

Knowledge, Virtue, and Method in Republic 471c-502c

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The last third of Plato's *Meno* has been an enigma for readers of Plato for centuries. After leading Meno to the recognition of his own ignorance (of the nature of virtue) and persuading Meno that rectifying that ignorance is possible (by offering the theory of recollection and the conversation with the slave in response to Meno's paradox), Socrates sets about determining whether virtue is teachable. He first offers an argument to the effect that it is teachable on the grounds that virtue is knowledge and knowledge is teachable. Next he offers an argument that it is not teachable, on the grounds that what is teachable has teachers and there are no teachers of virtue. He concludes by indicating that the first argument contains a flaw and maintaining that virtue is true belief acquired by divine dispensation.

What readers have found so puzzling about this argument in the last third of the *Meno*¹ is not so much that Socrates appears here to be arguing, on the one hand, for *p* and then, on the other, for *not-p*.² Rather, what is puzzling is that Socrates appears to plump for the second argument. This is puzzling for at least three reasons. First, in plumping for the second argument, Socrates appears to be abandoning his intellectualism – the view minimally that knowledge (of the good) is necessary and sufficient for virtue – maintained repeatedly in the other Socratic dialogues.³ True belief according to Socrates in the last third of *Meno* appears sufficient for virtue.⁴ Second, Socrates had just asked to employ an alleged mathematical method in order to seek an answer to Meno's question whether virtue is teachable – the so-called method of hypothesis. Having received Meno's agreement to do so, he employs that method in the first argument to the effect that virtue is knowledge and so teachable. But then he appears to abandon the method he had just been given permission to employ in the second argument to the effect that virtue is not teachable and so not knowledge. Third, this last argument has appeared to many to be subject to a variety of fallacies, perhaps the most crude of which is an equivocation between teachable and taught.⁵

These difficulties with the second argument have led a variety of commentators to maintain that Socrates does not take this second argument seriously.⁶ But I have argued elsewhere that we have good reasons to doubt that Socrates abandons his method of hypothesis in this second argument. Rather this second argument conforms to one of two processes described at *Phaedo* 101d1-e3 for confirming a hypothesis whose consequences answer the question at hand – roughly the process of determining whether the consequences of the hypothesis are consistent with the facts on the ground and other background beliefs or information concerning the topic under discussion – the argument *from* the hypothesis.⁷ If this is right, then we cannot so easily dismiss the second argument in the *Meno*. It may have an un-Socratic conclusion and it may even be subject to a variety of fallacies, but it is presented as part of a general philosophical method that Socrates is made to recommend.⁸ What then are to make of this argument in the *Meno*?

I want to throw light on this question by turning to a rather surprising text – *Republic* V-VI from the beginning of the so-called third wave at 471c through the introduction of the Form of the Good at 502c.⁹ I will maintain that the content and structure of the argument during this stretch of the *Republic* parallels the last third of the *Meno*. The similarities highlight a difference and the difference suggests an explanation of what is unsatisfactory in the *Meno*. My focus in this essay, however, is not to claim that the passage in the *Republic* determines or even informs how we should understand Plato's views about virtue, knowledge, or its teachability in the *Meno*. For the purposes of this essay, I leave these issues wholly to one side. Rather the primary focus of this essay is the light the *Republic* passage throws on the philosophical method recommended and pursued in the *Meno*. What is unsatisfactory, if anything, about the application of the method pursued in the *Meno*?

I will argue that in response to the question whether Kallipolis is possible Socrates employs the method of hypothesis recommended in the *Meno*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Republic*.¹⁰ 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 (*Rep.* 473b-e). Next Socrates sets out to confirm the truth of the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide. First, he provides an argument *to* the hypothesis – going up to a higher hypothesis that philosophers are knowers of Forms and then arguing that so understood philosophers have the necessary and sufficient characteristics for ruling (*Rep.* 474c-487a). Next, he provides an argument *from* the hypothesis – testing the claim that philosophy (so understood) and political power coincide against experience, *endoxa*, and other ordinary beliefs (*Rep.* 487b-502c).¹¹ At this point, however, the parallel between this passage and the last third of the *Meno* breaks down. In the *Meno*, the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge is discredited by the argument *from* the hypothesis. As Socrates puts it, a consequence of the hypothesis is that there are teachers of virtue, but in fact there

are no such things. In the *Republic*, however, the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide is further confirmed by the argument *from* the hypothesis. Seeing how the hypothesis in the *Republic* escapes refutation in the argument *from* the hypothesis will illuminate the precise nature of this procedure and clarify its roughly *a priori* character. 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.¹²

The essay falls into four parts: First, I will briefly describe the method of hypothesis as it is articulated in the *Meno*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Republic* (sect. I). Next, I will equally briefly outline the structure of the method as it is practiced in the last third of *Meno* (sect. II). In these two sections I will be rehearsing and elaborating on previous work.¹³ Third, I will present in some detail the argument structure of *Republic* 471c-502c. I will highlight both various allusions to the last third of the *Meno*, and more importantly its structural parallel with the method practiced in this portion of the *Meno*. I will also underscore the salient structural difference from the last third of the *Meno* (sect. III). Finally, I will speculate on the significance of this difference between these arguments of the *Republic* and the *Meno* as it pertains to Plato's recommended method of philosophical inquiry (sect. IV). I will leave it to others and another time to speculate about the significance of this difference as it pertains to Plato's views about virtue, knowledge and its teachability in the two dialogues.

I. The Method of Hypothesis

As I mentioned above, after Socrates has persuaded Meno of his ignorance (by means of the *elenchos* in the first third of the dialogue) and the possibility of rectifying that ignorance despite their mutual ignorance (by means of the theory of recollection and an example of a geometrical conversation with a slave in the middle third of the dialogue), he sets out somewhat reluctantly to determine whether virtue is teachable (in the final third of the dialogue). His reluctance stems in part from his preference to pursue first what virtue is, but he accedes to Meno's insistence to return to the question with which the dialogue began on the condition that Meno permit him to employ a method borrowed from the mathematicians.¹⁴ Here for the first time in the dialogues Socrates refers rather explicitly to what has come to be known in the literature as the method of hypothesis.¹⁵ In light of the geometrical example Socrates uses to introduce the method—the details of which are obscure, controversial, and do not need to be pursued here—the method appears to consist of the following two stages. The first stage is to identify a hypothesis such that its truth is necessary and sufficient for a determinate answer to the question under consideration. It consists in identifying a hypothesis from which the answer to the question under consideration can be derived.¹⁶ In the case of the geometrical example, the hypothesis appears to be that the area is “such that when one has applied it as a rectangle to the given straight line in the circle it is deficient by a

figure similar to the very figure which is applied,” while in the case of the question whether virtue is teachable the hypothesis is that virtue is a kind of knowledge (cf. *Meno* 87b5-c7). The second stage is to confirm the hypothesis or determine whether the hypothesis is true. One seeks to determine whether the given area is “such that when one has applied it as a rectangle to the given straight line in the circle it is deficient by a figure similar to the very figure which is applied” or whether virtue is a kind of knowledge.¹⁷

