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# The Possibility of Inquiry

Meno's Paradox from  
Socrates to Sextus



GAIL FINE

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to Sextus*

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*To my mother  
and  
To the memory of my father*



## Preface

I think I first encountered the *Meno* in a Greek class when I was an undergraduate at the University of Michigan. I was immediately enchanted. I continued to think about it off and on, and discussed part of it briefly in my PhD dissertation. But it wasn't until I began teaching at Cornell in 1975 that I became seriously interested in the dialogue. It seems to me to be one of the best introductions to epistemology there is. (Another is the *Theaetetus*.) It raises a number of fundamental questions—about, for example, what knowledge is and how it differs from, and is more valuable than, mere true belief; about how, if at all, knowledge can be acquired; and about what can be known. And it does so in an elegant, compact, subtle, and often humorous way. But it lays various traps; and students and the secondary literature often—or so it seems to me—misunderstand Socrates' views in just the ways in which Meno does. It became something of a mission for me to insist on how important the distinction between knowledge and mere true belief is for Plato, and how it holds the key to many of his views, including his solution to Meno's Paradox and his view that one needs knowledge of what F is, *not* for inquiry into F, but for knowledge of other features of F.

Though the *Meno* as a whole fascinates me, I have long been particularly interested in Meno's Paradox (though understanding it, as well as Plato's reply, requires considering many parts of the dialogue). Meno's Paradox challenges the very possibility of inquiry. Yet we tend to take the possibility—indeed the actuality—of inquiry for granted. Meno's Paradox forces us to wonder whether we are right to do so. In deciding about that, we need to consider such fundamental questions as: What exactly is inquiry? What conditions must be satisfied if one is to be able to inquire into something and to find answers to the questions one is considering? What is knowledge, and is knowledge needed for inquiry? If knowledge isn't needed, what alternative cognitive condition will do? In addition to these general questions, considering Meno's Paradox in the context of the *Meno* also requires one to ask: Why does Meno think Socrates is vulnerable to the paradox? How exactly do Meno and Socrates understand the paradox? How, and how well, does Socrates reply to it?

I am not the only one to have worried about Meno's Paradox. Aristotle also reflected on it, and so too did the Stoics, Epicureans, and Sextus. It was fun and illuminating to discover differences and similarities; and I felt that I understood some of their general epistemological views better by seeing them through this



lens. At some point I learned of the Plutarch fragment (preserved in Damascius' commentary on the *Phaedo*) in which he considers various replies to Meno's Paradox (all the ones I consider except for Sextus'). I didn't want to leave Meno's Paradox behind; but here was a way of extending my interest in it to philosophers other than Plato—and so this project was born. At first I worked in a piecemeal way on various formulations of and replies to Meno's Paradox, as I taught one or another of the philosophers who engaged with it, or as I wrote one or another article. But then I tried to tie them all together; and this book is the result.

I was partly moved to write this book, not only because of my deep interest in the questions arising from Meno's Paradox, but also because there was no full-length, unified treatment of the various replies considered here. Yet considering the various formulations of and replies to the paradox provides insight into ancient epistemology in particular, and into epistemology in general. This book is by no means a general account of ancient epistemology; its focus is more limited. But I hope it will be helpful to, among others, anyone interested in ancient epistemology.

In the spring of 2013, I went to the Pompeii–Herculaneum exhibition at the British Museum, and saw the delightful and beautiful mosaic of sea creatures that is reproduced on the dust jacket. The large flat fish in the center of the top of the mosaic is a torpedo fish. At *Meno* 80a, just before challenging Socrates' ability to inquire about virtue, given that he's said that he doesn't know anything at all about virtue, Meno compares Socrates (not to a sting ray, as some translations suggest, but) to a torpedo fish. I discuss this image in Chapter 3, section 1.

In working on this project, I have acquired a number of debts that I am pleased to acknowledge. I am grateful to the faculty and administrative staff at the Sage School of Philosophy at Cornell University for all their support, of various kinds, during the many years in which I've been privileged to be there. Many of my ideas were first formulated—and subjected to criticism and revised—in classes at Cornell, ranging from introductory survey courses to graduate seminars; I am pleased to acknowledge my debt to the many students who helped me clarify and improve my views. Since January 2007, I have been a Visiting Professor of Ancient Philosophy in Oxford University; and, since January 2008, I have also been a Senior Research Fellow at Merton College, Oxford. I thank the Faculty of Philosophy and the members of Merton College for providing a stimulating, friendly, and collegial atmosphere, in a beautiful setting.

For over 20 years, I have benefitted from numerous insightful, constructive, and stimulating discussions with Lesley Brown. Many of the ideas developed in this book were first formulated in, and have been clarified as a result of, these

conversations. Lesley also provided helpful written comments on some of the chapters on Plato. For many years I have also benefitted from collegial and insightful discussions with Dominic Scott. More recently, David Charles and David Bronstein have been helpful interlocutors; David Bronstein also provided helpful written comments on Chapter 6. Jessica Moss provided helpful written comments on an earlier version of Chapter 1. I am also grateful to two anonymous referees for the Press, who provided detailed and constructive comments on an earlier version of the entire manuscript.

Thanks are due to Peter Momtchiloff of Oxford University Press for his help in overseeing the project; to Nate Bulthuis for preparing the first version of the Bibliography; and to Ian Hensley for his valuable help as a research assistant. Ian helped me to prepare a revised version of the bibliography, downloaded Greek, checked references, prepared the *index locorum* and the *index nominum*, and filled in page references for all the indexes. Thanks are also due to my copy editor, Malcolm Todd, for his expert and efficient help; and to Terry Irwin for help with the general index.

My greatest debt, in this project as in all else, is to my husband, Terry Irwin. He has endured numerous discussions and read many drafts of this book (as well as drafts of everything I write); his many oral and written comments, as well as his faith in my abilities, have been invaluable. Without his help, in every aspect of my life, from the most mundane to the most important, I would never have finished this book; and it would be very much worse than it is. Nor, more importantly, would I have had the wonderful life we've shared.

I also thank my parents, Jean and Sidney Fine, for their love and support, and for instilling in me a love of education, of reading and writing, and of classical music. I am sorry that my father did not live to see this book completed. I dedicate it my mother and to the memory of my father.

A few parts of Chapters 2–5 draw on material from my 'Inquiry in the *Meno*' in R. Kraut (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (1992). I thank Cambridge University Press for permission to use a revised version of this material.

An earlier version of parts of Chapter 5 originally appeared as 'Enquiry and Discovery: A Discussion of Dominic Scott, *Plato's Meno*' in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 32 (2007), 331–67. I thank Oxford University Press for permission to use a revised version of this material.

An earlier version of parts of Chapters 2–4 appeared in 'Signification, Essence, and *Meno's* Paradox: A Reply to David Charles's "Types of Definition in the *Meno*"' in *Phronesis* 55 (2010), 125–52. I thank Koninklijke Brill NV for permission to use a revised version of this material.

An earlier version of Chapter 6 originally appeared as ‘Aristotle and the *Aporêma* of the *Meno*’ in V. Harte, M. M. McCabe, R. W. Sharples, and A. Sheppard (eds.), *Aristotle and the Stoics Reading Plato*, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, supplement 107 (2010), 45–71. I thank Wiley Blackwell for permission to use a revised version of this material.

An earlier version of Chapter 10, and of part of Chapter 8, appeared as ‘Sceptical Enquiry’ in D. Charles (ed.), *Definition in Ancient Philosophy* (2010), 493–525. I thank Oxford University Press for permission to use a revised version of this material.

An earlier version of Chapter 11, and of part of Chapter 7, appeared as ‘Concepts and Inquiry: Sextus and the Epicureans’ in B. Morison and K. Ierodiakonou (eds.), *Episteme, Etc.: Essays in Honour of Jonathan Barnes* (2011), 90–114. I thank Oxford University Press for permission to use a revised version of this material.

# Contents

1. Introduction	1
1. Overview	1
2. What is inquiry?	4
3. Meno's Paradox and the possibility of inquiry	7
4. Plutarch's account	9
5. Plato's reply to Meno's Paradox	10
6. Foreknowledge: stepping-stone and matching versions	12
7. Propositional and objectual inquiry	14
8. Foreknowledge: cognitive level	16
9. Foreknowledge: content	19
10. When must one know or cognize?	20
11. Skeptical inquiry	23
12. Conclusion	24
Appendix: Meno's Paradox: what's in a name?	25

## Part I. Plato's *Meno*

2. The Origins of the Problem	31
1. The priority of knowledge what	31
2. Knowing what x is and knowing what x is like	35
3. The scope of the priority of knowledge what	38
4. The oneness assumption	42
5. The first definition of shape and the first statement of the Dialectical Requirement	45
6. The Dialectical Requirement and knowledge	50
7. The Dialectical Requirement and further definitions	53
8. Definitions and circularity	57
9. The second statement of the Dialectical Requirement	61
10. The problem of discovery	64
11. Conclusion	67
3. Meno's Questions and Socrates' Dilemma	69
1. The torpedo fish	69
2. Meno's first two questions	74
3. Meno's third question	78
4. Meno's argument	81
5. Meno's mistake	82
6. Socrates' dilemma	83
7. The structure of Socrates' dilemma	87
8. Three clues	91
9. Socrates' support for S2 and S3	93

10. Ryle on the ambiguity of 'know what one is inquiring into'	94
11. Charles on signification and Meno's Paradox	99
12. Conclusion	103
4. Socrates' Three-Stage Reply: The First and Second Stages	105
1. Socrates' three-stage reply	105
2. The first stage: the initial statement of the theory of recollection	106
3. Teaching, learning, and recollection	114
4. The second stage: the geometrical discussion	119
5. How has Socrates replied?	124
6. The slave's cognitive condition and its content	128
7. Conclusion	134
5. The Third Stage: The Second Statement of the Theory of Recollection	137
1. Preliminaries	137
2. Varieties of innatism	140
3. Plato's argument for the immortality of the soul, and steps 1–2	147
4. Steps 3–6	152
5. Steps 7–10	155
6. Innate true belief?	160
7. Step 11	162
8. Summary of the argument	164
9. Why posit prenatal but not innate knowledge?	165
10. The problem of discovery and the theory of recollection	168
11. Evidence outside the <i>Meno</i> : two passages	171
12. Conclusion	175

## Part II. Aristotle and After

6. Aristotelian Inquiry	179
1. Introduction	179
2. The implicit and explicit replies	179
3. Teaching, intellectual learning, and inquiry	182
4. <i>APo.</i> 71a2–11 and Plato's conditions on inquiry	183
5. What is intellectual learning?	185
6. Prior <i>gnôsis</i>	187
7. Prior cognition	190
8. Two types of prior cognition	191
9. Plato and Aristotle on prior cognition	195
10. A particular case	197
11. Analysis of the case	200
12. The <i>aporêma</i> of the <i>Meno</i>	203
13. Aristotle's reply	206
14. Must one know that which one is learning?	208
15. A rival solution	211
16. <i>Prior Analytics</i> 2.21	212
17. <i>Posterior Analytics</i> 2.19	215
18. Sleeping geometers and writing tablets	221

7. Epicurean Inquiry	226
1. Introduction	226
2. Prolepses: introduction	228
3. Prolepses and belief	231
4. Prolepses and apprehension	233
5. The range of prolepses	235
6. The contents of prolepses	237
7. Prolepses and meaning	241
8. Prolepses and innatism	245
9. Three types of inquiry	249
10. Prolepses and inquiry	250
11. Conclusion	255
8. Stoic Inquiry	257
1. Introduction	257
2. Aetius' account	258
3. Prolepses	260
4. The range of prolepses	265
5. Prolepses, outline accounts, and definitions	267
6. Prolepses and meaning	272
7. Innatism	275
8. Innatism and the early Stoics	277
9. Epictetus and innatism	283
10. Prolepses and inquiry	286
11. Possible criticisms	291
12. Conclusion	296
9. Plutarch's Account	299
1. Introduction	299
2. Plutarch's account of Plato	301
3. Plutarch's account of Aristotle	308
4. Plutarch's account of the Stoics	312
5. Plutarch's account of Epicurus	315
6. Conclusion	318
10. Skeptical Inquiry 1: Sextus and the Stoics	320
1. Introduction	320
2. Skeptics and Dogmatists	320
3. The Stoics' challenge to the possibility of Skeptical inquiry	322
4. Evaluation of the Stoics' argument	326
5. The Some Belief View and the No Belief View	329
6. Sextus' reply: two types of apprehension	331
7. Sextus' reply: a third type of apprehension	333
8. Thinking, concepts, and nondoxastic appearances	336
9. Thinking, understanding, and inquiry	339
10. Sextus' challenge to Dogmatic inquiry	343

11. Skeptical Inquiry 2: Sextus and the Epicureans	345
1. Proof	345
2. A challenge to the possibility of inquiry about proof	348
3. An Epicurean challenge to Skeptical inquiry	350
4. Concepts and prolepses	353
5. Concepts as apprehension	356
6. An Epicurean reply	357
7. Concepts as bare motions of thought	358
8. Skepticism and concepts	360
9. Is Sextus inconsistent?	364
10. Skeptical and Dogmatic inquiry: a compromise	367
<i>Bibliography</i>	369
<i>Index Locorum</i>	385
<i>Index Nominum</i>	393
<i>General Index</i>	396

# 1

## Introduction

### 1. Overview

We routinely assume that we can inquire, and that at least some of our inquiries succeed, that we sometimes find what we are looking for. We inquire how to get to Larisa, how to solve a geometry problem, what virtue is. And we think we can find answers to at least the first of these two questions, indeed, that an answer to the first is readily available and that answers to at least some geometrical problems have been found. But are we right to assume that we can inquire, and that our inquiries can be, and often have been, successful? If so, what explains the possibility of inquiry and of successful inquiry? If, on the other hand, inquiry, or successful inquiry, is not possible, why is that?

These questions are first systematically explored in Plato's *Meno*. The dialogue begins with Meno and Socrates inquiring what virtue is. Socrates says that neither of them knows what it is, and that they therefore don't know anything at all about virtue. Their inquiry eventually fails, insofar as they don't find the answer to their question: they don't discover what virtue is. This leads Meno to ask whether inquiry into something is possible if one doesn't at all know what it is. For, he asks, which of the things one doesn't know will one put forward as the thing one is inquiring into? He also asks whether, if one were to find the thing one was looking for but didn't initially know, one would know, or realize, that one had done so. Socrates reformulates Meno's questions as a dilemma: whether one does or doesn't know that which one is inquiring into, inquiry is impossible. I shall call the conjunction of Meno's questions and Socrates' dilemma Meno's Paradox.<sup>1</sup>

Meno's Paradox challenges the very possibility of inquiry; it therefore challenges something we routinely take for granted. Though we might think to dismiss the paradox, Plato doesn't do so. On the contrary, he offers an elaborate three-part reply. In the first and third stages, Socrates introduces his celebrated

<sup>1</sup> What I call 'Meno's Paradox' also has other labels. I consider some of them in the Appendix to this chapter.



theory of recollection, according to which we all have immortal souls that knew some range of things prenatally; inquiry and learning, he says, are recollection. Since recollection is possible, so too are inquiry and learning. Hence the conclusion of Meno's Paradox—that inquiry is impossible—is false. The second part of his reply—which Leibniz calls 'a very solid doctrine' (*Discourse on Metaphysics* 26) is sandwiched in between the two discussions of the theory of recollection. In it, Socrates cross-examines one of Meno's slaves about a geometry problem. He shows how the slave, despite being untutored in geometry, can not only inquire about but also discover the right answer. This too shows that the conclusion of Meno's Paradox is false: contrary to it, inquiry, indeed successful inquiry, is possible.

