question requires a genuine search for the answer, i.e., an examination from ignorance, searching from a hypothesis may prove helpful. In addition, like the case of Meno and Socrates, 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. So, nothing here indicates Plato’s disapproval.

Perhaps when Plato depicts the application of the method of hypothesis to the case of the teachability of virtue at 87B evidence of his disapproval will appear. 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 (ἐπειδή οὐκ ἔσμεν οὐθ’ ὅτι ἐστὶν οὐθ’ ὑπόθεσιν τι, ὑποθέμενοι αὐτὸ σκοπώμεν εἶτε διδακτὸν εἶτε οὐ διδακτὸν ἐστὶν)” [87B3-4; Grube trans.]. 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

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23 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 claim here simply that searching from a hypothesis may prove helpful (προώργου).

24 Of course 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 procedure. In the Republic, Plato has been thought to be no fan of the method of the mathematicians. See, for example (Seeskin 1993:44–47), and (Gonzalez 1998:377 n 97). For a more positive view of Plato’s attitude of mathematics, at least at the time of writing the Meno, see (Vlastos 1991:107–131), (Burnyeat 2000), (Menn 2002:2002), and chapter 9 below. In any case, I can see no evidence of such derision here in the Meno.
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 - 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 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. 25

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 (Εἰ ποιὸν τι ἐστιν τῶν περὶ τὴν ψυχῆν ὄντων ἀρετῆς, διδακτὸν ἢ ἐν εἴῃ ἢ οὐ διδακτὸν)? First, if it is another sort than knowledge (ἔστιν ἄλλοιν ἢ οἶον ἐπιστήμην), 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. - But, if virtue is a kind of knowledge (ἔστιν ἐπιστήμης τις ἢ ἀρετῆς), it is clear that it could be taught - Of course. [Meno 87B5-C7; Grube trans.]

It is sometimes claimed that Socrates here manages to turn the discussion - at least temporarily - back to the ‘What is virtue?’ question. 26 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. 27 Socrates is not proposing an alternative method

25 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. 146-148 below. 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 chose 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 no one of the interlocutors is committed to that answer. Indeed, the potential answer is kept in the form of a question - ‘Is virtue the knowledge of good and evil?’ for example - and one attempts to reduce this question to another one. 26 See, for example (Sharples 1985:162–163), and (Brown 1967:65). For someone who does not make this mistake but draws a conclusion with which I cannot agree see (Gonzalez 1998:174).

27 (Bedu-Addo 1984:3).
for answering the ‘Is virtue teachable?’ question - an investigation from a hypothesis. He is instead surreptitiously returning to the method Meno had refused to pursue - the method of investigating from the nature of the thing.

But against this, the question that Socrates explicitly asks here is a poion question, not a ti question. He asks what sort of a thing is virtue (ποίον τι ἔστιν) such that it would be teachable or not.28 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?’.

Of course, 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.30 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. The question, of course, is, even so, why should this matter.

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

28 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 (ἐστιν ἄλλοις ἡ ἐπιστήμη), rather ‘if virtue is anything other than knowledge (ἐστιν ἄλλος ἡ ἐπιστήμη), and again at 87c5 where the protasis is ‘if virtue is some kind of knowledge (ἐστιν ἐπιστήμη τις ἡ ἄρετή), not ‘if virtue is knowledge (ἐστιν ἐπιστήμη ἡ ἄρετή).

29 It is true that in providing an answer to this last question, Socrates sometimes suggests that virtue is knowledge, not simply a kind of knowledge. See, especially, 89C3-4 (although in fact this is Meno, not Socrates), and 89D3-5. But we ought to let the language by which the question is introduced guide our understanding. Moreover, in other passages Socrates is more careful. See 88C4-d3 and 89A3-4. The fact that the text appears indifferent to the ti/poion distinction might plausibly indicate that Plato is as well.

30 In the Categories, Aristotle might have put the distinction as teachable is present-in virtue, while knowledge is said-of it (although Aristotle might not have been happy with something being present-in anything other than substances). Indeed, 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?’, 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 that would make it teachable?’ and ‘What is virtue that would not make it 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 which he did not want to pursue, nothing here indicates that Socrates is dissatisfied with the method he is recommending for answering it.\(^{31}\)

We have no reason, then to understand Plato as dissatisfied 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

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\(^{31}\)A second reason for doubting the methodological salience of the proximity of the ‘What kind of thing is virtue?’ question to the ‘What is virtue?’ question 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. 176-181 below), is not in any obvious way closer to the ‘What is virtue?’ question than was the question ‘What kind of thing is virtue?’. A similar point can be made concerning the geometrical example; see chap 5 n. 13 below. 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 1992:225–226 n 42), (Dimas 1996:5–7), and (Sharples 1985:125). Other commentators understand it as parallel to the distinction between essence and essential properties; see (Nehamas 1987:283–285). I do not see how either of these interpretations elucidates the current passage.
method of hypothesis. If Plato understands this method as in some way inferior to his preferred method, the 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*\(^{32}\) - the dialogue in which according to Richard Robinson one finds “the main account of [the method of hypothesis] in Plato” (Robinson 1953:123). In the course of Socrates’ intellectual autobiography,\(^{33}\) 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 of the aitia\(^{34}\) of generation and destruction” (περὶ γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς τὴν αἰτίαν διαπραγματεύσασθαι) [95E9-10; adapted from Grube trans.], 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 aitia of everything, why it comes to be, why it perishes and why it exists” (εἰδέναι τὰς αἰτίας ἐκάστου, διὰ τί γίγνεται ἔκαστον καὶ διὰ τί ἀπόλλυται καὶ διὰ τί ἔστι) [*Phaedo* 96A9-10; adapted from Grube trans.]. Unfortunately, Socrates discovered that he had no gift for such an inquiry (ταὐτὴν τὴν σκέψιν) for it led him to

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\(^{32}\)It is sometimes pointed out that the method has been introduced earlier at 85C7-D4 and 92C8-E2. We will be looking at both of these passages below. For the former, see, pp. 115-116 and 211-213, and for the latter, see, ch. 7 n. 24. 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. 122-126 below.

\(^{33}\)See, for example, (Gallop 1975:169), (Rowe, C. J. 1993:227), (McCabe 2000, 65 n. 25), (Byrd 2007:150–151), (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 aitia; see, for example, (Ross 1951a:29). But (Goodrich 1903:382) pointed out long out 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 aitia. 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 1883:125–126), (Ross 1951:29), (Hackforth 1955:127–131), (Taylor 1956:199–200), and (Vlastos 1969:297).

\(^{34}\)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 1986:135–156), (Sedley 1998), (Wolfsdorf 2005), and most recently, (Politis 2010).
unlearned even the things he formerly thought he knew. Next, Socrates describes his initial enthusiasm for something he heard someone 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; adapted from Grube trans.]. In response to this disappointment Socrates introduces the method of hypothesis as follows:

[A] I would gladly become the disciple (µαθητης) 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 (ουτ' αατως ευρειν ουτε παρ' άλλου μαθειν), do you wish me to give you an explanation of how, as a second best (δευτερον πλον), I busied myself with the search for the aitia (ἐπι την της αιτιας ζητησιν), Cebes? ... [Phaedo 99C6-D3; adapted from Grube trans.]

[B] After this, he said, when I had wearied of investigating things (τα οντα σκοπουν), 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 (τα πραγματα) 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 (ἐν εκεινοισ σκοπουν των οντων την άληθειαν). 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 (τον εν τοις λογοισ σκοπουµενον τα οντα εν εικοσι µαλλον σκοπειν ἢ τον εν τοις έργοις). [Phaedo 99D4-100A3; adapted from Grube trans.]

[C] However, I started in this manner: taking as my hypothesis (ὑποθεµενος) in each case the logos that seemed to me the most compelling (κρινον έρρωµενεστατον), I would consider as true, about aitia and everything else, whatever agreed (συµφωνειν) 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 100A3-100A8; adapted from Grube trans.]

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 suppose to indicate that the method of

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35 This person has been thought to be Archelaus; see, for example (Hackforth 1955:124 n 4), and (Gower 2008:336 n 16).

36 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 1993:240).
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 (δεύτερον πλοῦν) method of acquiring this knowledge - the method he
proposes to go on to describe. In the [B] portion, Socrates indicates a preferred method of
acquiring this knowledge by means of some sort of direct or immediate access to the truth
concerning such aitiae as opposed to his indirect or mediate method by means of logoi. In the
[C] section he describes (at least roughly) his indirect method by means of logoi - the so-called
method of hypothesis. Thus, the method of hypothesis is 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.37

This passage, however, is considerably more complex than this argument supposes. To
begin, it is far from clear that the contrast in the [A] portion is between two different methods of
learning as opposed to two different answers to the search for the aitia of generation and
destruction. Socrates has just completed describing his disappointment with Anaxagoras’ failure
to teach him that Mind is the aitia of things. Rather, Socrates maintains, Anaxagoras taught that
such things as air, ether, and water were the true aitiae of things. If Socrates’ ‘second best’
(δεύτερον πλοῦν) comment is meant to be contrasted with what he had just said about
Anaxagoras, he must be proposing to offer a second best answer to his search for the aitia of
generation and destruction.38 Certainly, no method of knowledge acquisition (other than reading,

37 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 of the text. (Rose 1966:464 and 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), (Gonzalez 1998:10, 14, 188, 192, 351 n 3),
et al. 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.
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 1955:111 n 1), (Rose 1966:464 & 469), (Gentzler
to think it is both a contrast in methods and in answers; see also (Hackforth 1955:127 n 5 & 138–139). Part of the
difficulty here is that the question ‘What method is Plato recommending here?’ is ambiguous between [a] ‘What
method of answering questions of the form ‘why is x F?’ is Plato recommending here?’ and [b] ‘What method of

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being taught, or learning from one who knows) has been offered in the discussion concerning Anaxagoras. And, no one that I am aware of takes Socrates to be seriously indicating that the method of hypothesis is second best to a preferred method of being taught or learning from someone who knows. Rather, Socrates suggests that since he has failed to come to know the aitia of generation and destruction (from another or on one’s own (οὐτ’ αὐτός εὑρεῖν οὐτε παρ’ ἄλλου μαθεῖν)), what he is about to offer is a second best answer to such knowledge. It is the best answer he can offer to what the aitia of generation and destruction is.

This reading of the [A] portion is reinforced by an earlier passage which almost certainly looks forward to our current passage. At 85C7-D1, Simmias explains that one must bring about for oneself one of the following:

learn the truth about these things or find it for oneself (μαθεῖν οπηχείν ἐυρεῖν), or, if that is impossible, adopt the best and most irrefutable of men's logoi ... [adapted from Grube trans.]

The contrast here is not between two methods of learning how things hold. Rather, the contrast is between knowing how things hold and adopting the best and most irrefutable logos concerning how things hold. The latter, presumably, is ‘second best’ to knowing it. It must be admitted answering questions like ‘what is the aitia of generation and corruption?’ is Plato recommending here?’ Plato’s answer to the former question is the aitia thesis; see pp. 214-230 below. Plato’s answer to the latter question is the method of hypothesis. This is method that Plato recommends for coming to know the aitia learning and it is this latter question that I am primarily concerned with here and in the subsequent chapters.

39See (Burnet 1911:108), (Crombie 1962:530–531), (Sayre 1969:4 n 3), and (Bedu-Addo 1979:113) who take Socrates’ comment concerning second best to be ironic.

40Of 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 we delineated in chapter 2. See (Gower 2008:336–341) 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.

41The connection between Socrates’ failure to know the answer that he is about to give and his failure to learn the teleological answer from Anaxagoras can be explained by Socrates’ in ability to derive the answer from the nature of the good (the unhypothetical first principle), which we will see is necessary in order to have acquired knowledge. But all of this presupposes much that has yet to be defended. See chapter 9 below.

42See, for example, (Huby 1959, 13), (Gallop 1975, 146–147), (Rowe 1993, 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.

43One must do this, that is, if one is to keep from being soft (μάλθακου εἶναι ἄνδρός); [Phaedo 85C6]. See, Meno 81D5-E1 and pp. 82-83 above.

44That Plato does not think we should rest content short of knowledge is clear at Republic 6 504B8-D3.
that the contrast at 85C7-D1 need not be a contrast in answers to the question concerning how things hold. It is rather a contrast in the cognitive grasp of the answer. But the point is similar to the one made in the [A] portion of 99C-100A. In [A], Socrates expresses his hope to have come to know the \textit{aitia} of generation and destruction by learning the teleological \textit{aitia} from Anaxagoras, a kind of \textit{aitia} that Socrates finds particularly attractive. However, after being disappointed with Anaxagoras, Socrates proposes to offer an alternative \textit{aitia}, less to his liking,\footnote{Perhaps, because it is not derived from the Form of the Good. For ‘Forms’ see n. 57 below.} and not one he would claim to know,\footnote{Perhaps, because he fails to know the Form of the Good, see \textit{Republic} 6 506C-D and previous note.} but one which is the best and most irrefutable \textit{logos} available. It is in this way that the answer he is about to propound is ‘second best’ to the knowledge of the teleological \textit{aitia}.

Even so, Socrates does offer to provide a display of how he engaged in the search of a second best \textit{aitia}. This might plausibly be taken to indicate that the display will be of a distinct method for learning the answer to the question ‘What is the \textit{aitia} of generation and destruction?’\footnote{For those who take the contrast to be between two distinct methods, see, for example (Goodrich 1903:282–283) (Goodrich 1904:7), (Ross 1951b:27), (Robinson 1953:110), (Wiggins 1986:2 & 14), (Kanayama 2000:89), and (Fine 2004:45 n 12).} But this raises the following question: ‘What is the method with which the forthcoming display is contrasted?’ What, that is, is the preferred method (or, perhaps, first voyage (\textit{πρῶτος πλοῦς})) with which the method of hypothesis is contrasted?

The [B] portion of our passage might be thought to help with this question. Plato here seems clearly to be contrasting two different methods - a method of investigating by means of \textit{logoi} (\textit{τὸν ἐν \textit{τοῦς} λόγοις σκοπούμενον}) and a method of investigating by means of facts (\textit{τὸν ἐν \textit{τοῦς} ἔργοις}).\footnote{I am tempted not to translate \textit{ergois} for reasons similar to those in nn. 34 and 36 above. 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 \textit{ἐν}. Perhaps translating as ‘in \textit{logoi}’ and ‘in facts’ should be preferred for its evident obscurity.} The former method is the method he proposes to describe in [C] and then to
So, the method of investigating by means of facts might look to be the preferred method (πρῶτος πλοῦς) against which the method of hypothesis is to be contrasted.

Unfortunately, such an understanding of the passage cannot be sustained. The method of investigating by means of facts is described in [B] as ‘investigating things’ (τὰ ὄντα σκοπῶν) and as ‘looking at things with my eyes and trying to grasp them with each of my senses’ (βλέπων πρὸς τὰ πράγματα τοῖς ὁμοίως καὶ ἐκάστη τῶν αἰσθήσεων ἑπιχειρῶν ἀπετεθαί αἰτῶν). Socrates tells us that he grew tired of and feared that he would be completely blinded by this method. These descriptions of the method of investigating by means of facts, however, reveal that this method is the method he was employing in seeking the wisdom of natural science. Socrates could have grown tired of no other method in the context of this passage. And the reference to becoming blind evidently refers back to Socrates’ proof (τεκμηρίον) for believing that he had no gift for the kind of investigation employed by the natural scientists. He explains there that that kind of investigation had made him quite blind (96C5-6). So, the method of investigating by means of facts is apparently the method of the natural scientists. But Plato does not take the method of the natural scientists - 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. Moreover, the last sentence of [B] suggests that investigating by

49 Pace (van Eck 1996, 225–226) 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.
50 Perhaps he has grown tired of learning from one who knows. See note XXX above and 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. Before describing this ‘confused’ method at 99C6-100A8, Plato takes his readers on a parenthesis concerning Anaxagoras.
51 (Bluck 1955:113 n 2) who takes the reference to blindness in [B] to be ironical, but makes no mention of the earlier reference.
52 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. Indeed, according to (Kanayama 2000, 95): “... for Socrates the second voyage is never inferior to the first. It is certainly laborious, but the labour is the price to be paid for safety and steadiness. I even doubt whether the phrase ‘second voyage’ was ever employed in ancient times merely in the sense of ‘second best’ or pis aller, without any connotation of safety.”
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 is made to put 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; adapted from Grube trans.]. 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 something (as of course does the method of investigation by means of facts). If, however, we are understand the method by means of *logoi*, which Plato evidently identifies with the method of hypothesis in [C], as second best and inferior to some Platonically preferred direct method of learning we will need to look elsewhere for evidence of such a preferred method.53 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*.54 Others, by far the most 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.55 But the *Phaedo* itself provides the preferred method against which the method of hypothesis is second best.56

Earlier in the *Phaedo*, in the passage known as Socrates’ defense (*Phaedo* 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 knowledge that genuine philosophers seek. Socrates explains that

53 Thus, I do not deny that this last sentence of [B] does indicate a potential distinction between a direct and indirect method 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 1883:189–190) 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. In what follows I will maintain that he does not.

54 See, n. 7 above.

55 See, for example, (Murphy 1936:46), (Robinson 1953:110), (Sayre 1969:40–44), (Gonzalez 1998:14), (Scott 2006:204), and (Byrd 2007:142).

56 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 was first suggested to me by my student Josh Dhanens and then reinforced by (Shipton 1979). Neither of them would agree with what I do with their suggestion.
the soul can best grasp the truth when it is free of the bodily senses which deceive the soul, and that the Forms 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 (αυτη διανοια ιοι έφ’ έκαστον), without associating any sight with his thought (μη τε τιν’ αυτην ειλικρινη τη διανοια χρωμενος αυτο καθ’ αυτο ειλικρινης έκαστον επιχειροι θηρευειν των οντων), freeing himself as far as possible from eyes and ears, and in a word, from the whole body (απαλλαγεις οτι μαλιστα όφθαλμων τε και άτων και ως έπος ειπειν συμπαντος τοδ σοματος), because the body confuses the soul and does not allow it to acquire truth and wisdom whenever it is associated with it (ταραττοντος και αυτο όντος την ψυχη ντοντος και όποιον κοινωνη). Will not that man reach reality, Simmias, if anyone does? [Phaedo 65E6-66A8; Grube trans.]

Plato here indicates that the best way for philosophers to acquire the knowledge they seek is to separate the soul from the body. It is 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

57This 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. 10-14 above. The relationship between knowledge (and so knowledge acquisition) and the Forms will be a recurring theme in the remainder of this study, but a full account of this relationship will not be attempted here. For important discussions see, for example, (Cross and Woozley 1971), (White 1976:89–116), (Annas 1981:190–271), (Fine 1990), (White 1992), (Ferejohn 2006), and (Ferejohn 2006).

58This 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 through 7, and, for example, (Vlastos 1965, 153 n 14). 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 learning to recommend. See pp. 24-26 above.

59Such 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 pp. XXX and nn. XXX above.
eliminate them.\textsuperscript{60} 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.\textsuperscript{61}

To return to Socrates’ account of his intellectual autobiography, near the end of the [B] portion of 99C6-100A8 Plato may indeed be contrasting his method of hypothesis with a preferred method of learning, viz. the disembodied soul’s attempt to directly view 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 \textit{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 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 \textit{now} in order to eliminate our robust ethical ignorance.

Consequently, Plato’s introduction of the method of hypothesis in the \textit{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 which he prefers for embodied souls, and the only method (such as it is) he may prefer appears to be 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

\textsuperscript{60}To eliminate them is to die.  
\textsuperscript{61}Plato might here be thought to be recommending the direct viewing of Forms while embodied. If so, then the method of hypothesis of method of hypothesis will be second best to this direct viewing in this life. This appears to be the way (Woolf 2004:102) reads the passage. Besides the general philosophical implausibility of such a view as well as the practical disutility of being encouraged to just view the Forms directly as a response to Clitophon’s challenge, I think there are variety of passages in which Plato indicates the value of the senses (when properly employed) in philosophical inquiry. See, for example, \textit{Phaedo} 74C7-75A10, \textit{Republic} 523A1-C5, the downward paths of the confirmation stage depicted at \textit{Meno} 89C5-96D4, and \textit{Republic} 487A-502C and pp. xxx (chapter 9) below. See (Bedu-Addo 1983:esp. 236, 239–240, & 243–244), (Bedu-Addo 1991:esp. 37–38, 44–48, & 53), (Rowe 1993, 139–140). We will also see that Plato spends considerable time, especially in the \textit{Republic}, explaining how to avoid letting the evidence of the senses play an inappropriate role.
‘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 *Meno* - 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.

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62 See also *Meno* 100A4-6 and *Phaedo* 107B4-9.
63 See, for example, (Weiss 2001:130–134).
Chapter 5
The Method of Hypothesis: A Preliminary Sketch

Introduction

A certain amount of bootstrapping is inevitably involved in any account of Plato’s method of inquiry. This is in part because there are fundamentally two kinds of evidence 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. 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 philosophical method in the dialogues. The introductory scene of the Symposium (172A-178A) presumably is not an application of philosophical 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 method? Is Protagoras’ Great Speech in the Protagoras a depiction of Plato’s philosophical method or Protagoras’ (or of philosophical method at all)? Is Socrates’ defense speech in the Apology an application of philosophical method or a display of the results of a life devoted to practicing philosophy? Are the apparently distinct methods that Plato depicts within

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 that I will be saying about Plato’s method is inconsistent with that other evidence. A similar dichotomy 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 1994), (Bolton 1994), (Smith 1995), and (Anagnostopoulos 2009). Nevertheless, Plato’s use of the dialogue form provides additional complexities.

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

3 I here leave open whether a philosophical method consists in acquiring the knowledge one lacks as opposed to displaying or defending the knowledge one has acquired. In attempting to respond to Clitophon’s challenge I am focusing on the former, but I do not presume that the latter might not be or be a part of a/the philosophical method, as Plato conceives it.
a single dialogue or across dialogues evidence of Plato’s development, his methodological pluralism, or distinct portions of some larger method of which these applications are part? 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 philosophical method. How could one even begin to answer whether Plato takes his mythological passages as instances of his philosophical methodology without some sort of commitment to what Plato takes his philosophical methodology 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 philosophical method found in the dialogues need to be supplemented, completed, and clarified by the depictions. On the other hand, identifying the depictions requires a relatively detailed, complete, and clear description of the method. We have to start somewhere, and I begin with his 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 Plato may or may not be referring to 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 said above, 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 be describing his method of hypothesis. We will see that they in fact provide very little information about the nature of Plato’s method. They -----------------------------

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4For the beginnings of an argument for something like the last option see (Benson 2005).
tend to raise many 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 will be to uncover from these passages a structure substantial enough to enable us to identify passages in the dialogues in which Socrates is depicted as employing this method.

The structure that emerges consists of two stages, which I will call a proof stage and a confirmation stage, themselves each consisting of two procedures. In outline, in order to learn on one’s own the answer to some question, Q1, one should proceed as follows.

The Proof Stage

[a] Identify a second question, Q2, from whose most compelling answer (the hypothesis, H1) the answer, A1, to the initial question, Q1, can be derived.

[b] Show how A1 is derived from H1; sometimes this will be immediate and trivial, sometimes not.

The Confirmation Stage

[a] Test the consequences of H1 for agreement or disagreement with each other.

[b] Identify a second reduced question, Q3, from whose most compelling answer (a higher hypothesis, H2) H1 can be derived, show how H1 can be derived from H2, and continue this process until one reaches something acceptable.

But numerous questions - concerning the nature of hypothesis, derivation, consequences, agreement, reduction, and acceptability, among others - remain.