Socrates does not tell us much in the *Meno* about how these stages are to be performed.¹⁸ In the *Phaedo*, however, he does provide some substance to the confirmation stage.¹⁹ In reply to Cebes’ objection to Socrates’ third attempt to prove the immortality of the soul, Socrates explains that he must engage in “a thorough investigation of the cause of generation and destruction” (*Phd.* 95e9-96a1; Grube transl.). After describing some failed methods for pursuing this investigation, Socrates returns to the method of hypothesis, saying:

I started in this manner: taking as my hypothesis (*hupothemenos*) in each case the theory that seemed to me the most compelling (*errômenestaton*), I would consider as true, about cause and everything else, whatever agreed (*sumphônein*) with this, and as untrue whatever did not so agree. (*Phd.* 100a3-100a7; Grube transl.)

Here Socrates describes the first stage mentioned in the *Meno* – the reduction stage or the stage of identifying a hypothesis from which an answer to the question under consideration can be derived. A bit later he describes the confirmation stage or the stage of determining whether the hypothesis itself is true as follows:

You would ignore [an individual who questioned the hypothesis] and would not answer until you had examined whether the consequences that follow from it agree with one another or contradict one another. And when you must give an account of your hypothesis itself you will proceed in the same way: you will assume another hypothesis, the one which seems to you best of the higher ones until you come to something acceptable, but you will not jumble the two as the debaters do by discussing the hypothesis and its consequences at the same time, if you wish to discover any truth. (*Phd.* 101d3-e3; Grube transl.)

Here Socrates goes beyond anything described in the *Meno* in explaining that the confirmation stage consists of two procedures – which I have called elsewhere “an argument *to* the hypothesis” and “an argument *from* the hypothesis.” The argument *to* the hypothesis consists of “assuming another hypothesis, the one which seems to you best of the higher ones until you come to something acceptable” from which the original hypothesis being confirmed can be deduced. The argument *from* the

hypothesis consists of “examining whether the consequences that follow from it agree with one another or contradict one another.” Nevertheless, despite offering more substance, Socrates leaves much unexplained and full of puzzles.

Finally, in the *Republic* Socrates is made to describe the greatest study – the Form of the Good (*Rep.* 505a2). Socrates calls the method by which one seeks to acquire this knowledge – the longer road – dialectic (*dialektikên*) (*Rep.* 532b4), but it is simply an elaboration of the method we have found in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*. In distinguishing dialectic from *dianoetic* – the method practiced by the mathematicians that corresponds to the mental state of *dianoia* in the third section of the Divided Line – Socrates explains that both dialectic and *dianoetic* employ hypotheses. The difference is that *dianoetic* “uses as images the things that were imitated before” and “proceeds not to a first principle but to a conclusion,” while dialectic proceeds “without the images used in the previous subsection, using Forms themselves and making its investigation through them” and “makes its way to a first principle that is not a hypothesis.” In light of what we have seen in the *Meno* and *Phaedo* we might explain this difference as follows: both *dianoetic* and dialectic seek to answer the question at issue by identifying a hypothesis from which an answer to the question can be derived. *Dianoetic*, however, limits itself to this first- reduction-stage of the hypothetical method – identifying the hypothesis and showing how the hypothesis entails the answer to the question, choosing the hypothesis that is generally consistent with sense experience and common sense.²⁰ Dialectic, on the other hand does not limit itself to the first stage of identifying and drawing out the consequences of the hypothesis, but continues with an extensive confirmation stage – both employing the procedure of an argument *to* the hypothesis all the way up to the “unhypothetical first principle of everything” and the procedure of an argument *from* the hypothesis, but this time in some way not “employing” sense experience and common sense but making its way using Forms alone. At 534b8-c3 Socrates elucidates this last procedure a bit further saying that one must be able to (1) define the Form of the Good in a *logos* distinguishing it from everything else, (2) go through all the examinations as if in a battle, (3) examine not according to *doxa*, but according to being, and (4) surviving all of this with the *logos* undefeated.²¹

Even now much remains unexplained and in need of further elucidation.²² But we cannot, I think, escape the fact that a rough outline of a method has emerged in these three dialogues. The method by which one seeks knowledge of the answer to a given question – whether virtue can be taught, whether the soul is immortal, or whether justice is a “good we like for its own sake and also for the sake of what comes from it” [357c1-2; Grube/Reeve trans.] consists of two stages.

- (1) First (a) one seeks to identify a hypothesis from which an answer to the question can be derived and (b) one shows how the truth of the hypothesis entails the answer to the question.

- (2) Next one seeks to confirm the truth of the hypothesis, (a) first by identifying a further hypothesis from which the original hypothesis can be derived and showing how this derivation goes until one reaches the “unhypothetical first principle of everything,” and then (b) by testing the hypothesis in some kind of *a priori* way.²³

We will see in the next sections that the structures of both the argument aimed at determining whether virtue is teachable in the *Meno* and the argument aimed at determining whether Kallipolis is possible in the *Republic* display this rough structure. Consequently both arguments amount to applications of the method of hypothesis and both can supplement our understanding of the method so far described.

II. The Structure of Meno 87b2-96d4

At *Meno* 87b2-c9, Socrates identifies the hypothesis from which an answer to the question whether virtue is teachable can be derived. Socrates maintains that virtue is teachable just in case virtue is a kind of knowledge.²⁴ The derivation of the answer from the hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge is straightforward. One need only supply the claim that all and only knowledge is teachable (*Meno* 87c2-6). Consequently, if the hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge is true, then the answer to the question at issue is that virtue is teachable. If the hypothesis is false, then the answer is that virtue is not teachable. The bulk of this portion of the *Meno* is concerned with confirming the truth of the hypothesis—the second stage of the method of hypothesis.