If the conclusion of the paradox is false, the paradox is unsound. But where exactly does it go wrong? Is it valid but unsound? If so, what premise or premises should we reject? Or is it invalid? If so, what inference should we reject? To answer these questions, we need to understand the point of the geometrical discussion and of the theory of recollection, and how they fit together. As we shall see, this will, among other things, require us to understand Plato's distinction between knowledge and true belief.

Plato is not the only philosopher in antiquity to have engaged with Meno's Paradox. In *Posterior Analytics* 1.1, Aristotle considers and replies to what he calls 'the puzzle (*aporêma*) in the *Meno*'.<sup>2</sup> And in a fascinating but under-discussed fragment, Plutarch describes Meno's Paradox, and contrasts Plato's reply to it with the replies proposed by the Peripatetics, Epicureans, and Stoics.<sup>3</sup> Further, Sextus Empiricus records two arguments that clearly echo Meno's Paradox. He ascribes one of them to the Epicureans, the other to the Stoics.<sup>4</sup> It's true that, unlike Aristotle and Plutarch, the Epicureans, Stoics, and Sextus don't explicitly mention the *Meno*.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, it's reasonable to think that they knew or knew of it. They at any rate engage with Meno's Paradox at least in the

<sup>2</sup> However, as we shall see, it has been argued that his description of it has only a 'vague resemblance' to what Plato says. I discuss this in Ch. 6.

<sup>3</sup> I quote the fragment and discuss it briefly in sect. 4 below. I discuss it in more detail in Ch. 9, where I also provide the Greek.

<sup>4</sup> I discuss these arguments in Chs. 10 and 11.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle and Plutarch aren't the only ones in antiquity who explicitly mention it and discuss parts of it that are relevant to Meno's Paradox. In *Tusculan Disputations* 1.57, Cicero mentions the *Meno* and describes the geometrical discussion with Meno's slave, connecting it to the theory of recollection; the geometrical discussion and theory of recollection are Plato's reply to Meno's Paradox. For discussion of the *Meno* in antiquity, see H. Tarrant, *Recollecting Plato's Meno* (London: Duckworth, 2005). Curiously, he devotes little attention to Meno's Paradox. However, he discusses the theory of recollection, which is part of Plato's reply, though it is also invoked, by both Plato and others, for other purposes as well.

sense that they consider the issues it raises; and they argue, against its conclusion, that inquiry is possible. Like Plato and Aristotle, they also explain what makes inquiry possible; and they do so in ways that are sensitive to Meno's Paradox.

In this book, I consider Meno's Paradox, along with the replies to it that are given by Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, the Epicureans, and Sextus. I also consider Plutarch's assessment of the replies given by Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and Epicureans. Presumably for chronological reasons, Plutarch doesn't mention Sextus Empiricus, who is the main exponent of Pyrrhonian skepticism.<sup>6</sup> But, as I've mentioned, he too discusses these issues. Indeed, *skeptikos* originally meant 'inquirer'; and Sextus claims that Pyrrhonists are the only genuine inquirers. Just as Plutarch argues that the Peripatetics', Epicureans', and Stoics' conditions for inquiry make inquiry impossible, so Sextus argues that the Epicureans' and Stoics' conditions for inquiry make inquiry impossible. His arguments apply to Dogmatists quite generally, including Plato and Aristotle. However, as we shall see, Plutarch and Sextus have very different reasons for their criticisms of the Peripatetics, Epicureans, and Stoics. Plutarch thinks they attempt to explain the possibility of inquiry from too impoverished a starting point: their conditions are too weak to enable inquiry. Sextus thinks the Dogmatists (including Plato, whose solution Plutarch favors) require too much: if their conditions were satisfied, inquiry would be at an end. The Epicureans and Stoics argue that it's the Skeptics who can't inquire. There is, then, an ongoing dialectical debate about how to explain the possibility of inquiry, and about who is, or isn't, in a position to inquire.

What are the conditions for the possibility of inquiry? Is Plutarch right to say that only Plato provides a satisfactory explanation of the possibility of inquiry? Is Sextus right to say that Dogmatists can't inquire? Are the Epicureans and Stoics right to say that Skeptics can't do so?

My exploration of these questions falls into two parts. In Part I, I focus on Plato's *Meno*. I spend more time on Plato than on the other philosophers to be considered here, because he devotes more attention to our main concerns than they do. Further, since, in discussing him, I develop many of the main issues, I can deal with them more briefly later on. In Part II, I discuss Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Stoics, as well as Plutarch's account of them. I also consider the Epicureans' and Stoics' challenge to the possibility of Skeptical inquiry and Sextus' challenge to the possibility of Dogmatic inquiry.

<sup>6</sup> According to the OCD, Plutarch's dates are approximately AD 50–120. Sextus' dates are uncertain, but he is generally thought to have lived in the 2nd c. AD. See D. House, 'The Life of Sextus Empiricus', *Classical Quarterly* 30 (1980), 227–38. In discussing Skepticism, I restrict my attention to Pyrrhonism as described by Sextus.

In the rest of the present chapter, I set the stage by introducing some of the main issues we'll be considering; and I give an overview of some of the main contributions to discussion of them.

The topic is vast, and my discussion is not exhaustive. For one thing, philosophers other than those I concentrate on also discuss Meno's Paradox.<sup>7</sup> But the philosophers I focus on form a natural unity: they consider the same questions; and they engage with one another, in some cases criticizing one another's replies to Meno's Paradox or, more generally, their various attempts to explain the possibility of inquiry.

## 2. What is inquiry?

Before considering challenges to, or defenses of, the possibility of inquiry, it will be helpful to have a preliminary account of what inquiry is. On one familiar account, inquiry is a systematic, goal-directed search for knowledge, or information, one doesn't have.<sup>8</sup> Or perhaps it would be better to say that inquiry is a systematic, goal-directed search for knowledge, or information, one *thinks* one doesn't have. As Sextus puts it:

<sup>7</sup> For a partial anticipation of Meno's Paradox, see Xenophanes DK B34: 'And indeed, no man has known, nor will there be one who knows (*eidôs*) clearly about the gods or about all the other things I say. For however much one might happen to say what is actually the case, nonetheless one would still not know, but belief (*dokos*) covers all things'. (The text, translation, and interpretation of this passage are much disputed. For one interesting discussion, see E. Hussey, 'The Beginnings of Epistemology from Homer to Philolaus', in S. Everson (ed.), *Epistemology*, vol. 1 of *Companions to Ancient Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 11–38, at 17–25. My translation is indebted to his.) Cf. B18: 'Not indeed from the outset did gods reveal all things to mortals; but, in time, by inquiring they discover something better.' Cf. Sextus, *M* 8.324–7, which I discuss in Ch. 11, sect. 2.

Others who discuss Meno's Paradox (or a variant of it) include Augustine, in *Confessions* Books 1 and 10. For discussion, see S. MacDonald, 'How Can One Search for God?: The Paradox of Inquiry in Augustine's *Confessions*', *Metaphilosophy* 39 (2008), 20–38. MacDonald thinks it's unclear whether Augustine knew the *Meno* first hand or merely knew of it. Al-Farabi also discusses Meno's Paradox, with explicit reference to the *Meno*, in both his *Philosophy of Plato* and his *Harmony*. For discussion see D. Black, 'Al-Farabi on Meno's Paradox' in P. Adamson (ed.), *In the Age of Al-Fārābī: Arabic Philosophy in the Fourteenth Century*, Warburg Institute Colloquia 12 (London: Warburg Institute, 2008), 15–34. Although there's no evidence that classical Indian philosophers knew, or even knew of, the *Meno*, they discuss a paradox that is remarkably like the one discussed in the *Meno*. For discussion, see A. Carpenter and J. Ganeri, 'Can You Seek the Answer to this Question?', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 88 (2010), 571–94.

<sup>8</sup> Although dictionary definitions aren't always helpful in explaining philosophical terminology, in this case I am in broad (but not complete) agreement with Webster's and the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. According to Webster's, inquiry is 'a request for information; a systematic investigation often of a matter of public interest'. According to the Shorter OED, to inquire is 'to search into, seek knowledge concerning'; 'to seek information by questioning'. Inquiry is 'the action of seeking, especially (not always) for truth, knowledge, or information concerning something'.

those who agree that they do not know how objects are in their nature may continue without inconsistency to inquire about them; those who think they know them accurately may not. For the latter, the investigation is already at its end, as they suppose, whereas for the former, the reason why any inquiry is undertaken—that is, the idea that they have not found the answer—is fully present. (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* [= *PH*] 2.11)<sup>9</sup>

Thinking one doesn't know something, and not knowing it, are different. A modest knower might know something without realizing that she knows it.<sup>10</sup> Further, someone might think that she knows something, when she doesn't. To be sure, Socrates claims that he has human wisdom, which consists, at least in part, in not thinking one knows something when one doesn't know it; he lacks false pretenses to knowledge. But most of us lack this human wisdom; most of us, as Socrates often points out, think we know things that we in fact don't know.<sup>11</sup> Be that as it may, most of the philosophers we'll be looking at tend to speak as though we inquire into what we don't know, though sometimes they move seamlessly between speaking of not knowing and of thinking one doesn't know; and I shall for the most part follow suit.

A few sample passages will make it clear that the philosophers at issue here accept the account of inquiry just described. In the *Meno*, Socrates proposes to inquire with Meno into what virtue is, precisely because they don't know what it is, but want to find out what it is.<sup>12</sup> In *EN* 1142a34–b1, Aristotle says that 'we do not inquire for what we already know', the implication being that we inquire in order to obtain knowledge we don't have.<sup>13</sup> In the *Letter to Herodotus* 37–8, Epicurus says that we need prolepses in order to judge matters of belief, inquiry, and *aporia*.<sup>14</sup> The suggestion is that, in these cases, we lack knowledge, and need prolepses in order to acquire it. In the *Academica*, Cicero says that, according to the Stoics, 'inquiry is an impulse directed towards cognition (*cognitio*) and the aim of inquiry is discovery... Discovery is the opening up of things previously

<sup>9</sup> My translations of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* generally follow those in J. Annas and J. Barnes, *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Scepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), though I have sometimes modified them without comment.

<sup>10</sup> This would be disputed by those who accept the so-called KK principle, according to which, if one knows that p, one knows that one knows that p.

<sup>11</sup> See esp. *Ap.* 21d, 23a–e. I discuss Socrates' human wisdom in 'Does Socrates Claim to Know that He Knows Nothing?', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 35 (2008), 49–88.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Ch.* 165bc.

<sup>13</sup> In *Met.* 982b17–21, he says that 'one who is puzzled (*aporón*) and wonders thinks he doesn't know', and that people in this position 'philosophized in order to escape their lack of knowledge'. Aristotle first speaks of thinking one doesn't know, and then simply of not knowing.

<sup>14</sup> I discuss prolepses in Chs. 7 and 8. The Greek is *prolēpsis* (sing.); I shall translate this as 'prolepses'. See Ch. 7, sect. 2.

hidden' (2.26).<sup>15</sup> The implication is that one inquires in order to attain cognition one doesn't already have. And Diogenes Laertius explicitly says that Skeptics were called inquirers (*zêtêtikoi*) precisely because they were always inquiring for the truth (*zêtein tèn alêtheian*) (DL 9.70)—sc. because they took themselves not to have grasped it.<sup>16</sup>

On this account of inquiry, not every way of attempting to acquire knowledge, or information, counts as inquiry. Rather, one considers a range of possibilities and seeks to discover which if any of them obtains; or one attempts to answer a given question, without yet having any answers in mind. In *PH* 1.28, Sextus tells the story of the painter Apelles who wanted to represent the foam on a horse's mouth. He kept trying, but failing, to do so. He eventually gave up his effort to paint the desired effect and, in frustration, threw a sponge at the painting. When it hit the picture, it produced the desired effect. The systematic attempt to produce the foam—the deliberate painting—is analogous to inquiry, though in this case, to one that is not successful. When Apelles achieved his goal, he did so not by inquiry, but by accident. As Plutarch says, someone who happens upon something makes a discovery: that is, one might discover something by chance.<sup>17</sup> But one doesn't, in that case, do so by inquiring. By contrast, the Socratic elenchus counts as inquiry.<sup>18</sup> Although a detailed account of the elenchus is beyond my scope here, we can say for present purposes that it generally takes the form of an inquirer expressing his beliefs (or considering various claims) and considering their mutual consistency or inconsistency. When inconsistencies are uncovered, the typical inquirer, after rational reflection, revises one or more of his initial beliefs (or rejects a given claim). The hope is that by repeatedly engaging in elenchus, one will arrive at a belief set whose members

<sup>15</sup> My translations of the *Academica* generally follow those in C. Brittain, *Cicero: On Academic Scepticism* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2006), though I have sometimes altered them without comment. Clement explains the Stoic view of inquiry along similar lines: 'inquiry is an impulse towards apprehension (*katalêpsis*), an impulse that discovers the subject through some signs. Discovery is a limit and cessation when inquiry has arrived at apprehension' (*Strom.* 6.14 p. 801 Pott = SVF 2.102). I discuss the Stoics on apprehension in Ch. 8.

<sup>16</sup> I discuss Skeptical inquiry in Chs. 10 and 11. For a brief discussion of whether they inquire for the truth, see Ch. 10, sect. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Fr. 215e. I quote the passage in its fuller context in sect. 4.

<sup>18</sup> In *Socratic Epistemology: Explorations of Knowledge-Seeking by Questioning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), J. Hintikka construes 'knowledge acquisition as a process of questioning, not unlike the Socratic *elenchus*' (2). This process of questioning is an 'interrogative approach to inquiry' (4). He thinks '[t]he interrogative model helps to extend the basic concepts and insights concerning questions to inquiry in general' (5). In his view, 'Socrates was right. All rational knowledge-seeking can be conceptualized as a questioning process, with question-answer steps interspersed with logical inference steps. "Rational" here means "capable of epistemological evaluation"' (83).

are not only mutually consistent but are also true and that stand in the appropriate explanatory relations to one another. This process of rational reflection in an effort to ascertain the truth counts as inquiry.

### 3. Meno's Paradox and the possibility of inquiry

Is inquiry, in the sense described, possible? Meno's Paradox returns a negative answer. Let's look briefly at it.<sup>19</sup>

At the beginning of the *Meno*, Meno asks Socrates whether virtue is teachable. Socrates replies that he doesn't know the answer to that question or, indeed, anything at all about virtue. For he doesn't know at all what virtue is (71ab); and, if one doesn't know what something is, one doesn't know anything about it (71b). Meno agrees (71b9); and, after being questioned by Socrates, he discovers that he doesn't know what virtue is either. Hence he concludes that, like Socrates, he doesn't know anything about virtue. Frustrated by his failure to explain what virtue is, he turns to the offensive and asks Socrates three related questions:<sup>20</sup>

(M1) But how will you inquire into this, Socrates, when you don't at all know what it is?  
 (M2) For what sort of thing, from among those you don't know, will you put forward as the thing you're inquiring into? (M3) And even if you really encounter it, how will you know that this is the thing you didn't know? (80d5–8)

Socrates replies:<sup>21</sup>

I understand the sort of thing you want to say, Meno. Do you see what an eristic argument you're introducing, (S4) that it's not possible for someone to inquire either into that which (*ho*)<sup>22</sup> he knows or into that which he doesn't know? For (S2) he wouldn't inquire into that which he knows (for he knows it, and there's no need for such a person to inquire);

<sup>19</sup> I provide a detailed discussion in Ch. 3.

<sup>20</sup> I insert '(M1)', '(M2)', and '(M3)' for ease of reference. For the Greek of this and the next passage, see Ch. 3, sects. 2 and 6, respectively.

<sup>21</sup> I insert '(S4)', '(S2)', and '(S3)' for ease of reference. I supply the implicit (S1) below.