Nevertheless, the results of this chapter together with the preceding one provide a defeasible way of identifying depictions of the method of hypothesis in Plato’s text. The preceding chapter gave us reason to expect that when Plato depicted instances of de novo inquiry - of the 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

5 My use of ‘proof’ and ‘confirmation’ is meant to be more suggestive, than technical.
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 the many of questions that remain following our examination of the introductory passages examined here. This will be 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. In what has preceded I have tried to motivate my starting points. I have 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 it from one who knows. In addition, I have maintained that Meno’s paradox and the theory of recollection indicate that Plato believes that 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, for example, contemporaneous geometrical method, might not be fruitfully pursued, although I will sometimes offer considerations for distrusting their fruitfulness. 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 which follows.

The Description in the *Meno*

After requesting that Meno permit him to investigate whether virtue is teachable from a hypothesis (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως), 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 ὄος, ὡσπερ οἱ γεωμέτραι πολλάκις σκόπούνται), 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 (ἀλλὰ ὡσπερ μὲν τινα ὑπόθεσιν προήργων οἴμαι ἐχειν πρὸς τὸ πράγμα), 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 (ὑποθέσεως) 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 2002:209) trans.]

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 being depicted as 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.

The focus of scholarly attention has been primarily to determine the details of the geometrical example referred to in the passage. But given the brevity of the description of the geometrical example referred to in the passage.

6I 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 below.

7(Scott 2006:134) calls this passage “one of the most perplexing of all the works of Plato.” (Wolf, D. 2008:46 n 30) 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 1964:441–461) discusses five ‘among the most interesting explanations’ of his predecessors (Benecke 1867), (Butcher 1888a), (Cook Wilson 1903), (Farquharson 1923), and (Heijboer 1955). Note that Heath’s interpretation ((Heath 1921:1298–303)) is the same as Cook Wilson’s. Since Bluck’s count, at least four more ‘interesting’ interpretations have been published (Gaiser 1964), (Sternfeld and Zyskind 1977), (Meyers 1988), and (Lloyd 1992).”

8According 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”. While I am in general agreement with Sayre in the sense that the *Meno* leaves more questions unanswered than answered concerning the method of hypothesis, there can be little doubt that Plato means to be explaining (however obscurely) the method he is about to employ.
example, Plato seems more focused on the method illustrated by the example.\textsuperscript{9} And the method illustrated is reasonably clear. Plato has Socrates describe geometers attempting to answer a question, the answer to which they fail to know. The question, on the Cook Wilson interpretation,\textsuperscript{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 (ὑπόθεσιν) that may be helpful (προοργο) in answering the inscription question. The hypothesis, again according to the Cook Wilson interpretation, is that 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. We might put the hypothesis so described as follows: 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).\textsuperscript{11} Let us call this hypothesis ‘the bi-conditional’. As such, the method appears to be one of reducing one question
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\textsuperscript{9}(Meyers 1988:173–174) 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 \textit{Meno}. While I am sympathetic with the sentiment, I have not been persuaded by Meyers’ interpretation of the problem. For responses to Meyers’ objection, see, for example, (Heath, T. L. 1921:302), (Lloyd 1992:181), and (Wolfsdorf, D. 2008:52).

\textsuperscript{10}This interpretation seems to have attained a kind of consensus in recent years. See, for example (Mueller 1992:178), (Menn 2002:209–215), (Scott 2006:134–137), and (Wolfsdorf, D. 2008a:48–54). Earlier supporters of this interpretation include (Heath 1921:1 298–303) and (Gulley 1958:7 n 1). But nothing about the general structure of the method which I discuss below depends on accepting this interpretation.

\textsuperscript{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 1888b)’s 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 (Bluck 1964:324–325) who writes concerning the concluding phrase that it “has rightly been taken to suggest that the geometer considers himself in a position to decide whether the conditions laid down in his υπόθεσις are satisfied or not, and also that if the conditions are not fulfilled, his answer will be that the γωρίς cannot be inscribed in the desired manner.” We will see in the next chapter that the application of the method of hypothesis to the question whether virtue can be taught also indicates a bi-conditional. See pp. 171–172 below. It is not clear, however, whether Plato takes this feature of the geometrical example and the application which follows it to be methodologically salient.

\end{footnotesize}
to another question - reducing the inscription question to what we might call ‘the application question’ - 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.

Here, then, we have Plato’s introductory description or illustration of the method of hypothesis. On the one hand, we have a relatively straightforward answer to Clitophon’s challenge. When one wants to acquire knowledge of something on one’s own, i.e., not from someone else who knows, behave as the geometers do when they are in a similar position. Seek 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. On the other hand, this can hardly be the end of the story. This introductory description, as I have just articulated it, raises more questions than it answers. Among the questions it has raised are: first, what about this method is hypothetical? Why, that is, does Plato have Socrates describe it as ‘examining from a hypothesis’? Second and relatedly, what is the hypothesis in this description? Which, if any, of the propositions appealed to by the geometers in this example is the or a hypothesis? Third, how does one discover the bi-conditional which permits one to identify the reduced question? Without a procedure for identifying the reduced question, it is difficult to see how this method of examining from a hypothesis is supposed to get off the ground. And finally, and perhaps most

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12 See Prior Analytics B 25 69a20-36 where Aristotle illustrates the method of reduction (ἀπαγωγή) by referring to the example pursued in the subsequent passage in the Meno. I owe this reference to (Menn 2002:212 n 25) and (Wolfsdorf, D. 2008a: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 2006:133–134), and (Wolfsdorf, D. 2008a:62).
13 It may be worth noting in light of my discussion above (pp. 109-111) that the question to which the geometers reduce the original question looks no less like a poion question than the original question.
14 A similar question might be asked about Aristotle’s discussion of demonstrating what something is in essence by hypothesis (ἀποδείξας τὸ τί ἐστι κατ’ οὐσίαν, ἐξ ὑποθέσεως) in Posterior Analytics 2.6.
15 See n. 19 below.
16 Throughout I will refer to the question to which the original question has been reduced as the ‘reduced question’, not the question that has been reduced. The latter question I will refer to as the ‘original question’.
importantly, how does one go 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 understood as an attempt to respond to Clitophon’s challenge looks like a non-starter.\[17\]

In what follows I will maintain that the geometrical illustration leaves these questions open. If we are to get answers to 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 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 become known) 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).

Consider, for example, the first question - ‘What is hypothetical about this method?’ Richard Robinson investigated more than five decades ago what referring to something as a ‘hypothesis’ (*hypothesis*/ὑποθέσις) means throughout Plato’s corpus. According to Robinson’s investigation of Plato’s use of the word and its cognates (including the root verb τιθηµι) “The

\[17\] 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. that a similar regress objection has been raised against the theory of recollection as a response to *Meno’s* paradox. But unlike in the recollection case, the objection here has some force. In the recollection case the the issues surrounding disembodied knowledge acquisition may be different than 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.
noun ‘hypothesis’ in Plato always means that which is posited as a beginning, whether a beginning of practice or of deduction” (Robinson 1953:69) and that “[w]hat is posited is always provisional and tentative” (Robinson 1953:94). More recently, David Wolfsdorf has argued that in fourth century Greek intellectual contexts, including Plato, ‘hypothesis’ 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. 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 (for every Socratic argument depends upon premises that are taken as more cognitively secure than its conclusion) and we will fail to do justice to the context of the introduction of the method of hypothesis. 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

18 According to Robinson, provisionality is one of the five features of the method of hypothesis that can be summed 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 general.” Here is a clear example of how different starting effect one’s understanding of the method. Others who adopt the provisionality feature include (Ross 1951:28), (Bluck 1961:85–91), (Taylor 1967:194–196), (Bailey 2005:100 n 5), and (Scott 2006:138–140).

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 in the form of theories, like the theory of Forms or theory of causation or both; pace (Bluck 1955:161–162). See pp. 214-230 below. Finally, in the Republic, Plato appears to refer to things like the odd, the even, the figures, and the three kinds of angles (τὸ τε περίττον καὶ τὸ ἄριστον καὶ τὰ σχήματα καὶ γονίων τριττά εἴδη; Republic 6 510C3-5) as hupotheseis. I prefer to refer to Platonic hupotheseis as things which 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 underdetermined by the text and perhaps goes beyond Plato’s own explicit thinking. See, for example, p. 152 below. For a similar sentiment (confined to dialogues prior to the Theaetetus) see (Wolfsdorf, D. 2008b:182).

20 (Wolfsdorf, D. 2008a:177–181) appears happy to accept this result.

21 (Scott 2006:222–224). 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’. But this is another example of the bootstrapping nature of coming to terms with Plato’s method of hypothesis and the interconnectedness of the questions concerning it. Scott takes the argument against the bi-conditional interpretation to depend on his argument for the provisionality of the hupotheseis.
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. 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 (robust) ignorance, rather than from one who knows. This wider context indicates that the essential feature of a hypothesis is not that it is provisional, but that it is not (robustly) known. If it were otherwise, then the hypothesis would either be known by the teacher and the method of hypothesis would fail to provide a method of de novo learning, or the hypothesis would be known by the inquirer and the question of knowledge acquisition would have only been pushed back to how knowledge of the hypothesis is learned. What is essential about hypotheses 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. That is what accounts for their usefulness in pursuing de novo learning.

Consequently, I will return to the translation of ‘hypotheses’ 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 procedure [ii] that are not yet (robustly) known. This, at least, is what is

\[\text{\textsuperscript{22}}\]See also (Bluck 1964:76).
\[\text{\textsuperscript{23}}\]Recall that by ‘robust ignorance’ I simply mean lack of robust knowledge; see ch. 3 n. 35 above.
\[\text{\textsuperscript{24}}\]See n. 17 above.
\[\text{\textsuperscript{25}}\]See (Rose 1970:2).
\[\text{\textsuperscript{26}}\]For the connection between hypotheses and beginnings or archai see also (Menn 2002:217–218 & n 33), (Huffman 1993:78–92), and (Netz 2003:309).
\[\text{\textsuperscript{27}}\]Even Wolfsdorf takes the cognitive security of the hypotheses to lie somewhere between Platonic true belief and the Platonic robust knowledge that requires “a ‘reasoning of the cause.’” See (Wolfsdorf, D. 2008a:41); see also (Wolfsdorf, D. 2008b:181): “… the Platonic view is that the postulates in the ethical sections are not known, but cognitively secure,” although he expresses considerable uncertainty about this interpretation. I think (Cooper 2004) would agree as well. (Cooper 2004:21) maintains that On Ancient Method “is very probably the first recorded use of those words [the noun and its related verb] to indicate a ὑποθεσίς of some sort in any context of logical argument,
hypothetical about the method. It depends on beginning with propositions that are not yet known (as we would expect). Such an understanding is compatible with both Plato’s word usage and beyond. How cognitively secure these hypothetical propositions need to be can await an examination of Plato’s other descriptions and/or depictions. Plato’s introductory description leaves this undetermined. We should not dismiss passages as evidence of Plato’s method of hypothesis because he uses ‘hypothesis’ for a cognitively secure or provisional proposition.

Indeed, a similar answer awaits our second - related question: which proposition is the hypothesis. It is natural to read 87A2-7,

but I think I have as it were a hypothesis (ὁσπερ μὲν 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 [(Menn 2002:209) trans.]

as indicating what might be called ‘the bi-conditional interpretation’. That is, it is natural to read these lines as indicating that the hypothesis is ‘the area has the ascription property just in case it has the application property’. But others have suggested that the qualification ‘as it were’ (ὁσπερ μὲν τινα) indicates that the conditional statements that follow are not hypotheses in the strict sense of the word. Rather, 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]

theoretical analysis, or explanation.” For the author of On Ancient Method 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;” (Cooper 2004:23). According to Cooper, these words had a negative connotation for the author of On Ancient Method, associating the use of hypothesis with his Empedoclean opponents, whose hypotheses 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 (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. (Cooper 2004:19 n 22)) 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.

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 n. 21 above.

See, for example (Bedu-Addo, J. D. 1984:6 & n 22).
in the circle, whether it is impossible or not” ((Menn 2002:209) trans.) he indicates that the hypothesis in the strict sense of the word is the proposition that the area has the application property, or the proposition that the area lacks the application property.\textsuperscript{30} It is only after hypothesizing one or the other of these propositions that one should be willing to state whether the area has the ascription property or not.

As far as the text of the introductory description goes, both propositions 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 two propositions - the bi-conditional or the answer to the reduced question - is the hypothesis the text of Plato’s introductory illustration leaves open.\textsuperscript{31} Some have thought that the evidence for the cognitive security of hypotheses indicates that the bi-conditional is the hypothesis, since the bi-conditional is cognitively secure. Others favoring the provisionality interpretation have taken the answer to the reduced question to be the hypothesis, since such an answer is necessarily provisional. But again, insofar as an independent answer to this question matters, we would do well to await an examination of Plato’s other descriptions and/or depictions before answering it. Nothing in the current description requires one answer rather than the other. And, one ought not dismiss passages which do require one or the other of these answers as thereby useless for understanding Plato’s introductory illustration.

\textsuperscript{30}(Bedu-Addo, J. D. 1984:6) translates ὑποθέμαις οὖν ἐθάλοι τοῖς σοι τὸ συμβαίναν as ‘accordingly, I should like to make a hypothesis and tell you the result ...’

\textsuperscript{31}Thus (Bedu-Addo, J. D. 1984:6), and (Mueller 1992:178–179), 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 2002:209–210) 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 (see pp. 133-138 below) 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.
Concerning the remaining two questions arising from this opening description, it has been thought that a careful examination of the geometrical example briefly illustrated will prove helpful. Recall that the remaining questions are how the bi-conditional by which one identifies the reduced question can be acquired, and how an answer to the reduced question is to be acquired. According to the Cook Wilson interpretation of the geometrical example, the bi-conditional is found 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*.\(^{32}\) Menn maintains that “it is tolerably certain, ... that Plato was aware of analysis as a distinctive geometrical practice ...” (Menn 2002:204). Menn’s evidence for Plato’s awareness is three passages in Aristotle (*Posterior Analytics* I 12 78a6-13, *Sophistical Refutations* 16 175a26-28, *Nicomachean Ethics* III 3 1112b15-27). All three of these passages testify to a familiarity in the Academy with geometrical analysis. Thus, since it is ‘tolerably certain’ that Plato is aware of geometrical analysis, Plato could be alluding to it with this example in the *Meno*. But is he? According to Menn, “Plato is recommending a method for finding appropriate hypotheses” (Menn 2002:212) in the current geometrical passsage and the method by which this is in fact done in the geometrical example 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

\(^{32}\)And that Plato “at least experimented with taking [geometrical analysis] as a model for philosophical reasoning” (Menn 2002:196).
attempt to answer the latter question. To find in this passage a recommendation for how to carry
out such a reduction, i.e., how to find an appropriate hypothesis, is to find in this passage more
than there is.

Of course, Menn would not likely disagree. 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 "the given area can be applied to the
diameter in such a way that it falls short by a figure similar to the applied area," 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. 33

After providing a careful explication of how geometrical analysis does lead one to the bi-
conditional, Menn concludes his discussion of the geometrical example by maintaining that the
element 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." 34 Those steeped in 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 bi-conditional
required for following Plato’s recommended method of learning. We have been offered a
relatively straightforward explication (the theory of recollection) and illustration (the
conversation with the slave) of the possibility of 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

33 (Menn 2002:212). See also (Vlastos 1991:123),: “Though the detail of the mathematics is left obscure, the logical
structure of the recommended method is entirely clear: when you are faced with a problematic proposition p, to
‘investigate it from a hypothesis,’ you hit on another proposition h (the ‘hypothesis’), such that p is true if and only if
h is true, and then shift your search from p to h, and investigate the truth of h, undertaking to determine what would
follow (quite apart from p) if h were true and, alternatively, if it were false” [emphasis added].
34 (Menn 2002:215).
so, he becomes obscurantist and cultish. Nevertheless, Plato may be recommending geometrical analysis in this passage as Menn suggests. Nothing in the passage, however, 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 would do well to look at Plato’s other introductory descriptions and depictions of his method to determine if this is indeed what Plato would recommend.

Moreover, even if Plato were recommending geometrical analysis in order to identify the reduced question in this passage, it does not follow that he is recommending geometrical analysis as Menn understands it. Menn’s argument depends on a specific interpretation of the nature of geometrical analysis. 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

35 (Menn 2002:215 n 31) cites with approval (Heath, T. 1981:v 1 302 check)’s 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).

36 I say ‘roughly’ because in displaying the logical details of the method Menn goes on to complicate the process, both in the case of theoretical and problematic analysis; see (Menn 2002:199–204). But I think the less complex description offered above will suffice for our current purposes. We will meet with the distinction between theoretical and problematic analysis again later; see pp. XXX-XXX (Chapter 9) below.
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. For example, Ian Mueller writes “Analysis can be thought of as a process of looking for the proof of an assertion $P$ by searching for propositions that imply $P$, propositions that imply those, and so on until one reaches propositions already established; in synthesis one simply writes down the proof discovered by analysis, that is, one goes through the steps of analysis in reverse order.”

Of course, 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’). Mentioning that the ascription property also entails the application property is salient if this is how the application property is discovered.

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37 (Wolfsdorf, D. 2008a:54–55 & n 50), despite agreeing with Menn, highlights its controversial nature. For an earlier discussion of the debate, see (Gulley 1958). Gulley does not doubt that there is a form of geometrical analysis that fits the pattern maintained by Menn, but he argues that there is also a form of geometrical analysis that fits the pattern suggested by Mueller; (Bluck 1964:77 n 1) apparently agrees with Gulley. On behalf of Menn’s pattern, Gulley cites (Heath 1926:137–142), (Cherniss, H. 1951:414–419), (Robinson 1936:464), and (Robinson 1953:166), who asserts that this interpretation of the geometrical analysis “is really as certain as anything in the history of thought.” Wolfsdorf adds the following (Mahoney 1968/9:321), (Knorr 1986:354–357), and (Behboud 1994:53). On behalf of the alternative pattern, Gulley cites (Cornford 1932:43–50), (Farquharson 1923), and (Lee 1935); Wolfsdorf adds, with some hesitation, (Hintikka 1974:7–21).

38 (Mueller 1992:175). To be fair, Mueller may not have geometrical analysis in mind here. He may be looking for a description that would fit both geometrical analysis and dialectical analysis.

39 Another virtue is that it explains in part Aristotle’s interest in convertible propositions in the Posterior Analytics.
One examines the logical consequences of the area having the ascription property to see whether any of them also entail the area having the application property. If one does, one has discovered the bi-conditional (i.e. having the ascription property entails having the application property and having the application property entails having the ascription property), and so the reduced question. But, a disadvantage of Menn’s interpretation is the relative scarcity of such reversible propositions. Reversible propositions may be sufficiently frequent in geometry (or mathematics in general) to recommend such a procedure, but outside mathematics they are rare indeed.

We should remember, however, that Plato is recommending the method of hypothesis of the geometers not for learning in geometry or even in mathematics, but quite generally, and especially for acquiring the robust ethical knowledge he and his interlocutors lack. The method of acquiring the bi-conditional on Menn’s interpretation hardly looks promising for a pursuit of that sort. So, either we must take Plato to be unaware of the scarcity of such propositions in the inquiries he is particularly interested in, or we would do well to look to Plato’s other descriptions and applications of his recommended method for pursuing such inquiries, before saddling him with this mistake. He may have analysis in mind, and if so, it may or may not be the sort of analysis Menn supposes. Then again, he may not have analysis in mind at all. All we need to saddle Plato with on the basis of this introductory description is the recommendation that when one seeks the knowledge of an answer to a question one fails to know one should proceed as the

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40 Notice that by suppressing Menn’s talk of pursuing the logical consequences of the positive answer to the original question until something ‘clicks’ or until one arrives at some proposition known to be true or false, the procedure amounts to a method for discovering the bi-conditional without thereby amounting to a procedure for discovering the answer to the original question.

41 See *Posterior Analytics* I.12 78a6-13 for Aristotle’s explicit acknowledgement that convertible propositions are more common in mathematics than in dialectic. If we take Aristotle to be objecting to Plato here, then we would have some reason to think that Aristotle understands Platonic method in a way similar to Menn, although Aristotle is not always our best guide to understanding Plato. See also *Posterior Analytics* I.3 73a17-18. Further, it might be more accurate to maintain, not that convertible propositions are rare outside mathematics, but that deriving interesting results from convertible propositions is rare outside mathematics.

42 (Robinson 1953:166) and (Cherniss, H. 1951:414–419) interpret geometrical analysis in the same way as Menn. They do so precisely in order to distinguish geometrical analysis from Plato’s method of identifying the reduced question. But their evidence for this distinction comes from texts other than this introductory one. As Cherniss points out there were many different methods that went by the name ‘analysis’. See n. 38 above.
geometers do: find a second question whose answer answers the original question and seek an answer to the second question. This, of course, leaves a lot of unanswered questions, but it at least begins to supply a structure to the method of learning on one’s own that Plato recommends.

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 acquiring knowledge on one’s own is suspect. In the introductory description, Plato recommends that when one wants to purposively acquire knowledge of 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 acquire the knowledge of 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. Alternatively, it may be supposed that 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.

Unfortunately, Plato’s general hostility to sense experience (see Socrates’ defense at the beginning of the Phaedo pp. 117-119 above) makes this particular response look unpromising. On the other hand, nothing in the introductory description rules out an appeal to sensory experience either. Perhaps more troubling, in the case of the geometrical example of our text the application problem (the reduced question) may not have been solvable at the time of the writing of the Meno, depending as it does

43 Other than, I suppose, that such ‘clicks’ just do occur in the case of geometrical analysis. In the final section of Menn’s paper (Menn 2002:219–223), he connects this ‘click’ to the activation of habitual knowledge, roughly what I called in the previous chapter ‘tactic’ or ‘latent’ knowledge. Menn’s ‘click’ corresponds to my earlier talk of the ‘aha!’ feeling.

44 On (Meyers 1988:177–178)’s interpretation of the geometrical example, the application condition (which is only sufficient not necessary on her interpretation) can simply be seen to be met.
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, though, our introductory text remains silent on this question as well. Plato tells us that when attempting to purposively acquire knowledge of an answer to a question on one’s own 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 reduce that question to a third question, and so on.

In conclusion, 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 whose answer one seeks to know to another question and seek to acquire knowledge of this latter question. On the other hand, the simplicity and brevity of this recommendation raises more questions than it answers. The method is hypothetical to the extent that it relies on beginning the search with propositions that are not yet (robustly) known, but whether these propositions are the bi-conditionals by which one identifies the reduced question, or the answer to the reduced question from which the answer to the original question can be derived is left open. Plato’s use of the geometrical example in this passage may indicate that the procedure to acquire the bi-conditional by which one identifies the reduced question is the method of geometrical analysis, although it is less than clear what the method of geometrical analysis is to which Plato is potentially referring. 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 the fact that the answer to the geometrical example’s reduced

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45See (Menn 2002:214), who thinks the solution is in the air at the time of the writing of the *Meno* and (Wolfsdorf, D. 2008a:50) who thinks the solution post-dates the writing of the *Meno*. (Bluck 1964:448–449) cites (Heijboer 1955:95) and (Heath, T. L. 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.
question may not have even been known at the time of the composition of the Meno makes it exceedingly difficult to determine 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 appears to raise more questions than it answers. Nevertheless, answers to at least some of these questions appear critical in gaining a thorough understanding of Plato’s recommended method. Such answers, if they are to be forthcoming, will have to come from elsewhere. Plato’s introductory description of the method of hypothesis in the Meno leaves them unanswered.

**The Description in the Phaedo**

*Phaedo* 100A3-8

Perhaps we can get some help with these answers by returning to the introduction of the method of hypothesis 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 is made to say

[C] ..., I started in this manner: taking as my hypothesis (ὑποθέμενος) in each case the logos that seemed to me the most compelling (κρίνω ἐρωμενέστατον), 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; adapted from Grube trans.]