At *Meno* 87d2-89c4 Socrates proceeds to the aspect of this stage that I have labeled “the argument *to* the hypothesis.” Socrates begins by hypothesizing that virtue is good (*Meno* 87d2-3), and then providing an argument to the effect that nothing else is good other than knowledge (*Meno* 87c1-89a2). He concludes from this that virtue is a kind of knowledge (*Meno* 89a3-4). Here we have a fairly explicit example of the aspect of the confirmation process which in the *Phaedo* is described as “assuming another hypothesis [i.e. that virtue is good], the one which seems to you best of the higher ones until you come to something acceptable [which the *Meno* describes as ‘remaining for us’]” from which the original hypothesis [i.e. that virtue is a kind of knowledge] being confirmed can be deduced. The truth of the hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge has been confirmed by means of an argument *to* the hypothesis. But our review of the method of hypothesis in the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic* indicates that such confirmation is insufficient.²⁵ The hypothesis must also be confirmed by means of an argument *from* the hypothesis. And it is to this portion of the confirmation stage that Socrates turns at *Meno* 89c.

When Meno agrees at 89c2-4 that virtuous individuals become virtuous not by nature, but by learning or being taught given the truth of the hypothesis that virtue

is knowledge, Socrates expresses some misgivings, which he explains as follows: “I am not saying that it is wrong to say that virtue is teachable if it is knowledge, but look whether it is reasonable of me to doubt whether it is knowledge” (*Meno* 89d3-6; Grube transl.). Socrates here expresses misgivings not about the first stage of the method of hypothesis as it has been performed in the *Meno*. The claim that virtue is teachable just in case it is a kind of knowledge remains undisturbed. What Socrates expresses concern about is whether the claim that virtue is a kind of knowledge has been adequately confirmed by the argument to the hypothesis. He is concerned that the confirmation of this hypothesis by the argument *from* the hypothesis will have different results. He is concerned, that is, that the hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge is incompatible with other background beliefs. In particular, Socrates maintains the general principle that something is teachable just in case it has teachers and learners (*Meno* 89d6-e3), and then expresses his inability to discover teachers of virtue (*Meno* 89e6-9). His inability to discover such teachers is reinforced by a series of arguments first with Anytus and then with Meno undermining the authenticity of the claim of traditional and alleged teachers of virtue—the Sophists, the *kaloi kagathoi*, and the poets. What is striking about this portion of the *Meno* is what we might roughly describe as its empirical nature. One might say that what Socrates argues in this portion of the *Meno* is that the claim that virtue is a kind of knowledge, and so teachable, is incompatible with the facts on the ground.²⁶

The empirical nature of the background beliefs that are found to be incompatible with the hypothesis is brought out in a number of ways throughout this passage. First, there is the puzzling passage at *Meno* 92b-c in which Anytus rejects the claim of the Sophists as teachers of virtue, explicitly disavowing any experience of them, but nevertheless claiming to know what sort the Sophists are. Consequently, Socrates’ rejection of the Sophists claim to being teachers of virtue is not affirmed until near the end of the “downward path” when Meno—whose experience with Gorgias is emphasized at the beginning of the dialogue—praises Gorgias for denying that he and other Sophists are teachers of virtue.²⁷ Second, the argument against Anytus’ claim that the *kaloi kagathoi* are teachers of virtue rests on four specific counter-examples—Themistocles, Aristides, Pericles, and Thucydides, perhaps together with the probabilistic assumption that if anyone of the *kaloi kagathoi* could teach virtue it would be one of these four (see, for example, *Meno* 94c7-e2).²⁸ Third, the poets’ claim to being teachers of virtue is rejected by a single counter-example—the self-contradictory claims of Theognis—without even a corresponding probabilistic assumption. Finally, there is the straightforward contingent nature of the argument structure: If it is possible to teach virtue, then virtue is actually being taught; but virtue is not actually being taught; so, it is not possible to teach virtue, and so virtue is not knowledge.²⁹

Having confirmed the hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge by an argument *to* the hypothesis at *Meno* 87c-89c, and then discrediting it at 89c-96d,

Socrates is forced to attempt to resolve this tension. He does so by suggesting that the sub-argument in the argument *to* the hypothesis to the effect that nothing else is good other than knowledge is flawed. True belief, as well as knowledge, Socrates professes, is good. Consequently, virtue need not be a kind of knowledge as the argument *to* the hypothesis appeared to confirm. Rather, virtue may be true belief as well and so something that does not come to those who have it by teaching (or by nature) as the argument *from* the hypothesis confirmed, but by divine dispensation (*theia(i) moira(i)*). Of course, how we are to understand this resolution of the conflicting results of the method of hypothesis is a matter of considerable scholarly controversy – a controversy which we have no hope of resolving in this essay, but one which I maintain is illuminated by the argument of *Republic* 471c-502c.

III. The Structure of Republic 471c-502c

A. *The First Stage: Identifying the Hypothesis (Republic 471c-473e)*

At *Republic* 471c-472b Glaucon suddenly³⁰ challenges Socrates to answer whether Kallipolis (as it has been described) is possible (*Rep.* 471c3-5). Before agreeing to take up this question Socrates first extracts a concession from Glaucon to the effect that he only be required to show how a city that closely approximates Kallipolis could come to be (*Rep.* 472c6-473b3).³¹ Having secured Glaucon's agreement, Socrates immediately proposes to reduce 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 (*Rep.* 473b4-c4) and follows this up by maintaining that unless this change takes place Kallipolis will never become possible (*Rep.* 473c11-e5). 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” (*Rep.* 473c11), “those now called kings and rulers philosophizing genuinely and adequately” (*Rep.* 473d1-2), and “political power and philosophy coinciding” (*Rep.* 473d2-3). For the remainder of this essay 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.³²

Notice that this introduction of the question whether Kallipolis is possible nicely parallels the introduction of the question whether virtue can be taught in the last third of the *Meno*. 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 abundant in both passages. 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 more obscure,³³ but it is roughly that Socrates not be forced to show that Kallipolis should become possible in fact (*tô(i) ergô(i)*) in every detail in which it has been presented in theory (*tô(i) logô(i)*). 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 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, just as in the *Meno* two theses compete for the title “hypothesis” – the thesis that virtue is knowledge and the biconditional that virtue is knowledge just in case virtue is teachable, so here in the *Republic* we have two theses that could plausibly be identified as hypotheses – the thesis that political power and philosophy coincide and the biconditional that political power and philosophy coincide just in case Kallipolis is possible. And again, just as in the *Meno* the former thesis receives the bulk of the attention in the remainder of the *Meno*, so here in the *Republic* the former thesis – that political power and philosophy coincides – receives the bulk of Plato’s attention in what follows.³⁴

B. The Second Stage, Part 1: The Argument to the Hypothesis (Republic 473e-487a)

Let us then turn next to Plato’s consideration of the thesis that political power and philosophy coincide. Glaucon immediately focuses on the hypothesis³⁵ 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. (*Rep.* 473e6-474a4; Grube/Reeve transl.)