<sup>22</sup> In 80e3–5, Plato uses the relative pronoun *ho*, which I have rendered as 'that which'. (He also uses the relative pronoun in 80d5–8.) It would be more natural in English to use 'what'. However, 'what' is ambiguous as between the relative pronoun and the interrogative. I have reserved 'what' for the *hoti* in 80e5, since *hoti*, unlike *ho*, is also ambiguous as between the relative pronoun and the interrogative. Matthews uses Grube's translation (which may be found in John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (eds.), *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997)), which uses 'what' for the relative pronoun in Socrates' formulation. He notes, however, that 'the thing which' (or 'that which') 'would be syntactically closer to Plato'; but he thinks that it is 'so artificial in English that it numbs our philosophical intuitions'. But he also has another motive for favoring 'what': he thinks it 'captures the puzzle better' (*Socratic Perplexity and the Nature of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 57, n. 4 ('*Socratic Perplexity*' hereinafter)). I discuss this issue in Ch. 3, sect. 10.

nor (S3) into that which he doesn't know (for he doesn't even know what (*hoti*) he'll inquire into). (80e1–5)

As I've said, I shall call the conjunction of Meno's questions and Socrates' dilemma 'Meno's Paradox'.<sup>23</sup> The two conjuncts differ from one another in various ways.<sup>24</sup> One difference is that Meno doesn't challenge the possibility of all inquiry. He challenges only the possibility of inquiring into something if one doesn't at all know what it is. Socrates' dilemma, by contrast, challenges the possibility of all inquiry: whether one does, or doesn't, know that which one is inquiring into, inquiry is impossible.

For now, let's focus on Socrates' dilemma. It can be formulated as follows:

- S1. For any *x*, one either knows, or does not know, *x*.
- S2. If one knows *x*, one cannot inquire into *x*.
- S3. If one does not know *x*, one cannot inquire into *x*.
- S4. Therefore, for any *x*, one cannot inquire into *x*.

As we shall see in Chapter 3, there are different ways of understanding the logical structure of this dilemma. There are also different ways of understanding each of its premises, depending on how knowing and not knowing are understood. For now, let's assume that the argument is valid, and that S1 is an instance of the Law of the Excluded Middle. In that case, it is not a promising candidate for rejection. Hence one can avoid the conclusion only if at least one of S2 or S3 is false. Yet both S2 and S3 might seem plausible.<sup>25</sup> On behalf of S2, we can note that if one already knows that which one is inquiring into, one's inquiry seems to be at an end. Suppose that one is inquiring what virtue is, and that one already knows what it is. Inquiry, we've said, is a systematic search for knowledge, or information, one doesn't have. If one already knows what virtue is, one already has the relevant knowledge; and so there's nothing left to inquire into. On behalf of S3, we can note that if one doesn't know that which one is inquiring into, it's not clear how one can embark on an inquiry into it. For if one doesn't know that which one is inquiring into, it seems that one can't specify what it is that one wants to inquire into. But if one can't specify the target one is aiming at, one isn't in a position to inquire. Let's call this the Targeting Objection.<sup>26</sup> Since the

<sup>23</sup> As I explain at the end of the Appendix, I also use 'Meno's Paradox' more broadly.

<sup>24</sup> I discuss some differences in Ch. 3, sect. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Whether they are plausible in the end is another matter, one that will occupy us at some length in what follows.

<sup>26</sup> I borrow the term from Matthews, *Socratic Perplexity*, 58. He uses it for Meno's first two questions.

argument is valid, since S1 is guaranteed to be true, and since both S2 and S3 seem plausible, inquiry seems to be impossible.

#### 4. Plutarch's account

Having looked briefly at Meno's Paradox, let's now ask how Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Stoics reply to it.<sup>27</sup> In a fragment preserved in Damascius' *Commentary on the Phaedo*, Plutarch provides one account of how they do so:

- 215c That only for Plato is there an easy explanation, when he refers knowing (*gnôsis*) and not knowing (*agnoia*) to forgetting and recollection.
- 215d That pieces of knowledge (*epistêmai*) are in us but hidden by other extraneous things, like the writing tablet (*deltos*) sent by Demaratus.
- 215e That both inquiry and discovery prove recollection. For no one could inquire into what he had no conception (*anennôêtos*) of, nor could he discover it—at least, not through inquiry, for we say that someone who comes upon something also discovers it.
- 215f That the problem in the *Meno*, namely, whether it is possible to inquire or to discover, is genuinely puzzling. For <we cannot inquire into or discover> either things we know (*ismen*) (for that would be pointless) or things we do not know (for even if we come upon them, we do not know (*agnooumen*) them: they might be any old thing). The Peripatetics considered the potential intellect (*ton dunamei noun*) <to be the solution to the puzzle>. But our puzzle arose from actual knowing (*eidenai*) and not knowing. For let it be granted that there is such a thing as the potential intellect; the puzzle is still the same. For how does this <potential intellect> think (*noei*)? For <it thinks about> either things it knows or things it does not know. The Stoics explain <the possibility of inquiry> with natural concepts (*phusikas ennoias*). If, then, these are potential, we will ask the same question <about the Stoics as we asked about the Peripatetics>. But if they are actual, why do we inquire into things we know? But if we start from them <in order to inquire> into other things we do not know, how do we <inquire into> things we do not know? The Epicureans <explain the possibility of inquiry> with prolepses. If they say these are articulated, inquiry is unnecessary. But if <they say> they are unarticulated, how do we go beyond prolepses to inquire into what we do not even have a prolepsis of?

According to Plutarch, Plato replies to Meno's Paradox with the theory of recollection, which, in his view, is the only satisfactory reply. He thinks the Peripatetics appeal instead to the potential intellect; the Stoics to natural concepts; the Epicureans to prolepses. He finds fault with these last three replies and argues against them.

<sup>27</sup> I defer discussion of Sextus until sect. 11.



Is Plutarch right about how these philosophers reply to Meno's Paradox? Is he right to think that only Plato has a satisfactory reply? In Chapters 2–8, we'll provide our own account of how these philosophers reply. Then, in Chapter 9, we'll look at Plutarch's account.

## 5. Plato's reply to Meno's Paradox

As I've mentioned, Plato replies in three stages.<sup>28</sup> In the first stage, he describes the theory of recollection, according to which we have some range of prenatal knowledge; inquiry and learning are recollection of things we knew before.<sup>29</sup> In the second stage, he cross-examines one of Meno's slaves about a geometry problem. Initially the slave thinks he knows the answer; but he eventually discovers that he doesn't know it after all. However, after being questioned further by Socrates, he discovers the right answer. Socrates says that he still doesn't know the right answer; he just has a true belief about what it is. In the third stage, Socrates again describes the theory of recollection; he also uses it to argue for the immortality of the soul, and explains the connection between the theory of recollection and the geometrical discussion with Meno's slave.

As we shall see, there are disputes about how to interpret each of these stages and about precisely how they fit together. There are also disputes about how exactly the three-stage reply responds to Meno's Paradox. Here I mention four of the main interpretative options; their credentials will be assessed later.<sup>30</sup>

On one view, Socrates takes the dilemma to be sound, and so he concludes that inquiry is impossible. Thus, Gilbert Ryle, for example, says that, according to Plato, '[o]ur ordinary notions of learning, enquiring and teaching are empty. There is instead of acquisition just retrieval of what is there but submerged. So Meno's dilemma was not a sophism after all, but rather a valid proof of the now Revealed Truth that enquiry cannot occur'.<sup>31</sup>

On a second view, Socrates rejects the conclusion of the dilemma, and so he takes the dilemma to be unsound. In particular, he rejects S2 and argues

<sup>28</sup> I discuss these in detail in Chs. 4 and 5.

<sup>29</sup> Plato also discusses the—or a—theory of recollection in the *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*. However, in these dialogues it isn't explicitly linked to Meno's Paradox; nor is it clear that the precise nature or point of the theory of recollection is exactly the same there as it is in the *Meno*. Hence I set them to one side here, though see Ch. 5, sect. 11 for a brief discussion of the *Phaedo* on recollection.

<sup>30</sup> Not all of the views I go on to describe are mutually exclusive. Nor are they exhaustive.

<sup>31</sup> G. Ryle, 'Many Things are Odd about our *Meno*', *Paideia* 5 (1976), 1–9, at 4. Cf. G. Vlastos, 'Is the "Socratic Fallacy" Socratic?', *Ancient Philosophy* 10 (1990), 1–15 (reprinted in *Socratic Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 67–86), at 8–9; and R. M. Dancy, *Plato's Introduction of Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 222.

that there are kinds of knowledge that, so far from precluding inquiry, enable it.<sup>32</sup> On the most usual version of this view, he thinks that we have latent innate knowledge which enables us to inquire. On this view, inquiry exists; and it consists in recollecting our latent innate knowledge. S2 is therefore false: we can inquire precisely because we have (latent innate) knowledge. Whereas the first view takes recollection to be an *alternative* to inquiry, the second view takes inquiry to *consist* in recollection.

It is sufficient for rejecting S2 that one argue that one *can* inquire into something even if one knows it (that is, knows what it is). But proponents of the second view generally think that Socrates holds a stronger view, according to which one *must* have knowledge in order to inquire. On this view, he accepts a *foreknowledge* principle.<sup>33</sup> As we shall see, there are various foreknowledge principles. We shall need to see which if any of them Socrates accepts, and which if any of them the other philosophers at issue here accept.

On a third view, Socrates rejects the conclusion of the dilemma, and so he takes the dilemma to be unsound. In particular, he rejects S3 and argues that there are ways of not knowing that don't preclude, but enable, inquiry. If, for example, one has mere true belief, one lacks knowledge (for mere true belief isn't sufficient for knowledge); but if one has and relies on relevant true beliefs, then, even if one lacks knowledge, one can inquire.<sup>34</sup>

On a fourth view, the dilemma is unsound because it relies on a misguided 'all-or-nothing' model of knowledge, as it is sometimes called.<sup>35</sup> There are various ways in which this view has been developed, either as Socrates' own analysis or as what we should in fact say about the dilemma. On one account, S2 takes knowing something to be having complete knowledge of it, whereas S3 takes not knowing

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, N. P. White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1976), 47–53; J. M. E. Moravcsik, 'Learning as Recollection', in G. Vlastos (ed.), *Plato 1: Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978; orig. pub. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971), 53–69, at 57; J. Barnes, *Aristotle: Posterior Analytics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 95 ('B1' hereinafter; there is also a second edition, published in 1993; I refer to it as 'B2'). For Barnes, see Ch. 6, sect. 2.

<sup>33</sup> The phrase 'foreknowledge principle' is due to D. Scott, *Plato's Meno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 84 (*PM* hereinafter).

<sup>34</sup> I defend this view in 'Inquiry in the *Meno*', in R. Kraut (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 200–26. Cf. T. H. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory: The Early and Middle Dialogues* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 138–40; and his *Plato's Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 130–6.

<sup>35</sup> For versions of this view, see R. W. Sharples, *Plato: Meno* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1985), 143; Scott, *PM*, 79; D. Charles, 'The Paradox in the *Meno* and Aristotle's Attempts to Resolve it', in D. Charles (ed.), *Definition in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 115–50, at 116 ('Paradox' hereinafter); and D. Bronstein, 'Meno's Paradox in *Posterior Analytics* 1.1', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 38 (2010), 115–41, at 134 ('Meno's Paradox' hereinafter).

something to be being in a cognitive blank with respect to it. S2 and S3 are true when they are so read; but, so read, they are not exhaustive options. The solution to the dilemma is to point out that there are intermediate conditions—such as partial knowledge and true belief—that permit inquiry. This differs from the third solution, because whereas the third solution takes true belief to be a way of not knowing, the fourth solution takes partial knowledge and true belief to be intermediates between, and so alternatives to, knowing and not knowing. On one way of understanding this fourth solution, S1 is not an instance of the Law of the Excluded Middle; rather, it says instead that, for any *x*, either one has complete knowledge of *x* or is in a cognitive blank about *x*. S2 and S3 then say that, whichever of these (as it turns out, non-exhaustive) options obtains, inquiry is impossible. So understood, the argument is still valid, but S1 is false.

## 6. Foreknowledge: stepping-stone and matching versions

The solutions just canvassed raise various issues that will concern us throughout, not only in looking at Plato, but also in looking at the other philosophers of concern to us here. It will help to introduce some of these issues now; in doing so, I can also introduce the other philosophers we'll be discussing.

One question is whether inquiry requires *foreknowledge*. Foreknowledge can be understood in many different ways. One important distinction is between what, following Lesley Brown, I'll call a *stepping-stone* and a *matching* version of a foreknowledge principle.<sup>36</sup> According to the former, to inquire one needs to have some relevant knowledge. According to the latter, to inquire one needs to know the very thing one is inquiring into.

Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and Epicureans have all been thought to favor a matching version of a foreknowledge principle. Thus C. C. W. Taylor, for example, speaks of 'Plato's characterisation of enquiry as the attempt to recover *that very knowledge*'.<sup>37</sup> And Jonathan Barnes says that, in *Posterior Analytics* 1.1, Aristotle first argues that 'the learner must already know the premises'; but, according to Barnes, Aristotle eventually 'adds that in a sense he also knows the conclusion':<sup>38</sup> hence he already knows the very thing he is seeking to learn.

<sup>36</sup> See her review of Dominic Scott's *Plato's Meno*, *Philosophical Review* 117 (2008), 468–71 ('Review' hereinafter).

<sup>37</sup> 'Aristotle's Epistemology', in S. Everson (ed.), *Epistemology*, 116–42, at 119, n. 8; emphasis in the original.

<sup>38</sup> B1, 94.

According to Plutarch, the Epicureans solve Meno's Paradox by appealing to prolepses; later I'll agree with him. According to Long and Sedley, the importance of prolepsis 'as a criterion lies especially in its guarantee that we know what the things we are discussing actually are. Our conjectures about them can be directly tested against that knowledge.'<sup>39</sup> In saying that we know what the things we are discussing actually are, Long and Sedley seem to ascribe a matching version of foreknowledge to the Epicureans, though it's not entirely clear that they mean to do so.<sup>40</sup> Dominic Scott, however, seems to do so, for he says that the Epicureans think that '[a]t the end of it all the learner realizes that the knowledge was always right under his own nose. He did not have to go out in search of obscure or recondite truths; he had to become aware of what, in a sense, he already knew—the *res apertae* that were constantly to hand.'<sup>41</sup> On this view, the Epicureans think we already have the knowledge we are seeking to acquire.

According to Plutarch, the Stoics solve Meno's Paradox by positing natural concepts (or notions; the Stoics also call these prolepses); later I'll agree with him. According to Michael Frede, the Stoics think that 'if we have a natural notion of human beings we know that if something is a human being, it is mortal'. He goes on to say that '[p]art of the motivation for such a conception of reason [as consisting in the having of natural notions which, in turn, involves having knowledge] clearly is the conviction that we can only come to know something if, in some sense, we already know what we are coming to know'.<sup>42</sup> There's room for doubt about whether this passage ascribes a matching version of foreknowledge to the Stoics. For one thing, Frede says that it is only *in a sense* that we already know what we are coming to know; perhaps the underlined phrase is meant to weaken or qualify the operative foreknowledge principle. Be that as it may, Charles Brittain says that, according to the Stoics, 'it is notable that there is a sense in which the inquirer already knows the conclusion: as Plutarch suggested, it is there potentially in the inquirer's set of preconceptions'.<sup>43</sup> If the inquirer

<sup>39</sup> A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley (eds.), *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1.89 ('LS' hereinafter).

<sup>40</sup> And perhaps, if they mean to do so, they have in mind what, below, I call objectual, rather than propositional, inquiry. Taylor and Barnes clearly have propositional inquiry in mind: if we are inquiring whether *p* is true, we already know whether it is true.

<sup>41</sup> D. Scott, 'Epicurean Illusions', *Classical Quarterly* 39 (1989), 360–74, at 374.

<sup>42</sup> 'The Stoic Conception of Reason' in K. J. Boudouris (ed.), *Hellenistic Philosophy* (Athens: International Center for Greek Philosophy and Culture, 1994), 50–63, at 54.