On an initial reading of the text the method again appears clear enough. Socrates testifies to hypothesizing some logos which he judged to be strongest or 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 problems abound. Gallop summarizes “the main problems” as follows:

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46Henceforth, I will refer to *Phaedo* 100A3-8 as ‘the Phaedo’s introductory description of the method of hypothesis’.
What is meant at 100A4 by ‘taking as my hypothesis (ὑποθέμενος) in each case the logos that seemed to me the most compelling (κρινόν ερρομένεστάτον)’?47 How can the metaphor of ‘[agree]’ (a5) be interpreted in such a way that ‘putting 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 problem in Chapter 7 below.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. Doing so will go some way toward resolving these two problems, or at least so I maintain.

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 than the one illustrated by the obscure geometrical example in the Meno. His reasons are two-fold. 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

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 1955:167–168 & 173), (Rowe, C. 1993:54), and (Rowe, C. 1996:237). Others who take the method as meant to be fully general include (Gallop 1975:166 and 181), (Bostock 1986:157), (Blank 1986:151 n 20), (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 2001:187 n 10), (Wolfsdorf, D. 2008b:179), and perhaps (Cooper 2004:19 n 22). (Weiss 2001:187 n 10) does not offer any reasons for taking the two methods as distinct. (Wolfsdorf, D. 2008b: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. (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 I think it is a mistake to read too much into the Meno’s appeal to the geometrical example. We can, however, be confident about the importance of reducing one question to another. How formal that process is understood to be outside of mathematics is underdetermined by the text.
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 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. 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 underdetermined 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-

51 This is particularly salient, since I will be arguing (in the next chapter) 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.
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 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 is made to recommend 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.53 Here in the Phaedo, Socrates is again faced with a question whose answer he fails to know:54 ‘What is the aitia of generation and destruction (95E9-96A1)?’, which we call ‘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

52See (Dancy 2004:296) who thinks that the words ὑποθέμενος at 100A3, B5, 101D7, and ὑπόθεσις 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, H. 1947:169), (Hackforth 1955:141), (Bluck 1964:87–90), (Sayre 1969:3 n 1), (Bostock 1986:166), (Kahn 1996:315–319), (Gonzalez 1998:197–199), and (Scott 2006:139–140).

53It may have been recommending geometrical analysis, but the problems associated with geometrical analysis (both determining precisely what it amounted to and applying it to questions outside mathematics) opposed such a recommendation given that it was not required by the text.

54At least, at this point in his narration of his intellectual history. See (Bedu-Addo, J. T. 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.
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?’ one looks for another question which answers the *aitia* question and seeks to answer this reduced question. Then one sets down as the answer to the *aitia* question the answer which agrees with the answer to the reduced question and as not true the answer which does not.

Understood in this way the [C] portion of Plato’s introductory passage provides a fairly immediate answer to Gallop’s first problem: What is meant at 100A4 by ‘taking as my hypothesis (ὑποθέσιν) in each case the *logos* that seemed to me the most compelling (κρινομένος)?’ ‘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 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.55 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.56 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 100A6.57 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.58

55To an extent, however, Gallop’s first problem remains unresolved. The comparison with the *Meno* leaves open whether the answer to the reduced question, i.e., the *logos* hypothesized, is meant to be a proposition, a theory, a definition, or even, I suppose, an object (the answer in the material mode, so to speak). It does, however, tell against Gallop’s view (supported by (Rowe, C. 1993) and (Rowe, C. 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), and (van Eck 1996). For more on this dispute see n. 85 and 214-230 below.
56See p. 152 below for what is meant by ‘most compelling’.
57See n. 49 above.
58See (McLarty 2005:126) and (Mueller 1992:181).
It may be objected to this alleged parallel with the *Meno* that unlike the *Meno*’s questions,⁵⁹ the *Phaedo*’s question is not a ‘yes-or-no’ question. The *Phaedo*’s question is more open-ended.⁶⁰ And this difference between the two dialogues raises special difficulties for discovering or 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 question⁶¹ without comment. 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.⁶² While we might plausibly collect a list of available alternatives from the description of Socrates’ intellectual history,⁶³ there is no reason to suppose

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⁵⁹By the *Meno*’s questions I mean both ‘Does the area have the inscription property?’ and ‘Is virtue teachable?’.
⁶⁰(Belnap and Steel 1976:19–34) would classify the *Meno*’s questions as a type of whether-question and the *Phaedo*’s question as a which-question.
⁶¹By a ‘broader question’ I mean one which presents as its subject more alternatives; see (Belnap, et al. 1976:16–34).
⁶²Although 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, et al. 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, et al. 1976:22).
⁶³Among the alternatives suggested by Socrates’ intellectual history are heat, cold, blood, air, fire (96A9-B9), flesh, bone, a head (96C8-E5), addition, division (96E6-97B3), nous or mind (97B8-C6), beauty, bigness, tallness (100C9-E7), shape, and color (100D1-2). Perhaps, the *Phaedo*’s question would be better understood more narrowly as ‘What is the aitia of something becoming bigger?’ and/or ‘What is the aitia of something becoming beautiful?’ The available answers to the former question suggested in the Socrates’ intellectual history include a head, addition, nous, or bigness, while the available answers to the latter include shape, color, nous, or beauty. I doubt that there is any significance to Plato’s use of the singular ‘aitia’ at 95E9 (pace (Bedu-Addo, J. T. 1979:128 n 4)), in part because already by 96A9 he has begun using the plural; note also that he returns to the singular at [C] (see (Bostock 1986:157 n 1)). If Plato’s answer to the question he raises at 95E9-96A1 is that specific Forms are the aitiae of specific instances of generation and destruction, as I suppose (e.g., the Form of Beauty is the aitia of something’s
this list is exhaustive nor how such a collection is justified. Of course, similar worries may apply to the list of alternatives in *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. But we have already seen that the project of discovering the reduced question was left under-determined in the *Meno* passage and yet the recommendation to find a second, reduced question which would be helpful in answering the original question remained. 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 which ideally determines, but minimally helps with, the answer to the *aitia* question and 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.

becoming beautiful) (see pp. 214-230 below), he might well have described this as ‘Forms are the *aitia* of generation and destruction’.

64In 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, i.e., 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 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.
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 which agrees with this hypothesis and as not true the answer which does not.

Here, then, we arrive at Gallop’s second problem. This problem involves a sort of vagueness or equivocation surrounding the metaphor (if it is a metaphor) of agreement. By ‘agree’ or “συµφωνεῖν” Plato might mean ‘is consistent with’ or ‘is entailed by’. 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 supposed to 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 while 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*), he will be implausibly recommending that one consider true whatever is consistent with the given area having the application property. For example, the (false) proposition that Aristotle is an Athenian citizen is consistent with the given area having the application property. But, it would be unreasonable to consider that it the proposition is true simply because it is consistent with such a hypothesized *logos*. Unfortunately, understanding Plato in the latter way, that is, as taking ‘agree’ to mean ‘entailed by’ will not help. While Plato will be plausibly recommending that one consider true whatever is entailed by the hypothesized *logos* that the given area has the application property, he will again be implausibly recommending that one consider not true whatever is not entailed by this *logos*. Again, the (true) proposition 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 the proposition 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. 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. Still others understand Plato as using ‘συµφωνεῖν’ for some quasi-logical relation, analogous, for example, to musical harmony. 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 or Plato’s realization of a necessary lack of precision and rigor in disciplines outside of mathematics.

While none of these alternatives are 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 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 which 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.

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65 See (Bostock 1986:162–163) who takes Plato not quite to say what he intended. It is, according to Bostock, “a slip on Socrates’ part.”
66 See, for example, (Gentzler 1991). (Hackforth 1955:139)’s 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 previous note.
67 See (Bailey 2005) for an interesting argument along these lines. See also (Sedley 2003, 125 n. 6).
68 See, for example, (Dancy 2004:297), and perhaps, also (Robinson 1953:126–129), (Annas, J. 1981:288–289), and (Mueller 1992:181).
69 Perhaps, see (Mueller 1992:183)’s discussion of ‘harmonious expansion’ and, of course, Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* I.3.
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. Plato is not recommending that one consider true anything 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.

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 sufficient conditions 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, the gap will reappear.

For example, consider a case in which the only possible answers to the question ‘How is virtue acquired?’ are ‘by teaching’, ‘by divine dispensation’, or ‘by birth’. Suppose also that acquiring virtue by teaching is compatible with acquiring virtue by divine dispensation, but not by birth. Finally, suppose that the most compelling answer to the reduced question ‘What is virtue?’ is ‘knowledge’ and virtue’s being knowledge is a sufficient condition for virtue’s being teachable. If we take Plato to be directing that one should set down as true the answers to the original question entailed by the most compelling answer to the reduced question and set down as false those answers not entailed, then Plato will be rightly directing us to accept as true that virtue is teachable and as false that virtue comes by birth, but wrongly directing us to set down as

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70 One might wonder in this case, why Plato uses the plural *α —* 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’ question, 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 *τα όρμηθεντα* 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. 153-162 below.

71 See (Kanayama 2000, 64) for a similar response.
false that virtue comes by divine dispensation. On the other hand, if Plato is directing us to set
down as true the answers to the original question which are consistent with the most compelling
answer to the reduced question and as false those answers which are not consistent with that most
compelling answer, then he will again be rightly directing us to set down as true that virtue is
teachable and as false that virtue comes by birth, but he will be wrongly directing us the set down
as true that it comes by divine dispensation. The point here is that the gap between entailment
and consistency has reappeared, but it has done so in a localized way. Plato’s mistake is not the
gross one of directing us either to accept as false that Socrates is not an Athenian citizen because
it is not entailed by virtue’s being knowledge or to accept as true that Aristotle is an Athenian
citizen because it is consistent with virtue’s being knowledge.\textsuperscript{72} Rather, Plato’s mistake is
localized to potential answers to the original question. And the mistake is a result of the move
away from exclusive yes-or-no questions to questions whose answers may not be exclusive and
so the difficulties of obtaining genuinely reduced questions, i.e., questions whose answer
genuinely determine (as opposed to merely help with, as Plato explicitly puts it in the obscure
geometrical illustration of the \textit{Meno}) the answer to the original question,\textsuperscript{73} especially once one
moves beyond the relative simplicity and rigour associated with geometry and mathematics.

So, if we read Plato’s brief introduction to the method of hypothesis in the \textit{Phaedo} in
light of his obscure geometrical illustration in the \textit{Meno}, a reasonably coherent picture develops.
Plato has Socrates recommend that when one seeks to acquire knowledge of the answer to a
specific question one should look for another question 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 which one judges to be most compelling and consider as true the answer to the
original question that agrees with that hypothesis 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

\textsuperscript{72}See (Gallop 1975:181), (Mueller 1992:181), and (Kanayama 2000:64), although the latter seems to think that by
recognizing the salience to a given context of inquiry favors the consistency interpretation.

\textsuperscript{73}In either the strong or the weak sense of determination. See n. 64 above.
simple case of ‘yes-or-no’ questions in relatively rigorous and developed disciplines 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 his illustration of the obscure geometrical illustration in the *Meno*, the beginning of a response to Clitophon’s challenge.

Indeed, if we return to the questions which were 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 which 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 does indicate 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, 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

74 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.

75 See also 101D7 where the object of hypothesizing is called a hypothesis, rather than a *logos*; (ὑποθέσων ὑποθέμενος).
answer to the reduced question, rather than the bi-conditional. 76 But in the Phaedo’s introductory description, Plato provides no justification or explanation for hypothesizing the logos one does. He simply recommends hypothesizing the answer one judges most compelling (ὅν ἄν κρίνω ἐρρωμενέστατον εἶναι; 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 cognitive attraction to it 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, at least, the hypothesis and so, the answer to the original question that agrees with it 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 which determines 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, i.e., 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 which appear to be general descriptions of his method of hypothesis. 77

Phaedo 101D1-E3

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76 See n. 28 above.
77 Pace (Bluck 1955:166 n 2) and (Bluck 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’. 
Following the introduction of the theory of Forms and an answer to the question that lead to the introduction the method of hypothesis in the first place, Socrates is made to say

But [a] you ..., would cling (ἐχομενος) to the safety of your own hypothesis (ἐχεινον τοι άσφαλος της υποθέσεως) and give that answer. [b] If someone then attacked (ἐχοιτο) your hypothesis itself (αυτης της υποθέσεως), you would ignore him and would not answer until you had examined whether the consequences that follow from it agree with one another or contradict one another (τα ανεστρεφονται ορμηθεντα σκέψαι ει σοι άλληλος συμφωνει η διαφωνει). [c] And when you must give an account (διδοναι λόγον) of your hypothesis itself you will proceed in the same way: you will assume another hypothesis (Άλλην αυ υποθέσειν υποθέμενος), the one which seems to you best of the higher ones (η της των ανωθεν βελτιστη φαινοτο) until you come to something acceptable (ικανον), [d] but you will not jumble the two as the debaters do by discussing the hypothesis and its consequences at the same time (περι της αρχης διαλεγομενον και των εξ εκεινης όρμημενον), if you wish to discover the truth (των δοντων). [Phaedo 101D1-E3; Grube trans.]

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 consequences of 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 ‘acceptable’ - 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, one [b] should examine whether this answer (which one judged most compelling) has

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78 Or at least so I will argue in chapter 7 below.
79 See, for example, (Robinson 1953:136–141), and (Bostock 1986:170). Those who do not read the text in this way include: (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 ἐχοιτο as ‘attacked’ and the obscurity of the process of examining whether the consequences of the hypothesis are in accord with another or not - cannot be solved “as long as we suppose that [this passage] focuses 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 ἐχοιτο is not read as ‘attacked’.
consequences which agree with another and [c] look for other ‘higher’ hypotheses which seem best and agree with this answer until one comes to something adequate. Despite the apparent plausibility of this initial reading, again a number of problems arise.

Perhaps the most immediate difficulty with this initial reading is that it appears to depend on an inadequate translation of ‘ἐχοιτό’. The majority of scholars maintain that ‘ἐχοιτό’ should not be translated as ‘attacked’ (pace Grube). Among other reasons, the verb in its participial form has just been used 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. Grube’s translation, then, should be revised as follows

But [a] you , ..., would hold on (ἐχόμενος) to this safety of the hypothesis (ἐκείνου τοῦ ἀσφαλοῦ τῆς ὑποθέσεως) and answer thus. [b] If someone held on (ἐχοιτό) to the hypothesis itself (αὐτῆς τῆς ὑποθέσεως), you would ignore him and would not answer until ...

Translated in this way, however, it becomes difficult to see what the contrast is supposed to be that accounts for Socrates’ recommendation to answer in [a] but not to answer in [b]. According to what we might call ‘the attack interpretation’ 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) and answer the original question accordingly. But if someone were to attack the answer to the reduced question that one judged most compelling, one should not answer him, i.e., ignore his attack, until one first examined the consequences to see if they are in accord with one another. If they are not, one should abandon the answer to the reduced question one judged most compelling and look for another one. But if they are, then one should proceed to respond to the attack by providing a higher hypothesis from which the answer to the reduced question can be

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80 Those who reject the ‘attack’ translation include (Jackson 1882:148 n 1), (Archer-Hind 1884:102–103), (Burnet 1911:113), (Robinson 1953:125), (Gallop 1975:235 n 67), (Bostock 1986:166–168), (Blank 1986:148 n 5), (Rowe, C. J. 1993:63 n 25), (Kahn 1996:318 n 35), (Kanayama 2000:76–77), and (Byrd 2007:146). Those who accept it, in addition to Grube, include (Bluck 1955:116 n 2), (Huby 1959:14), (van Eck 1996:221 n 10), and (Dancy 2004:298 n 24). (Jackson 1882:148 n 1) and (Archer-Hind 1884:102–103) recommend deleting the entire sentence ‘εἰ δὲ τις ... διαφωνεῖ’. Others have proposed more moderate emendations; see, for example, (Goodrich 1904:8).

81 I have also made some other minor changes. See (Gallop 1975:53)’s translation.
determined, and so on. But if the translation of ‘ἐχοιτο’ as ‘attack’ in [b] as opposed to ‘hold on to’ in [a], is not what accounts for the different Socratic advice, what does?

The alleged differences in the translations of ‘ἐχομενος’ in [a] and ‘ἐχοιτο’ in [b] are not the only differences between [a] and [b]. Perhaps, most importantly the objects of these two verbs are different. In [a] Cebes holds on to this safety of the hypothesis (ἐχομενος ἐκεινον τοῦ ἀσφαλοὺς τῆς ὑποθέσεως,) and answers accordingly, while in [b] someone holds on to the hypothesis itself (αὐτῆς τῆς ὑποθέσεως ἐχοιτο) which leads Plato to recommend that Cebes not answer. But but how does this help? What is meant by the contrast between this safety of the hypothesis and the hypothesis itself that should 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 ‘safety’ with reference to the proposed answer to the question concerning the aitia of generation and destruction which provoked the use of the method of hypothesis in the first place. That answer is roughly that Forms, like Beauty and Bigness, are the aitiae of a thing’s becoming beautiful or big. Thus, the answer to the original question which agrees with the hypothesis that is judged most compelling is repeatedly referred to as safe. ‘This safety of the hypothesis’, then, may be taken as referring to the safe answer to the original question which agrees with the

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82 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’.

83 At 100C9-E2, Plato writes: “I no longer understand or recognize those other sophisticated aitiae, 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] (ἐχω) 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 (ασφαλεστατον) answer I can give myself or anyone else. And if I [hold on] (ἐχομενος) to this I think I shall never fall into error. This is the safe (ασφαλεζ) 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?” [adapted from Grube trans.] See also 105B6-C2, where Socrates is made to propose an additional safe answer, more subtle than the safe answer described at 100C9-E2.

84 I here come close to violating my conservative approach to the text by presupposing a reading of an application the method of hypothesis. But, in referring the 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,
hypothesis, and the contrast between [a] and [b] is the contrast between the answer to the original question (the (safe) ‘consequent’ of the hypothesis) and the answer to the reduced question (the hypothesis itself). 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 answer, 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 to the inscription question that agrees with the answer to the application question that one judges most compelling, and answer the inscription question accordingly. But if one (whether oneself or another) should hold on to the answer to the reduced answer 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 ‘ἐξοτρίβο’ 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

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85 (Rowe, C. 1993:62) (see also (Rowe, C. 1996:235)) reads this as ‘the safe part of the hypothesis’ and takes this as the strongest bit of evidence for his and (Gallop 1975:179 ff.)’s 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 *aitia*. I will return to this so-called 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 with Rowe that the proposition referred to by ‘the safety of the hypothesis’ is what might be called ‘the *aitia* proposition’. Gallop-Rowe must explain why Plato contrasts this proposition with the ‘hypothesis itself’, rather than with ‘a different part of the hypothesis’. See (Plass 1960, 111–112) for ‘the safe consequent of the hypothesis.’
be most compelling). To correctly hold on to the answer to the reduced question, i.e. the hypothesis itself, without being ignored and to answer the reduced question safely, two procedures are required.

But how are we to understand these two procedures? In the case of the first procedure, Plato recommends that one examine (σκέψασθαι) whether the things following from the hypothesis (τὰ ἀπ’ ἐκείνης ὀρμηθέντα) agree or disagree with each other (ἄλληλοις συμφωνεῖ ἢ διαφωνεῖ). It is 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.87

The good news is that the words translated as ‘the things following from’ (τὰ ὀρμηθέντα) are not Plato’s usual words for logical consequences.88 Plato’s typical words for logical consequences are ‘τὰ συμβαίνοντα’.89 A more literal translation might be “... examine whether

86 Notice that if this is 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 ‘ἐχθοτο’ as ‘attacked’ tells against a common understanding of Plato’s recommendation here according to which only the second, and not the first procedure, is meant to be a response to the attack. The idea on this 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 ‘ἐχθοτο’ 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. Finally, if one persists in preferring the ‘attacked’ translation of ‘ἐχθοτο’ the passage should still be understood in roughly the same way. If one should attack the hypothesis, one should not answer the reduced question accordingly (safely?) until one perform two procedures.

87 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.

88 See (Gallop 1975:188). See also ὀρμηθέντα at 101E3.

89 See (Burnet 1911:114) who identifies τὰ ὀρμηθέντα with τὰ συμβαίνοντα.
the things beginning from this hypothesis ...” But precisely what Plato means by such things is left unaddressed in the passage. Further, we are familiar from a few pages back with the difficulties surrounding the translation of ‘συµφωνεῖ’ and its contrary. Plato should be using the word in a 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 additional information.90 Perhaps the best we can do with this procedure based on this passage is to suggest that Plato recommends that before holding on to the answer to the reduced question, i.e., before holding on to the hypothesis itself, one should test the things that begin from it to see whether they agree or disagree with each other. To get a better understanding of this procedure we will need to look outside our current passage to various alleged applications of the method of hypothesis in the dialogues. For now it is sufficient 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 (διδοναι λόγον) of your hypothesis itself (ἐκείνης αὐτῆς) you will proceed (διδοίης) in the same way (ὡςαὐτῶς): you will assume another hypothesis (ἀλλήλαν αὖ ὑπόθεσιν ὑποθέμενος), the one which seems to you best of the higher ones (ἡτίς τῶν ἀνωθέν βελτιστῆ φαινότο) until you come to something acceptable (ικανόν), ...


90 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, J. T. 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. As we will see in chapter 9, I offer an interpretation of Plato’s discussion in the Republic that does accommodate the elenchos.
Concerning what Plato means by ‘giving an account of the hypothesis itself,’ we do not need to look at depictions of the method of hypothesis to make progress. Throughout the dialogues, in passages evidently unconnected with the method of hypothesis, Plato uses the notion of giving an account of something. Sometimes, to be sure, the idea is colloquial or at least non-technical. But 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. Thus, 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, we will see that 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, but in the same way as what? The same way, presumably, one proceeded in an attempt to answer the original question described back at 100A3-8. Recall that Plato’s advice there was to propose another question to which the original question could be reduced, hypothesize the answer to the second question which one judged to be most compelling, and accept as true the answer to the original question which agreed with the most compelling answer.

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91 See, perhaps, *Laches* 187B8-C3 and 187D1-5.
92 See also, *Republic* 534B3-7 and *Timaeus* 51E3-4.
93 See, for example, *Laches* 187E6-188A3, and perhaps *Protagoras* 336B8-D4, 347E1-348A2, *Theaetetus* 169A6-9, and 175C8-D2. I do not mean to be belittling the ability to respond to Socratic questioning in a consistent manner. None of the interlocutors in the elenctic dialogues appear to have this ability.
94 See, for example, *Charmides* 165A8-B4, *Cratylus* 426A1-B3, *Meno* 81A10-B3, and *Republic* 507A1-6. These two aspects of ‘giving an account’ may correspond to the two procedures Plato has in mind in this passage.
95 Perhaps, ‘give an account in the same way’; see the διδοι at 101d7.
and accept as false the answer to the original question which did not. Thus, Plato is recommending that when one gives an account of the hypothesis itself, i.e., when one seeks to hold on to the answer to the reduced question, one should proceed in the same way 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, choose the answer to this new question which one judges to be most compelling, 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. 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, chose 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 reveals what Plato means by a higher hypothesis. The higher hypothesis is the answer which 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 which one judges to be most compelling. The procedure can be put schematically, using the Meno illustration, as follows (reading from bottom to top):

| H2 (answer to the second reduced question): The area has the Φ property. |
| Q3 (second reduced question): Does the area have the Φ property? |
| A2/H1 (answer to the reduced question): The area has the application property. |
| Q2 (first reduced question): Does the area have the application property? |
| A1 (answer to original question): The area has the inscription property. |
| Q1 (original question): Does the area have the inscription property? |

96See Topics I.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 ‘ἀνωθεν’ at Posterior Analytics I.32 88a30-36 and II.13 97a28-34.
Thus, H2 is a ‘higher hypothesis’ than H1 in virtue of the H2’s being an answer to a question to which H1’s question, i.e. Q2, 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 the answer to the first reduced question is doubly designated 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 (without further investigation or inquiry), 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’, i.e., ‘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 determining or helping with another - concepts which 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 learning? 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 question whose most

97 See, for example, *Topics* I.4.
compelling answer determines or helps with the previous answer and so until one reaches something acceptable (ικανον).