It is not immediately clear whether Glaucon is objecting to the biconditional or the thesis 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 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 (*diorisasthai pros autous tous philosophous*) 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, while the rest are naturally fitted to leave philosophy alone and follow their leader.

This would be a good time to give that definition (*horizesthai*).

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

Lead on. (*Rep.* 474b3-c7; Grube/Reeve transl.)

Here Plato makes clear that the argument that follows consists of two parts—first, an attempt to delineate the nature of genuine philosophy (*Rep.* 474c8-480a13), and second an argument that philosophy so understood includes the characteristics necessary and sufficient for genuine political power (*Rep.* 484a1-487a8). Thus, the argument that follows is aimed at confirming the truth of the hypothesis that political power and philosophy coincide. Moreover, the argument that follows conforms to the first of the two confirmation procedures we discussed above—“the argument to the hypothesis.” Socrates is made to take the argument up to a hypothesis concerning the nature of philosophy that is adequate³⁶ (see *Phd.* 101e1) and then argue from that hypothesis back down to the original hypothesis that political power and philosophy coincide.

The portion of the argument concerned with coming to something adequate concerning the nature of philosophy has received considerable attention in the literature and I will not presume to add to it.³⁷ Rather, I will turn to the second portion of the argument conforming to the first procedure for confirming the hypothesis that political power and philosophy are one at *Republic* 484a1-487a8—a passage that has generated considerably less attention.

Socrates opens Book VI of the *Republic* by recapitulating the nature of philosophy “adequately” achieved in light of the arguments of the closing pages of Book V. Philosophy, Socrates maintains, is the ability to grasp what is always the same in all respects (*Rep.* 484b3-5). Philosophy, that is, is knowledge of Forms. Socrates next asks whether philosophy so understood is the same as political power (*Rep.* 484b6-7), i.e., whether the higher hypothesis entails the original hypothesis.³⁸ He first points out that philosophy so understood is necessary for political power on the grounds that the knowledge that is philosophy 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. (*Rep.* 484d1-3; Grube/Reeve transl.)

And, next Socrates sets out to consider whether philosophy so understood is sufficient for the other necessary features of political power. As Socrates is made to put it:

Should we, then, make these blind people our guardians or rather those who know each thing that is and who are not inferior to the others, either in experience or in any other part of virtue?... Then shouldn't we explain how it is possible for someone to have both these sorts of qualities? (*Rep.* 484d5-485a2; Grube/Reeve transl.)

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 necessary for political power. So if he can show that philosophy is sufficient for virtue, he will have confirmed the original hypothesis (that political power and philosophy coincide) by deducing it from something adequate. And that is precisely what he goes on to do. After rehearsing yet again the nature of philosophy (*Rep.* 485a-c), Socrates goes on to argue that philosophy so understood entails (1) love of truth (*Rep.* 485c3-d5), (2) moderation (*Rep.* 485d6-c6), (3) liberality (*Rep.* 486a1-7), (4) courage (*Rep.* 486a8-b5), (5) justice, reliability, gentleness (*Rep.* 486b6-13), (6) fast-learning (*Rep.* 486c1-6), (7) memory (*Rep.* 486c7-d3), and (8) measure and calm (*Rep.* 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?

They're all completely necessary.

Is there any objection you can find, then, to a way of life that no one can adequately follow unless he's by nature good at remembering, quick to 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? (*Rep.* 486c1-487a8; Grube/Reeve transl.)³⁹

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* is 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*. 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 sufficient for virtue. But the virtue or virtues necessary for knowledge in this passage appear unlike the virtues discussed at the end *Republic* IV. They appear more propaedeutic, incomplete or imperfect. The discussion at the end of *Republic* IV 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* VI, the knowledge of the philosopher, then, turns out to be both necessary and sufficient for genuine virtue.⁴⁰ 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 when we turn to the next portion of the argument in the *Republic*.

C. The Second Stage, Part 2: The Argument from the Hypothesis (Republic 487a-502c)

Having confirmed the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide via an argument *to* the hypothesis from a higher hypothesis, Socrates is confronted by Adeimantus as follows:

No one would be able to contradict the things you've said, Socrates, but on each occasion that you say them, your hearers are affected in some such way as this. They think that, because they're inexperienced in asking and answering questions, they're led astray a little bit by the argument 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 (*logô(i) men*) he's unable to oppose you as you ask each of your questions, yet he sees (*ergô(i) de*) that of all those who take up philosophy – not those who merely dabble

in it while still young in order to complete their upbringing and then drop it, but those who continue in it for a longer time – the greatest number become cranks, not to say completely vicious, while those who seem completely decent are rendered useless to the city because of the way of life you recommend. (*Rep.* 487b1-d5; Grube/Reeve transl.)

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 and political power coincide is simply contradicted by the facts on the ground. Counterexamples, he suggests, are almost too numerous to mention. Most philosophers are vicious and so not genuine political rulers. The rest are useless. Adeimantus is not here reiterating Glaucon's objection at 475d-e. He is not misunderstanding what philosophy is and so 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.⁴¹ (It is also, by the way, in violation of Glaucon's concession at the beginning of the argument [*Rep.* 472e6-473b3]). 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 argument *from* the hypothesis.

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"; *Rep.* 487d10 Grube/Reeve transl.), and reiterates this concession at least two more times (*Rep.* 489b3, d5).⁴² 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 are inconsistent 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. Fortunately a detailed analysis of the argument is unnecessary given our focus on the philosophical method being employed in this portion of the *Republic* as opposed to its philosophical content. The argument falls into three distinct parts. First, an account of why the decent philosophers are useless (*Rep.* 487d-489d); second, an account of why most philosophers are vicious (*Rep.* 489d-496a); and third, an account of how it nevertheless remains possible even given these facts for philosophy and political power to coincide (*Rep.* 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 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-owner 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 *technê* of steering, nor being able to point to anyone who taught them the *technê* nor to a time at which they learned it. Indeed, they claim it is not teachable and are ready to kill anyone who maintains that it is. Moreover, they call those who are clever at persuading the ship-owner to let them rule navigators, captains, and those who know ships, 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 his *technê*. 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 this ship not to think of Anytus, who was clever at persuading the Demos that he should rule, despite lacking the *technê* to rule, not being able to point to anyone who taught the *technê* (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 *technê* 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 (*Rep.* 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 (*aitiasthai*) for the philosophers' uselessness. Rather, it is "those who don't make

use of the philosophers” who are to blame – the Demos and/or the demagogues. The Demos which is already short-sighted is blinded by the demagogues to the utility of philosophy. It is not the nature (*phusin*) of a genuine captain to beg the sailors to rule, nor of the genuine ruler, or philosopher, to beg the Demos to rule.⁴⁴ 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 (*tên aitian*) the decent ones are useless? (*Rep.* 489d7-8; Grube/Reeve transl.)