<sup>43</sup> C. Brittain, 'Common Sense: Concepts, Definition and Meaning in and out of the Stoa', in D. Frede and B. Inwood (eds.), *Language and Learning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 164–209, at 182–3.

already knows the conclusion, a matching version of foreknowledge seems to be at issue.

Yet it might seem difficult to square a matching version of a foreknowledge principle with the view that inquiry is a systematic search for knowledge, or information, one doesn't have. For a matching version of a foreknowledge principle seems to make it a necessary condition on inquiry that one already know the very thing one is inquiring into; but if one already knows that, it seems there is nothing left to inquire into. Combining a matching version of a foreknowledge principle with our account of inquiry seems to imply that a necessary condition for inquiry precludes inquiry. Yet a matching version is typically offered to explain how inquiry is possible, not to explain why it is impossible. We have various options. Perhaps there is this inconsistency, but one or another philosopher doesn't detect it. Alternatively, perhaps they are not committed to a matching version of a foreknowledge principle. Or perhaps there is a version of a matching version of a foreknowledge principle that is, despite initial appearances, compatible with inquiry as we have conceived it. We shall need to see which if any of these options is right.

## 7. Propositional and objectual inquiry

Another distinction that will prove useful—one that complicates the distinction between a matching and a stepping-stone version of a foreknowledge principle—is between what I shall call propositional and objectual inquiry.<sup>44</sup> One form propositional inquiry takes is asking whether a given proposition is true or false. For example, is it true or false that Socrates is virtuous? As I shall use the phrase, propositional inquiry also includes asking what a given proposition means and what its grounds are, as well as asking a question, even if no specific answer has yet been put on the table and so no specific proposition is being evaluated as true or false. For example, one might ask what virtue is, without yet having any possible answers in mind, though one will presumably consider possible answers in the course of one's inquiry.

<sup>44</sup> N. P. White, 'Inquiry', *Review of Metaphysics* 28 (1974–5), 289–310, suggests that Plato sometimes thinks of inquiry as a search for an object, and sometimes as an effort to say what an object is, where the latter involves producing a definition or specification of it; and he wonders whether Plato conflates the two. By contrast, in *Plato on Knowledge and Reality* (1976), he speaks of 'one's ability to recognize the object of an inquiry (whether it be an object in some narrow sense, or something more like the answer to a question that frames the inquiry)' (43). According to his earlier usage, objects contrast with propositions. According to his later usage, objects include both objects narrowly conceived (e.g. Socrates) and propositions. It's not always clear which usage various commentators have in mind.

We can also speak of objectual inquiry. In objectual inquiry, one inquires about things, such as Socrates or virtue. Various objectual inquiries are possible: one can ask whether that's Socrates over there; who Socrates is; whether he is virtuous. One can also ask whether virtue is teachable, and what its essence is.

As these examples make clear, the distinction between propositional and objectual inquiry is not always sharp. In asking whether Socrates is virtuous, one is asking about an object, Socrates. But one is also asking whether the proposition 'Socrates is virtuous' is true. Indeed, it is tempting to say that objectual inquiry is just a special case of propositional inquiry: it involves asking a question about a person, place, or thing; and that, in turn, involves asking either whether some proposition about that thing is true or what the answer to a question about it is. When we inquire about a thing, we do so either by asking whether a given proposition is true of it or by trying to answer a question about it. We can put this in the material mode: we wonder what properties a given object has—whether, for example, virtue has the property of being teachable. But this is not an alternative to propositional inquiry as I am conceiving of it.

Once we introduce the distinction between propositional and objectual inquiry, the distinction between the stepping-stone and matching versions of a foreknowledge principle becomes more complex. For example, a matching version of a foreknowledge principle for propositional inquiry says that, to inquire whether *p* is true, one must already know whether it is true. By contrast, a matching version for objectual inquiry says that, to inquire about Socrates, one must already know Socrates—that is, one must know who he is. However, this is equivalent to a stepping-stone version of a foreknowledge principle for propositional inquiry: one must know who Socrates is, to inquire (for example) where he is. The proposition saying who he is differs from the proposition saying where he is.<sup>45</sup> Or suppose I'm inquiring about virtue. A matching version of a foreknowledge principle for objectual inquiry says that, to be able to do so, I must know virtue—that is, I must know what it is. Suppose that, to know what virtue is, is to know its essence. And suppose that the particular inquiry about virtue that I'm engaged in is whether virtue is teachable. Knowing what virtue is is different from knowing whether it's teachable. Once again, a matching version of a foreknowledge principle for objectual inquiry is equivalent to a stepping-stone version for propositional inquiry.

Suppose, however, that I'm inquiring what virtue is. A matching version of a foreknowledge principle says that, to do so, I need to know what it is. But that's also what I'm inquiring about. Here, then, a matching version of a foreknowledge

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Ps.-Plato, *Sisyphus* 388b–c.

principle for objectual inquiry might seem to be equivalent to a matching version for propositional inquiry. And that is indeed the case if the knowledge one needs in order to begin an inquiry into what virtue is, is knowledge of its essence; and if that is also what one is seeking to discover. If, however, one's initial knowledge of what virtue is can be different from the knowledge one is seeking to acquire, then, once again, a matching version for objectual inquiry will be equivalent to a stepping-stone version for propositional inquiry: one needs to know a proposition stating what virtue is, but the content of that proposition differs from the content of the proposition one is seeking to discover. The latter states the real essence of virtue; but perhaps the former need not do so. Perhaps there is a way of knowing what virtue is that enables one to inquire what its real essence is, even though it doesn't specify its real essence. We shall see, however, that this solution isn't open to Plato, though it may be open to the other philosophers we'll discuss. It's sometimes thought that the fact that this solution isn't open to Plato makes him vulnerable to Meno's Paradox. We shall need to see whether that is so.

## 8. Foreknowledge: cognitive level

Another question about foreknowledge concerns cognitive level. If, as is often held, Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Stoics all reply to Meno's Paradox by accepting a foreknowledge principle, it might seem that they are in substantial agreement. However, before concluding that that is so, we should ask what they take knowledge to be. If each of them thinks that foreknowledge is necessary for inquiry, but each of them understands knowledge differently, then their seeming agreement about foreknowledge would in fact mask important differences.

In *Meno* 98a, Plato defines knowledge (*epistêmê*) as true belief that is tied down with reasoning about the explanation: one knows that *p* if and only if one believes that *p*, *p* is true, and one can explain why *p* is true. On this view, one knows what virtue is if and only if one has a true belief about what virtue is, and one can explain why virtue is as it is. In Plato's view, one can explain what virtue is and why virtue is as it is only if one knows the real essence of virtue, what virtue really is.<sup>46</sup> Let's call this *P-knowledge*, for knowledge as Plato understands it in the *Meno*. Those who think that Plato accepts a foreknowledge principle generally think that the prior knowledge he requires is *P-knowledge*. It's

<sup>46</sup> I discuss this account of knowledge in detail in 'Knowledge and True Belief in the *Meno*', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2004), 41–81. To say that Plato thinks that one can know what virtue is only if one knows what its real essence is, is not to say that he thinks that, in general, for any *x*, one can know what it is only if one knows its real essence. See Ch. 2, sect. 2.

reasonable to think that, if Plato accepts a foreknowledge principle, it involves P-knowledge. For he thinks that's the only sort of knowledge there is. If our cognitive grasp of something falls short of P-knowledge, then, in his view, we have at best true belief.<sup>47</sup>

Aristotle begins the *Posterior Analytics* by saying that:

All teaching and intellectual learning come from prior *gnôsis* (71a1–2).

*Gnôsis* is often thought to be knowledge; so it might seem that, in the passage just quoted, Aristotle requires prior knowledge for inquiry.<sup>48</sup> But even if Aristotle uses *gnôsis* for knowledge here—we shall ask later whether he does so—it might not follow that he is requiring P-knowledge. For perhaps he thinks knowledge extends beyond P-knowledge. In that case, even if he requires knowledge as he conceives of it (A-knowledge), it might not follow that he requires P-knowledge; and perhaps Plato would think that the relevant sort of A-knowledge is just true belief. If so, Plato and Aristotle would disagree about what knowledge is; but they wouldn't be disagreeing about what sort of cognitive condition (whatever it is called) is needed for inquiry.

As we'll see, both the Epicureans and Stoics say that we can inquire only if we have prolepses. And, as we've seen, it's been held that, in doing so, they are requiring prior knowledge for inquiry. However, even if they require knowledge as they conceive of it (E-knowledge and S-knowledge)—a question we'll explore—it might not follow that they require P-knowledge. For perhaps the sort of knowledge they take us to have in virtue of having prolepses—if we should speak of knowledge here at all—falls short of P-knowledge.

If all these philosophers require knowledge—again, we shall ask later whether they do so—but they all conceive of knowledge differently, then, even if they all accept something appropriately called a foreknowledge principle, they wouldn't all accept the same version of it. For they would in this case disagree about what sort of knowledge is at issue.

Whatever these philosophers think, the view that knowledge is needed for inquiry is controversial. The more demanding a condition one takes knowledge to be, the less reasonable it is to require knowledge for inquiry. Indeed, one might

<sup>47</sup> Since Plato thinks that knowledge is a species of true belief, he also thinks that, if we have knowledge, we have true belief. But if we have knowledge, we don't have *mere* true belief. When I contrast true belief with knowledge, I use 'true belief' for true beliefs that fall short of knowledge. Not all of these are on a par; some true beliefs that fall short of knowledge are better justified than others are. Nonetheless, insofar as they fall short of knowledge, they are all *mere* true beliefs.

<sup>48</sup> More precisely, for teaching and intellectual learning. In Ch. 6, I ask how these are related to inquiry.



argue that if knowledge goes beyond true belief, it isn't necessary for inquiry; true belief will do. One might also argue that even if true belief is sufficient, it isn't necessary; false beliefs will do, so long as they are roughly accurate. Or one might argue that belief isn't needed: one can inquire on the basis of nondoxastic appearances. That is, one doesn't need to believe that the oar is bent in water to inquire whether it is; one can inquire whether it is on the basis of its seeming that it is. Similarly, one can inquire whether *p* is so by entertaining *p*. One doesn't need to know that it is true, or have the true belief that it is true, or even the belief that it is true; nor does *p* need to be true. It will do if one considers the possibility that it is true.

Here, however, we should return to our distinction between a matching and a stepping-stone version of a foreknowledge principle. According to the first, as we've seen, one needs to know the very thing being inquired into; according to the second, one needs to know just something suitably relevant to that which one is inquiring into. If one argues that one can inquire whether *p* is true even if one doesn't already know or even believe that *p* is true, one rejects a matching version of a foreknowledge principle, as well as a matching version of what we might call a prior-belief, or a prior-cognition, principle.<sup>49</sup> However, one might think that one must have some knowledge or beliefs to inquire. So, for example, J. Cook Wilson says that '[i]n an inquiry, first comes this questioning activity when we set a problem to ourselves. This implies that we know something of a given subject but are ignorant of some aspect of it which interests us'.<sup>50</sup> This seems to reject a matching version of a foreknowledge principle for propositional inquiry, but to endorse a stepping-stone version. Similarly, it's one thing to reject a matching version of a prior-true-belief, or a prior-belief principle, and another to reject even a stepping-stone version. To do the latter, one must say not only that one doesn't need to have the true belief, or even the belief, that *p* is true, to inquire whether it is; one must also say that one can inquire without having any true beliefs, or any beliefs, at all.

Inquiry is often thought of as a series of belief revisions. On this conception of inquiry, one needs to have at least some beliefs in order to inquire. Hintikka, however, objects to this conception of inquiry. He notes that when Simenon's Inspector Maigret is asked what he believes about an investigation, his typical answer is 'I don't believe anything.' As he puts it, 'The moment for believing or not believing hasn't come yet.'<sup>51</sup> Maigret exaggerates. He may not have any

<sup>49</sup> At least, one rejects it for propositional inquiry.

<sup>50</sup> 'The Relation of Knowing to Thinking', in *Statement and Inference*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), vol. 1, 36. He doesn't say, here, what he takes knowledge to be.

<sup>51</sup> Hintikka, *Socratic Epistemology*, 32. For the Simenon, he cites *Maigret and the Pickpocket* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985).

beliefs about who committed the crime. But he has other relevant beliefs—for example, about how to go about finding out who committed it. Although he rejects a matching version of a foreknowledge, and of a prior-belief, principle, he doesn't reject a stepping-stone version of some such principle. As we shall see, however, on one interpretation Pyrrhonian Skeptics claim to inquire even though they have no beliefs at all. If they argue in this way, they reject even a stepping-stone version of a prior-belief principle.<sup>52</sup>

## 9. Foreknowledge: content

Another question about foreknowledge—or about prior cognition, if knowledge isn't needed—concerns its content: what must one know, or have some sort of grasp of, to be in a position to inquire? Suppose one is inquiring what the real essence of virtue is. Must one already know what it is? So the matching version of a foreknowledge principle might seem to imply. But there are other possibilities, all of which have been advocated either as what one should say or as what one or another philosopher at issue here thinks. For example, it's been argued that, to inquire what virtue is, one must know, or in some way grasp, a feature true of all and only cases of virtue; or a feature true of all cases of virtue; or a feature that enables one to distinguish virtue from other things with which it might easily be confused; or a feature that enables one to represent virtue to oneself in some way. On yet another view, all one needs to do is to understand what the question being considered means.<sup>53</sup>

It's not plausible to think that we can inquire into something only if we know its real essence. Scientists were able to inquire about water before they knew, or even believed, that it is H<sub>2</sub>O. If we need to know something's real essence to inquire into it, the scope of inquiry will be considerably more limited than we take it to be. Surely knowing, or in some way cognizing, just some sort of distinguishing mark, where that falls short of knowing something's essence, will do? Yet, as we've seen, at *Meno* 71b Socrates says that if one doesn't know what something is, one can't know anything at all about it. He is often taken to mean that if one doesn't know what something's essence is, one doesn't know anything

<sup>52</sup> Even if they argue this, it doesn't follow that they accept the argument in their own right. They might offer the argument *ad hominem* or as an account of how things nondoxastically seem to them to be.

<sup>53</sup> Here, however, we can ask what it takes to understand what a question means. Will it do if one grasps its conventional linguistic meaning? Or must one have a deeper grasp? If I grasp the dictionary definitions of neutrino and of light, is that sufficient for me to understand the question 'Can neutrinos travel faster than light?'. Or do I need a more substantial grasp of neutrinos and light? If so, how substantial must that grasp be?

else about it either; and it is then inferred that he thinks that if one doesn't know what something's essence is, one can't inquire into it. For, he is thought to believe, one needs to know what something is to be able to inquire into it.<sup>54</sup> If Plato reasons in this way, he would reject the view that one can inquire into something simply on the basis of a distinguishing mark that falls short of essence. We shall need to see whether he reasons in this way and, if he doesn't do so, what his alternative view is.

If, at the outset, we know, or in some way grasp, the essence of *x*, or a distinguishing mark of *x*, we know, or grasp, something that is true of *x*. But it seems that, at the beginning of some inquiries, we have a mixture of true and false beliefs about the things we're inquiring into. In that case, finding something that satisfies all of our initial beliefs isn't going to be finding the right answer. For we want to know (say) what virtue really is; and we don't assume that what it really is satisfies all our initial beliefs about it, for we are open to the possibility that some of them are false. But beliefs don't wear their truth and falsity on their faces. So what's to stop us relying on the false ones? Yet if we do so, it's not clear we'll ever reach our goal.

Suppose we favor just a stepping-stone version of a foreknowledge, or of a prior-cognition, principle. We can then ask what related things or propositions one must know or grasp. Suppose I am inquiring whether virtue is teachable; and suppose I know, or have a good grasp of, physics. It's not clear that my grasp of physics is a suitable stepping stone for enabling me to inquire whether virtue is teachable. There must, then, be some constraints on the relevant related contents.