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. 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 acceptable to one’s opponent, until, that is, one’s opponent ceases the attack. To the extent that the ‘attack’ translation of ‘εχοτο’ 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 ‘ικανον’ to mean acceptable to everyone involved in the shared search. Indeed, Blank has examined the other uses of ‘ικανον’ and its various forms in the Phaedo and has concluded that they all support such an understanding. It might be wondered how this helps address our question though. Are we to suppose 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? It is true that if he thinks something more is necessary he does not say so here in the these introductory passages. But we might hope that Plato has something more to offer elsewhere.

Conclusion

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98 Assuming as they do that the the Form of the Good and the unhypothetical first principle are identical; see, for example, (Bedu-Addo, J. T. 1979:123–124).
99 See, for example, (Robinson 1953:137).
100 See (Blank 1986:155–161), who offers a nice defense of this view and cites an abundant literature. More recent examples include (Bostock 1986:175) and (Byrd 2007:147). 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 I.2 101a25-101b4.
In 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 have answered. 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 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 employs 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.\(^\text{101}\) 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 had the implausible consequence of setting as true, for example, that Aristotle was an Athenian citizen on the grounds that it was consistent with the hypothesis that the area has the application property or of setting down as false that Socrates was an Athenian citizen on the grounds that it was not entailed by that same hypothesis. We saw, however, that if we read Plato’s recommendation with the *Meno* passage in mind, we would see 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.

\(^{101}\) 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.
Now, of course, the compatibility of these passages in the \textit{Meno} and the \textit{Phaedo} is primarily a result of the thinness of the descriptions themselves. To the extent that one goes on to add substance to these descriptions either from other parts of the respective dialogues or from outside those dialogues themselves (appealing to other Platonic dialogues or features of mathematical disciplines) inconsistencies between the method proposed in the \textit{Meno} and the method proposed in the \textit{Phaedo} 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 \textit{Meno} as inconsistent with his account in the \textit{Phaedo} against the considerations that allow their compatibility. I do not believe that there is an indefeasible interpretative principle here. How we fill out these initial descriptions will depend on any number of issues. But at least one of those issues ought to be the compatibility of the accounts from one dialogue to another.

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 \textit{de novo}, has two stages. The first stage, described in the \textit{Meno} and the first \textit{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 (the original question), one seeks to identify a second question (the reduced question), whose answer 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 which agrees with the most compelling answer of the reduced question. In some cases, perhaps the ideal cases, the 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 this 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 the stage that consists of these two parts ‘the proof stage’. We can put this stage schematically in order to make explicit its two parts as follows:

The Proof Stage

[a] Identify a second question, Q2, from whose most compelling answer (the hypothesis, H1) the answer, A1, to the initial question, Q1, can be derived.

[b] Show how A1 is derived from 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, i.e., the answer to the reduced question which one judged most compelling. This stage too consists of two parts. In one part, one tests ‘the things that begin from’ 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 whose most compelling answer helps with or determines 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. Again, we might schematize this confirmation stage as follows:

The Confirmation Stage

[a] Test ‘the consequences’ of H1 for agreement or disagreement with each other.

[b] Identify a second reduced question, Q3, from whose most compelling answer (a higher hypothesis, H2) H1 can be derived, show how H1/A2 can be derived from H2, and continue this process until one reaches something acceptable (*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, but the sketch of the method of hypothesis we have just uncovered makes such a description potentially misleading. Both stages of the

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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 ([a] in the proof stage) or the answer to the reduced question ([b] in the confirmation stage). 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 (the hypothesis) to the answer to the original question ([b] in the proof stage), while in the second stage it would consist of testing the consequences of the most compelling answer to the reduced question (the hypothesis) to see whether they agree with one another ([a] in the confirmation stage). 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 - both consisting (at least in part) in identifying a higher hypothesis, the downward paths of the two stages are really 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. It corresponds roughly to the synthesis portion of the method of analysis and synthesis discussed earlier. 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 the consequences 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:

What is the nature of the (logical?) 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?)

What is relationship between the method of de novo learning that Plato is recommending and the mathematical method of Plato’s time?

What are ‘the things beginning from the hypothesis’ (which I have been calling the ‘consequences’) and in what sense do they need to ‘agree’ or ‘disagree’ with each other?

How long does the recursive procedure in the second stage need to go on? (That is, what is it to reach something acceptable?)

We will need to face all of these questions as we go on to look for depictions of this structure and at Plato’s more detailed description of this procedure of de novo learning in the Republic. For now I hope only to have identified a structure detailed enough to recognize instances of its application in the dialogues. Our next task will be to uncover some of those applications in the dialogues and see if a careful examination of those applications will help to answer the outstanding questions.
Chapter 6

The Method of Hypothesis: Socrates At Work in the Meno

Introduction

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 (ἐπειδὴ οὐκ ἴσμεν ὡθὸ ὤτι ἔστιν οὐθ’ ὑποτίν τι, ὑποθέσαντι αὐτὸ σκοπῶμεν εἴτε διδάκτων εἴτε οὐ διδάκτων ἐστιν). [87B3-4; Grube trans.].

Here we might expect an application of the method of hypothesis just described by Plato’s obscure geometrical example in the previous passage. Unfortunately, as one might expect, the application that follows is fraught with difficulties, not the least of which is where the application ends. Does Plato depict Socrates employing 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 he depict Socrates employing 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 Plato depict Socrates as employing the method of hypothesis throughout the remainder of the dialogue - all the way through to the conclusion of the dialogue at 100B2-6:

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. [Grube trans.]

In the present 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

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1This chapter is a substantial revision of and so supersedes (Benson 2003).
2(Robinson 1953:117) ‘assumes’ a positive answer to this question.
hypothesis and resolves the incompatibility arising from these two arguments in a way he explicitly asserts falls short of knowledge. In the course of this defense we will reveal an application of the structure of the method we sketched in the previous chapter. We will, thereby, come to a better 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 Plato has Socrates focus 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. 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 knowledge of virtue - knowing neither what it 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 oneself 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

Socrates begins the investigation concerning the teachability of virtue with a passage with which we have met before:

> Among the things existing in the soul, of what sort is virtue, that it should be teachable or not (Εἰ ποιὸν τι ἐστὶ τῶν περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ὄντων ἀρετῆ, διδακτὸν ἢν εἶδό ἢ οὐ διδακτόν)? First, if it is another sort than knowledge (ἐστὶν ἄλλοι οὐ οἷον ἐπιστήμη), 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. - But, if virtue is a kind of knowledge (ἐστὶν ἐπιστήμη τις ἢ ἀρετῆ), it is clear that it could be taught - Of course.  

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3 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 as managing to turn the discussion - at least temporarily - back to the ‘What is virtue?’ question. Rather, just as in the geometrical example, Plato depicts Socrates as introducing 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. So, just as in the geometrical example, Plato depicts Socrates as establishing the reducibility of the question under investigation to another question by identifying a property - being a kind of knowledge - the possession of which is a necessary and sufficient condition of virtue’s having the teachability property.

That Socrates should maintain that virtue’s being knowledge is both necessary and sufficient for virtue’s teachability is striking for at least two reasons. First, 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, from which it follows that virtue is teachable, 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 condition appears otiose for the purposes of the arguments that follow. But, second, and perhaps

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4See ch. 4 nn. 26 and 27.
5See (Bluck 1964, 326), (Sharples 1985, 162), and (Scott 2006:136).
6See (Bluck 1964, 326), (Sharples 1985, 162), and (Scott 2006:136).
more troubling, the claim that being knowledge is a necessary condition of teachability looks false.\(^7\) Plato has taken care to remind us of the theory of recollection in this passage - noting that teachability and recollectability are being used interchangeably. But just a few pages earlier Plato has given us an example of the slave recollecting, i.e., being taught, true belief. Knowledge is not alone in being teachable/recollectable. True belief can be taught/recollected as well. So, being knowledge would appear not to be a necessary condition for teachability despite what Socrates maintains at 87C2.\(^8\) The fact that Plato depicts Socrates as maintaining the necessity of knowledge for teachability despite not being necessary for the argument and being in conflict with the previous conversation may indicate Plato’s desire to underscore the parallel with the geometer’s method. Like the geometers, Socrates reduces the teachability question to the knowledge question. He does this by appealing to a bi-conditional, again like the geometers, although in fact the bi-conditional is neither necessary, nor clearly acceptable. Unlike the geometry example, if it turns out that virtue is not knowledge, it will not follow that virtue is not teachable.\(^9\) More work will need to be done, as is often the case outside the exactness of the mathematical disciplines. But, if it does turn out that virtue is knowledge, Socrates will have discovered the answer to the teachability question.

Finally, we should note that 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:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\(^7\)I am purposefully hedging here on whether Plato takes it be false that knowledge is a necessary condition for teachability. At Timaeus 51E2-3, Plato distinguishes between true belief and knowledge (νοὸς) on the grounds that the latter is teachable, while the former is persuadable. My present point is simply that even if Plato does take knowledge to be a necessary condition for teachability, he didn’t need to call it to our attention here, especially in light of the tension it causes with his description of the conversation with the slave.

\(^8\)If Plato should deny that knowledge is necessary for teachability, this would tell against (Menn 2002)’s 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.

\(^9\)Although the argument at 99B5-D6 may depend on thinking that it does. This is yet another reason to be suspicious about the concluding argument of the Meno. See pp. 190-193 below.
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; Grube trans.]

Here Plato distinguishes between the process of identifying the question to which the question of virtue’s teachability is to be reduced from the process of coming to know or discovering the answer to this reduced question. We saw in the previous chapter that Plato described this latter process in the Phaedo as performing two confirmation processes on the answer to the reduced question which one judged most compelling. The first confirmation process was described as examining whether the ‘consequences’ 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. It is to this second confirmation process that Socrates is made to turn first 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 the previous chapter, from this application of it here in the Meno. Recall that one of the issues left underdetermined by the geometrical illustration was whether the hypothesis was the biconditional (the area has the inscription property just in case the area has the application property) by which one identified the reduced question, or the answer to the reduced question which one judged most compelling. 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 biconditional) or ‘Virtue is knowledge’ (the answer to the reduced question). Richard Robinson in the first edition, 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 -

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10 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.
11 (Robinson 1941:120–123), (Zyskind and Sternfeld 1976), and (Stokes 1963:197–198). Accuracy requires pointing out the proposition Robinson identified in his first edition was not the bi-conditional, but the conditional claim that if virtue is knowledge, then it is teachable. See also (Weiss 2001:131 n 10).
‘Virtue is knowledge’ is the hypothesis under consideration. But, unfortunately nothing in the current passage can advance the debate, if for no other reason than that the term ‘hypothesis’ does not occur in the present passage and so no proposition is so designated.

Nevertheless, in the very next lines (87D3), the proposition that virtue is good is explicitly called a hypothesis, and this proposition 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 to the ‘Is virtue knowledge?’ question, to which the ‘Is virtue teachable?’ question has been reduced, ought to be designated the hypothesis of the proof stage. That is, it suggests that the answer to the reduced question is the hypothesis, not the biconditional. 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 Meno is made to say in response to Socrates’ question whether the good are good by learning that

Necessarily, as I now think, Socrates, and clearly, on our first hypothesis, if virtue is knowledge, it can be taught (κατὰ τὴν ὑπόθεσιν, εἰπὲρ ἐπιστήμη ἐστὶν ἀρετή, ὅτι διδακτὸν ἐστὶν). [89C2-4; Grube trans.]

Some scholars have thought the Greek here indicates that the hypothesis referred to is ‘virtue is knowledge’ (the most compelling answer to the reduced question 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 suggests that the hypothesis is the answer to the reduced question judged most compelling and not the biconditional (or conditional), but it is hardly definitive.

12(Cherniss 1947), (Friedländer 1945), (Bluck 1964:325), (Stahl 1971), (Sharples 1985:167), and (Scott 2006, 139).
13Of course, ‘ὑπόθεσις’ is used at 87B3-4, but the object of this participle is inscrutable. (Friedländer 1945:255) and apparently (Cherniss 1947:140 n 38) think otherwise, but see (Bluck 1964:325).
14See, for example, (Sharples 1985:167).
15See, for example, (Stokes 1963:297–298).
What is important, however, is not which of these two propositions is designated as the hypothesis, but that both propositions 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 which will help in answering the original question. The answer to the reduced question which one judges most compelling is used in order to answer the original question and to decide on which answer to begin the confirmation stage. It is also important that both of these propositions are robustly unknown starting points for those seeking to learn whether virtue is teachable on their own. It is difficult to believe that identifying which of the potential propositions is the hypothesis is essential for understanding the method, given how Plato fails to even begin to make this clear. What is essential is identifying the relevant propositions and recognizing their cognitive status, not determining which of the two propositions are designated ‘the hypothesis’.

In any case, Plato begins his depiction of Socrates employing the method of hypothesis by [1] reducing the question under investigation (the original question) to another question (the reduced question), both of which are unknown (and 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). 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 seeks to identify a property whose possession is at least sufficient and ideally necessary for something to possess the property of teachability. Finally, [3] Socrates distinguishes between the process of identifying such a property, (i.e., the process of identifying a reduced question) from the process of determining whether the thing possesses that property (i.e., answering the reduced question).

What Plato has portrayed is the proof stage of the method of hypothesis as we have sketched it in the previous chapter. 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. Let us see how Socrates is made to go on to apply 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 (καὶ αὐτὴ 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; Grube trans.]

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.

Plato depicts Socrates as describing the structure of the argument which follows as falling into two parts. First, he reduces the question whether virtue is knowledge to the question

18 It is also the only answer to the original question which is consistent with virtue’s being knowledge.
whether virtue is good, and proposes that the most compelling answer is that it is, i.e., 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 (πολὺν δὲ χρόνον οὐκ ἐθέλουσι παραμένειν, ἀλλὰ δραπετεύουσιν ἐκ τῆς ψυχῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου; 98A1-2). The idea seems to be that a proposition 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 ‘acceptable’ (hikanon).\(^1\)

Second, Socrates explains that the next step is to show that nothing else is good other than knowledge, and thereby derive the ‘lower’ hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge 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) is derived 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. Socrates recognizes, however, that the argument here will not be immediate. Showing how virtue’s being good entails that virtue is knowledge will take some work.

Consequently, these two parts of the argument 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. That is to say, these two parts of the argument together amount to an application of the upward path of the confirmation procedure.

\(^{19}\) (Wolfsdorf 2008:162) 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.”
Unfortunately, the argument that follows in the text does not have the relatively simple structure that Socrates suggests it will have at 87D2-8. Socrates does not simply argue for the conditional that if something is good, then it is knowledge, from which one can immediately derive the answer to the reduced question (that virtue is knowledge) from the answer to the second reduced question (that virtue is good). I suspect that Socrates does not attempt to argue for this conditional because, at least on a fairly straightforward reading, it is evidently false. There would appear to be many good things that are not knowledge. Rather, what Socrates appears to argue 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 (τὰ κατὰ τὴν ψυχήν), things like “moderation, and justice, courage, intelligence, memory, munificence, and all such things,” beneficial, and its absence makes those qualities harmful. Socrates appears concerned to maintain both that the presence of knowledge is necessary for the virtues being virtues (or

\[\textit{Phaedo} 68C5-69C3 and 82A10-B9.\]

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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 accounts\textsuperscript{22} 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),\textsuperscript{23} it follows that virtue is knowledge. As Socrates is made to put it:

So, virtue is knowledge, either in whole or in part. \textit{[Meno 89A3-4]}\textsuperscript{24}

And, so virtue is teachable.

Necessarily, as I now think, Socrates, and clearly, on our first hypothesis, if virtue is knowledge, it can be taught. \textit{[Meno 89C2-4; Grube trans.]}\textsuperscript{25}

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.

\textsuperscript{22}Perhaps ‘causes’ in the sense of ‘\textit{aitia}’ which Plato discusses at \textit{Phaedo} 96A5ff. See (Scott 2006:148–149).

\textsuperscript{23}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 \textit{Euthyphro} 6D9-E1) or that beauty makes beautiful things beautiful (see \textit{Phaedo} 100C3-101D1). The point of citing the \textit{Euthyphro} passage is to at least suggest that such an idea need not commit one to a full-fledged 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).

\textsuperscript{24}(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 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 \textit{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, 372 n. 21).

\textsuperscript{25}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, 157–158.)) 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
Whatever we think of the argument here - and certainly neither Plato’s commitment to it nor its logical structure are uncontroversial, Socrates appears to be employing the second of the two confirmation procedures he describes in the *Phaedo*. He reduces the reduced question to a second reduced question whose most compelling answer is in some way ‘acceptable’ and ‘derives’ the answer to the reduced question from it. Indeed, this is just the proof stage directed at the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge. The difference lies in that the answer to the second reduced question to which the first reduced question has been reduced, i.e., that virtue is good, is in some way given or stable, i.e. ‘acceptable’ (*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 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 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 the 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 ‘consequences’ 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 Και 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.

26See the previous notes. The version of the argument and my understanding of the passage owes much to (Scott 2006:145–157), although I am sure he would not approve of my way of putting things. See also (Vlastos 1991:200–232) and more recently (Brickhouse and Smith 2010:172–189), 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 n. 20 above). 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 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 below.
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 ‘acceptable’ - it is in some way to ‘stand firm for us’ - as well as a rather expanded application of the downward path of the proof stage 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 (the first hypothesis) is ‘derived’ from the answer to the second reduced question (the higher hypothesis) 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 fairly rigorous way. To achieve anything like the deductive rigor associated with disciplines like geometry 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 ‘acceptable’ or by being ‘derived’ 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 can be discerned. And the recommendation to pursue such a procedure can be accommodated.

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 - has been maintained before. But, it is sometimes thought that the method of hypothesis here in the *Meno*

\[ \text{See, for example, (Thompson 1901:153), (Bluck 1964:89), (Sharples 1985:10), and (Bostock 1986:166).} \]
comes to a conclusion with this procedure. At 89C5, it is suggested, Plato has Socrates return 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, i.e., the question to which the question of virtue’s teachability has been reduced, has not in fact been abandoned. This is clear from the following passage with which Plato introduces the next portion of the dialogue. He writes:

I am not saying that it is wrong to say that virtue is teachable if it is knowledge (τὸ μὲν γὰρ διδακτὸν αὐτὸ εἶναι, εἴπερ ἐπιστήμη ἔστιν, οὐκ ἀνατίθεμαι μὴ οὗ καλῶς λέγεσθαι), but look whether it is reasonable of me to doubt whether it is knowledge (ὅτι δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐπιστήμη, σκέψει ἐὰν σοὶ 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; Grube trans.]

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.

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 ‘acceptable’ hypothesis that virtue is good? Yes. But as we should recall from the previous chapter 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 ‘consequences agree or disagree

See, for example, (Robinson 1953:116–117) and (Bedu-Addo 1984:2). (Gonzalez 1998:180) 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 2006:139–140) correctly, in my view, sees that following 89C, Plato depicts Socrates finding an inconsistency in the consequences of the hypothesis. (Vlastos 1991:124 nn 72–73) 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.
with each other’. It is this second, downward confirmation procedure 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 originally 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 is made to put 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; Grube trans.] Socrates here endorses the following thesis: 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. But, I am not sure this thesis is as implausible as it has been made out to be. The thesis is a claim about the consequences 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

29 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 1985:272 n14)); (Devereux 1978:122–123) 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 1984:12 n. 49) the arguments on behalf of ‘virtue is not knowledge’ are deliberately fallacious. (Vlastos 1991:124 n 73) describes the argument against the teachability of virtue from 89D-96C as “lame”, but he think the argument against virtue is knowledge at 96D-98C to be “perfectly solid”. (Bluck 1964:19–30), for one, 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 2001:139–140).

30 See (Bluck 1964, 342) and (Scott 2006:161–162).
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.  

Whether or not the thesis 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). The arrival of Anytus leads Socrates to invite him to join in their search for teachers of virtue, 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 in order to learn to become a good doctor, a good shoemaker, a good flute player, or any other expert or practitioner. 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,  

31 It must be admitted, however, that Socrates’s use of ‘ὤνγκατον’ 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 contrapositive of the thesis in the next lines (89E1-3), his use of ‘εἰκάζοντες εἰκάζομαι’ 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.

32 See chapter 2 above.

33 That this is what the search is for is indicated by Socrates’ use of ‘ζητησεως’ 89E10, given the use of ‘ζητῶν’ and ‘ζητῶ’ at 89E6 and 89E8, and by 90B3-6.
Socrates asks to whom should they send Meno, who wants to become a good household and city manager, i.e., who wants to acquire virtue-knowledge (90E10-91B2). In light of what they have 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). 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 κάγαθοι will do (92E3-6). At this point Socrates offers an argument against the καλοὶ κάγαθοι as teachers of virtue that relies roughly on the following three claims:

1. If any of the καλοὶ κάγαθοι 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” (ἄλλα γὰρ ... μὴ οὐκ ἦ διδακτὸν ἀρετῆ) [Meno 94E2; Grube trans.]. Anytus gets angry and leaves.

Socrates next turns to Meno and proposes two main lines of argument, one directed at the failure of the καλοὶ κάγαθοι, 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

34 It is not obvious how to understand Socrates’ criticism here given that 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 chapter 9 pp. xxx below.

35 See (Scott 2006:165 n 3) who also cites (Bluck 1964:432–433) and (Sharples 1985:178 & 188) for supposing that Anytus leaves, rather than stays but remains silent for the rest of the dialogue.
the καλοὶ κἀγαθοὶ (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

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

the Sophists are not so recognized (95C5-8).

Socrates concludes this portion of the dialogue by securing Meno’s agreement to the proposition that

only sophists and καλοὶ κἀγαθοὶ are potential teachers of virtue (96B6-8).  

Consequently, there are no teachers or pupils of virtue (96C6-8). 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 (Αρετή ἄρα οὐκ ἐν ἔνδοξαι; 96C10), and so, that virtue is not a kind of knowledge.

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. the fact that there are 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 - a character that has 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

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36 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 καλοὶ κἀγαθοὶ.

37 The argument to this conclusion also relies on the the proposition that [9] if there are no teachers of virtue then there are no pupils of virtue at 96C1 and 96C8.

38 That virtue is not a kind of knowledge is not explicitly inferred, but that this is hypothesis under consideration is indicated by the way Plato begins the next section of argument; see also 98E7-8.

39 See, for example, (Scott 2006, 177–178).
to, for example, the goodness of Themistocles, the absence of virtue in his sons, the presence of καλοὶ κἀγαθοὶ 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 - perhaps endoxa - in exhibiting this disagreement. It is not just the observational facts - if that is what they are - that Themistocles was good, but 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 endoxa that if anyone is a teacher of virtue Themistocles was one, [1]. Again, it is not just the observational facts - if that is what they are - that teachers of other disciplines don’t disagree about its teachability, but that the καλοὶ κἀγαθοὶ 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). Aristotele 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 loose and ambiguous or inclusive.41

Furthermore, it is easy to see why this portion of the Meno might be associated with the method of elenchos. The elenchos too appears to proceed by investigating whether a given

40(Owen 1975:114–115).
41See also (Nussbaum 1982:274) who I think 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.
42See, for example, (Bluck 1964:54–55).
proposition or consequence of a proposition agrees or disagrees with a variety of other observations, beliefs, or *endoxa*. 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 proposition - what I have labeled elsewhere as the apparent refutand - is always put forward as a knowledge claim. 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 do. 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.

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 premises are 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 acceptability.

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43 This is true on any of the accounts of the *elenchos* mentioned in Chapter 2 above. 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).

44 (Benson 2000:54–55), (Benson 2011), and pp. 46-47 above.

45 Perhaps, Anytus does, but if so it is certainly not explicit.

46 See (Kanayama 2000, 93).

47 More properly, the interlocutor will exhibit doxastic coherence; see (Benson 2011).

48 (Benson 2000:37–53) and for a more nuanced, and hence more precise, view see (Benson 2011). For an argument against such a constraint on premise acceptability in the *elenchos* see, for example, (Beversluis 2000:ch. 2).