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 (*tên aitian*) 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 (*hê aitia*) 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 (*aitia*) for this either? (*Rep.* 489d1-e1; Grube/Reeve transl.)

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,⁴⁵ but denies that they are inconsistent with the consequences of the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide because philosophy is not the cause of philosophers' viciousness. The argument begins with a recapitulation of the nature of philosophy or the philosophic nature (*Rep.* 489e3-490e1),⁴⁶ followed by a description of the argument to follow.

We must now look at the ways in which this nature 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 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? (*Rep.* 490e2-491a6; Grube/Reeve transl.)

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 (*Rep.* 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 (*Rep.* 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 will lead to vice “unless some god happens to come to its rescue” (*Rep.* 491a7-492a5).⁴⁷ Socrates next is made to explain how traditional education corrupts those with the necessary qualities for philosophy (*Rep.* 492a5-493a5) and then how sophistic education corrupts those with this nature as well (*Rep.* 493a6-494a10). This is followed with an account of the corruptive influence of family, friends and other flatters (*Rep.* 494a11-495a3).⁴⁸ The argument concludes

Do you see, then, that we weren’t wrong to say that, when someone with a philosophic nature 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 (*aitia*) of his falling away from the philosophic way of life? (*Rep.* 495a4-8; Grube/Reeve transl.)

Like the argument *from* the hypothesis in the *Meno*, then, Socrates goes through the traditional modes of education – one’s elders 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 is not the cause.

Next, Socrates is made to explain 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, (*Rep.* 495c4-6; Grube/Reeve transl.)

for their thoughts and beliefs

are properly called sophisms, things that have nothing genuine about them or worthy of being called true wisdom. (*Rep.* 496a7-9; Grube/Reeve transl.)

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. 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 is made to conclude 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 (*Rep.* 496a11-e2).

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 in the current climate, it remains for Socrates to show that in this climate it is possible for philosophy and political power to coincide. First (*Rep.* 497a-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 VI and VII (esp. 518b-540c). In the meantime, we must depend on chance or divine inspiration (*ek tinos theias epipnoias*) for the coincidence of philosophy and political power (*Rep.* 499a10-e6). While such a coincidence is rare indeed, Socrates maintains “it cannot be reasonably maintained... that either of these things is impossible” (*Rep.* 499c2-3; Grube/Reeve transl.). 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 legislation is best, if only it is possible, and that, while it is hard for it to come about, it is not impossible” (*Rep.* 502c5-7; Grube/Reeve transl.).⁵¹

IV. The Salient Difference and Two Kinds of Consequences

One of the many puzzles surrounding the method of hypothesis is making sense of Socrates' description in the *Phaedo* (101d3-5) of the procedure I have been calling the argument *from* the hypothesis. Socrates maintains that one should examine "the consequences that follow from [the hypothesis to see whether they] agree with one another or contradict one another (*ta ap' ekeinês hormêthenta skepsaiō ei soi allêlois sumphônei ê daiphônei*)." What is puzzling about this is that on a natural understanding of "consequences" and "agreement" this procedure amounts to examining whether the hypothesis is self-contradictory. Only a self-contradictory proposition can have deductive consequences that are inconsistent. But while one certainly would want to discredit self-contradictory hypotheses, this hardly looks like a very productive procedure. The odds of proposing a hypothesis that is self-contradictory are pretty slim.⁵² Now there are well-known issues concerning the correct understanding of agreement in this context,⁵³ but our examination of the application of the procedure of the argument *from* the hypothesis at *Republic* 487a-502c suggests we may begin to make some headway by focusing on a special way of reading "consequences."

Readers familiar with the *Republic* will recall an earlier passage in which the nature of consequences plays an important role. At the beginning of Book II, Glaucon presses Socrates to defend the claim that justice is a good welcomed for its own sake as well as its consequences. Again on a natural understanding of "consequences" it is common to read the distinction between welcomed for its own sake and welcomed for its consequences as a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value. Nevertheless a variety of scholars have raised difficulties for understanding the distinction in this way and consequently have proposed understanding the distinction as a distinction between two kinds of consequences.⁵⁴ The distinction is controversial, but it is roughly a distinction between the natural or necessary consequences of justice, for example, and the artificial, contingent, or societal consequences of justice. The idea is that Socrates is challenged to show not only that justice is beneficial in the current climate, given the difficulty of avoiding detection for injustice and the need to appear just to reap various societal rewards like wealth, political power, and a pleasant afterlife, but that justice would be beneficial even in different circumstances, in which detection for injustice was easier to avoid (Gyges' ring; *Rep.* 359c-360b) or one's injustice was rewarded with wealth, political power, and good marriage (choice of lives; *Rep.* 360c-362c). Socrates must show that benefits flow directly from the nature of justice itself, and not from justice together with other artificial or contingent matters of fact. We might put the distinction as follows: Socrates must show that justice itself is the cause (*aitia*) of the benefits of justice.⁵⁵ He must show that it is not the case that all of the benefits of justice are caused by justice together with contingent features of the current climate.

Keeping this distinction in mind, let us return to the difference between the argument *from* the hypothesis in the last third of the *Meno* and in *Republic* 471c-502c. In the *Meno*, Socrates is made to propose that the hypothesis that virtue is a kind of knowledge had the consequence that virtue has teachers (and learners), given the background beliefs that all knowledge is teachable and everything teachable has teachers (and learners). This consequence of the hypothesis, however, was found to be inconsistent with the facts on the ground. In the current climate, no teachers (or learners) of virtue are to be found. Consequently, the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge is discredited because – to use the language of the *Phaedo* – the consequences of the hypothesis are not in harmony (*diaphônei*). Analogously, in the *Republic*, Socrates is evidently proposing that a consequence of the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide is that philosophers are useful and virtuous, perhaps given the background beliefs that genuine political power is useful and an argument through the nature of philosophy that genuine political power is necessary and sufficient for genuine virtue. This consequence of the hypothesis, however, appeared to be inconsistent with the facts on the ground. In the current climate philosophers are neither useful nor virtuous. Socrates is made to preserve his hypothesis in the *Republic*, however, by arguing that philosophy is not the cause (*aitia*) of the facts on the ground. The uselessness and viciousness of philosophers in the current climate is not a consequence of the nature of philosophy, but a consequence of the nature of philosophy together with various other artificial and contingent matters. There is a sense, then, in which the “consequences” of the hypothesis that philosophy and political power coincide are inconsistent, but Socrates argues that one of those “consequences” is not a natural or necessary consequence of the nature of philosophy.