## 10. When must one know or cognize?

Yet another question about foreknowledge or prior cognition asks *when* one must have the relevant knowledge or cognition. Commentators who think that one or another philosopher requires foreknowledge (or prior cognition) generally suppose that that philosopher thinks one must have knowledge (or cognition) not just at some time prior to inquiry, but when one is inquiring. To this extent, these commentators ascribe a *current* knowledge, or cognition, principle to the relevant philosopher. But when do we first acquire this knowledge, or cognition? Did we acquire it for the very first time at some point in this life by, for example, perceiving and having certain experiences and reasoning in various ways? Or did we first acquire it prenatally? Or did we not acquire it at all? In this latter case, we

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, F. Grgic, 'Plato's *Meno* and the Possibility of Inquiry in the Absence of Knowledge', *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter* 4 (1999), 19–40, at 24.

might have had it for the whole of our prenatal existence, but lose it on being born; or we might just have been born that way. Of course, these latter two possibilities are compatible: we might have prior knowledge for the whole of our prenatal existence and also when we are born. But, as we shall see, one might hold one of these options without holding the other: one might think we have innate knowledge or cognition but not prenatal knowledge or cognition; or one might think we had prenatal knowledge or cognition, but lost it on being born in such a way that we no longer know at all.

The theory of recollection clearly posits prenatal knowledge. Though it is generally taken to posit innate knowledge as well, I shall argue that, at least in the *Meno*, it doesn't do so. But deciding whether Plato, or any of the other philosophers we'll be considering, posits innate knowledge is complicated by the fact that innatism has been understood in more than one way. First, various things have been held to be innate: for example, knowledge, belief, and concepts. Secondly, each of these things might be held to be innate in various ways. I shall distinguish three varieties of innatism: cognitive-condition, content, and dispositional innatism.<sup>55</sup> Let's focus for now on what these amount to in the case of knowledge. According to cognitive-condition innatism about knowledge, from birth we are in the cognitive condition of knowing. According to content innatism about knowledge, from birth there are contents—mental representations of some sort—in us that are suitable to serve as the content of knowledge, whether or not they so serve from birth. According to dispositional innatism about knowledge, we are, from birth, disposed to acquire knowledge, or to know certain specific truths, though we don't actually have knowledge from birth. (Hence, on this view, knowledge isn't innate; just the disposition is.) If one favors cognitive-condition innatism about knowledge, one thereby favors content innatism about knowledge. But content innatism about knowledge doesn't imply cognitive-condition innatism about knowledge. Nor does dispositional innatism imply either content innatism or cognitive-condition innatism.

<sup>55</sup> I discuss these varieties of innatism in more detail in Ch. 5, esp. sect. 2. Here I give just a brief overview, to be refined in due course. For discussion of varieties of innatism, see J. Barnes, 'Mr. Locke's Darling Notion', *Philosophical Quarterly* 22 (1972), 193–214; N. Jolley, *Leibniz and Locke: A Study of the New Essays on Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) and his *The Light of the Soul: Theories of Ideas in Leibniz, Malebranche, and Descartes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); S. Stich (ed.), *Innate Ideas* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1975); G. Hunter and B. Inwood, 'Plato, Leibniz, and the Furnished Soul', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 22 (1984), 423–34; Scott, *Recollection and Experience: Plato's Theory of Learning and Its Successors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) (*RE* hereinafter), *PM*, and his 'Innatism and the Stoa', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 33 (1988), 123–54 ('Innatism' hereinafter); and J. Miller, 'Innate Ideas in Stoicism and Grotius', *Grotiana*, n.s. 20/1 (1999/2000), 143–62. Many of the distinctions I draw in what follows are also drawn in one or another of these works.

Similarly, one might favor cognitive-condition innatism, content innatism, or dispositional innatism about true beliefs or concepts. Thus, one might think that we are, from birth, in the cognitive condition of having true beliefs, or concepts; or that mental contents that are suitable to serve as true beliefs, or that constitute concepts, are in us from birth, whether or not we are in the cognitive condition of belief or of having concepts; or that we are, from birth, predisposed to acquire either some true beliefs or other, or certain specific true beliefs, or some concepts or other, or certain specific concepts.

Plato, we shall see, is often thought to favor cognitive-condition innatism about knowledge, though other views have also been held. I explore this issue in Chapter 5.

Aristotle is generally—but, as we shall see, not always—thought to reject both content innatism and cognitive-condition innatism. There is more room for dispute about whether he favors dispositional innatism. I explore this issue in Chapter 6.

The Epicureans are generally thought not to be innatists. However, it has been argued that they are innatists, either quite generally or at least for the special case of the prolepsis of god. I explore this issue in Chapter 7.

There is dispute about whether the Stoics are innatists. I discuss this in Chapter 8. It has been held that none of them are. But it has also been argued that either all of them, or at least later Stoics such as Epictetus, are innatists of some sort, either in general or just for moral notions. Among those who think that at least some of the Stoics are innatists, there is dispute about whether their version of innatism is the same as, or different from, Plato's (if he is an innatist). Dominic Scott, for example, argues that Plato is a cognitive-condition innatist about knowledge; but he thinks that the Stoics, both early and late, are just dispositional innatists, and only for moral notions.<sup>56</sup> Leibniz, by contrast, seems to think that Plato and the Stoics favor the same version of innatism, which is, arguably, dispositional innatism. In the Preface to the *New Essays on Human Understanding*, he says that Locke is closer to Aristotle (who, Leibniz thinks, rejects innatism), whereas he himself is closer to Plato, though he 'parts company at many points' from him. He goes on to say that:<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> See *RE* and 'Innatism'. This is my way of putting Scott's view; though he uses the phrase 'dispositional innatism', he doesn't use 'cognitive-condition innatism'. Nor does he use 'content innatism'.

<sup>57</sup> *New Essays on Human Understanding*, trans. and ed. P. Remnant and J. Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 48–9.

There is the question whether the soul in itself is completely blank like a writing tablet on which nothing has as yet been written—a *tabula rasa*—as Aristotle and the author of the *Essay* [i.e. Locke] maintain, and whether everything which is inscribed there comes solely from the senses and experience; or whether the soul inherently contains the sources (*princeps*) of various notions and doctrines, which external objects merely rouse up on suitable occasions, as I believe and as do Plato and even the Schoolmen . . . The Stoics call these sources Prolepses, that is, fundamental assumptions of things taken for granted in advance.

Though there is dispute about whether Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Stoics are innatists of some stripe in at least some cases, it is generally agreed that they reject prenatal knowledge. At least here, then, Plato is the odd man out.

## 11. Skeptical inquiry

So far I've largely left the Pyrrhonian Skeptic Sextus Empiricus to one side. In the last section, I mentioned one way in which Plato is the odd man out: only he, among the philosophers we'll be considering, posits prenatal knowledge. Sextus might seem to be the odd man out in a different way. For, whereas the other philosophers we'll discuss are usually thought to accept some version of a foreknowledge principle, Sextus isn't usually thought to do so. Indeed, on one view he disclaims not only all knowledge but also all belief. Yet he claims that Skeptics can and do inquire. So whereas the Dogmatic philosophers (who, according to Sextus, include Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and Epicureans) are often thought to say that one can inquire only if one already has some knowledge, Sextus has been taken to say that one can inquire even if one lacks all knowledge, and even all beliefs. He also seems to argue that if one has—or rather, if one thinks one has—knowledge or even belief, that's an impediment to inquiry. Skeptics, he suggests, are the only true inquirers, precisely because they don't think they have the answers. He claims that the Dogmatists, by contrast, both think they know the answers and also require knowledge for inquiry. Sextus argues that, in doing so, they preclude inquiry. Hence, just as Plutarch argues that Peripatetics, Epicureans, and Stoics can't inquire, so Sextus argues that Dogmatists like the Epicureans and Stoics can't inquire. However, Plutarch bases his argument on the claim that they don't favor recollection. Sextus, by contrast, bases his argument on the claim that they require knowing, and also thinking one knows, the answers. The Stoics and Epicureans argue in turn that they, but not Skeptics, can inquire. For, they argue, if the Skeptics really lack all knowledge and even all belief, they aren't in a cognitive condition that is sufficiently robust to allow inquiry.

In Chapters 10 and 11, I look at the Stoic and Epicurean challenges to the possibility of Skeptical inquiry. I also look at Sextus' attempt to vindicate the possibility of Skeptical inquiry, and at his argument for the claim that Stoics and Epicureans, or Dogmatists more generally, can't inquire. We will continue our exploration of what cognitive condition one needs to be in, to be in a position to inquire, as well as our exploration of what the content of that condition needs to be. Skeptics say that they have concepts and that they use them to inquire. But they also distance themselves from the accuracy—perhaps even from the meaningfulness or coherence—of these concepts. Can one inquire into F on the basis of a concept of F that is far from accurate? How inaccurate can it be, compatibly with enabling one to use it so as to fix a target to aim at, or so as to help one realize one has hit the target one was aiming at, should one succeed in doing so?

## 12. Conclusion

In what follows, then, we'll ask whether various philosophers accept a foreknowledge principle and, if they do so, what version of it they accept: the same one or different ones. If a given philosopher doesn't accept any version of a foreknowledge principle, we'll want to know what cognitive condition he thinks one must be in, in order to inquire: must one have true beliefs? Will it do if one has just nondoxastic appearances? We'll also ask what sort of content one must grasp (whether as a matter of knowledge or belief or of some other cognitive condition) in order to be able to inquire: must one grasp something's real essence, or will grasping something less than that do? Must one in some way grasp the very thing one is inquiring into, or will it do if one grasps something suitably related to it? We'll also ask when one needs to know or grasp whatever one must know or grasp if one is to be able to inquire: Must one do so prenatally? Must one have innate knowledge (or true beliefs or concepts)? Or can one acquire the relevant knowledge or cognition for the first time later in life, as one matures?

In attempting to answer these questions, we'll touch on a variety of broader issues, especially about how each philosopher, or school, understands the nature of knowledge and of other cognitive conditions such as belief, true belief, and nondoxastic appearances; and of how they explain our cognitive development. A full account of these broader issues would require a long book on ancient epistemology in general. My aim here is more limited. I hope to say just enough to be able to explain Meno's Paradox and various replies to it. But I hope that the reader who is interested enough to wonder about these issues will be tempted to explore ancient epistemology more extensively than I shall do here.

## Appendix: Meno's Paradox: what's in a name?

I've been speaking of Meno's Paradox; but the label has been criticized. For example, it has been argued that Meno doesn't raise a paradox: he asks questions; but questions aren't a paradox.<sup>58</sup> However, Meno's questions are easily converted into an argument—I formulate it in Chapter 3, section 4—and, as we shall see, that argument is a paradox in the familiar sense that it has seemingly plausible premises that issue in a startling conclusion.<sup>59</sup>

It has also been argued that the use of 'paradox' is misleading because 'this name misrepresents what [Plato] does address. He does not try to explain why some fact, which according to some seemingly compelling argument is not a fact, is after all a fact. He answers Meno by simply pointing to a fact whose existence Meno never doubts' (viz. recollection).<sup>60</sup> But however Socrates replies, he and Meno raise a paradox if they provide a seemingly compelling argument that challenges the truth of a familiar claim; and, on the account I shall suggest, that's what they do.

It has also been argued that 'paradox', in the singular, is misleading, on the ground that Meno raises two paradoxes, one about inquiry (M1 and M2) and one about discovery (M3).<sup>61</sup> I address, and attempt to assuage, this worry in Chapter 3.

The label 'Meno's paradox' has also been criticized on the ground that Socrates, no less than Meno, raises a paradox; 'Meno's paradox' doesn't capture that fact. This point is not worrying if Socrates captures Meno's concerns. It has been argued that he doesn't do so. I address, and attempt to assuage, this worry in Chapter 3.

Whether or not 'Meno's Paradox' is an apt label, it has rival claimants. For example, the passage is sometimes said to raise 'the learner's paradox'.<sup>62</sup> This

<sup>58</sup> J. Moline, 'Meno's Paradox?', *Phronesis* 14 (1969), 153–61, at 157.

<sup>59</sup> According to A. Cantini, 'By "paradox" one usually means a statement claiming something that goes beyond (or even against) a "common opinion" (what is usually believed or held)' ('Paradoxes and Contemporary Logic', in E. N. Zalta (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring, 2013), <<http://www.plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/paradoxes-contemporary-logic>>. The OED cites the following from A. Prior, *Formal Logic* III.i.224: 'As with Lewis's paradoxes, these appear less startling when the definitions of the terms used are considered.' As we shall see, the issue of what various terms mean in Meno's Paradox will prove important.

<sup>60</sup> P. Dimas, 'True Belief in the *Meno*', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 14 (1996), 1–32, at 19, n. 35.

<sup>61</sup> See especially Scott, *PM*, 82–3. Cf. *RE*, 24–32; and R. Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's Meno* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 53–4.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, Moravcsik, 'Learning as Recollection', 63; cf. 64. He also uses 'the paradox of inquiry' (63). These are connected labels, since he thinks Plato presents 'a paradox of learning taking the form of inquiry' (54).



might seem surprising; for neither Meno's questions nor Socrates' dilemma mentions learning. By contrast, in the *Euthydemus* Socrates considers similar puzzles which, however, are phrased in terms of learning rather than in terms of inquiry (275d–278d).<sup>63</sup> Similarly, when, in *Posterior Analytics* 1.1, Aristotle describes what he calls the 'puzzle (*aporêma*) in the *Meno*', he mentions learning, but not inquiry. However, at 81d4–5 Socrates says that 'inquiry and learning are, as a whole, recollection'. Hence, learning, or at least some learning, is in some way relevant. Nonetheless, the label 'learner's paradox' is sometimes criticized on the ground that the paradox in the *Meno* doesn't concern *all* learning.<sup>64</sup> In Chapter 4, I ask how Plato connects inquiry and learning.

Sometimes 'eristic paradox' is used on the ground that Socrates says that Meno has introduced an *eristikos logos* (80e2).<sup>65</sup> 'Eristic' can be understood in different ways, and there's dispute about how Socrates uses it here. Because the word is so often used in a way that's inappropriate here, it's not the best label. I discuss this issue in Chapter 3.

Sometimes Meno's questions and Socrates' dilemma are collectively called 'the Paradox of Inquiry'.<sup>66</sup> One might also challenge this label. For, like 'Meno's Paradox', it suggests that there is just one paradox at issue, whereas, as I've mentioned, it has been argued that there is more than one; and, it's sometimes thought, only one of them is properly called a paradox of inquiry. I attempt to assuage this worry in Chapter 3. As I understand Meno's questions and Socrates' dilemma, 'the Paradox of Inquiry' is an appropriate label. It also has the advantage, over 'Meno's Paradox', of indicating something about the content of the paradox. However, it has the disadvantage of not indicating its origin. Though

<sup>63</sup> There is dispute about the connection between Meno's Paradox as it is formulated in the *Meno* and the related paradoxes in the *Eud.* For a lucid defense of the view, with which I agree, that the arguments in the *Eud.* differ from the argument in the *Meno* in that the former arguments trade on an ambiguity whereas the latter argument does not do so, see Matthews, *Socratic Perplexity*, 54–62. Aristotle seems to agree. For, as we shall see in Ch. 6, in *APo.* 1.1 he takes Meno's Paradox seriously; but *Sophistici Elenchi* (= *SE*) 4 suggests he thinks that the *Eud.*'s argument equivocates on *manthanein*, which can refer both to the process of learning and to its product, which in the ideal case is knowledge or understanding. (Though *SE* 4 doesn't explicitly mention the *Eud.*, it plainly recalls it.)

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality*, 43.