49 For other, compatible reasons, see (Scott 2006:165–175).
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.\textsuperscript{50}

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, we can begin to see what that path amounts to. Plato offers the following application of testing the consequences of a hypothesis to see if they agree or disagree with one another. A consequence 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 propositions concerning virtue and its teachability - in short, that only the sophists and καλοὶ κάγαθοι are potential teachers of virtue, and yet neither the sophist nor the καλοὶ κάγαθοι actually are in fact teachers of virtue. These propositions are found to disagree with each other. But why should Plato think that these last propositions (more accurately, propositions [1] through [8]) and the proposition that there are teachers and pupils of virtue are all ‘consequences of the hypothesis’ (τὰ ἀπ’ ἐκείνης ὀρμηθέντα) that virtue is a kind of knowledge? We have already seen that the sense in which the proposition that there are teachers and students of virtue is a consequence of the proposition that 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.\textsuperscript{51} But that is a very different kind of consequence than the consequence of virtue’s being knowledge that virtue is teachable. Nevertheless, if Plato does think that virtue’s teachability has as a consequence its exemplifications or images, the other propositions involved in the argument may be related to the hypothesis in a similar way. They

\textsuperscript{50}(Bluck 1964:90–91) may be taken as suggesting 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 or the upward path of the confirmation stage) and the Socratic *elenchos* (which represents the downward path of the confirmation stage). I have no objection to such a description of the method as long as 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 agreement or disagreement of a set of propositions. Something like this may also be the view of (Sharples 1985:10).

\textsuperscript{51}See (Rowe 1992, 64 n 9) who writes “The ‘consequences’ if the hypothesis are its applications to particular cases.” See also (Bedu-Addo 1979, 120).
may be understood as exemplifications or images of virtue, knowledge, and teachability (and/or their interrelations or interweavings), and the ‘consequences of the hypothesis’ include not just those consequences 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.\(^{52}\)

Of course, as it stands, understanding the downward path of the confirmation stage of Plato’s method of hypothesis in this way is rather 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 consequences’ 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 fill in the rough sketch of the structure of the method of hypothesis outlined in the previous chapter.

A Reconsideration of the Upward Path of the Confirmation Stage (96D5-100B4)

\(^{52}\) I recognize the obscurity and contentiousness of the assertion that these observations, sayings, or common opinion are in someway appropriately associated with virtue and knowledge, the two component forms or concepts of the hypothesis. I have tried to clarify (however unsuccessfully) this notion elsewhere; see, for example, (Benson 1992) and (Benson 2000:99–163 and 250–255). I also will have more to say about it in the pages which follow. Indeed, one of the consequences of seeing Plato’s response to Clitophon’s challenge as the method of hypothesis understood as I do in these pages is that Plato’s method of philosophical inquiry is less rationalistic and more empirical than it is is often taken to be. (Indeed, the similarities between Plato and Aristotle appear stronger than the differences.) At the same time we should perhaps begin (if we haven’t already) to doubt the philosophical utility and historical appropriateness of appealing to the distinction between rationalism and empiricism in the first place. Others who appear to understand the downward path of the confirmation stage in the Phaedo similarly, although by no means identically, include (Bostock 1986:171) who writes: “what Plato’s first test in fact comes down to [is] just this: examine whether your hypothesis is consistent with all the other beliefs that you already have” and (Gonzalez 1998:197) who describes the first procedure as follows: “You should first resist having the hypothesis considered in isolation by situating it within the context of the account (of causes or of anything else) to which it has given rise. ... What must therefore be examined is whether or not there is any inconsistency within the resulting account as a whole, that is, either between those claims that have been individually postulated as consistent with the hypothesis or between the conclusions that have been inferred from the hypothesis in conjunction with the postulated claims and certain assumed beliefs. Thus the phrase “τά ἐπ᾿ ἐκείνης ὀρμηθέντα” covers a variety of propositions related to the hypothesis in different ways: ...”
That Socrates and Meno still have been proceeding 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, Plato depicts Socrates as returning 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), 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). 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 re-examine 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 - 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). True belief, as Socrates puts it, ‘is no less beneficial (ὡς ἠλθεῖν) than knowledge’ (97C4-5). This is followed by Socrates’ well-known explanation of why knowledge nevertheless is more valuable (τιμωρητα) than true belief.

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53See 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.

54Both (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 (ὀρθή χρήσις) 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.
belief (97C11-98B6). According to Socrates, knowledge is more valuable (τιµιωτέρον) than true belief because, unlike true belief, it is stable (μονήμοι), having been tied down by working out the reason (τις αυτάς δήση αιτίας λογισμὸ). And finally Socrates presents a longer argument to the effect that virtue, now understood as true belief, is acquired by divine dispensation (98B7-100B4).55

What makes this concluding passage so difficult to understand is that 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. (Και μην καὶ ἐγὼ ὡς οὐκ εἰδώς λέγω, ἄλλα εἰκάζων: ὅτι δὲ ἔστων τι ἄλλοιον ὅρθη δὸξα καὶ ἐπιστήμη, οὐ πάνῳ μοι δοκῶ τοῦτο εἰκάζειν, ἄλλῃ ἐπερ τι ἄλλῳ φαίνῃ ἂν εἰδέναι ὀλίγα δ᾽ ἂν φαίνῃ –ἐν δ᾽ οὖν καὶ τοῦτο ἐκείνων θείην ἂν ὧν οἶδα.) [Meno 98B1-5; adapted from Grube trans.]

55The argument goes roughly as follows:
[1] If something is beneficial, then it is accompanied either by knowledge or true belief (97A9-C10 & 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 καλοί καγαθοὶ do not guide correctly by knowledge (99B5-9)
[16] So, the καλοὶ καγαθοὶ 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)
But Plato’s sincerity in the remainder of the passage has had many doubters.\textsuperscript{56} The apparent Platonic endorsements that are difficult to abide include the assertion that knowledge, though it may be sufficient, is not necessary for correct use or for virtue,\textsuperscript{57} that the Athenian political leaders (the καλοὶ κἀγαθοὶ) - Themistocles, Aristides, Pericles, and Thucydides - are virtuous and good,\textsuperscript{58} and that virtue is acquired by divine dispensation.\textsuperscript{59} Indeed, Dominic Scott, in perhaps the best book devoted to the \textit{Meno} in many decades correctly devotes almost nine full pages to an explicit discussion of whether we should take this passage seriously or not; (Scott 2006:185–193).\textsuperscript{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. If I


\textsuperscript{57}See Socratic intellectualism and the unity of virtues from ch. 1 n. 3 and \textit{Euthydemus} 281A1-B6. Even Plato’s alleged abandonment of the unity of virtues and the denial of synchronic \textit{akrasia} at the end of \textit{Republic} 4 need not be understood as a denial of the necessity of knowledge for virtue.

\textsuperscript{58}See, especially, \textit{Gorgias} 515C-516E. See (Scott 2006:189 n 21) who 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 1984:302 n 82), and (Weiss 2001:168), and the following who are not: (Gomperz 1905:II 375), (Hackforth 1952:149 n 3), (Dodds 1959:360), (Calvert 1984:11), and (Vlastos 1991:125 n 75). It is noteworthy that in the downward path argument Socrates appears to allow these καλοὶ κἀγαθοὶ 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 2000:123–134). Of course, for the argument to succeed, Socrates must allow that what makes these καλοὶ κἀγαθοὶ 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.

\textsuperscript{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 2006:177–178) 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.

\textsuperscript{60}The next chapter devoted to the relationship between the \textit{Meno} and \textit{Gorgias} is also related to the seriousness of the final passage; (Scott 2006:194–208).
understand him correctly, Scott doubts that Plato endorses the claim that virtue is true belief, full stop. 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 καλος κάγαθος who could teach his virtue to others\(^{61}\) 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.”

\[\text{Meno 100A3-5; Grube trans.}\]

Such a counter-factual καλος κάγαθος would possess genuine virtue compared to the shadow-virtue of the actual καλοι κάγαθοι. Scott, however, argues persuasively that Plato does endorse the claim that the actual καλοι κάγαθοι 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 καλοι κάγαθοι 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, i.e., 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 καλοι κάγαθοι 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

\(^{61}\) Actually Socrates considers a politician who could make politicians of others (ει μὴ τις εἰη τοιοῦτος τῶν πολιτικῶν ἄνδρῶν οἶος καὶ ἄλλον ποίησαι πολιτικόν; 100A1-2), but it is clear from the context that Plato is contrasting this individual with those earlier καλοὶ κάγαθοι who could not teach their virtue to others.

\(^{62}\) Pace (Kraut 1984:301–302 n 82).

\(^{63}\) It is hard not to hear the Socrates of \textit{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 \textit{virtue} is - what genuinely virtuous things have in common. And we all agree, even Scott, that the actual καλοὶ κάγαθοι don’t have that.”
explain the good works of the καλοὶ κἀγαθοί is a consequence of his commitment to the necessity of knowledge for 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 lead by the knowledge of the gods, since they themselves lacked such knowledge. Nor does Plato mean to endorse that true belief is virtue, i.e., 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. Even so I suspect it would fail to be definitive. 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 is 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 chapters. 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, deriving that answer from a higher
hypothesis until when one came to something acceptable and then testing that higher hypothesis to see whether its ‘consequences agree or disagree with each other’. But this is not what Plato does here in the Meno. Rather the method of hypothesis looks to be 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. Rather he recommends something like a synthetic procedure that somehow combines what can be preserved from the two conflicting paths. 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 should not have arisen if the method had been carried out correctly. 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

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64 If one scans the argument of this passage as I present it in n. 55 above, [1] through [6] and [11] captures 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] reiterates the central claims of the downward path from 89C5-96D4, with the remainder of the argument appearing to be a synthetic result of combining these two arguments appropriately revised.
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 one identifies a second question (the reduced question) - whether virtue is knowledge - whose answer will provide an answer to the original question, 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): Identifying a second reduced question - whether virtue is good - from whose most compelling answer (a higher hypothesis) an answer to the reduced question - whether virtue is knowledge - can be derived, showing how the answer to the reduced question can be derived from the answer to the second reduced question (87D4-89A4), and continuing this process until one reaches something acceptable (*hikanon*) - as Socrates is made to put it: ‘this hypothesis, that virtue is something good, stands firm for us (μένει ἡ μιν)’ (87D2-3). Next, Plato turns to the downward path of the confirmation stage (89C5-96D4): Testing ‘the consequences’ of the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge to see ‘whether they agree or disagree with each other’. Plato portrays Socrates contending that the consequence 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 is made to resolve 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 was not clear, however, whether this last portion of the dialogue was intended as part of Plato’s recommended procedure for *de novo* learning or inquiry, viz. the method of hypothesis, both because no similar procedure was indicated in the description passages from the *Meno* and *Phaedo* and because of the difficulty of determining whether Plato meant to be endorsing the argument of this portion of the *Meno*.

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 propositions Socrates designates as the hypothesis, the application of the proof stage here in the *Meno* indicates that both propositions 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, i.e. that virtue is good, a hypothesis, Socrates is at least sometimes willing to designate the answer to the reduced question a hypothesis. Plato has also indicated that what it is for a hypothesis to be ‘acceptable’ (*hikanon*) is at least for it to ‘stand firm for us’ (*μένιτυ*), and given the connection to Plato’s 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 to the answer to the original question to be immediate or logically rigorous. Plato’s representation of this procedure - the downward path of the proof stage or the synthesis procedure - in the proof stage at 87B2-D1 was fairly immediate and rigorous, but the corresponding procedure in the upward path of the confirmation stage 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, Plato presented Socrates employing a broadly empirical and elenctic test of the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge. There was the suggestion that Plato might understand the consequences of the hypothesis as not only including its vaguely logical consequences but also its similarly vaguely 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 are the features of the hypothesis that stands firm for us that enables it to serve 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 considers 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; Grube trans.]*

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.

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65 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 been largely ignoring.
Chapter 7
The Method of Hypothesis: Socrates At Work in the *Phaedo*

Introduction

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. [100A7-9; Grube trans.]

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 us further guidance in coming to grips with 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 further account 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 we need to place the application of the method of hypothesis that follows 100A7-9 in the context of the argument of the *Phaedo* as a whole. 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* was that once Plato introduces his method of *de novo* inquiry or learning on one’s own, viz. the method of hypothesis, he sticks with it. We were 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 other dialogues in which the method is recommended. Thus, one might expect the method to be applied throughout the *Phaedo*, as opposed to only a couple of pages. Our first task in this chapter, then, is to say something about the arguments in the *Phaedo* as whole.

**The Arguments in the Phaedo Prior to Socrates’ Intellectual Autobiography**

At the beginning of Chapter 5 I indicated that unraveling Plato’s method of philosophical inquiry was a boot-strapping 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 is intentionally incomplete or thin. The goal was to arrive at a structure that would suffice to identify applications and then enrich or 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. 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

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1 See, for example, (Kahn 1996:315) who writes concerning 92C3 “This rejection thus illustrates the negative branch of the downward path: ‘what does not accord (sumphinein) with the hypothesis, I posit as false’ (100A6). The argument from Forms to recollection, on the other hand, like the final argument from Forms to immortality, illustrates the positive branch of the method: ‘what seems to me to accord with it, I posit as true’ (100A5). Thus the bulk of the *Phaedo*, like the last half of the *Meno*, is a systematic exercise in the method of hypothesis, with the difference that here the *hypothesis* is provided by the doctrine of Forms.”

2 See ch. 4 n. 33 above concerning the issues surrounding ‘Socrates’ intellectual autobiography’.

3 I have in mind here Barnes’ interpretation of Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*; (Barnes 1994:xii).
examples, Plato is not depicting Socrates as 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, Phaedo, and Republic, even if he is depicting Socrates and his interlocutors as engaging in philosophical activity.  

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. While Plato may recommend employing the method of hypothesis for other philosophical purposes, I maintain that he recommends it at least for philosophical inquiry. Consequently, we should expect to find it employed in those passages in which Plato is depicting Socrates and/or his interlocutors as engaging in such inquiry. But which passages those are, i.e., 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), 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

4 Other passages need to be treated in different ways. For example, it is difficult to believe that Plato is depicting Apollodorus and the friend as engaging in any sort of philosophical activity at all in the introductory scene of the Symposium (172A1-174A2), which is not to say that the scene may not be 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 ch. 2 n. 36 above.

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 - Meno, the Phaedo, and the Republic - Plato recommends the method of hypothesis as a method of inquiry, whether or not he always depicts his interlocutors as employing the method of hypothesis when engaged in such inquiry, whether or not he allows that other methods might be useful as well, or whether or not 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 2007), (Patterson 2010), (Brown 2010), (Gill 2010), and (Gill 2010). For now, the point is that if my thesis is correct 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 ch. 3 n. 45 above.
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 incompleteness or thinness of the structure contributes to the challenge of the text. The structure may be so thin that virtually any passage can be interpreted as accommodating that structure. I have offered an account of the structure based on Platonic descriptions of the method that 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 under-interpretation of the structure of the method I have presented risks the possibility that the method can be seen to occur everywhere 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)\(^7\) 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 (ἀλλὰ ὑμῖν δὴ τοῖς δικασταῖς βουλομαι ἢ δὴ τὸν λόγον ἀποδοῦναι), as to why I think that a man who has truly spent his

\(^7\)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.
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, Simmias and Cebes, how this may be so. \[Phaedo 63E8-64A3; Grube trans.\]

Socrates here proposes to give a logos (τὸν λόγον ἀποδοῦναι) 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.

This is my defense, 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 is more convincing to you than to the Athenian jury, it will be well (εἰ τι ὑμῖν ῥηματικὸν ἐμὴ ἀπολογία ἦ τοῦ Ἀθηναίων δικαστῶν, εὖ ἔχοι). \[Phaedo 69D7-E4; Grube trans.\]

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 willingly die. He is seeking to defend, explain, or persuade Cebes and Simmias that this is so. Consequently, we should not expect Phaedo 63E to 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 so-called cyclical
argument, the recollection argument, the affinity argument, Simmias’ and Cebes’ objections, as well as 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 (διαμυθολογώμεν) whether this is likely to be true or not? Personally, said Cebes, I should like to hear your opinion (δοξαν) on the subject. 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 (χρηδιασκοπείσθαι), if you think we should do so. [Phaedo 70B5-C3; Grube trans.]

Socrates’ last sentence suggests that the discussion to follow will be an investigation, examination, perhaps 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, 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. These two projects - philosophical inquiry and philosophical justification - may be

8 'διαμυθολογώμεν’ and its cognates are only used three times by Plato and in no case does it mean ‘seek to acquire knowledge’ or ‘inquire’.
9 'διασκοπείσθαι’ 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’.
10 Compare Socrates’ response to Cebes request to hear Socrates’ doxa here to Socrates’ response to Glaucon’s similar request at Republic 506B5-D1.
11 Consider, for example, Bedu-Addo’s comment on Phaedo 95D3-E1 where Socrates evidently approves of Cebes’ claim that only a fool would not fear death who did not know that the soul was immortal: “Since Socrates obviously does not consider himself a simpleton, and is indeed portrayed throughout the dialogue as being quite unperturbed by the prospect of his own impending death, we may safely assume that he thinks he knows that the soul is immortal, and can give an account of this;” (Bedu-Addo 1979, 111). 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 would appear to indicate 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. 113-115.
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.\textsuperscript{12} So, as I suggested, it is difficult to determine
whether the discussion that follows is meant to depict philosophical inquiry or philosophical
explanation, justification, or defense. On the face of it, Socrates hardly looks to be inquiring
whether the soul continues to exist, but to be arguing that it does.\textsuperscript{13}

But let us suppose that Plato is depicting inquiry in the pages between 70B and 95A. Can
we find in those pages applications of the method of hypothesis? Perhaps, the argument that
most closely resembles the structure of the method of hypothesis, as we have come to understand
it, is the cyclical argument at 70C-72E. Socrates begins this argument by immediately reducing
the question whether the soul exists after we die to the question whether the living come from the
dead at 70C8-D5. Socrates explicitly maintains that if the living do come from the dead, then it
follows, i.e., we have sufficient proof (ικανὸν τεκμήριον), that the soul exists after we die, while
if the living do not come from the dead, it does not follow that the soul does not exist after we
die. As he puts it, if the living do not come from the dead, ‘we will need another logos’. The
argument here resembles the upward path of the proof stage of the method of hypothesis. And if
Plato intends this passage to represent that upward path, Plato may be conceding that in messy
examinations or inquiries like those concerning the immortality of the soul the best we can hope
for is reducing the original question to another question whose positive answer only provides a
sufficient condition for answering the original question. Finding a reduced question whose
answer is bi-conditionally related to the answer to the original question concerning whether the
soul continues to exist is more than one should expect.

\textsuperscript{12}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.
\textsuperscript{13}This point is captured by the common refrain that the \textit{Phaedo} appears more positive or constructive than the so-called elenctic dialogues.
Next, Plato reduces the reduced question to a second reduced question at 70D7-E6 - whether, in general, opposites must come to be from their opposites. This is followed by an epagogic-like argument aimed at establishing a positive answer to this second reduced question, an answer which Socrates describes as something we grasp or hold sufficiently (Ἰκανὸς οὖν ... ἔχομεν τούτο; 71A9). The next stretch of text might be aimed at showing how it follows from this positive answer that, in general, opposites come to be from their opposites that the living come from the dead (71B6-72A10). If that is the correct way to read the passage, then Plato has depicted an application of the upward path of the confirmation stage on the hypothesis that the living come from the dead from which it follows that the soul exists after we die.

Finally, at 72A11-D5 Socrates follows this argument with a second, supplementary argument that the living come from the dead, the answer to the first reduced question or the (first) hypothesis. It is not immediately clear why Socrates proposes a second argument for this conclusion. He does not indicate that the preceding argument was in some way flawed. Of course, Socrates is not precluded from offering multiple arguments for the same conclusion. But, a second argument looks gratuitous.

This second argument appears broadly elenctic and empirical in character. The argument amounts to a counter-factual argument to the effect if the opposites did not come to be from their opposites then everything would “be in the same state, be affected in the same way, and cease to become”, and if the dead did not come to be from the living everything would be dead. But, of course, neither of these ‘consequences’ are in fact the case. That is to say, consequences of a negative answer to the second reduced question and a negative answer to the reduced question do not ‘agree’ with the phainomena. So, perhaps, Socrates has not simply offered a second, supplementary argument for the same conclusion at 72A11-D5, but rather has offered an application of the downward path of the confirmation stage.

Despite this rough parallel with the downward path of the confirmation stage I should quickly point out important differences between the structure of 72A11-D5 and the structure of the downward path of the confirmation stage as we have come to understand it. First, this
‘supplementary’ argument is aimed at both the answer to the reduced question and the answer to the second reduced question, while the downward path of the confirmation stage is meant to confirm the answer (judged most compelling and perhaps confirmed by the upward path) only to the reduced question, although a similar procedure will be employed on the answer to the second reduced question until one reaches something hikanon. But, a second difference is perhaps more significant. This ‘supplementary’ argument is aimed at showing that a negative answer to the reduced question (i.e., not the answer judged most compelling and confirmed by the upward path) has consequences that disagree with the phainomena, while the downward path of the hypothetical method’s confirmation stage is meant to test the answer to the reduced question which is judged most compelling (and perhaps confirmed by the upward path) to see whether it agrees with the phainomena.

These two differences can be understood in one of two ways. They can be understood as evidence against seeing this passage as an application of the downward path of the confirmation stage. If they are read in this way, the differences will either be read as evidence against reading this portion of the Phaedo as a depiction inquiry (because it fails to depict the method of hypothesis sufficiently closely) or as evidence against understanding Plato’s recommended method of inquiry to be (only) the method of hypothesis (since this portion of the Phaedo is a depiction of inquiry, but not a depiction of the method of hypothesis). But these differences might also be understood as providing evidence for a thicker interpretation of the downward path. The essence of the downward path is that it is a broadly elenctic and empirical test of the ‘consequences’ of the hypothesis. If 72A11-D5 is meant to represent the downward path of the confirmation stage, then it suggests that this test can be carried out by testing the consequences of the hypothesis for agreement or disagreement with the phainomena or by testing the consequences of the negation of the hypothesis for such an agreement (or perhaps both).

Nevertheless, all of this is rather speculative. It is not clear whether the cyclical argument is meant to represent an application of inquiry or a defense of a commitment that Socrates or Plato already endorse. Nor is it clear whether the similarity in structure to the method of
hypothesis as I have been developing it is sufficient to allow the clear differences to inform and thicken our earlier account or whether those differences indicate that the argument fails to be an application of the method of hypothesis. And so, in understanding the cyclical argument as I have just presented it, we may be reading more into the text than is actually there. We should not, I think, take this text to support the account of Plato’s method of hypothesis that we have sketched earlier. But, nor should we take it to rebut it. Rather, we should recognize how understanding Plato’s method of hypothesis as we have been doing reveals new ways of approaching the arguments that Plato depicts Socrates as presenting.

But, as I say, the cyclical argument is perhaps the best case for seeing Plato as depicting the method of hypothesis in the *Phaedo* prior to Socrates’ intellectual autobiography. The other arguments are considerably more tenuous.

The recollection argument starts out promising enough. At 72E6-73A3, Cebes appears to reduce the question whether the soul is immortal to the question whether the theory of recollection is true, which he says Socrates customarily maintains (σὺ εἴωθας θαµα λέγειν). This is followed by two arguments aimed at confirming this answer to the reduced question that Socrates judges most compelling. Unfortunately, neither of these arguments have structures resembling either the upward or the downward paths of the confirmation stage of the method of hypothesis. The first one is a short argument alluding to the conversation with the slave in the *Meno*. The second one is a longer one referring to Forms and generating a considerable literature. It might be seen as the reduction of the reduced question (whether the theory of recollection is true) to a second reduced question (whether the Forms exist), but one is hard pressed to find any convincing evidence that either of these theses (the theory of recollection and

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14 The original question raised by Cebes back at 70B3-4 was whether the soul exists after an individual dies and continues to have power and knowledge. This continues to be the question throughout the cyclical argument; see the conclusion at 72D8-10. With Cebes’ introduction at 72E6-73A3, the question has become for the first time whether the soul is immortal; 73A2-3. (See (Gallop 1975:114).) I will henceforth refer to this last question as the original question raised by Cebes, despite the inaccuracy, but for the sake of simplicity.