If something like this is on the right track,⁵⁶ we should notice that the natural but uncharitable reading of the *Phaedo* passage turns out to be correct but perhaps not so uncharitable. The argument *from* the hypothesis consists in examining whether the natural consequences of the hypothesis are consistent or inconsistent. It remains true that only a self-contradictory hypothesis would be effectively ruled out by this procedure, but it may now appear more plausible to suppose that it will be productive to show that a hypothesis is not self-contradictory. What one must do is examine whether the consequences of the hypothesis are inconsistent, i.e., examine whether the effects of the Form alone are inconsistent (“without the images used in the previous subsection, using Forms themselves and making its investigation through them”; *Rep.* 510b7-9), and explain how apparent natural consequences of the hypothesis are in fact artificial or contingent (see *Rep.* 534b8-c3). It is only when one can successfully complete the argument *from* the hypothesis in this way (after having completed the argument *to* the hypothesis up to unhypothetical first principle of everything), that one can be genuinely said to have knowledge.

V. Conclusion

In closing let us return to the argument of the last third of the *Meno* with which this essay began. The similarities between this argument and *Republic* 471c-502c should be apparent. The allusions in the *Republic* to the *Meno* are abundant. 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 appears to be alluded to in the description of the sailors who manage to gain control of the ship of state despite their lack of expertise. *Meno* even 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 the parallel argument structure – a structure which conforms to the method of hypothesis as elaborated in the *Meno*, the *Phaedo*, and *Republic*. 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 deduced. 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 reduction stage – in which one (a) seeks to identify a hypothesis from which an answer to the question can be derived and (b) shows how the truth of the hypothesis entails the answer to the question. Indeed, both dialogues focus on the first of these procedures, taking the second procedure to be relatively straightforward.

Again, in both passages, Socrates is made to turn next to the second or confirmation stage of the method of hypothesis – taking up the argument *to* the hypothesis 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 primarily theoretical argument (*tô(i) logô(i)*), both dialogues turn to the confirmation process concerned with the facts on the ground (*tô(i) ergô(i)*) – the argument *from* the hypothesis. 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 is inconsistent with the fact that there in fact 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 was inconsistent with the facts that philosophers

are in fact useless or vicious. But Socrates is made to defend his hypothesis in the *Republic* against this attack on the grounds that philosophy is not the cause (*aitia*) of the uselessness and/or viciousness of philosophers in the current climate.

The difference between the two passages is significant, but it should not obscure the similarity of method. In both dialogues Plato exhibits an application of the method of hypothesis. But the difference should affect our understanding of the application in the *Meno*, for the difference highlights a feature lacking in the *Meno*. While both applications appeal to facts on the ground that appear to discredit the hypothesis as part of the confirmation process, the *Republic* makes clear that appeal to such facts is insufficient for abandoning the hypothesis. In addition to providing the conflicting facts on the ground one must determine whether those facts are a natural consequence of or caused by the hypothesis itself (or the Forms or concepts used to deduce the hypothesis). When they are, the hypothesis must be abandoned; when they are not, the hypothesis can be retained. And when the hypothesis can be retained against all such conflicting facts it has been confirmed (at least with respect to the argument *from* the hypothesis). Of course, no such determination has been made in the *Meno*. Socrates has been made to present only the conflicting facts on the ground. He has not determined nor even attempted to determine the cause of those facts. Consequently, the results of the application of the method of hypothesis in the *Meno* are untested and incomplete (at least by the lights of the *Republic*) and Socrates is correct to profess his ignorance of the nature of virtue at the end of the *Meno* (100b4-6). We too would be wise to hesitate in taking the argument in the last third of the *Meno* as endorsing a particular understanding of the nature of virtue. But at *Republic* 471c-502c progress appears to have been made along the longer road to the unhypothetical first principle of everything.^{57,58}

Notes

¹ The *Meno* can be seen 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 boy, and an argument for the immortality of the soul (80a-86c), and (3) the discussion concerning the teachability of virtue (86c-100a).

² Although arguments in which Socrates is made to argue for both *p* and not-*p* are not as common as one might think. Perhaps the best examples of such arguments can be found in the *Cratylus*, where Socrates appears to argue first against conventionalism and then against naturalism, and especially in the *Parmenides*.

³ By the “Socratic dialogues” I mean those dialogues which have also been described as “early” or “aporetic”: *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Crito*, *Euthydemus*, *Euthyphro*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias Major*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, and *Protagoras*.

⁴ This has often been taken as the first step in the rejection of Socratic intellectualism in Plato’s so-called middle dialogues. For some reason to doubt this change or development on Plato’s part see Carone (2001).

⁵Both captured by the same Greek word—*didakton*. See Scott (2006, p. 162) for a plausible way to avoid the equivocation at least in its crudest form.

⁶See, for example, Cornford (1957, p. 245), and Bedu-Addo (1984, pp. 10-14)

⁷See Benson (2003; 2006).

⁸For an argument that Plato endorses the method of hypothesis see Benson (2003).

⁹After composing some early drafts of this essay I reread Nettleship's lecture IX entitled "Philosophy and the State: [*Rep.* 471c-502c]" (Nettleship 1925, pp. 184–211). This is one of the few examples in the literature of a treatment of the entire stretch of argument from 471c-502c. 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. I was happy to discover that in the main my reading of the structure of the argument over this stretch of text was 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.

¹⁰I defend the view that Plato recommends roughly the same method of philosophical investigation in these three dialogues in Benson (2006). The present essay is an additional piece of that argument. Few commentators would fail to take seriously Plato's argument from 471c-502c, and yet if the present essay is correct, Plato employs his method of hypothesis in pursuing this argument. While I am inclined to think that Plato's views concerning the method of hypothesis and dialectic undergo a development in the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic*, nothing I say in this essay depends on that inclination. So, on this issue as well, I leave to one side issues concerning developmentalism.