<sup>65</sup> See e.g. W. Jordan, *Ancient Concepts of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1990), 73. (He also uses 'paradox of enquiry': 72.) Scott uses 'eristic dilemma' for Socrates' dilemma and 'Meno's challenge' for Meno's questions: *PM*, 75. However, I don't think Socrates means to restrict the phrase *eristikos logos* to the dilemma. For he says that Meno has introduced (*katagein*) it, which suggests that Meno's questions fall within its scope.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Matthews, *Socratic Perplexity*, ch. 6. By contrast, C. Kahn seems to use 'paradox of inquiry' just for M1 and M2: see his 'Plato on Recollection', in H. Benson (ed.), *A Companion to Plato* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 119–32, at 120. In *Plato's Ethics*, sect. 92, Irwin uses 'paradox of inquiry', though in his earlier *Plato's Moral Theory*, he uses 'Meno's Paradox': 138–40.

these two labels are equally appropriate, using two labels would be distracting.<sup>67</sup> I chose 'Meno's Paradox' largely because it is so well entrenched, being used not only in contemporary literature but also (near enough) by Aristotle and Plutarch.<sup>68</sup> It also serves the useful purpose of reminding us that the problems it raises are first seriously discussed in Plato's *Meno*.

In addition to using 'Meno's Paradox' for the conjunction of Meno's questions and Socrates' dilemma, I shall also use the phrase more broadly for arguments that challenge the possibility of inquiry by focusing on questions about knowing and not knowing.<sup>69</sup> I shall also sometimes speak of variants of Meno's Paradox—for example, in discussing what I call the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry, which, according to Sextus, the Stoics and Epicureans level against the Skeptics.

<sup>67</sup> As a waiter in a restaurant in Paris once said to me, when I was dithering about what to order: *il faut choisir*.

<sup>68</sup> More precisely, they speak of the problem, or puzzle, in the *Meno*. So yet another possible label is 'the *Meno*'s paradox'. This might be misleading too, though, since the dialogue is sometimes thought to discuss one or another of the so-called Socratic paradoxes, which have nothing to do with Meno's Paradox.

<sup>69</sup> Similarly, sometimes 'the problem of evil' is used for a particular determinate argument, sometimes for a range of related arguments. Thanks here to Sydney Penner.



# PART I

## Plato's *Meno*



## 2

# The Origins of the Problem

### 1. The priority of knowledge what

Before looking at Meno's Paradox in detail, we should set the scene. For understanding the context in which it first appears will help us understand its force and point. Further, it's been argued that Socrates' commitments at the beginning of the dialogue make him vulnerable to Meno's Paradox. We can't assess whether that's so without looking at those commitments. Doing so will prove crucial for understanding what is, and isn't, at stake in Meno's Paradox. In considering the origins of the problem, two issues will be of central concern. First, we'll ask whether Socrates commits himself to any version of a foreknowledge principle. Secondly, we'll ask what if anything he tells us about the sort of content that must be available to one, if one is to be able to inquire.

The dialogue begins with Meno asking:

Can you tell me Socrates, whether virtue is teachable? Or is it not teachable, but acquired by practice? Or is it acquired neither by practice nor by learning, but comes to people by nature or in some other way? (70a1–4)<sup>1</sup>

Socrates replies that he doesn't know whether virtue is teachable. Indeed:<sup>2</sup>

So far am I from knowing whether it is teachable or not, that I don't even in fact know at all (*parapan*) what virtue is.<sup>3</sup> (71a5–7)

As he explains:

I blame myself for not knowing at all (*parapan*) about virtue. But if I don't know what something is, how could I know what it's like? Or do you think someone who doesn't at all

<sup>1</sup> Ἐχεις μοι εἰπεῖν, ὦ Σώκратες, ἄρα διδασκτὸν ἡ ἀρετή; ἢ οὐ διδασκτὸν ἀλλ' ἀσκητόν; ἢ οὔτε ἀσκητόν οὔτε μαθητόν, ἀλλὰ φύσει παραγίγνεται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἢ ἄλλῳ τινὶ τρόπῳ.

<sup>2</sup> Though 'at all' (*parapan*) occurs both here and in the first and third sentence of the next passage that I quote, it is omitted in the second sentence of the next passage that I quote (71b3–4). Elsewhere, too, 'at all' is sometimes used, but sometimes omitted. There is dispute about whether this is significant. I discuss this in Ch. 3, sect. 6.

<sup>3</sup> ἐγὼ δὲ τοσοῦτον δέω εἶτε διδασκτὸν εἶτε μὴ διδασκτὸν εἰδέναι, ὥστ' οὐδὲ αὐτὸ ὅτι ποτ' ἐστὶ τὸ παράπαν ἀρετὴ τυγχάνω εἰδώς.

know who Meno is<sup>4</sup> could know whether he's handsome,<sup>5</sup> wealthy, or well born, or the opposite of these? (71b1–8)<sup>6</sup>

In the passage just quoted, Socrates says that just as one can't know whether Meno is handsome, wealthy, or well born unless one knows who he is, so one can't know whether virtue is teachable unless one knows what virtue is. In general, unless one knows what (*ti*) *x* is, one can't know what *x* is like (*poion*) (71b3–4).<sup>7</sup> Let's call this the Priority of Knowledge What (PKW):

(PKW) If one doesn't know what *x* is, one can't know what *x* is like.

It's because Socrates accepts PKW and thinks he doesn't know what virtue is, that he claims not to know anything about virtue. How exactly should PKW be understood? The first thing to notice is that Socrates speaks interchangeably of not knowing what *x* is like, on the one hand, and not knowing anything about *x*, on the other. So we can rewrite PKW as follows:

(PKW1) If one doesn't know what *x* is, one can't know anything about *x*.

<sup>4</sup> ὅστις Μένωνα μὴ γινώσκει. This is standard Greek for 'not know who Meno is'. In *Plato's Meno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), however, R. S. Bluck says that Socrates is talking about knowing Meno, which he takes to be 'a matter of acquaintance' (213; cf. 213–14, 32–3). But knowing Meno in the sense of being acquainted with him is different from knowing who he is. It would take argument to show that one can know who someone is only by being acquainted with him. Even if acquaintance is the means by which one comes to know who or what someone or something is (a view that is controversial), it is not what knowing who or what someone or something is consists in. I take it that Plato is here concerned just with knowing who or what someone or something is.

<sup>5</sup> *kalos* can be used to mean 'noble' or 'fine'. But 76b4–5 suggests it means 'handsome' here. Contrast A. Nehamas, 'Socratic Intellectualism', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 2 (1987), 274–316, reprinted in his *Virtues of Authenticity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 27–58, at 31 (latter pagination).

<sup>6</sup> καὶ ἐμavτὸν καταμέμφομαι ὡς οὐκ εἰδῶς περὶ ἀρετῆς τὸ παράπαν· ὁ δὲ μὴ οἶδα τί ἐστὶν, πῶς ἂν ὁποῖόν γέ τι εἰδείην; ἢ δοκεῖ σοι οἶόν τε εἶναι, ὅστις Μένωνα μὴ γινώσκει τὸ παράπαν ὅστις ἐστίν, τοῦτον εἰδέναι εἴτε καλὸς εἴτε πλούσιος εἴτε καὶ γενναῖός ἐστιν, εἴτε καὶ τάναντία τούτων.

<sup>7</sup> 'In general' is controversial. Nehamas, for example, thinks that Socrates is making just 'the modest claim that there are some features of virtue (those which are as disputable as its definition is or that are essentially connected with it) about which he can have no knowledge, or any other cognitive attitude, without first knowing what virtue itself is' ('Socratic Intellectualism', 32; cf. 35–6). The claim Nehamas takes Socrates to be making is more modest than the claim I take him to be making insofar as Nehamas thinks it requires knowledge of what something is for knowing just *some* of its features, whereas I think Socrates claims that one can't know *any* of a thing's features unless one knows what that thing is. But in another way, Nehamas ascribes a stronger claim to Socrates than I do. For he thinks Socrates requires knowledge of what something is for having any other cognitive attitude (such as belief) about disputable features of that thing, whereas I shall argue that Socrates thinks one needs knowledge of what something is, not for having *beliefs* about features of it (whether those features are, or are not, disputable), but just for having *knowledge* of them.

But this still leaves it unclear exactly what the principle amounts to. One possibility is that it means:<sup>8</sup>

(PKW2) If one has no idea what *x* is—if one is in a cognitive blank with respect to *x*—one can't have any ideas about *x*.

PKW2 is a plausible claim. So perhaps Meno readily accepts PKW because he interprets it as PKW2.<sup>9</sup> However, PKW2 is unlikely to be what Socrates means. For he thinks that, where virtue is concerned, he satisfies the antecedent of PKW: he says that he doesn't at all know what virtue is. If PKW2 captures what he means, it follows that, in his view, he has no ideas about virtue. But he seems to have various ideas about virtue. For example, he says that everything that is virtuous is so because of some one form (72c6–8). Nor does he say that he has *no ideas* about virtue. He says he doesn't at all *know* (*eidenai*) what it is.<sup>10</sup> It is one thing to lack all *knowledge* of what something is, another to have no *ideas* about what it is. At least, that is so on any view of knowledge according to which knowledge goes beyond belief. And whatever Meno may think knowledge is, Socrates thinks it goes beyond not just belief, but also beyond mere true belief.<sup>11</sup>

He makes this clear later in the dialogue when he says, at 98a, that knowledge is true belief that is tied down with reasoning about the explanation. That is, one knows that *p* is true if and only if one believes that *p* is true; *p* is true; and one can explain why *p* is true. On this view, one can't know *that* *p* is true unless one knows *why* *p* is true.<sup>12</sup> Let's call this *P-knowledge*, for knowledge as Plato understands it at 98a.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. A. Nehamas, 'Meno's Paradox and Socrates as a Teacher', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 3 (1985), 1–30, at 5f.

<sup>9</sup> 71b9 makes it clear that Meno accepts the principle Socrates enunciates. However, whether he interprets it as Socrates does is another matter, which I discuss in due course.

<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, some translations obscure this crucial point. For example, W. K. C. Guthrie, *Plato: Protagoras and Meno* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1956), translates 71a5–7 as: 'The fact is that far from knowing whether it can be taught, I have no idea what virtue itself is.' In place of 'I have no idea', he should have 'I do not at all know (*eidōs*).' Guthrie translates 71b4–6 as: 'Do you suppose that somebody entirely ignorant who Meno is could say whether ...', when he should have: 'Do you suppose that someone who does not at all know (*gignōskei*) who Meno is could know (*eidenai*) whether ...'.

<sup>11</sup> That is, he doesn't think knowledge is *identical* to true belief: it isn't *mere* true belief; it involves more than true belief. That's compatible with his thinking that knowledge is a species of true belief and, in my view, that's what he thinks in the *Meno*.

<sup>12</sup> I explore the *Meno*'s account of knowledge more fully in 'Knowledge and True Belief in the *Meno*'. The definition in 98a is of *epistēmē*; in 71, Socrates uses forms of *eidenai*. One might argue that the conditions for one to *eidenai* something are weaker than are the conditions for one to have *epistēmē* of something. However, 96d5ff. seems to use forms of the verbs *eidenai* and *epistasthai*, and of the noun *epistēmē*, interchangeably. For example, 97a9 has *eidōs*, but b2 has *epistamenos*; it would be very awkward and misleading were any difference intended. Similarly, the contrast in 98d1



Socrates, then, doesn't say that he has no idea what virtue is; nor is that what he means to imply. He says, and means, that he doesn't at all *know* what virtue is. Accordingly, let's consider another interpretation of PKW:<sup>13</sup>

(PKW3) If one doesn't know what *x* is, one can't have any ideas about *x*.

In contrast to PKW2, PKW3's antecedent is one Socrates thinks he satisfies in the case of virtue. But PKW3 is deeply problematic. For if one must know what something is in order to have any ideas about it, and if, as Socrates says, he doesn't at all know what virtue is, he can't have any ideas about it. Yet, as we've seen, he says quite a lot about virtue. Socrates' claims about his cognitive condition, coupled with PKW3, conflict with his practice.

Perhaps Socrates nonetheless intends it; or perhaps he is committed to it without realizing it. But we shouldn't assume this—at least, not just yet. For PKW doesn't say that one must know what something is in order to *have any ideas* about it. It says that one must know what something is in order to *know* anything else about it: one kind of knowledge—knowledge of what *x* is—is needed for further knowledge about *x*. This suggests the following interpretation of PKW:<sup>14</sup>

(PKW4) If one doesn't know what *x* is, one can't know anything about *x*.

I shall from now on understand PKW in this way. The crucial point to bear in mind is that PKW requires one kind of knowledge (not merely having an idea about something) for another kind of knowledge (not for having ideas). One kind of knowledge or knowledge of one kind of property depends on another kind of knowledge or on knowledge of another kind of property.

between *epistēmē* and true belief would be very awkward and misleading if there were also a sort of knowledge that is less than *epistēmē*. It's true that Socrates doesn't define *epistēmē* until late in the dialogue; and one might argue that, until then, he uses epistemic vocabulary differently. However, that might seem to violate the Dialectical Requirement, on which see further below. Even if, contrary to my view, Socrates uses *eidenai* more broadly earlier in the dialogue than he does later in the dialogue, it wouldn't follow that, if one didn't *eidenai* something in that allegedly broader way, one was in a cognitive blank about it – and that is my main point here. According to J. Lyons, *Structural Semantics: An Analysis of Part of the Vocabulary of Plato* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963) ('*Structural Semantics*' hereinafter), in Plato the verb *epistasthai* and the noun *epistēmē* are semantically distinct, in that the verb is more specialized than the noun. Even if that is true in general, Plato doesn't seem to intend any difference in 97b2–5; here, to *epistasthai* something is to have *epistēmē* of it.

<sup>13</sup> In 'Plato's *Euthyphro*: An Analysis and Commentary', *Monist* 50 (1966), 369–82, P. T. Geach assumes something like PKW3 in his account of what he calls 'the Socratic fallacy'. For he thinks Socrates is committed to the view that if one doesn't know what *F* is, one can't use or recognize examples of things that are *F* in an effort to discover what *F* is.

<sup>14</sup> PKW4 is identical to PKW1. But I hope that consideration of various interpretations has made its meaning clearer.

## 2. Knowing what x is and knowing what x is like

What are these two kinds of knowledge, or two kinds of property? On a familiar view, the claim is that to know what something is, is to know its essence; and to know what something is like (or, equivalently, to know anything further about the thing) is to know its nonessential properties.<sup>15</sup> Deciding whether this view is right is complicated by the fact that there are different interpretations of what it is to be an essential or a nonessential property. There are also disputes about which if any properties of a thing are its essential or nonessential properties. So, for example, on one account Socrates' essence is or includes his origins; on another, his essence is just to be human; on another, it is his particular way of being human. On yet another view, things like Socrates have no essences; only universals or properties do.<sup>16</sup> Without knowing how if at all Plato distinguishes essential from nonessential properties, and what he takes to be examples of each, it's difficult to know whether the distinction he has in mind between what something is and what it is like is meant to be the distinction between the essential and the nonessential properties of a thing. Unfortunately, he doesn't provide an explicit account of essential or nonessential properties.

But perhaps we can nonetheless make some headway. For Socrates goes on to suggest that a correct answer to the question 'What is virtue?' says what virtue is. He wants to know the one form (*eidos*, 72c7, d8) of virtue by which everything that is virtuous is so (72c6–d1); this is the essence (*ousia*, 72b1) of virtue. So it seems that, at least in the case of virtue, knowing what something is is knowing its essence, where that, in turn, is revealed by its real definition, which specifies the one property because of which everything that is virtuous is so.<sup>17</sup> One might infer that, in general, to know what x is, is to know its essence. Accordingly, if something lacks an essence, it can't be known.

Socrates may intend that view. But there is an alternative worth considering. Perhaps he thinks that what it takes to know what something is depends on the

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Scott, *PM*, 20–2. Contrast White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality*, 35–40.