15 For some recent discussions see, for example, (Gallop 1975:115–137), (Morgan 1984) (Bostock 1986:60–110), (Bedu-Addo 1991), (Robins 1997), (Dimas 2003), (Dancy 2004:253–283), and (Franklin 2005).
the existence of Forms) are put forward as answers to questions or are considered to be hypotheses in need of confirmation. Consequently, seeing this latter argument as conforming to the upward confirmation path is rather speculative and risks the inability to decisively rule out any Platonic argument as an application of the method of hypothesis. Moreover, nothing corresponding to the downward path of the confirmation stage is to be found.\textsuperscript{16} Nevertheless, the argument concludes with a fairly explicit statement that the soul is immortal just in case Forms exist (76D7-77A5) which has prompted at least one scholar to see this argument as an application of the method of hypothesis.\textsuperscript{17}

Similar hints of the proof stage and upward path of the confirmation stage can be found in the next argument - the so-called affinity argument. Its initial paragraph (78B4-10) suggests the following structure. The original question whether the soul is immortal can be reduced to the question whether the soul is likely to be dispersed and this reduced question can be reduced to two further questions - a first second-reduced question, what kinds of things are likely to be dispersed, and a second second-reduced question, to which kind does the soul belong.\textsuperscript{18} Then, Socrates proceeds to offer an answer to the first of those second-reduced questions by

\textsuperscript{16}This in itself is not a decisive objection to taking the recollection argument as an application of the method of hypothesis as we will see below (p. 221), but combined with the tenuousness of the other evidence, it is difficult to overcome. It is true, however, that an objection to the argument is considered (although not one based on a conflict between the results of the two confirmation procedures) that could be viewed as an objection to the downward path of the proof stage. On the model of the method of hypothesis, according to the downward path of the proof stage it should ‘follow’ from the theory of recollection that the soul is immortal. Cebes and Simmias object that it does not. It only ‘follows’ that the soul pre-exists birth; 77A8-C5. Socrates responds that immortality ‘follows’ from the theory of recollection and cyclical argument; 77C6-D5.

\textsuperscript{17}(Weiss 2001:187 n. 10): “Although the \textit{Phaedo} has its own ‘method of hypothesis,’ it instantiates the \textit{Meno}’s hypothetical method in the way it proceeds, at [\textit{Phaedo}] 72E-77A, to prove the immortality by way of recollection. It asks what would have to be true if the soul is to be immortal. It answers: learning would have to be recollection. And what would have to be true if learning is to be recollection? Answer: there would have to be Forms. And do we know that there are Forms? Answer: not quite. So we do not really know that the soul is immortal.” Notice that Weiss here distinguishes between the method of hypothesis in the \textit{Meno} and the method of hypothesis in the \textit{Phaedo}. The latter she takes to be more substantive. Consequently, given her rather thin understanding of the method in the \textit{Meno}, virtually any argument for \textit{p} that has the structure, establish that \textit{p} is true just in case \textit{q} and then argue that \textit{q}, amounts to an application of the method of hypothesis.

\textsuperscript{18}See (Gallop 1975:137). I apologize to the reader for the inelegance of the phrases ‘the first second-reduced question’ and ‘the second second-reduced question’. But these two questions are not hierarchically related to each other so that we cannot designate the second of them as the third-reduced question. They are both on the same level, so to speak. And the names ‘reduced’, second-reduced’, ‘third-reduced’, ... are designed to indicate that hierarchy.
distinguishing between Forms and ordinary objects (78C1-79A11) and, then, an answer to the second second-reduced question by means of an argument that the soul belongs to the kind associated with Forms that is not likely to be dispersed (79B1-80A9). Finally, this is followed by an argument to show how it follows that given that the soul belongs to the kind of things that contain the Forms and that Forms are the kinds of things not likely to be dispersed that the soul is not likely to be dispersed (80A10-84B8). But to see the argument as having this structure requires us to take a very wide perspective and ignores that the details of 80A10-84B8 are quite complex (perhaps even rambling) and do not in anyway lend themselves to features of the method of hypothesis as we have sketched it.

Perhaps, Simmias’ and Cebes’ objections which occupy the remainder of the Phaedo that precedes Socrates’ intellectual autobiography can be seen as resembling the downward path of the confirmation stage. Indeed, the introductory paragraph of Simmias’ objection has often been thought to refer to the method of hypothesis. Simmias is made to say

One should achieve one of these things: learn the truth about these things or find it for oneself (μαθεῖν ὅτι ἔχει ἤ ἐγινότο) or, if that is impossible, adopt the best and most irrefutable (δυσεξελεγκτότατον) of men's theories, and, borne upon this, sail through the dangers of life as upon a raft, unless someone should make that journey safer and less risky upon a firmer vessel of some divine doctrine (λόγου θείου τινός). [Phaedo 85C7-D4; Grube trans.]

This has often been taken as a reference to the introduction of the method of hypothesis at 100A on the grounds, as I understand it, that it indicates Simmias’ approval of adopting the best, most irrefutable (δυσεξελεγκτότατον), hypothesis available and resigning oneself to the impossibility or unlikelihood of doing better. But there are at least two reasons to doubt that this is meant to be a reference to the method of hypothesis at 100A.

19 See the conclusion at 84B4-8.
20 A quick search of the TLG indicates that ‘δυσεξελεγκτότατον’ or its cognates occur only seven times in the extant Greek corpus and this is the only occurrence before the first century B.C.E.
21 See, for example, (Gallop 1975, 146-147), (Rowe 1993, 176), and (Kanayama 2000, 93), although the reason for taking this to be a reference to the method of hypothesis is clearest (to the extent that a clear reason is offered at all) in Rowe.
First, I have already maintained that while this passage does indeed look forward to 99C-100A, it is not looking forward to the method of hypothesis as such, but to the second best answer to the ‘What is the *aitia* of generation and destruction?’ question referred to at 99C. Simmias’ point, as well as the point of 99C-100A, is not to distinguish between two different methods, one of which can arrive at certain or demonstrative answers, and a second-best one which can only arrive at provisional or conditional answers. Rather his point is to distinguish between second-best or provisional answers and known or demonstrative answers. But, second, even if Simmias does approve of adopting second-best or provisional answers (the best, most irrefutable (δυσεξελεγκτότατον), hypotheses available) and resigning oneself to the impossibility or unlikelihood of doing better, it is clear that Socrates does not. Passages like *Phaedo* 90D9-91A6 and *Republic* 6 504B8-C4 insist that resting content with such answers is unacceptable to the philosopher. Such answers should be seen as the best answer one can give at the moment, given one’s failure to know. Consequently, we should hesitate to take Simmias’ introduction to his objection as referring to Plato’s recommended method of inquiry.

Nevertheless, both Simmias’ and Cebes’ objections have a broadly elenctic and empirical character, perhaps indicative of the downward path of the confirmation stage. Both Simmias and Cebes might be seen as objecting that Socrates’ argument that the soul’s similarity to the Forms ‘entails’ that the soul is not likely to disperse conflicts with various facts on the ground. According to Simmias, the principle that things resembling Forms do not disperse and the premise that the harmony produced by a musical instrument resembles Forms while the musical instrument resembles the ordinary objects conflicts with the *phainomenon* that the harmony disperses before the musical instrument. And, according to Cebes, this same principle together with something like the presumption that the weaver resembles the Forms while his cloaks resemble ordinary sensible objects conflicts with the *phainomenon* that weavers die, i.e. disperse, (perhaps not before their first or second or third cloak, but before their last).

22 Perhaps it is to highlight the empirical character of these objections that Cebes is made to assert that both objections make use of *eikones* at 87B3-4.
Before we make too much out of this similarity with the downward path of the confirmation stage we should note that the thesis whose ‘consequences do not agree with each other’ is not the answer to the reduced question whether the soul is likely to disperse or the answers to the two second-reduced questions, viz. which kind of things do not disperse or whether the soul is one of that kind. Rather the thesis whose ‘consequences do not agree with each other’ is the conditional one, i.e., if the soul resembles the Forms, then the soul is not likely to disperse. This can either be understood as a premise used in the argument to the answer to the second second-reduced question that the soul belongs to the kind of things that do not disperse, or it can be understood as the conditional hypothesis\(^{23}\) needed to get us from a third reduced question, viz. whether the soul resembles the Forms, to the answer to the second second-reduced question. In either case our sketch of the structure of the method of hypothesis did not suggest that this was the thesis whose ‘consequences’ were supposed to be tested. Rather according to the sketch we have been developing the thesis whose ‘consequences’ are supposed to be tested is the answer to the reduced question, (or the answer to the second-reduced question, or third-reduced question, etc.)\(^{24}\)

\(^{22}\)By the ‘conditional hypothesis’ I mean the bi-conditional or the conditional in the messier cases which we discussed above as the having a claim to being called the hypothesis; see, for example, pp. 131-132 above.

\(^{24}\)A further difficulty with seeing Simmias’ objection as conforming to the downward path of the confirmation stage is that only about half of it has that structure (85E3-86B5). The other half of Simmias’ objection is devoted to developing his own alternative hypothesis that the soul is a harmony and hence subject to dispersal and destruction (86B5-D4). Indeed, Simmias’ use of ‘ὑποθέσεως’ at 93C10 and ‘ὑπόθεσις’ at 94B1 (in Socrates’ reply to Simmias’ objection) has indicated to some again that Simmias is employing the method of hypothesis here; see (Rowe 1993, 176) and (Kahn 1996:315). But Simmias’ mere use of the word does not indicate the method. Nevertheless, seeing Simmias’ objection as having these two halves with the first half conforming to the downward path of the confirmation stage may help make sense of Socrates’ response; see (Rowe 1993, 178) for one who does not find much worthy of praise in this response. In the first part of Socrates’ response (91E-92E), Socrates might be seen as pointing out that Simmias’ hypothesis that the soul is a harmony does not agree with the hypothesis that learning is recollection and so as part of the proof stage Simmias is required to set down as true everything that agrees with the hypothesis (the answer to the reduced question whether the theory of recollection is true that he finds most compelling; see δ’ ὑποθέσεως ἀξίας ἀποδείκνυσθαι (92D6-7) and ἵκανος τε καὶ ὅρθος ἀποδείκτηκα (92E1-2) and (Gallop 1975, 157)). In the second part of Socrates’ response (92E4-94B3), Socrates might be seen as showing that Simmias’ hypothesis that the soul is a harmony has consequences (that all souls would be equally virtuous) that conflict with the phainomena, showing that Simmias’ hypothesis is not confirmed or disconfirmed by the downward path of the confirmation stage. And finally, the last part of Socrates response (94B4-95A3) might be seen as returning to the defense of his own hypothesis that if the soul is like the Forms then it is not likely to be dispersed against the first half of Simmias’ objection that it conflicts with the phainomena. Socrates’ response might be seen as proposing that Simmias’ objection is based on a consequence that does not follow from the hypothesis. It does
What, then are we to make of this rather quick excursus through more than 30 pages of text? On the one hand, some of the arguments found in these pages clearly fail to be applications of Plato’s method of hypothesis, although they remain applications of philosophical activity. On the other hand, other arguments found in these same pages reveal parallels, hints, and perhaps even foreshadowings of the method of hypothesis which Socrates explicitly introduces later in the *Phaedo* and whose general structure I have sketched above. Nevertheless, even in these cases we should forebear identifying these arguments as applications of this method. The evidence of these parallels, hints, and foreshadowings is too slight to justify taking these arguments to be applications capable of supplying evidence for the nature of Plato’s recommended method of inquiry. If we are to proceed conservatively, as I have been advocating, we will have to look elsewhere for clearer applications of Plato’s method of inquiry.\(^\text{25}\) But we should not ignore the fact that understanding Plato’s method of hypothesis as I have been suggesting allows us to see the structure of Plato’s philosophical argumentation (even if it is not argumentation representing inquiry) in new and fruitful ways. Nor, I suppose, should we ignore the fact that if one insists on understanding some of these arguments as applications of Plato’s method of hypothesis despite my conservative warnings, doing so generally supports the interpretation of the method I have been proposing in previous chapters and fails to provide any reasons for rejecting it.

**The Application of the Method of Hypothesis in the *Phaedo***

We should expect a more credible application of Plato’s method of hypothesis following 100A7-9, since Socrates is explicit that what follows is intended to clarify his rather compressed initial description of the method. But before looking at that clarification we should step back and view the context of this clarification.

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\(^{25}\)It is for this reason that I cannot agree with the Kahn’s ((Kahn 1996:315)) assessment of 92C3, although I would like to; see n. 1 above.
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 aitia of generation and destruction (ὅλως 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. [95E7-96A4; Grube trans.]

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 what appears to be an application (or the results of an application) of the method employed by those who seek wisdom concerning the science of nature (φύσεως ἱστορίαν). Unfortunately, Plato fails to make clear precisely what this method of inquiry is supposed to be. At 99D4-100A3, Socrates describes it as a method of investigating things (τὰ ὅντα σκοπῶν) by means of facts (ἐν [τοῖς] ἔργοις) in contrast to investigating things by

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26 The question is almost immediately broadened to ‘What are “the aitiae of everything, why it comes to be, why it perishes and why it exists”?’ (τὰς αἰτίας ἐκάστου, διὰ τί γίγνεται ἐκάστον καὶ διὰ τί ἀπόλλυται καὶ διὰ τί ἔστι) 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 2010:64 ff.). 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.
means of *logoi* (ἐν τοῖς λόγοις), the latter evidently referring to his method of hypothesis whose initial description immediately follows (100A3-100A8). Moreover, this method of the natural scientists appears to be in some way intimately tied up in the use of sense perception (ἐκάστη τῶν αἰσθησεων ἐπιχειρῶν ἀπεσταθαι αὐτῶν), as we might expect given its association with natural science, but Plato does not explain how.27 Indeed, he seems especially concerned to maintain that as a method for investigating τὰ ὀντα, it is no more indirect than the method of hypothesis or investigating by means of *logoi*.28 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.29 Whatever the method was, it led Socrates to “become blind and to unlearn what [he] thought [he] knew before” (τότε ὑπὸ ταύτης τῆς σκέψεως οὕτω σφόδρα ἐνυφλώθην, ὡστε ἀπέμαθον καὶ ταῦτα ἀ πρὸ τοῦ ὁμοῦ εἰδέναι).30

27 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 ch. 9.
28 Pace (Kanayama 2000, 47).
29 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 (τινα ἄλλον τρόπον αὐτοῦ ἀκη κῆ φόρο), 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*.
30 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). The reason for his *aporia* appears to be that his former beliefs about the *aitiai* of these things violate two principles which might be roughly put as follows: [1] the same *aitia* must not be *aitia* of different (opposite) things and [2] different (opposite) *aitia* must not be the *aitia* of the same things. These principles and the issues surrounding them have generated a considerable literature. See, for example (Gallo 1975:186–187), (Bostock 1986:136 ff), (Sedley 1998:119 ff), (Kanayama 2000:54 ff), (Politis 2010:67–80), and (Menn 2010). See (Gallo 1975, 172), who takes Socrates’ expression of *aporia* here to be ironic.
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. After
expressing his excitement upon hearing someone reading from a book of Anaxagoras that Mind
\textit{(nous)} was the \textit{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” (ιν’ ώς τάχιστα
ειδείην τὸ βέλτιστον καὶ τὸ χείρον; 98B5-6; Grube trans.). Unfortunately, as it turned out,
Socrates’ hopes were dashed when he discovered that Anaxagoras failed to use Mind at all in
answering the \textit{aitia} question, but instead merely referred to a necessary condition of an \textit{aitia}
(ἐκεῖνο ἄνευ οὐ τὸ αἵτιον οὐκ ἄν ποτ’ εἰη αἵτιον; 99B3-4). It is at this point that Socrates is made
to say

I would gladly become the disciple (μαθητής) of any man who taught the workings of that
kind of \textit{aitia}. However, since I was deprived and could neither discover it myself nor
learn it from another (οὐτ’ αὐτός εὑρεῖν οὔτε παρ’ ἄλλου μαθεῖν), 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 \textit{aitia} (ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς αἰτίας ζήτησιν), Cebes? ... \cite{Phaedo 99C6-D3; adapted
from Grube trans.}

the passage with which Plato introduces his initial description of the method of hypothesis in the
\textit{Phaedo}.\footnote{See p. 122 above.}

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 long passage
in which Socrates professes to describe his inquiry concerning the \textit{aitia} question. He has
rehearsed his failed attempts at answering this question by means of the method of natural
science and by means of reading the books of Anaxagoras. He has just described a new method
which he proposed to use to answer the \textit{aitia} question and now he resolves to explain that
method more clearly by describing how he applied it to the \textit{aitia} question. We should expect

\footnote{See ch. 4 n. 33 for whether this is meant to represent a chronological sequence.}
\footnote{N.B. that Socrates here explicitly distinguishes between the method of learning the \textit{theory of aitia}, i.e. reading the
books of Anaxagoras, and the \textit{theory of aitia} itself, about which Socrates’ great expectations were dashed.}

\footnote{See p. 122 above.}
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. But I contend that 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. But if 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 pre-conceived 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

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34 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*.

35 See, for example, (van Eck 1996, 218) who thinks the method is not employed until 102A8 (but see n. 44 below). One way to see what motivates the Gallop-Rowe view below is that they begin with the assumption that the hypothesis must entail its consequences (and higher hypotheses must entail lower ones) and so 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 1993); (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. 229-231 below.

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show you the kind of *aitia* with which I have concerned myself (ἐρχομαι γὰρ δή ἐπιχειροῦν σοι ἐπιδείξασθαι τῷς αἰτίας τὸ εἰδός ὁ πεπραγμάτευμαι).  [b] I turn back to those oft-mentioned things and proceed from them (ἀρχομαι ἀπ’ ἐκεῖνων). I assume the existence of a Beautiful, itself by itself, of a Good and a Great and all the rest (ὑποθέμενος εἶναι τι καλὸν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ μέγα καὶ τῶλλα 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 (αὐτίαν ἐπιδείξει καὶ ἀνευρήσεις ὡς ἀθάνατον [η] ψυχῆ).  Take it that I grant you this, said Cebes, and hasten to your conclusion.  [Phaedo 100B1-C2; adapted from Grube trans.]

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.36 And in [b] and [c] he immediately tells us how he achieved those results. In [b] he tells us that he assumed (ὑποθέμενος) the being or existence37 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’ (ἐκ τούτων), 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 what we might describe as the theory of Forms.

While it is true that the language of question and answer is absent from this description, Socrates’ introductory explanation of his (at least partially)38 successful investigation concerning the *aitia* question fits quite well the brief description of his method of hypothesis at 100A3-7. He

36‘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 labored or undertook to answer that question. Whether we want to call that labor or undertaking an investigation or not, it suffices for my purposes that he is describing his labor or undertaking.

37For our purposes of investigating the nature of Plato’s method of hypothesis nothing important hangs on determining whether the ‘ἐίναι’ in this clause should be understood existentially.

38Socrates 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*.  

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describes himself as being able to answer the original question (‘What is the aitia of generation and destruction?’, i.e., the aitia question), whose answer is necessary to respond to Cebe’s objection and so to show that the soul is immortal, by hypothesizing an answer to another question which will determine or 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 theory of Forms, what we might call ‘the Form hypothesis’. And Socrates, is explicit that from this answer (ἐκ τοῦτον) he can answer the original question, i.e., the aitia question.

Lest one think I am reading too much into this introductory description of his pursuit, consider how Socrates continues, following Cebe’s approval of the Form hypothesis.

Consider then ... whether you share my opinion as to what follows (τὰ ἑξῆς ἐκείνως), 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; adapted from Grube trans.]

Socrates here makes explicit that an answer to the aitia question follows (τὰ ἑξῆς ἐκείνως) from his Form hypothesis, and the answer goes roughly as follows: the Forms are the aitia of generation and destruction. As Socrates is made to put it ‘beautiful things are beautiful for no other reason than because (διό) they participate in the beautiful itself.’ We might put this more formally and more generally as ‘the F itself is the aitia of x’s being F’. Let us call this the aitia thesis. So, the answer to the original question, i.e., the aitia thesis, is determined by or follows from the Form hypothesis, i.e., the theory of Forms. And we have a straightforward application of the method Socrates has so briefly described at 100A3-7 - to repeat with modifications:

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39(Kanayama 2000:62–63??) calls this the ‘Existence Proposition’; (Dancy 2004, 301) calls it the ‘fundamental hypothesis (HF)’.
40See “and I say so with everything” (καὶ πάντα δὴ ὁμοίως λέγω) at 100C6.
41Because the text seems to me to require that the aitia thesis, i.e., Socrates’ answer to the aitia question, follows from the Form hypothesis, I cannot agreed with David Sedley’s view that Plato takes the aitia thesis to be self-evident; (Sedley 1998:117–118).
42(Kanayama 2000:62–63??) calls this the ‘Aitia Proposition’.
However, I started in this manner: taking as my hypothesis (ὑποθέμενος) in [the case of the aitia question] the logos [i.e., the theory of Forms] that seemed to me the most compelling (κρίνω ἐρρομένηστατον).\(^{43}\) 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]. [100A3-7; adapted from Grube trans.]

Indeed, following his answer to the aitia question at 100C3-8, he goes on to detail those answers to this question that evidently 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 (ἐτί μανθάνω οὐδὲ δύναμαι ... γιγνώσκειν) other aitiae 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 inconsistent or incompatible with thinking that color and shape are the aitiae of x’s being beautiful.\(^{44}\) 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 is made to offer the second of his two descriptions of the method of

\(^{43}\) Perhaps indicated by the fact that Socrates never stops talking about them (οὐδὲν κανόν, ἅλλον ὑπὲρ ὑπὲρ τε ἅλλοτε καὶ ἐν τῷ παρελθόντι λόγῳ οὐδὲν πέπαιναι λέγον); 100B1-3.

\(^{44}\) Pace (van Eck 1996, 217–218) who maintains that Socrates’ reasons for dismissing these other aitiae 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 1993:244). 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, he does not explicitly say so. All he does say is that having assumed the Form hypothesis, he holds on to the aitia thesis and dismisses the other aitia; see (Rowe 1996:232 n 17). See p. 231 below for how Plato must be understanding ‘agreement’.
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 path of the confirmation stage, searching for higher hypotheses from which the Form hypothesis can be derived (or alternatively reducing the Form question to another question whose answer determines or reveals the answer to the Form question) until one reaches something acceptable (*hikanon*). And the Form hypothesis also needs to be subject to the downward path of the confirmation stage, testing its ‘consequences’ 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, I think he made these things wonderfully clear to anyone of even small intelligence (ως ἐναργῶς τῷ καὶ σμικρὸν νοῦν ἔχοντι εἰπεῖν ἐκεῖνος ταῦτα).
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; Grube trans.]

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. And, our current passage is the second and last reminder of this relatively unusual feature of the dialogue until the concluding scene at 117B2. 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* hypothesis is jolting.
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.

Second, it has struck some commentators as odd 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.⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰ 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).

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⁴⁹ See (Rowe 1993:50–51) 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.

⁵⁰ (Rowe 1992, 96) and (Rowe 1993, 50–51). This is, of course, quite in keeping with my more general conservative approach to coming to understand Plato’s method of hypothesis.
Nevertheless, a number of commentators would dispute my interpretation of this application. 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 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 derived 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. As a result the application of the method of hypothesis on Rowe’s account 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

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51 Among those who would agree in general with the application of the method of hypothesis as I have presented it above are (Bedu-Addo 1979:115–119) and (Dancy 2004:300–301). My objections to the Gallop-Rowe interpretation owe much to van Eck’s interpretation (in (van Eck 1994) and (van Eck 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 *aitia* 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) and (van Eck 1996:218). (See (Rowe 1996:230 n 11) 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 the Socrates’ theory of *aitia* or explanation, rather than his method of hypothesis. (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), (van Eck 1996:215–218), and (Rowe 1996:228 n 4 & 230). In the end, I fail to understand how van Eck integrates what he calls the elements of Socrates’ theory of explanation. See n. 29 above for the difficulty of keeping straight Socrates’ method of hypothesis and his answer to the *aitia* question.