¹¹For the phrases "an argument *to* the hypothesis" and "an argument *from* the hypothesis" see Benson (2003). These two procedures correspond roughly to what has in the literature has sometimes been call "the upward path" and "the downward path." See, esp. Robinson (1953, pp. 162-177). One of the goals of my recent work (including the present essay) is to put a more precise formulation on the nature of these two procedures.

¹²For the longer and shorter road, see *Republic* 504a4-d3 and for the unhypothetical first principle, see *Republic* 510b5-6, 511b6-7, and 533c8-d1.

¹³See Benson (2003; 2005; 2006). Differences between and among these essays and the present one indicate my own development in understanding Plato's dialectical method. The present essay supersedes the previous ones, but I do not anticipate that it will be my final judgment on the matter. As is the case with every aspect of Plato's view there are always further passages to consider, literature to read, and puzzles to be teased out.

¹⁴For a defense of the claim that Socrates' reluctance here does not amount to Plato's reluctance to endorse the method of hypothesis see Benson (2003, pp. 6-12).

¹⁵Socrates' precise words are "...allow the question—whether virtue comes by teaching or some other way—to be examined by means of hypothesis (*ex hupotheseôs auto skopeisthai*). I mean by hypothesis what the geometers often do in dealing with a question put to them (*hôsper hoi geômetrai pollakis skopountai, epeidan tis erêtai autous*); for example..." (*Meno* 86e2-5; Lamb transl.). In maintaining that this is the first time in the dialogues that the method of hypothesis is explicitly referred to, I leave open the possibility of which I am rather dubious that it is practiced earlier (as Kahn [1996, pp. 184, 196] and perhaps Weiss [2001, p. 114 n. 78] appear to think). Moreover, in assuming that the so-called Socratic dialogues were composed earlier than the *Meno*, I continue to leave open the question of Platonic development. Whether Plato's philosophical position ever developed or not, he did not write all of the dialogues on the same day. The totality of the evidence suggests that the so-called

Socratic dialogues were written relatively early and probably earlier than the *Meno* – but in the end nothing in this essay hangs on this. The literature on the method of hypothesis is enormous. For a bibliography see Benson (2003).

¹⁶ The entailment need not be so immediate as it is in the *Meno*. The entailment from the truth of the hypothesis that Forms exist (or the theory of Forms) to the conclusion that the soul is immortal at *Phaedo* 100b-107b is hardly immediate. See also *Phaedo* 76d7-77a5 where Plato suggests Forms exist just in case souls exist before birth.

¹⁷ See note 24 below.

¹⁸ Although, as I will maintain in a moment, he does attempt to illustrate by example the confirmation process – however unsuccessfully.

¹⁹ Ironically, he *illustrates* the reduction stage in the *Phaedo*.

²⁰ By “choosing the hypothesis” I mean choosing, for example, that virtue is a kind of knowledge, or that virtue is not a kind of knowledge.

²¹ Dialectic is sometimes viewed by Plato as the culmination of a method aimed at complete knowledge or understanding and sometimes as merely the method aimed at complete knowledge or understanding. Understood in the former way, any attempt at confirming a hypothesis that falls short of either confirmation procedure would not amount to an application of dialectic. In this case, Plato might prefer to think of such applications as applications of the method of hypothesis (more broadly construed) or of dianoetic (construed as any application of the method of hypothesis that falls short of dialectic). Nevertheless, such applications would be instances of dialectic understood in the latter way, i.e. as the method aimed at complete knowledge or understanding whether successful or not. In this case, dianoetic should be restricted to any method that employs only the first stage of the dialectic method.

²² As is well known the literature on the Divided Line is vast and diverse; the literature on Plato’s educational curriculum in *Republic* VII is only slightly less so.

²³ See section IV below for a suggestion concerning the way the testing of the hypothesis is *a priori*. For a somewhat longer defense of this rough outline of the dialectical method see Benson (2006).

²⁴ Considerable ink has been spilled concerning whether *the* hypothesis here is “virtue is teachable just in case virtue is knowledge” or “virtue is knowledge.” As I suggest in Benson (2003) this issue need not detain us since it is clear in the *Meno* that Socrates is willing to designate a variety of propositions as hypotheses. (For some of the literature involved in this debate see Benson [2003, nn. 53, 54].) We might speculate that the appropriateness of designating one or the other of these sorts of propositions as the hypothesis varies with their respective clarity and credibility. For example, when the connection between the two sides of the bi-conditional is relatively straightforward as it is in the *Meno* (and as we will see in the *Republic*), the proposition representing one side of the bi-conditional is more appropriately seen as the hypothesis since it is the proposition that will need to undergo the more elaborate explanation and defense. On the other hand, when the bi-conditional itself is hardly straightforward and so in need of explanation and defense as is the bi-conditional in the *Phaedo* – roughly that Forms exist just in case the soul is immortal, it is the bi-conditional that is appropriately designated as the hypothesis. In fact, however, in the *Phaedo* it is the proposition that Forms exist that is designated as the hypothesis. Scott (2006, pp. 221–224) has plausibly rejected the bi-conditional interpretation. He admits, however, that “at the level of textual detail, both interpretations have their difficulties” (p. 224). Scott plausibly suggests that one of the key features of the hypothesis is its provisionality and only the proposition

that virtue is knowledge is provisional in the *Meno*. This fits well with the suggestion above that which of the two propositions is dubbed the hypothesis varies with its relative clarity or credibility.

²⁵ As Scott (2006, p. 157) sees the argument *to* the hypothesis here in the *Meno* is insufficient for another reason as well. The argument *to* the hypothesis fails to go all the way up to the Form of the Good or the unhypothetical first principle of everything as is required by the method as elaborated in the *Republic*.

²⁶ For a longer defense that this portion of the *Meno* corresponds to the argument *from* the hypothesis see Benson (2003, pp. 21-25).

²⁷ Even here it is hardly affirmed confidently, since Meno goes on to claim he cannot say whether the Sophists are teachers of virtue, sometimes he thinks they are, and sometimes he thinks they are not. (*Meno* 95c5-8). I might note in passing that being a teacher of virtue is not something Gorgias denies in the *Gorgias*.