<sup>16</sup> For various views about how to draw the distinction between essential and nonessential properties, see e.g. B. A. Brody, 'Natural Kinds and Real Essences', *Journal of Philosophy* 64 (1967), 431–46 and his 'Why Settle for Anything Less than Good Old-Fashioned Aristotelian Essentialism?', *Noûs* 7 (1973), 351–65; S. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980); K. Fine, 'Essence and Modality: The Second Philosophical Perspectives Lecture', *Philosophical Perspectives* 8 (1994), 1–16 and his 'Senses of Essence', in W. Sinnott Armstrong et al. (eds.), *Modality, Morality and Belief: Essays in Honor of Ruth Barcan Marcus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 53–73.

<sup>17</sup> For the view that a correct answer to a 'What is F?' question is the real definition of F, which specifies F's real essence, see e.g. T. Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, sects. 90–1. It becomes clear later in the dialogue that, for Socrates, the essence of virtue is some one property; see sect. 4.

kind of thing it is. Perhaps, if  $x$  has an essence, knowing what  $x$  is requires knowing its essence, whereas, if  $x$  lacks an essence, one can know what it is by being able to identify it without specifying its essence. Alternatively, perhaps knowing what something is is context relative in the sense that what it takes to know what something is depends on what else about the thing one wants to know. Perhaps to know whether virtue is teachable one needs to know what virtue essentially is; for whether or not it's teachable is the sort of thing that is at least partly explained by what it essentially is. But perhaps one can know whether Meno is handsome without knowing his essence, even if he has one. For perhaps that's the sort of property of a thing that isn't even partly explained by its essence.<sup>18</sup>

If, in every case, knowing who or what something is requires knowing its essence, it follows that one can know who Meno is only if one knows his essence. And since one can know whether he's handsome, wealthy, or well born only if one knows who he is, it would follow that one couldn't know whether he's handsome, wealthy, or well born unless one knew his essence. If this is Socrates' view, then he thinks either that (i) Meno has an essence, and one can know what it is, and so the possibility is left open that one can also know other things about Meno, such as whether he's handsome and so on; or else (ii) Meno doesn't have an essence, and so one can't know who he is, and so neither can one know whether he's handsome and so on. If, however, Socrates thinks that in some cases one can know who or what something is without knowing its essence, then he might think that (iii) one can know whether Meno is handsome, wealthy, or well born by knowing who he is, where that doesn't require knowing his essence.

If, in speaking of knowing who Meno is, Socrates is giving a literal example of something one can know, that favors (i) or (iii). If he is just giving an analogy, in order to get Meno to understand that knowledge of one sort of property depends on knowledge of another sort of property, (ii) becomes an option.<sup>19</sup>

One might think that Socrates' account of knowledge in 98a counts against (iii). For, as we've seen, 98a says that one can't know that  $p$  is true unless one knows why  $p$  is true. One might think it follows that, to know what something is,

<sup>18</sup> For discussion of what it takes to know who or what something is, see S. Boer and W. Lycan, *Knowing Who* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986).

<sup>19</sup> For the view that Socrates mentions knowing who Meno is just as an analogy, see White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality*, 54 n. 5; Nehamas, 'Meno's Paradox and Socrates as a Teacher', 27; Scott, *PM*, 21. At 97a ff. Socrates speaks of knowing the way to Larisa. The three options just canvassed in the text arise here as well: Socrates might think that if one knows the way to Larisa, one knows its essence; or he might think that one can know the way to Larisa without knowing its essence, either because it doesn't have one or because one doesn't need to know it, to know the way; or he might mention knowing the way to Larisa merely as an analogy.

one must know its essence; for essences are explanatory. However, to say that all knowledge requires an explanation of why what one knows is true is not to say that it all requires a grasp of essence. To be sure, essences are explanatory. For example, it's only by reference to the essence of virtue that one can explain why virtue is (or is not) teachable. But even if, in some cases, one can explain what *x* is like only by reference to its essence, it's not clear that's always so. Aristotle, for example, recognizes various ways of explaining why things are so, not all of which require reference to the essence of the thing.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps, similarly, Socrates thinks one can explain why Meno is handsome, wealthy, or well born without appealing to his essence (whether or not he has one).

It might seem implausible to think that to know whether Meno is, for example, handsome, one needs to know his essence: surely it will do if one can identify him as the person he is? And surely one can do that without knowing his essence? However, it's reasonable to think that one can't know whether Meno in particular (as opposed to that person over there, whoever he is) is handsome unless one knows who he is. Whether it's plausible to think that one can know who he is without knowing his essence depends on what one thinks essential properties are. The more robust the notion of essence is, the less reasonable it is to require knowledge of Meno's essence for knowing whether he's handsome. It also matters here what the operative notion of knowledge is. Suppose that knowledge is P-knowledge, and that one can't P-know who Meno is without knowing his essence. That leaves open the possibility that one might be able to have a *well-founded true belief* about whether he's handsome without *knowing* his essence; for having a well-founded true belief about something falls short of having P-knowledge about it.<sup>21</sup>

Whether or not it's plausible to think that one can know whether Meno is handsome only if one knows his essence, it's plausible to think that one can know whether virtue is teachable only if one knows its essence. For, again, whether virtue is teachable depends on what the essence of virtue is; we can explain why virtue is (or is not) teachable only by reference to its essence. Given Plato's conception of knowledge as P-knowledge, PKW is plausible in the sorts of cases that primarily interest him here, such as that of virtue.

Unfortunately, the text doesn't say enough to allow us to choose among (i), (ii), and (iii). Socrates' main interest is in cases like virtue where, in his view, knowing what something is does involve knowing its essence. He doesn't tell us whether, in every case, one can know what something is like only if one knows its essence, or

<sup>20</sup> See e.g. *Physics* 2.3 and 7.

<sup>21</sup> At least, this is so on many conceptions of what it takes to have a well-founded true belief.

whether that's true only in the sorts of cases that especially interest him here. Nor does he tell us what's involved in knowing the essence of sensible particulars or whether he thinks they have them. Be that as it may, I shall from now on follow Socrates and focus on cases like virtue. It's clear that he thinks that such things have essences, which are specified in correct answers to 'What is F?' questions.

### 3. The scope of the priority of knowledge what

So far I've suggested two interpretations of what it is to know what something is: either it's to know what the thing's essence is, or else it's a broader notion that requires knowledge of essence in some but not all cases. It's difficult to choose between these two options. For though Socrates makes it clear that in some cases knowing what something is is knowing its essence, he doesn't make it clear whether he thinks that's true in all cases.

Let's now ask what's involved in knowing what something is like (*poion*). As we've seen, Socrates seems to think that *x*'s *poion* properties are all those properties *x* has that don't constitute what *x* is. If what *x* is is what *x* essentially is, and if *x*'s properties are exhausted by its essential and nonessential properties, then *x*'s *poion* properties are equivalent to *x*'s nonessential properties. If what *x* is is a broader notion than what it essentially is, and if *x*'s essential and nonessential properties exhaust *x*'s properties, then *x*'s *poion* properties are a subclass of *x*'s nonessential properties. If something can be true of *x* without its being either an essential or a nonessential property of *x*—if what's true of *x* is a broader notion—then *x*'s *poion* properties will be more extensive than *x*'s nonessential properties, though they won't be so extensive as to include any of *x*'s essential properties, since these are, or are among, the properties that constitute what *x* is, if *x* has any essential properties at all.

As before, it's difficult to decide among these possibilities without knowing exactly how Socrates conceives of the essential and nonessential properties of a thing. However, we've seen that he takes it to be sufficient for *F*'s having an essence that there is a correct answer to the 'What is *F*?' question about it.<sup>22</sup> Virtue is among the things that have an essence. Socrates makes it clear that he thinks that being teachable is not part of it. Rather, it would be a *poion* property of virtue, one that would flow from, or be at least partly explained by, the essence of virtue. Generalizing, it seems that *x*'s *poion* properties include all those properties of *x* that aren't essential to it (or that don't constitute what it is,

<sup>22</sup> In speaking of properties like virtue, it's convenient to use '*F*' rather than '*x*'.

where, as we've seen, that might be a broader notion than what something essentially is).

Socrates may accept a broader principle than that, in order to know whether *x* is *F*, where *F* is a nonessential property of *x*, one must know what *x* is. For at 79c8–e1, he says that one can't know whether justice is a part of virtue unless one knows what virtue is. If parts of virtue are nonessential properties of virtue, then 79c8–e1 is not evidence that a thing's *poion* properties include more than its nonessential properties. However, if parts of virtue like justice are not properties of virtue, whether essential or nonessential, then either 79c8–e1 relies on a different principle from PKW or else what a thing is like is not exhausted by its nonessential properties but includes some of the parts of a thing.<sup>23</sup>

Let's now ask about another case: does Socrates think that one must know what virtue is in order to know whether someone or something counts as an instance of virtue? More generally, does he think that, to know what counts as an instance of *F*, one must know what *F* is?

If Socrates' being virtuous (if he is) is a nonessential property of virtue, then this would presumably count as a *poion*-property of virtue. But one might argue that, though Socrates' being virtuous isn't a nonessential property of virtue, it is nonetheless a *poion*-property of virtue, since it tells us something about what virtue is like: virtue is the sort of thing that Socrates instantiates. If so, then a thing's *poion*-properties are more extensive than its nonessential properties are.

But one might think that, though Socrates' being virtuous (if he is) is a property of Socrates, it is not a property of virtue. In that case, PKW doesn't imply that one can know that Socrates is virtuous (if he is) only if one knows what virtue is. So perhaps Socrates thinks that one can know whether something is an instance of virtue without knowing what virtue is.

However, I doubt whether Socrates means to leave this possibility open. For as we've seen, at 72c7–8 he says he wants to know the one form of virtue by which all cases of virtue are cases of virtue. He might have just types of virtue (rather than particular token cases of virtue) in mind. But it seems reasonable to suppose that he means his point to apply to particulars as well: *anything* that is virtuous is virtuous because of the one form of virtue.<sup>24</sup> So either PKW covers such cases; or

<sup>23</sup> As I explain more fully below, there presumably needs to be some restriction on the sort of parts. Otherwise, Socrates would be committed to the view that to know what water and oats are, one has to know what porridge is, since they are parts of porridge. I take it that Socrates has in mind parts that are what they are by being parts of a given whole. Justice is what it is by being a part of virtue, whereas neither water nor oats are what they are by being parts of porridge.

<sup>24</sup> Here I agree with Scott, *PM*, 85–7. Cf. *Eu.* 5–6, where (in my view) Socrates says that, to know whether anything is pious, one must know the form of piety. The issue of whether Socrates believes that one can know whether *x* is *F* only if one knows what *F* is has been much discussed. For detailed

else Socrates is tacitly relying on a different but related principle, according to which one can know whether *x* is *F* only if one knows not just who or what *x* is, but also what *F* is.

There is, then, some unclarity about the precise scope of PKW as it is stated in 71b: it's not clear whether it is meant to imply that one can know whether *F* is a part of *x* only if one knows what *x* is.<sup>25</sup> Nor is it clear whether it is meant to imply that one can know whether *x* is *F* only if one knows not only what *x* is but also what *F* is. But whether or not PKW covers these latter two cases, Socrates accepts them in the *Meno*. So either they fall under PKW or else Socrates tacitly relies on different but related principles without explicitly formulating them. If the former is the case, *poion*-properties are more extensive than a thing's nonessential properties.<sup>26</sup> If the latter is the case, something's *poion*-properties are restricted to its nonessential properties,<sup>27</sup> but Socrates nonetheless, on the basis of different tacit but related principles, thinks that one can know that *F* is a part of *x*, where *F* is a certain sort of part of *x*, only if one knows what *x* is; and that one can know whether something is an instance of *F* only if one knows what *F* is. We need not decide between these two options. For us, the crucial point is the extent of his commitments, whether they are captured by PKW as it is formulated in 71b or emerge only gradually.

Though it's not clear whether PKW as it is formulated in 71b includes the claims about certain sorts of parts and instances, I shall for the sake of convenience assume that it does. I shall also from now on take PKW to say that, to know about *F*, one needs to know its essence, that is, an answer to the Socratic 'What is *F*?' question, where that asks for the real essence of *F*. For though Socrates may think that, in some cases, one can know who or what *x* is without knowing its essence, such cases won't be of concern to us in what follows.

On the reading I've suggested, PKW requires *knowledge* of what *x* is for any other *knowledge* about *x*. It is not the weak principle that one can't have any ideas about *x* if one has no idea what *x* is. Nor is it the self-defeatingly strong principle that one needs to know what something is in order to have any ideas about it. It is the defensible but controversial view that one needs to know what something is to *know* anything else about it.

discussion, see H. Benson, 'The Priority of Definition and the Socratic *Elenchos*', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 8 (1990), 19–65.

<sup>25</sup> Where, as we've seen (n. 23), there is a restriction on the relevant sorts of parts.

<sup>26</sup> Unless one counts such parts of virtue as justice as nonessential properties of virtue, and unless one counts instances of properties as nonessential properties of those properties.

<sup>27</sup> Or to the subclass of them that don't constitute what a thing is, if what a thing is extends beyond a thing's essential properties.

I've suggested that PKW grounds one kind of knowledge in another, where knowledge is understood as it is defined in 98a, as P-knowledge. Meno, we've seen, unhesitatingly accepts PKW. But whether, in doing so, he understands it as Socrates does remains to be seen. After all, Socrates hasn't yet said what he takes knowledge to be. Perhaps Meno has a different view of the nature of knowledge. We shall need to see.

We shall also need to see whether I'm justified in interpreting PKW as I have done. For my interpretation assumes that Socrates is clear about the difference between knowledge, on the one hand, and lower-level cognitive conditions, such as belief or having ideas about something, on the other hand. It also assumes that he thinks that lacking knowledge about something doesn't mean that one is in a complete cognitive blank about it, that one has no ideas at all about it. It has been argued that the early dialogues are unclear about the difference between knowledge and true belief.<sup>28</sup> If that should prove to be true in the *Meno*, our interpretation of PKW will be open to challenge.

Two further points about PKW should be made before proceeding further. First, PKW is a principle about *epistemological* priority: if one doesn't know what x is, one can't know anything about x. If one doesn't know what virtue is, one can't know whether it's teachable; if one doesn't know who Meno is, one can't know whether he's handsome, wealthy, or well born. One sort of knowledge is prior to another, in that one can't have the latter without having the former. PKW is not, however, a principle about *chronological* priority. It doesn't say that one needs to know what x is temporally prior to knowing anything else about x. For all PKW says, one might come to know what x is at the same time as one comes to know something else about x. Perhaps one can come to know what virtue is at the same time as one comes to know that it's teachable.<sup>29</sup>

Secondly, PKW doesn't say that, in order to *inquire* whether (e.g.) virtue is teachable, one must first know what it is.<sup>30</sup> It says that one can't *know* whether virtue is teachable if one doesn't *know* what it is. That doesn't imply that one can't *inquire* whether virtue is teachable unless one *knows* what it is. It's true that Socrates' *preferred* method is to begin by ascertaining what virtue is, and only then to inquire whether it is teachable. That's why, when Meno asks whether virtue is teachable, Socrates suggests that, before doing so, they should first ascertain what virtue is. Presumably he thinks they will be in the best possible

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., J. Beversluis, 'Socratic Definition', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 11 (1974), 331–6.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Scott, *PM*, 132. However, in *RE* he says that 'Socrates insists that we must know what virtue is *before* we can discover what it is like' (27; emphasis added). Even in *PM*, he at one point describes Socrates' 'methodological stance' as favoring 'the chronological priority of definition' (193).

<sup>30</sup> Contrast Grgic, 'Plato's *Meno* and the Possibility of Inquiry', 24.



position to discover whether virtue is teachable if they first know what it is, since virtue's being or not being teachable can only be explained by reference to the nature of virtue. But, though Socrates' preferred method is to inquire what F is before inquiring what F is like, PKW doesn't commit him to the claim that one can inquire whether virtue is teachable only if one first knows what it is. Nor does it commit him to the view that one can discover whether virtue is teachable only if one first knows what it is. To say that a given method is preferable doesn't imply that it's the only one that's possible.