52 See (Gallop 1975:179).


54 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.
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 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 or inquiry in whose service Socrates applies the method of hypothesis after the failure of the application of the method of natural science 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 application. It is true, of course, that Socrates engages in this investigation in order to argue for the immortality of the soul. But Socrates does not assert that he is *inquiring* concerning the immortality of the soul in this portion of the *Phaedo*. Rather, he is recounting 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, i.e., 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 or inquiry 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.55 Why then do they take the hypothesis Socrates is appealing here to be the conjunctive Form-Reason hypothesis?

55See (Rowe 1993, 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).
A variety considerations are suggested. First, as we have seen, Plato’s talk of the safety of the hypothesis in the second description passage at 101D1-E3 should be understood as referring to the *aitia* thesis in order to explain the contrast in the passage without being forced to translate ‘ἐξορρό’ as ‘attack’. As a result Rowe understands ‘this safety of the hypothesis’ as ‘the safe part of the hypothesis’ indicating a hypothesis that has parts, viz. the Form hypothesis and the *aitia* thesis. But I have already suggested an alternative reading - ‘the safe consequent of the hypothesis’ - which bypasses the necessity of the conjunctive Form-Reason hypothesis.

Second, following Gallop, Rowe emphasizes the ‘inseparability’ of the Form hypothesis and the *aitia* thesis. But their inseparability should come as 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 determines or 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. 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’ (ἐκ τούτων and τὰ ἐξής ἐκείνων) the former, and only the former is explicitly designated as

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56 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’.

57 (Rowe 1996:235).

58 See pp. 156-158 above.

59 (Rowe 1996, 236); see also (Gallop 1975, 179).

60 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. See pp. 171-172 above.
being hypothesized. 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. 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; Grube trans.]

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 immediate (and safe) consequence.

Finally, Socrates is made to conclude his final argument for the immortality of the soul as follows:

You are not only right to say this, Simmias, 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; Grube trans.]

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 immortality 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 theory of Forms as his hypothesis (or even one of his hypotheses) - at least, between 100A7 and 102A10. I will discuss 107B5-9 in a moment.

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61 At least, between 100A7 and 102A10. I will discuss 107B5-9 in a moment.
62 See, for example, (Gallop 1975:192) and (Rowe 1993:249) for the argument beginning here.
63 For important discussions of this final argument and its validity see, for example, (Keyt 1963), (Reeve 1975), and (Kanayama 2000).
64 Simmias has just confessed to some private doubts (αποστασιоν) despite apparently having no grounds for them.
hypotheses). What he hypothesized back at 100B1-C2 was not the theory of Forms but the
“existence of a Beautiful, itself by itself, of a Good and a Great and all the rest (ὑποθέμενος εἶναι
τι καλὸν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ μέγα καὶ τὰλλα πάντα). If you grant me these and agree
that they exist, I hope to show you the aitia as a result, and so to find the soul to be immortal;”
(100B5-9; Grube trans.) It is from these hypotheses (ἐκ τοῦτον - 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 existence of such things (and presumably anything else he needed to
hypothesize in reaching the aitia thesis or the immortality of the soul from the aitia thesis) before
holding on to the hypothesis itself and answering the Form question accordingly, or 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, the interpretation I have proposed is

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65Thus, 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 of 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 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 1996:234 n 22). 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 ‘υποθέσεις’ or its cognates in 100A8-102A10 is at 101D2 and 101D7, in the second description of the
method in general.
66Rowe 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
compatible with all of the evidence. It can account for the difficulty surrounding the appropriate translation of ‘ἐκτρο’ at 101D1-E3, the alleged ‘inseparability’ of the Form hypothesis and the aitia thesis, Socrates’ reference to both of these propositions 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 theory of Forms which in some way ‘agreed’ with the answer that the F is the aitia of F-things 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 Cleitophon’s challenge. Understanding Socrates’ application of the method of hypothesis at Phaedo 100A8-101D1 in the way that 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 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).

67Although I will have more to say about this below.
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 speak in terms of questions and answers here in the *Phaedo*, he does indicate that the Form hypothesis (which evidently answers some question - perhaps ‘Do Forms exist?’ or ‘What are τὰ ὀντα?’69) in some way determines 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 the answer to the reduced question and the answer to the original question is not (or not any longer)70 the relatively simple and rigorous relationship of strict logical entailment. Rather the relationship appears more indeterminate, looser, or contextually sensitive.71

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 theory of Forms

68 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 n. 66 above.

69 See τὰ ὀντα σκοπῶν at 99D5.

70 I think some of the considerations I mention below tell against a developmental approach from the *Meno* to the *Phaedo*, but I have long ago put aside these sorts of questions. See pp. 10-14.

71 By contextually sensitive I have in mind sensitivity to background beliefs and/or salience.
or the proposition that Forms exist - 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.\textsuperscript{72}

Moreover, the very idea of thinking of the relationship between the hypothesis and the answer to the original question as a logical relationship between propositions is up for grabs in light of this application in the Phaedo. We have frequently referred to the hypothesis in the application at 100A8-101D1 as the theory of Forms and the relationship between a theory and answers to specific questions can often be more complex than simple strict logical entailment.

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

\textsuperscript{72}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.
given that Socrates appeared to be 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 determine, reveal, provide a good explanation for, or otherwise help answer 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. We should remember that we are searching for answers to questions from (robust) ignorance of anything about the subject matter in question.

As Socrates is made to put it in the *Meno* “we do not know either what [virtue] is or what qualities it possesses;” (87B3; Grube trans.). 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.

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73 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 (ἄλλως ἔσσας μὲν τινα ὑπόθεσιν προϊσχομενάν ὁμίαν ἑχειν πρός τὸ πρᾶγμα), as follows ...” (87A3-4; (Menn 2002:209) trans.; emphasis added).

74 Part of my goal in this study 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 good, between virtue is knowledge and there are teachers of virtue and there are no teachers of virtue, between the theory 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 ἀρχή, or so I hope to argue in the future.

75 If Socrates had known of 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 n. 7 above), it is difficult to explain why it took him so long to discover it or why he needed to postulate the theory of Forms in order to confirm, justify, or explain it.
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 question\textsuperscript{76}), if 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 determine or help with the answer to the reduced question, and on the other hand, one needs to test the consequences 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 \textit{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 \textit{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 ‘deriving’ it from an answer to a higher question and by testing its ‘consequences’ for.

\textsuperscript{76}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.
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 (ἀντιλογικοὶ) do; (101D1-102A2). That Socrates is depicted as a philosopher and not as 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 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 method or 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.
Chapter 8

The Method of Hypothesis: Socrates At Work in the Republic

Introduction¹

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 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 readers’ imagination.

In the present chapter I present an application that does not have these faults. I will sketch an argument in the Republic which appears to be an application of the method of hypothesis in its full glory. All of the components of the method of hypothesis as it has been developed in previous chapters are on display without conflicting results - although in the end they remain incomplete in a sense I will explain below. Unfortunately, it is much less clear that this argument in the Republic is intended to be an application of inquiry, as opposed to defense or

¹The current chapter is a substantial revision of, and so supersedes (Benson 2008).
justification of an already existing commitment, and so it is much less clear that the argument is intended to be an application of the method of hypothesis.

The argument I have in mind is Plato’s argument for the possibility of Kallipolis in *Republic* 5 and 6 - specifically *Republic* 471C-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 of hypothesis.\(^2\) The goal of the present chapter is to defend this proposal, and 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 (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 philosophers are knowers of Forms, and then argues that, so understood, philosophers have the necessary and sufficient characteristics for ruling (474C-487A), i.e., 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.

\(^2\)(Nettleship 1925:184–211) is one of the few examples in the literature of a treatment of the entire stretch of argument from 471C-502C; see more recently (Pappas 1995, 114). Many (perhaps most) scholars focus on the arguments at the end of *Republic* V and then refocus at 502C, and especially on the analogies of the Sun, Line and Cave. In the main my reading of the structure of the argument over this stretch of text is in 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 will explain, below the parallel with the *Meno* underwrites seeing the Kallipolis argument in the *Republic* as an application of the method of hypothesis.
hypothesis that philosophy (so understood) and political power coincide, against experience, *endoxa*, and other ordinary beliefs (487B-497A).\(^4\) At this point, however and finally, the parallel between this 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 consequence 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 consequence that philosophers are virtuous and beneficial, and while that consequence appears to be at odds with the facts on the ground, i.e., with the fact avowed by Adeimantus that philosophers are vicious and useless, Socrates explains why in fact the consequences 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.\(^5\)

**Context of the Passage**

Before turning to the Kallipolis argument itself, we must (as always) consider its context. Specifically, we must consider whether the context suggests that Plato is presenting the Kallipolis argument as an instance of the inquiry that led to Socrates’ commitment to Kallipolis’ possibility or whether Plato is depicting Socrates as presenting his defense or account of that commitment? As I have mentioned earlier, the distinction here is slippery and vague especially at the edges, but it is important for our present purposes. For if the context presents the argument as an instance of inquiry, then we should expect to find an application of the method of

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\(^4\)From 497A to 502C Plato takes up two subsidiary issues. From 497A to 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 499A to 502C Plato explains how it is not impossible for such philosophers to arise even in current cities through, for example, divine dispensation.

\(^5\)For the longer and shorter road, see *Republic* 504A4-D3 and for the unhypothetical first principle, see *Republic* 510B6-7, 511B5-6, and 533C8-D1, and my discussion of both in the next chapter.
hypothesis. But if not, we will need another argument for taking the Kallipolis argument to be such an application. Unlike our earlier examination of the arguments for the teachability of virtue in the *Meno* and for the *aitia* thesis in the *Phaedo*, the context of the *Republic* hardly leads us to expect an application of Plato’s recommended method of inquiry.

Plato begins Book 5 of the *Republic* by depicting Socrates as about to relate the 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 (κοινωνίαν γυναικῶν τε καὶ παιδῶν). Socrates had mentioned this almost in passing at 423E5-424A3 in 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” (η σοι δοκεῖ διεξιών; 450B9-C1; Grube/Reeve trans.), Socrates hesitates because he fears that he will harm his interlocutor-friends by misleading them. As Socrates is made to put it

> Your encouragement would be fine, if I could be sure I was speaking with knowledge (πιστεύοντος μὲν γὰρ ἐμοὶ ἐμοὶ εἰδέναι ἄ λέγω), for one can feel both secure and confident when one knows the truth (τὰληθῆ εἰδότα) about the dearest and most important things (τῶν μεγίστων τε καὶ φίλων) 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 (α ἀπιστούντα 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

6See 449C7-8, as well as Adeimantus’ assertion at 449D6-450A2 that Socrates has not discussed this point sufficiently (πρὶν τάστα ἰκανῶς διέλθησα) and so urges him to do so now (διέλθης). Throughout, I will be referring to Adeimantus request to give an account of Socrates’ proposal that women and children are held in common (κοινωνίαν γυναικῶν τε καὶ παιδῶν), even though in fact Adeimantus asks two apparently distinct questions (“We've been waiting for some time, indeed, for you to tell us about the production of children—how they'll be produced and, once born, how they'll be brought up—and about the whole subject of having wives and children in common” (Grube/Reeve trans.)) at 449D1-4 as does Glaucon (“what the common possession of wives and children will amount to for the guardians and how the children will be brought up while they're still small” (Grube/Reeve trans.)) at 450C1-2. Socrates manages to convert these questions into his three waves: that men and women guardians ought share tasks and so be trained/educated in common (education *koinonia*; 451C-457B), that women and children should be held in common (family *koinonia*; 457D-471C), and that Kallipolis is possible (471C-502C). How all of these are related to each other is an interesting question, but not salient to our current concerns.
not to, I'll not only fall myself but drag my friends down as well.) [Republic 5 450D8-451A4; Grube/Reeve trans.]  

Nevertheless, Socrates is ultimately persuaded and embarks upon the ostensible digression of the central books (5 through 7) of the Republic. 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.

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 because he recognizes his ignorance about these matters that he fears harming his interlocutor-friends by misleading them. 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 depicted as about to begin a joint inquiry from mutual ignorance with Glaucon and Adeimantus in order to answer the question in what way women and children are to be held in common as he is, for example, in the Meno. Nor, is he depicted as recounting his intellectual autobiography in pursuit of an answer to the question how women and children are to be treated in Kallipolis as he is, for example, in the Phaedo. Rather, Socrates is depicted as about to explain, justify, or defend to Glaucon and Adeimantus his 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

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7 Compare this passage with the end of the Laches at 201A3-7 (pp. 39-40 above), Phaedo 70B5-C3 (pp. 205-206 above), and Republic 506B5-E7 (pp. chap 9 xxx below).
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). On the other hand, see (White 1979:20), for example, who doubts that Books 5-7 are a genuine digression. See also (Adam 1902:274).
9 See Republic 8 543C4-544B3.
10 Compare Socrates worrying about learning from the sophists at Protagoras 313C-314A; p. 50 above.
11 Plato appears concerned to highlight in the Meno the similarity of Meno’s and Socrates’ cognitive position 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 seem concerned to highlight it. Moreover, Socrates expresses no concern with harming Meno in pursuing their joint inquiry concerning the teachability of virtue. One might suppose that such a worry is appropriate only in the case of defending a thesis, not in the case of joint inquiry.
a result, while it is clear that Socrates is still in the process of learning or seeking knowledge concerning the *koinonia* thesis, nevertheless it is far from clear 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. This distinction between defense and inquiry may indeed be slippery, and these two philosophical activities may elide into one another, but our conservative approach requires clear cases of inquiry to be employed as evidence for coming to understand Plato’s recommended method. Consequently, we have no reason yet, at least, to expect to be able to use what follows in an attempt to enrich our understanding of the method of hypothesis.

Indeed, the pages that immediately follow do not encourage such an expectation either. In the first wave, Socrates defends his proposal or law that men and women share the task of guardianship and so should receive the same training - as Socrates puts it near the end of the first wave “that men and women guardians must share their entire way of life” (ὡς δεῖ κοινῆ πάντα ἐπιτηδεύειν τούς τε φύλακας ἠμῶν καὶ τὰς φυλακίδας; 457B9-C1; Grube/Reeve trans.). Most of the effort of this wave is directed at defending this proposal against the objection that it is incompatible with Socrates’ own principle of specialization on the basis of which they began founding the city back in Book 2 (370A7-C6). According to the principle of specialization, it is maintained, each person must do one’s own work according to nature (δεῖν κατὰ φύσιν ἐκαστὸν

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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.

13 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): first wave (451C-457B), second wave (457D-471C), and third wave (471C-502C).

14 Throughout the first and second wave Socrates continually refers to the *koinonia* thesis he is defending as a law (νόμος) or laws; see, for example, 452C5, 453D1, 456C2, 457B8, 457C7, 461B3, 461E2, and 465A1. In the first wave, he defends a portion of this thesis, viz. that men and women have tasks and education in common, and in the second wave, a second portion, viz. that women and children should be held in common. See n. 6 above.

15 There is also a very brief argument at the end of the wave aimed at defending the benefit of this proposal (456c-457b).

16 See ἄπολογεῖσθαι at 453C4.

εν το αυτοπράττειν; 453B3-4). But, since the natures of men and women are obviously different (453B6-8), it follows that they should not share the same tasks, and so not be trained in the same way (453B2-C7). Socrates responds that the objection depends on an equivocation of the term ‘nature’. The kind of nature referred to in the principle of specialization is different than the kind referred to in the claim that the natures of men and women are obviously different. Socrates then spends the bulk of the first wave arguing that in the relevant sense of nature, men and women do not have different natures, but the same.

Once, again there is little here to encourage the expectation of an application of the method of hypothesis. Socrates is depicted as defending a thesis to which he is already committed, and not as inquiring or searching for an answer to the question how women and men should be trained or whether they should share the task of guardianship. There may be hints of the method of hypothesis here in the first wave, but whether they should be used to enrich our understanding of the method cannot be securely conceded, and so must await a more complete understanding, given our conservative approach.

Socrates’ discussion of the second wave, while considerably longer, is no more encouraging. The passage begins with Socrates proposing that the next law (the family koinonia law), viz. 

[t]hat all these women are to belong in common to all the men, that none are to live privately with any man, and that the children, too, are to be possessed in common; so that no parent will know his own offspring or any child his parent. [Republic 5 457C10-D3; Grube/Reeve trans.],

follows from the previous ones (Τουτω .. ἐπεται νόμος καὶ τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν τοῖς ἄλλοις). When Glaucon asserts that this wave is bigger than the previous one, doubting its possibility as well as its benefit, Socrates expresses surprise that its benefit would be disputed (ἀμφισβητεῖσθαι). This leads Socrates to extract a concession from Glaucon to allow him to examine (σκέψομαι, συνδιασκοπεῖσθαι, σκόπει; 458B1-8) its benefit, on the assumption that it is possible (ὦς ἰδιότων ὄντων θεῖς). Glaucon agrees, and Socrates begins a rather long argument to the effect that the law concerning family koinonia is beneficial.
The structure of this argument is difficult to discern, but it apparently fall roughly into two parts. First, an account of the arrangements put into place for possessing women and children in common (458B-461E), and, then, an argument that such arrangements are indeed beneficial (462A-466D). To accomplish this last task Socrates maintains that the first step (ἀρχή) is to say what is the greatest good in the construction of the city and then to examine (ἐπισκέψασθαι) whether the arrangements just gone through in the previous passage fit the footprint (ἱκνος) of this good (462A2-8).

This way of setting up the argument on behalf of the benefit of the family koinonia law favors a hypothetical structure. After hypothesizing an account of the greatest good and then showing that the family koinonia law fits that account of the greatest good, Socrates concludes that family koinonia is beneficial. But what follows does not fit the structure of the method of hypothesis we have been uncovering. While there is a kind of upward and downward movement of the argument, it does not in any obvious way indicate the reduction of the question concerning the benefit of family koinonia to a question concerning the nature of the greatest good, but rather, if any reduction is suggested at all, it appears to go the other way around. That is, the argument appears to go as follows. If women and children are possessed in common, then the city will possess the greatest good, rather than if the city possesses the greatest good then women and children will be possessed in common. Of course, one may respond to this feature of the passage in two ways. One might take this feature of the passage as evidence that the account

18 See the stage directions at 461E5-8.
19 From 462A9-463E3, the structure looks to be roughly upward as follows: the greatest good is unity (462A9-B3), which can be/is brought about by common pleasures and pains (462B4-C1), which can be/are brought about by calling the same things ‘mine’ (462C2-8), which can be/is brought about by one part of an entity feeling the pain of another part as one’s own (462C9-E3), which can be/is brought about by the arrangements discussed in 458B-461E (462E4-463E2). And then from 463E3-464B7 back down: so given these arrangements, the city (or one part of the city) will feel the pain of any other part (462E4-463E3), and so the the citizen (or the guardians) will call the same things one’s own (463E4-7), and so the guardians will have common pleasures and pains (464A1-3), and so the city will fit the footprint of the greatest good (464B5-7). This upward and downward structure may also appear to be followed by a kind of testing of the family koinonia law for consistency (against what was said before; 464C5) (464B8-466C4). I owe this way of viewing the general structure of this passage to some helpful discussion with Charles Brittain.
of Plato’s method of hypothesis I have been advocating is mistaken on the grounds that the passage is an application of the method and yet it does not fit the structure of the method I have been advocating. Or, second, one might take this feature of the passage to be incompletely understood, and in fact, the passage supports my reading of the method, given a broad enough understanding of question reduction. What should be clear, however, is that before either of these two responses should be adopted, we should want some very good reasons to read this argument as an application of Plato’s method of hypothesis, and such reasons we simply fail to have. Despite the initial use of inquiry words, especially at the beginning of the passage, the argument itself appears to be a defense of Socrates’ commitment to the benefit of family koinonia, not an inquiry. As a result, we should hesitate to take the current passage as an application of that method.

Moreover, the next portion of the argument also fails to indicate inquiry. At 466D6-9 Socrates proposes to turn to the question concerning the possibility of the family koinonia law, and proceeds by detailing how it is clear that this will be brought about in the case of war (δῆλον ὑν τρόπον πολεμήσωσιν, 466E1-2). Socrates relates first how the children should be treated in the case of war (466E4-468A1), then how the guardians should treat each other (468A2-469B4), and finally how the guardians should treat their enemies (469B5-471C3). Again, the argument presents many difficulties. Specifically, it is not clear how this discussion addresses the possibility question. But what is clear is that it fails to depict anything like a genuine inquiry. Plato has a point to make (especially concerning Panhellenism) and he sets out to make it. The suggestion that Plato is depicting an application of inquiry, and so the method of hypothesis if I am right, is simply beyond the pale. As a result we have no reason to take this portion of the argument concerning the family koinonia law to indicate the structure of the method of hypothesis. And, the suggestion that the previous portion indicates such a structure is correspondingly less likely.

The Structure of Republic 471E-502C

Introduction
We have now reached the point of *Republic* 5 which I maintain does provide an application of the method of hypothesis - Socrates’ response to the third wave. Nevertheless, I have just spent considerable time insisting that nothing (or at least not enough given our conservative approach) in the context of this passage should lead us to anticipate an application of this method. That Plato is depicting Socrates engaged in inquiry is difficult to sustain. Rather, Socrates is depicted as defending or justifying answers to questions to which he is already committed, albeit without professing knowledge. Nor does Socrates’ response to the third wave, the Kallipolis argument, appear any more like an example of inquiry than his previous responses. Rather, he introduces it as a sudden attack on his *logos*. Why, then, should one take Socrates’ response to the third wave to provide evidence for a richer understanding of his method of hypothesis?

In what follows I outline the argument structure of Socrates’ response to the third wave, and in doing so highlight deep parallels and pointed allusions to the application of the method of hypothesis in the last third of *Meno*. These parallels and allusions encourage seeing Socrates’ response as an application of the 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 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 argument we will be examining is long and complex, covering over 25 pages of text. I have no hope of examining the argument in

\[20\] See 472A1-2.
the detail it deserves in the course of single chapter. Consequently, I will be treating 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 will be sketching, 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 Book 5 of the *Republic* 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 Plato is depicting Socrates as employing at this point in the *Republic*, Plato appears to be indicating that consideration of the *Meno* passage may prove helpful (although not necessary).

**The Proof Stage: Identifying the Hypothesis (Republic 471E2-473E)**

At *Republic* 471E2-472B2 Glaucon suddenly (Εξαιφνης) challenges Socrates to answer whether and in what way Kallipolis (as it has been described) is possible (ἀλλὰ τοῦτο αὕτο τῇ δή πειρόμεθα ἡμᾶς ἀὑτοῦς πείθειν, ὡς δυνάτον καὶ ἡ δυνατόν, τὰ δ’ ἄλλα χαίρειν ἐδομεν; 471E2-4). Why Socrates should describe this question as a sudden attack against his *logos* (ὡσπερ καταδρομὴν ἐποίησω ἐπὶ τὸν λόγον μου) is difficult to fathom. Socrates raised the possibility

21See 472A1.
question himself way back at 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 (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 ($\pi\alpha\nu\tau\alpha\chi\varphi\iota\iota\iota$) was happiest, but rather an individual who closely approximates it ($\epsilon\gamma\gamma\upsilon\tau\alpha\tau\alpha\alpha$) was happiest; (472B3-C3). Similarly, as Socrates puts it,

Then don't compel me to show that what we've described in theory ($\tau\omega\,\lambda\omicron\gamma\omega\,$) can come into being ($\tau\omega\,\delta\gamma\gamma\omega\,$) in every respect ($\pi\alpha\nu\tau\alpha\pi\alpha\pi\alpha$) 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 ($\epsilon\gamma\gamma\upsilon\tau\alpha\tau\alpha\alpha$) 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; adapted from Grube/Reeve trans.]