²⁸ It may be worth noting that throughout this discussion of these counterexamples Anytus repeatedly makes use perception verbs: he had heard (*akêkoas*) that Themistocles taught his son Cleophantus to be a good horseman, but he had never “heard (*akêkoas*) anyone, young or old, say that Cleophantus, the son of Themistocles, was a good and wise man at the same pursuits as his father” (*Meno* 93d9-e5; Grube transl.); he had seen (*hora(i)s*) the kind of man Aristides’ son was; and he had heard (*akoê(i)*) that Thucydides had provided the best wrestling teachers for his sons. See also Scott (2006, pp. 187-192) who plausibly defends the view that Plato is serious about the virtue (at least *qua* true belief) of these political leaders.

²⁹ On the empirical focus of this argument see Scott (2006, pp. 177-178).

³⁰ Despite the fact that the question has been in the background since *Rep.* 458a-b (and even since 450c-d).

³¹ Socrates here draws for the first time in this passage the distinction between *logos* and *ergon* which will get reiterated throughout the passage.

³² See Nettleship (1925, p. 186) who writes: “the union of political power and philosophical insight.”

³³ See Halliwell (1993, p. 198) who writes that Plato’s “contention here is a source of difficulty.”

³⁴ Why Plato fails to take the biconditional in the *Republic* to require explanation and defense is less clear than in the *Meno*. The biconditional in the *Meno* is a substitution instance of a relatively endoxic principle that something is teachable just in case it is knowledge; see, for example, *Protagoras* 361a3-c2 and *Timaeus* 51e2. Perhaps, our inability to recognize the obviousness of the biconditional in the *Republic* is a consequence of the normative and modal aspects of Plato’s discussion here. The biconditional might be more accurately characterized as follows: a genuine city is possible just in case it is possible for genuine political power and genuine philosophy to coincide (where the notion of genuineness is meant to capture something like a normative ideal). Characterized in this way, what may seem most problematic is the claim that genuine political power and genuine philosophy could coincide, not that a genuine city is possible just in case this claim is true. For simplicity I will continue to refer to the *Republic*’s biconditional as “Kallipolis is possible just in case political power and philosophy coincide.”

³⁵ See the dispute over *exoitto* at *Phaedo* 101d3: Robinson (1953), Gallop (1975, p. 235), Kanayama (2000, pp. 76-78), Kahn (1996, p. 318 n. 35), and Dancy (2004, pp. 298-299).

³⁶ See also *Republic* 485a6.

³⁷The literature devoted to the end of *Republic V* is of course enormous. As a suggestion, the entire passage may conform to a case of the first confirmation stage on the higher hypothesis concerning the nature of philosophy. After coming to an adequate account of the nature of philosophy at 475b8-c8 to the effect that philosophy is the desire for all wisdom and learning as a result of somewhat suspect *epagôgê*, the account is “attacked” or “clung to” by Glaucon on the grounds that “many strange people will be philosophers.” Socrates responds to this by seeking a higher hypothesis concerning the nature of wisdom or knowledge by which the hypothesis that philosophy is the desire for all such wisdom and knowledge can be confirmed.

³⁸Throughout 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 are one.

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

- [1] Philosophy \Leftrightarrow sophia (V.474b-480a)
- [2] Political power (PP) \Leftrightarrow sophia and virtue (VI.484d5-485a2)
- [3] PP \Rightarrow sophia (from [2])
- [4] Sophia \Rightarrow philosophy (from [1])
- [5] PP \Rightarrow philosophy (from [3] & [4])
- [6] Philosophy \Rightarrow sophia (from [1])
- [7] Sophia \Rightarrow virtue (VI.485a-486d)
- [8] Philosophy \Rightarrow sophia and virtue (from [6] & [7])
- [9] Sophia and virtue \Rightarrow PP (from [2])
- [10] Philosophy \Rightarrow PP (from [8] & [9])
- [11] Philosophy \Leftrightarrow PP (from [5] & [10]).

⁴⁰For 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, pp. 42-45). See also Irwin (1995) and Kamtekar (1998). See also *Meno* 88b1-8 and Scott (2006, pp. 146-153).

⁴¹See 490d1-2, 492d5, 494e3-5, 498e4, and 501e4-5.

⁴²See also *Republic* 495c8 and Nettleship (1925, p. 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 and 495c8 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.

⁴³See Adam (1902, p. 9), Nettleship (1925, p. 204), and Keyt (2006). Keyt’s recent 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 does Keyt.

⁴⁴ See also 489b8-9.

⁴⁵ See note 42 above.

⁴⁶ Forms of *phusis* 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.

⁴⁷ See also *theou moiran* at 493a1-2. Indeed, the entire passage from 492e2-493a3 evidently alludes to *Meno* 99b5-100b4, as Adam (1902, p. 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 499a10-c6.

⁴⁸ Alcibiades is often thought to be alluded to in this passage depicting the corruptive influence of family, friends, and flatterers on natural abilities (see, e.g., Adam [1902, p. 25], Nettleship [1925, p. 207], Ferrari [2000, p. 198 n. 12], Pappas [1995, p. 119], and Scott [2006, p. 167], *pace* Annas [1981, pp. 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” (*Rep.* 494c6-7). 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?”

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* 492a5-493a5) and then go on to find fault with sophistry (*Meno* 95b9-c8 & *Republic* 493a6-494a10).

⁵¹ Scott (2006, p. 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.”

⁵² Bostock (1986, p. 168) raises roughly this objection.

⁵³ For a perspicuous account of the difficulties here see Bailey (2005, pp. 97-99); see also Gentzler (1991).

⁵⁴ See, for example, Foster (1937), White (1984), and Pappas (1995, p. 55).

⁵⁵ What sort of *aitia* is at stake here is worthy of further consideration, but one suspects that it is closest to Aristotle’s formal *aitia*. See, e.g., Vlastos (1969).

⁵⁶ Notice the preceding argument does not depend on the interpretation of Glaucon’s challenge I described two paragraphs back. What is critical is the distinction between two kinds of consequences – consequences “caused” by the Form alone and consequences “caused” by the Form and contingent circumstances, whether or not this distinction is at play in Glaucon’s challenge.

⁵⁷ N.B. I am careful here not to suggest that Plato has made progress, nor even that Socrates’ professed ignorance in the *Meno* is genuine in order to leave open the questions of developmentalism mentioned above. Should we ask why Plato would present us with an

incomplete application of the method of hypothesis with respect to the nature of virtue, the issues surrounding developmentalism can no longer so easily be put to one side. See Weiss (2001) for an answer to this question that generally sidesteps the issues surrounding developmentalism.

⁵⁸I would like to thank Roslyn Weiss, Michelle Jenkins, the participants at the conference in Pyrgos, Greece in the summer of 2006, and at the Arizona Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy in February 2007 for helpful comments on various versions of this essay.

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