Plato here introduces for the first time the *logos*/ergon distinction which will be reiterated throughout the course of the argument, 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.

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 (473B4-C4) and follows 

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22Recall the earlier concession in the second wave at 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 466D5-8, what he goes on to propose does not appear to be particularly salient to the question. See (Schofield 2006:235) who suggests that the possibility of this law has been “dropped from view”.

23For the recurrence of the *logos*/ergon distinction see n. 41 below.

24(Schofield 2006:239–240) takes this concession passage (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 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.”
this up by maintaining that unless this change takes place Kallipolis will never become possible (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 βασιλεύσοσιν), ‘those now called kings and rulers philosophizing genuinely and adequately’ (οἱ βασιλῆς τε νῦν λεγόμενοι καὶ δυνάσται φιλοσοφήσωσι γνησίως τε καὶ ἰκανῶς), and ‘political power and philosophy coinciding’ (καὶ τοῦτο εἰς ταύτων συμπέσῃ, δύναμις τε πολιτικῆ 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.25

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.26 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.27 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. Unfortunately, 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 the Meno he

25See (Nettleship 1925:186) who writes: “the union of political power and philosophical insight.”
26Although I do not deny that it is introduced as Socrates’ logos requiring defense, as opposed to a genuine question requiring as an answer as in the Meno.
27The Meno passage contains five occurrences of cognates of ἄρχειν in 10 lines, while the Republic passage contains δεῖ at 472E7, ἀνάγκαζε at 473A5, and ἐπιτύπτας at 473B1.
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 biconditional 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 coincides - 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 (472A1-B2) but the alleged impossibility of philosophy and political power coinciding. 28 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 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? 29 The discussion by

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28 See 473E1-4, and, (Sedley 2005:205) and (Scholfield 2006:238), for example. Why Plato fails to take the biconditional in the *Republic* to require explanation and defense is, however, less clear than in the *Meno*.

29 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 effects matters of method.
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 current) city to acquire the constitution of Kallipolis (ἐλθοι εἰς τούτον τὸν τρόπον τῆς πολιτείας πόλις). Make this change in Athens and Athens will become Kallipolis (at least in time). Moreover, the phrases by which he introduces the hypothesis support this suggestion. Socrates proposes establishing current philosophers as rulers (οἱ φιλόσοφοι βασιλεύσωσιν), or converting current rulers into philosophers (οἱ βασιλῆς τε νῦν λεγόμενοι καὶ δυνάσται φιλοσοφήσωσι γνησίως τε καὶ ικανῶς), or even bringing it about that ‘political power and philosophy coincide in the same person’ (καὶ τοῦτο εἰς ταύτὸν συμπέσῃ, δύναμίς τε πολιτικὴ καὶ φιλοσοφία). 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 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.32

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 a purely or strictly a conceptual question. Rather, the latter question consists of two questions, only one of which

30 See, for example, the ‘νῦν’s at 473B5, D1, and D3.
31 I assume that ‘ταύτὸν’ could be translated as ‘same person’, although the parallel with Theaetetus 161D5-E2 and the bulk of the argument that follows indicates that ‘ταύτὸν’ should be translated as ‘same thing’.
32 See pp. 263-264 below.
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 of 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 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 473E-499A as I will now attempt to show.

The Confirmation Stage: The Upward Path (Republic 473E-487A)

Glaucon immediately focuses on the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide (casting doubt perhaps on the advisability of holding on to it\textsuperscript{33}) 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. \textit{[Republic 473E5-474A4; Grube/Reeve trans.]}

It is not immediately clear whether Glaucon is objecting to the biconditional 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 makes it clear that he takes Glaucon to be objecting to the latter. After securing Glaucon’s

\textsuperscript{33}See the discussion concerning \textit{ἐχοτό} at \textit{Phaedo} 101D3 above, pp. 155-158.
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 we need to define for them who the philosophers are (διορίσασθαι πρὸς αὐτοὺς τοὺς φιλοσόφους) that we dare to say must rule. And once that's clear, 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 (ἐνδεικνύμενος ὅτι τοῖς μὲν προσήκει φύσει ἀπεσθαί τε φιλοσοφίας ἔγεμονεδειν ἰ ἐν πόλει), while the rest are naturally fitted to leave philosophy alone and follow their leader. This would be a good time to give that definition (ὁρίζεσθαι).

Come, then, follow me, and we'll see whether or not there's some way to set it out adequately (ικανῶς).

Lead on. [Republic 474B3-C7; Grube/Reeve trans.]

Here Plato makes clear that the argument that follows consists of two parts - first, an attempt to delineate the nature of genuine philosophy (474C8-480A13), and second an argument that philosophy so understood includes the characteristics necessary and sufficient for genuine political power (484A1-487A8). Thus, the argument that follows is aimed at confirming the truth of the hypothesis that 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, is made to take the argument up to a hypothesis concerning the nature of philosophy that is adequate (ἐάν αὐτὸ ἀμὴ γέ πῇ ἰκανῶς ἔξηγησόμεθα,34 (474C8-480A13)), and then, second, argue from that hypothesis back down to the original hypothesis that political power and philosophy coincide (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 downward path of the confirmation stage of Plato’s method of hypothesis, it has, nevertheless, received

34See also Republic 485A5.
considerable attention in the literature, and I will not presume to add to it. 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 (σοφία) and learning (µαθήµατα) at 475B8-C8 by means of a frequently belittled *epagoge* from 474C8 to 475B7. According to this argument, the lover of youths loves all youths (474D1-475A4); the lover of wine loves all wine (475A5-8); the lover of honor loves all honor (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 (475B8-C8). The argument recalls a similar epagoric 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 the a higher hypothesis that virtue is good. The parallel, however, is hardly exact. The epagoric argument in the *Meno* is aimed at deriving the lower hypothesis from the higher hypothesis or perhaps better at arriving at a second higher hypothesis to the effect that knowledge is what makes good things good from which together with the higher hypothesis that virtue is what makes good things good Socrates derives the lower hypothesis that virtue is knowledge. The epagoric argument here in the *Republic* is aimed at arriving at the higher hypothesis that philosophy is the love of all wisdom. The argument from this higher hypothesis to the lower hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide must await the beginning of *Republic* 6.

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35 The literature devoted to the end of *Republic* V is of course enormous. See, for example, (Gosling 1960), (Gosling 1968), (Cross and Woozley 1971), (White 1977), (Fine 1978), (White 1984), (Fine 1990), (Baltzly 1997), (Smith 2000), (Wrenn 2000), and (Hestir 2000).

36 See n. 38 below 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.
Nevertheless, the epagogic structure of 474C8 to 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 475B8-C8 to the effect that philosophy is the desire for all wisdom and learning, Glaucon appears to again focus on to this higher hypothesis, wondering that ‘many strange people will be philosophers’ (Πολλοὶ ἄρα καὶ ἄτοποι ἔσονται σοι τοιοῦτοι; 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 (476A1-D6 and 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 derived. It is to this argument that I now turn.

Socrates opens Book 6 of the *Republic* 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 (φιλόσοφοι μὲν οἱ τὸ ἄεὶ κατὰ ταὐτὰ ὑστάτως ἔχοντος δυνάμειν ἐφάπτεσθαι; 484B2-5). Philosophy, that is, is knowledge of Forms.³⁷ Socrates next asks whether philosophy so understood is the same as

³⁷(Burnyeat 2000:36 n. 51) 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 476A-476D and 476D-480A. I forego 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 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 I maintain that these are difficulties with Plato’s argument, not with my account of the structure of the argument.
political power (ποτέρους δή δει πόλεως ἡγεμόνας εἶναι; 484B6-7), i.e., whether the higher hypothesis entails the original hypothesis. 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 484C8-D2; Grube/Reeve trans.]

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 (τοῦς ἐγνοκότας μὲν ἐκαστὸν τὸ δὲν) and who are not inferior to the others, either in experience (ἐμπειρία) or in any other part of virtue (ἐν ἄλλῳ μηδενί μέρει ἄρετής)? ... Then shouldn't we explain how it is possible for someone to have both these sorts of qualities (τίνα τρόπον οἰοί τ´ ἔσονται οἱ αὐτοὶ κάκεινα καὶ ταῦτα ἔχειν)? [Republic 484D4-485A2; Grube/Reeve trans.]

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 that philosophy is sufficient for virtue, he will have confirmed the original hypothesis (that political power and philosophy coincide) by deducing it from something adequate. And that is precisely what he goes on to do. After rehearsing yet again the nature of philosophy (485A-C), Socrates goes on to argue that philosophy so understood entails (a) love of truth (485C3-D5), (b) moderation (485D6-E6), (c) liberality (486A1-7), (d) courage (486A8-B5), (e) justice, reliability, gentleness (486B6-13), (f) fast-learning (486C1-6), (g) memory (486C7-D3), and (h) measure and calm (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 (τῇ μελλούσῃ τὸδ ὄντος ἰκανός τε καὶ τελέως ψυχή μεταλήψεσθαι)? They're all completely necessary.

38 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 473C-E 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.
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 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 486E1-487A8; Grube/Reeve trans.]

At this point, then, Socrates has reduced the question whether Kallipolis is possible to the question whether philosophy and political power coincide and confirmed a positive answer to the latter question by deducing 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 the Meno from 87B2-89C4 which reduced the question whether virtue is teachable to the question whether virtue is knowledge and then went on to deduce 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 necessary and sufficient for virtue. Clearly, this is the topic on the table here in the Republic as well. The argument from 485A-486D amounts to an argument for the thesis that knowledge of a certain sort (knowledge of the Forms or knowledge of the philosopher) is

39We can put the structure of this argument as follows:

[1] Philosophy ⇔ sophia (5.474B-480A)
[2] Political power (PP) ⇔ sophia and virtue (6.484D-485A)
[3] PP ⇒ sophia (from [2])
[4] Sophia ⇒ philosophy (from [1])
[6] Philosophy ⇒ sophia (from [1])
[9] Sophia and virtue ⇒ PP (from [2])
sufficient for virtue. But the virtue or virtues necessary for knowledge in this passage look different than the virtues discussed at the end Republic 4. They appear more propaideutic, incomplete, or imperfect. The discussion at the end of Republic 4 suggests that complete justice can only be attained by an individual who has the knowledge of the wisdom loving part (of the city and the soul), for example. The knowledge discussed here in Republic 6, the knowledge of the philosopher, then, turns out to be both necessary and sufficient for genuine virtue. But this is precisely the thesis defended at Meno 87B2-89C4. Rather than pursuing this further it is enough for our current purposes to note the similarity of subject matter between these two arguments. 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 487A-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 (ἀπειρίαν τοῦ ἐρωτάν καὶ ἀποκρίνεσθαι), they're led astray a little bit by the argument (ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου) 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 (λογω, μεν) he's unable to oppose you as you ask each of your questions (οὐκ ἔχειν καθ' ἐκαστὸν τὸ ἐρωτῶμεν εναντιοῦσθαι), yet he sees (ἐργῳ δὲ) 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 (παμπόνηρους), while those who seem completely decent are rendered useless (ἀξιός τους) to the city because of the way of life you recommend. [Republic 487B1-D5; Grube/Reeve trans.]

Notice that 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

40 For the restriction of genuine or complete virtue to the philosopher and a brief introductory discussion of the issues surrounding genuine or complete virtue and demotic or imperfect virtue see (Bobonich 2002:42–45). See also (Irwin 1995) and (Kamtekar 1998). See also Meno 88b1-8 and (Scott 2006:146–153).
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
Glaucos’s worry at 475D-E. 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 487C5-6 which is reiterated throughout the
remainder of the passage. 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 (“they seem to me to
speak the truth” (εμοιγε φαίνονται τάληθη λέγειν); Republic 487D9 Grube/Reeve trans.), and

41 See 490D1-2, 492D5, 494E3-5, 498E4, and 501E3-4.
reiterates this concession at least two more times (489B3 and 489D6). 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 facts on the ground disagree with the consequences of the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide.

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? 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 (487D-489D), second an account of why most philosophers are vicious (489D-496E), and third an account of how it nevertheless remains possible even given these facts for philosophy and political power to coincide (497A-502C).

Let us first look briefly at the account of why the decent philosophers are useless. Socrates is made to appeal to the image (της εικόνας) 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-

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42 See also *Republic* 495C8 and (Nettleship 1925:203). While Socrates does appear to explicitly concede that philosophers are in truth useless and vicious (the claim at 489B3 only concedes their uselessness, but 487D10, 489D6, and 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.
owner (ναύκληρον) standing for the Demos.43 The ship-owner who is described as bigger and stronger than everyone on board, but hard of hearing, short-sighted, and ignorant of sea-faring, 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 techne of steering, nor being able to point to anyone who taught them the techne 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-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, i.e the seasons, the sky, the stars, the winds and everything appropriate for her techne (πάντων τῶν τῆς τέχνης προσηκόντων). Finally, they call the true captain a star-gazer, a babbler, and useless.

It is difficult as we read the description of the sailors on the ship not to think of Anytus, who was clever at persuading the Demos that he should rule, despite lacking the techne to rule, not being able to point to anyone who taught the techne (other, I suppose, than any Athenian gentleman) nor anytime at which he learned it, and who was not only ready to, but did, kill someone who maintained that the techne was teachable - Socrates. Having described the ship in terms reminiscent of Anytus, Socrates is made to recount how the image of the ship explains the uselessness of philosophers. It is true he repeats (489B3) that the philosophers are useless in present 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

43See (Adam 1902:9), (Netleship 1925:204), and (Keyt 2006). Keyt’s essay devoted to Plato’s so-called ship-of-state analogy 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 analogy along side the more famous analogies 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 analogy with which to agree, although my current concerns will lead me to focus on different aspects of the analogy than he does.
short-sighted is blinded by the demagogues to the utility of philosophy. It is not the nature (φύσις) of a genuine captain to beg the sailors to rule, nor of the genuine ruler, or philosopher, to beg the Demos to rule. Consequently, it is not easy for the genuine philosopher to rule in the present climate. 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 (τὴν αἰτίαν διεξελθόθαμεν) the decent ones are useless? [Republic 489D8-9; Grube/Reeve trans.]

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 the current climate 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 cause (τὴν αἰτίαν) of this truth. It is not a consequence of the nature of philosophy that philosophers in current cities are useless. Rather it is a consequence of 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 coincides is compatible with philosophers being useless in current cities because the nature of philosophy is not the cause (η αἰτία) of philosophers’ uselessness.

A similar point appears to be the theme of the next portion of the argument - as Socrates is made to put 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 (αιτία) for this either? [Republic 489D11-E2; Grube/Reeve trans.]

Again, Socrates will concede 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, but denies that this shows that the consequences of the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide disagree with each other because philosophy is not the cause of philosophers’

44See also τὸ δὲ ἀληθὲς πέφυκεν at 489B8.
45See n. 42 above.
viciousness. The argument begins with a recapitulation of the nature of philosophy or the philosophic nature (489E4-490D7), followed by a description of the argument to follow.

We must now look at the ways in which this nature (τῆς φύσεως) 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 in turn at the natures (φύσεις) 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 490E1-491A6; Grube/Reeve trans.]

Socrates is here made to distinguish two parts of the subsequent argument - a part devoted to how genuine philosophy or the philosophic nature is corrupted (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 (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 485C-D are rare and when combined with a good education lead to complete virtue but when combined with a bad education (κακὴ παιδαγωγίας) will lead to vice “unless some god happens to come to its rescue” (491A7-492A5). Socrates next explains how traditional education corrupts those with the necessary qualities for philosophy (492A5-493A5) and then how sophistic education corrupts those with this nature as well (493A6-494A9). This is followed with an account of the corruptive influence of family, friends and other flatters (494A10-495A3). The argument concludes

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46Forms of φύσεως 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.

47See also θεοῦ μορφαν at 493A1-2. Indeed, the entire passage from 492E2-493A3 evidently alludes to Meno 99B5-100B4, as (Adam 1902:22) recognizes. Notice that divine dispensation plays two roles in the current passage. As in the Meno, it explains how genuine philosophers can arise in the current climate. But it also explains how genuine philosophers can become rulers in the current climate; (see 499B1-C6).

48Alcibiades 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 1902:25), (Nettleship 1925:207), (Ferrari and 2000:198 n. 12), (Pappas 1995:119), and (Scott 2006:167), pace (Annas 1981:186–187)). But it may be just as likely that Plato has Meno in mind, especially given the description of the one corrupted as ‘rich, wellborn, good-looking, and tall’ (πλουσίος τε καὶ γενναῖος, καὶ ἕπι εὐεξίδες καὶ μέγας; 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?” (.ItemsSource_0 τε πλούσιος ἐίπε καὶ γενναῖος).
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 as wealth and other similar advantages—are themselves in a way the cause of his falling away from the philosophic way of life (αἳτια τρόπον τινα τού ἐκπεσεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ἐπιτηδεύματος;)? [Republic 495A4-8; Grube/Reeve trans.]

Thus, like the downward path of the confirmation stage in the Meno, Socrates goes through the traditional modes of education - one’s elder’s and the sophists⁴⁹ - and finds them wanting. In fact, here in the Republic they are not simply unsuccessful, they are positively harmful.⁵⁰ 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 cause of the viciousness of philosophers. The nature of philosophy, itself, is not the cause.

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 495C4-6; Grube/Reeve trans.]

for their thoughts and beliefs (διανοήματα τε καὶ δοξας)

are properly called sophisms, things that have nothing genuine about them or worthy of being called true wisdom (φρονήσεως ... ἁληθινῆς). [Republic 496A7-9; Grube/Reeve trans.]

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 natural abilities necessary for genuine philosophy.

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⁴⁹ 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.

⁵⁰ 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 & Republic 492A6-493A5) and then go on to find fault with sophistry (Meno 95B9-C8 & Republic 493A6-494A9).
Again, the cause 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 (496A11-E3).

Having established that the corrupting influence of traditional education causes the viciousness of most philosophers, that the blindness of the Demos and/or the demagogues causes the uselessness of the rest, and that the nature of philosophy causes neither, it remains for Socrates to show that in the current climate it is possible for philosophy and political power to coincide. First (497A3-498C4), Socrates is made to explain the changes in traditional education that would mitigate its corrupting influence. The key change is reserving genuine philosophical study to old age. Socrates is made to elaborate 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. 518B-540C).\textsuperscript{51} 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 (ἐκ τινὸς θείας ἐπιπνοίας) for the coincidence of philosophy and political power (499A11-C6). While such a coincidence is rare indeed, Socrates maintains “it cannot be reasonably maintained, ..., that either of these things is impossible” (499C1-3; Grube/Reeve trans.). 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 471C to a close as follows: “Then we can now conclude that this

\textsuperscript{51}See chapter 9 below.
legislation is best, if only it is possible, and that, while it is hard for it to come about, it is not impossible” (502C5-7; Grube/Reeve trans.).

Comparison with the *Meno*

Given this reading of *Republic* 471C-502C, the parallels between it and *Meno* 87B-100B should be evident. Both passages begin with Socrates being compelled to pursue a question apparently against his will. In both passages Socrates is made to accede to this compulsion after extracting a concession from his interlocutor. Both passages make meaningful use of ‘divine dispensation’. Anytus may be 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 identical 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 is made to reduce the question whether virtue is teachable to the question whether virtue is a kind of knowledge, and in the *Republic* Socrates is made to reduce 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 derived and [b] shows how the answer to the original question can be derived from the hypothesis. Indeed, both dialogues focus on the first of these procedures, taking the second procedure to be relatively straightforward.

52 (Scott 2006, 218 n 5): “*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.”
Again, in both passages, Socrates is next made to turn 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 deriving it from the higher hypothesis that virtue is good and in the *Republic* Socrates confirms the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide by deriving 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 (τω λόγω), both dialogues turn to the confirmation process concerned with the *phainomena* (τω ἔργω) - the downward path. In the *Meno* the hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge is discredited on the grounds that its consequence 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 consequence that philosophers are useful and virtuous disagreed with the fact that philosophers are useless or vicious. But Socrates is made to defend his hypothesis in the *Republic* against this apparent disagreement on the grounds that philosophy is not the cause (αἰτία) 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 should encourage a reading of the *Republic*’s Kallipolis argument as an application of the method of hypothesis. It is true that the argument is not presented as application of *de novo* discovery, of learning from mutual ignorance, or of inquiry. We simply 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 identity 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 suggests that before one takes the apparent disagreement among the consequences 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 consequences of the hypothesis, i.e., those consequences that are caused by (αιτία) 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 (αιτία) for the fact that there are no teachers of virtue in Athens or anywhere else in 5th century Greece. One suspects that had Socrates been made to do this in the *Meno* that something like the argument that we find at *Republic* 487D-496E could have been uncovered to the effect that they are not. Rather the lack of teachers of virtue is to be blamed on traditional education or some other corrupting influence of the current climate. Consequently, the consequences of the hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge do not in fact disagree with each other.

**Conclusion**

However we ultimately come to understand the conclusion of the *Meno* in light 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/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 consequences 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 consequences 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.

If, then, something like this understanding of 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?

Unfortunately, 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. Rather, it is the similarity in
structure that permits 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 consequences of the hypothesis which helped with the original question to see whether they agreed or disagreed with each other. The notion of consequence 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) consequences 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) consequences 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 consequences is roughly empirical. The consequences 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 consequence 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 487b1-d5 is too make any sense at all) does not appear to be the same kind of consequence as the (apparent?) consequence 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 (*aírēa*) for the latter consequence, 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 consequence of the hypothesis and so the genuine consequences do not disagree with each other. Alternatively, we can distinguish between two kinds of consequences (perhaps, natural or Formal or metaphysical consequences vs. artificial or accidental or contingent consequences)\(^53\) and deny that univocal consequences 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.\(^54\) 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.

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

\(^{53}\) 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), (White 1984), and (Pappas 1995:55). Of course, one can understand Plato to be distinguishing between two kinds of consequences here in book 6, without thinking that he is doing so at the beginning of book 2.

\(^{54}\) 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.
at the edges, but it is difficult to doubt that the context of the Kallipolis argument is one of defense. As we noted above, Plato begins the Kallipolis argument by having Socrates describe Glaucion’s request to persuade ourselves that and how Kallipolis is possible (ἡμᾶς αὐτούς πείθειν, ὡς δύνατόν καὶ ἡ δύνατόν) as a sudden attack on his logos (Εξαιρήσης γε σύ ... ὡσπερ καταδρομὴν ἐποίησω ἐπὶ τὸν λόγον μου). Moreover, the entire passage from 471C-502C reads more like a defense of view Socrates is already committed to than a genuine inquiry concerning what might be the case concerning Kallipolis’ possibility. Indeed, Socrates is made to introduce the next portion of the text by describing the Kallipolis argument as a difficulty having been concluded (Οὐκοῦν ἐπειδὴ τοῦτο μόνος τέλος ἐσχέν), 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 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 has been sufficiently established to allow it to confirm the understanding we have been developing in 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 is depicted at the beginning of book 5 as hesitating to begin the defense of 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; G/R trans.]
These remaining issues lead ultimately to a discussion of the greatest *mathēma* (μεγίστον μάθημα) which occupies Plato attention in the rest of books 6 and 7 and which introduces the next chapter. But for now it is important to notice that despite the detail and thoroughness of the Kallipolis argument by 502C, it nevertheless remains in some way incomplete.

As a result, if we are right to read the Kallipolis argument here in the *Republic* as a successful application of the method of hypothesis, we should notice that like 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*, 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 up the hypothesis that philosophy is love/possession of the Forms\(^{55}\) and confirming the hypothesis by testing the consequences of the hypothesis 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 learning in the next chapter.

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\(^{55}\)See, for example, ἴκανος at 474c5, 477a2, and 485a5.
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*Phronesis*, **21**, 130-134.