#### 4. The oneness assumption

Though Socrates claims not to know what virtue is or, therefore, anything at all about virtue, he and Meno nonetheless proceed to inquire what virtue is.<sup>31</sup> Meno's first suggestion is that:

It is not hard to tell you, Socrates [what virtue is]. First, if you want the virtue of a man, it is easy to say that a man's virtue consists of being able to manage public affairs and in so doing to benefit his friends and harm his enemies and to be careful that no harm comes to himself. If you want the virtue of a woman, it is not difficult to describe: she must manage the house well, preserve its possessions, and be submissive to her husband. The virtue of a child, whether male or female, is different again, and so is that of an elderly man, if you want that, or if you want that of a free man or a slave. And there are very many other virtues, so that one is not at a loss as to what virtue is. (71e1–72a2)<sup>32</sup>

Socrates replies:

I seem to be in great luck, Meno: while I am inquiring for one virtue, I have found you have a whole swarm of them. (72a6–8)<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *zētôn*: 72a7; cf. 74a11. It's not clear that Meno arrives at his first account of what virtue is (71e–72a) through inquiry, though it's important to note that, before he gives it, Socrates tells him to answer as it seems to him; he shouldn't just say what Gorgias thinks. It's true that, at 72a7, Socrates claims that *he* (Socrates) is inquiring, which doesn't imply that Meno is also doing so. But the way in which the Dialectical Requirement is introduced (on which see below) suggests that they are engaged in a joint inquiry. This is also suggested by Socrates' claim that he wants to investigate and consider with Meno what virtue is (80d3–4).

<sup>32</sup> Ἀλλ' οὐ χαλεπὸν, ὦ Σώκρατες, εἰπεῖν. πρῶτον μὲν, εἰ βούλει ἀνδρὸς ἀρετὴν, ῥάδιον, ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἀνδρὸς ἀρετή, ἱκανὸν εἶναι τὰ τῆς πόλεως πράττειν, καὶ πράττοντα τοὺς μὲν φίλους εὖ ποιεῖν, τοὺς δ' ἐχθροὺς κακῶς, καὶ αὐτὸν εὐλαβεῖσθαι μηδὲν τοιοῦτον παθεῖν. εἰ δὲ βούλει γυναικὸς ἀρετὴν, οὐ χαλεπὸν διελεῖν, ὅτι δεῖ αὐτὴν τὴν οἰκίαν εὖ οἰκεῖν, σφίζουσάν τε τὰ ἔνδον καὶ κατήκοον οὔσαν τοῦ ἀνδρός. καὶ ἄλλη ἐστὶν παιδὸς ἀρετή, καὶ θηλείας καὶ ἄρρενος, καὶ πρεσβυτέρου ἀνδρός, εἰ μὲν βούλει, ἐλευθέρου, εἰ δὲ βούλει, δούλου. καὶ ἄλλαι πάμπολλαι ἀρεταὶ εἰσιν, ὥστε οὐκ ἀπορία εἰπεῖν ἀρετῆς περὶ ὅτι ἐστίν.

<sup>33</sup> Πολλὴ γέ τιτι εὐτυχία ἔοικα κεχρησθαι, ὦ Μένων, εἰ μίαν ζητῶν ἀρετὴν σμῆνός τι ἀνηύρηκα ἀρετῶν παρὰ σοὶ κείμενον.

Socrates doesn't deny that there are many cases, or kinds, of virtue. But he thinks that 'even if they are many and various, all of them have one and the same form (*eidos*) which makes them virtues' (72c6–8); and that's what the correct account of virtue should specify. This is the essence (*ousia*, 72b1) of virtue, what virtue really is. Let's call this *Oneness Assumption 1*.

(OA1): Properties like virtue are some one thing, the same in all cases; and such properties are forms.<sup>34</sup>

Further, anything that is F, for some range of cases, is F in virtue of some one and the same form of F, which is the essence of F, what F-ness really is. A statement of what F is should capture this one form or essence.

Having mentioned OA1, Socrates proceeds to apply it to bees, then to virtue, then to health, size, and strength. At 74b3–4, he says that it applies to everything (*peri pantos*). He then restates it, applying it to shape, saying that 'since you call all these many by one name, and say that no one of them is not a shape even though they are opposites, tell me what this is which applies as much to the round as to the straight and which you call shape, as you say the round is as much a shape as the straight' (74d5–e2). Let's call this second formulation *Oneness Assumption 2* (OA2).

OA1 and OA2 are not obviously equivalent. OA1 says that everything, or some range of things, that are F are F in virtue of some one and the same form or essence. OA2 says that since many things are called 'F', and each of these is F even though they are opposites, some one thing applies to them all. OA1 but not OA2 mentions form and essence. OA1 but not OA2 says that it's by, or because of, the form or essence of F that everything that is F is F. OA2 but not OA1 mentions names. Despite these differences, I think Socrates means to formulate just one oneness assumption. But how exactly should we understand it?

One possibility is that Socrates thinks that, for every general term 'F', there is some one property by which all things that are called 'F' are so called. So understood, Socrates would be committed to the view that, since river banks and financial institutions are called 'banks', there is a single property of being a bank in virtue of which they are called 'banks'. I doubt, however, that that is what is meant. For OA2 doesn't say that, whenever there's a general term, 'F', there's a single thing, F. It says that, whenever several things are called by one name, 'F', *and those things are all F, even though they are opposites*, as round and square are

<sup>34</sup> In *On Ideas: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), esp. chs. 4 and 8, I discuss one over many assumptions, as well as connections among forms, essences, and properties.

both shapes, even though they are opposites, there is something that applies to them all. This seems designed to exclude cases of ambiguity. Though river banks and financial banks are called ‘banks’, they are not opposites.<sup>35</sup>

Should we then say that Socrates thinks that, whenever ‘F’ has a single sense, all Fs are F in virtue of a single property of F? That is also too strong. ‘Grue’, for example, is not an ambiguous term.<sup>36</sup> Yet I doubt that Socrates wants to say that everything that is grue, or that is called ‘grue’, is grue in virtue of some one form or essence, grueness. For there is no form or essence of grueness. There is a form or essence of F only if F ‘carve[s] reality at the joints’ (*Phdrs.* 265e1–2; cf. *Pol.* 262b).

I’m therefore inclined to think that, despite the different formulations, Socrates has in mind just one Oneness Assumption, which says that, when things are F, where ‘F’ ‘carves reality at the joints’, there is some one property of F in virtue of which all F things are F; and this one thing is a form or essence.<sup>37</sup> So, unless a specific formulation is in mind, I shall from now on just speak of Socrates’ Oneness Assumption. This makes OA1 the basic, or most accurate, statement of the assumption.

But then why does Socrates mention OA2 at all? On one view, he is offering a semantic argument for the existence of forms: he infers from the existence of a name to the existence of a corresponding property in virtue of which all F things are F.<sup>38</sup> However, we’ve already seen that this is unlikely to be correct: Socrates doesn’t think that the fact that river banks and financial banks are called ‘banks’ means that there is a single form of bank in virtue of which all river banks and financial banks are banks. And there are two more plausible alternatives. First, in the *Cratylus* Socrates uses ‘name’ (*onoma*) in a special sense, such that genuine names are restricted to those that divide reality at the joints.<sup>39</sup> If he uses ‘name’ in that way here, then he does indeed think that there is a single property corresponding to every name; but the principle nonetheless means that there is a single property just in case ‘F’ carves reality at the joints, where that is determined by

<sup>35</sup> Dancy, *Plato’s Introduction of Forms*, 213, and Scott, *PM*, 25, agree.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Grue’ is a predicate coined by Nelson Goodman, in his *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955; 4th ed. 1983). An object is grue just in case it is observed before t1 and is green or is not so observed and is blue.

<sup>37</sup> On this account, not only is having a single name not sufficient for there being a single form, but neither is it necessary. There was a single form of horse before there were any names for horses.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality*, 9. He cites OA1, rather than OA2, as evidence of semantic concerns. But OA1 doesn’t mention names or anything linguistic. See *On Ideas*, 268 n. 23; cf. Scott, *PM*, 25.

<sup>39</sup> See e.g. *Crat.* 432b–433b. I discuss the *Cratylus* on names in ‘Plato on Naming’, *Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1977), 289–301, reprinted in my *Plato on Knowledge and Forms: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 117–31.

how the world is, not by linguistic considerations. A second possibility is that Socrates means that, since Meno calls many things shapes, and groups them together as such, he assumes that there is a single property because of which they are shapes. That doesn't imply that the mere existence of a name is sufficient for the existence of a corresponding form.

Though Meno eventually accepts the Oneness Assumption, he is at first reluctant to do so. He readily agrees that it applies in the case of bees, health, size, and strength. But he initially doubts whether it applies in the case of virtue (73a4–5). In finding the Oneness Assumption controversial, Meno has an ally in Wittgenstein who, in a famous passage in the *Philosophical Investigations* (66), says:<sup>40</sup>

Consider for example the proceedings we call 'games'. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? Don't say: 'There must be something common, or they would not be called "games"'—but *look and see* whether there is anything common at all.—For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.

On one point, Wittgenstein is closer to Socrates than one might think. For Wittgenstein cautions against inferring from the fact that we *call* many things 'games', to the claim that they are all games in virtue of some one thing. I've suggested that, despite OA2, Socrates also resists that inference. However, Socrates thinks that, if games are a real kind, everything that is a game is so in virtue of some one property, form, or essence. Wittgenstein resists that inference; and, though Meno doesn't discuss the existence of games, he is initially skeptical about the general claim that everything that is F is so in virtue of some one property, form, or essence.

## 5. The first definition of shape and the first statement of the Dialectical Requirement

Meno's first definition of virtue fails to satisfy the Oneness Assumption: it doesn't specify the one property because of which all cases of virtue are cases of virtues. Accordingly, he proposes a second definition of virtue. As he eventually agrees, it too fails to satisfy the Oneness Assumption: 'I cannot yet find, Socrates, what you are inquiring for (*zêteis*), one virtue for them all, as in the other cases' (74a11–b1). Socrates then suggests that they interrupt their inquiry into what virtue is and

<sup>40</sup> Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (London: Macmillan, 1953). The passage is also cited by M. F. Burnyeat, 'Examples in Epistemology: Socrates, Theaetetus and G. E. Moore', *Philosophy* 52 (1977), 381–98; Scott, *PM*, 25.

focus instead on shape and color. For perhaps it will be easier to see how to satisfy the Oneness Assumption in their case; and perhaps that, in turn, will give them some guidance about how to satisfy it in the case of virtue. Socrates tells Meno to ‘practice for your answer about virtue’ (75a8–9), by saying what shape is. Meno demurs, asking Socrates to say what shape is. Socrates obliges, suggesting that ‘shape is that which alone of existing things always follows color’ (75b10–11).

This definition doesn’t seem to satisfy the Oneness Assumption. Various strategies are possible. David Charles, for example, seems to agree that the definition doesn’t satisfy the Oneness Assumption, if that requires specifying the essence of the definiendum. But he thinks that, in addition to raising the essence question, Socrates also considers a second question, which Charles calls the signification question. The signification question asks, not what the essence of F is, but what ‘F’ signifies; what ‘F’ signifies is a feature true of all and only Fs. In Charles’s view, though the first definition of shape doesn’t satisfactorily answer the essence question, it does satisfactorily answer the signification question.<sup>41</sup> Hence we need not say that Socrates gives a bad answer to the essence question; we can say instead that he gives a good answer to the signification question. This may seem to be a welcome rescue mission. However, Charles thinks that, though Socrates fleetingly distinguishes signification from essence, he in the end confuses them. And this, Charles thinks, plays a role in motivating Meno’s Paradox and Plato’s reply to it.<sup>42</sup>

However, not only does the first definition of shape not satisfy the Oneness Assumption, but neither does it specify what ‘shape’ signifies. For shape isn’t the only thing that always accompanies color. Taylor, for example, suggests that visibility, extension, size, and luminosity also always accompany color.<sup>43</sup> But we

<sup>41</sup> Charles, ‘Paradox’, 123. See also his ‘Types of Definition in the *Meno*’, in L. Judson and V. Karasmanis (eds.), *Remembering Socrates: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 110–28 (‘Types’ hereinafter). I discuss ‘Types’ in detail in ‘Signification, Essence, and Meno’s Paradox: A Reply to David Charles’s “Types of Definition in the *Meno*”’, *Phronesis* 55 (2010), 125–52 (‘Signification’ hereinafter). Though Charles thinks that Plato takes ‘F’ to signify a feature true of all and only Fs, he thinks that Aristotle has a weaker conception of signification, such that ‘F’ signifies a feature true of all, but not necessarily only, Fs. He discusses Aristotle on signification in ‘Paradox’ and, in more detail, in his *Aristotle on Meaning and Essence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) (*AME* hereinafter).

<sup>42</sup> I discuss this in Ch. 3, sect. 11.

<sup>43</sup> C. C. W. Taylor, ‘Socratic Ethics’, in B. S. Gower and M. C. Stokes (eds.), *Socratic Questions: New Essays on the Philosophy of Socrates and Its Significance* (London: Routledge, 1992), 137–52, at 144. As R. W. Sharples notes (in *Plato: Meno* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1985), 131–2), it’s not clear whether the definition says that (a) one can’t have a patch of color that has no shape and/or (b) anything that has a shape must have some color. If Socrates intends (b), the definition isn’t true of all shapes, since it isn’t true of abstract geometrical shapes; a fortiori, it doesn’t satisfy the Oneness Assumption, nor does it specify what ‘shape’ signifies. Scott, *PM*, 37–42, attempts to avoid this

need not say that Socrates wrongly takes the definition either to satisfy the Oneness Assumption or to specify what ‘shape’ signifies. I’ve argued elsewhere that Socrates doesn’t raise the signification questions.<sup>44</sup> He is concerned just with the essence question; signification isn’t at issue. But, in his view, some answers come closer to being correct answers to the essence question than others do, even if, in the end, they are flawed. That’s why he says that he would be satisfied (*agapôêin an*, 75b11–c1) if Meno could give an analogous account of virtue. He doesn’t mean that he thinks a comparable answer would be a correct answer to the essence question. Nor does he mean that it’s a correct answer to the signification question. His point is that, though the proposed definition of shape isn’t correct, he would be content if Meno could offer a comparably good account of virtue. For the proposed definition of shape is closer to being correct than any of Meno’s definitions of virtue were. If Meno could define virtue in a way that is as good as the proposed definition of shape is, that would be progress, even if they wouldn’t yet have reached their ultimate goal.

Meno objects that Socrates’ definition of shape would not help someone who didn’t know what color is. Socrates replies that, for all that, he spoke truly.<sup>45</sup> But, he says:<sup>46</sup>

problem by taking *schêma* to mean ‘perceptible surface’ rather than ‘shape’. For criticism of this suggestion, see Brown, ‘Review’.

<sup>44</sup> See ‘Signification’. Cf. T. H. Irwin, ‘Socrates and Euthyphro’, in L. Judson and V. Karasmanis (eds.), *Remembering Socrates*, 58–71, at 64 and n. 7. For a brief reply to Irwin, see Charles, ‘Paradox’, 124, n. 12.

<sup>45</sup> He need not mean that he gave a true definition. He might instead mean that he said something true about shape. Alternatively, perhaps he is speaking counterfactually: had he given what he took to be the correct definition, though one that doesn’t satisfy the Dialectical Requirement (which I go on to discuss), he would say that the definition was true (i.e. it was the correct definition); but he’d then go on to try to get his interlocutor to grasp it, by going on to satisfy the Dialectical Requirement, where doing so doesn’t require giving a different definition, but just trying to get the interlocutor into a position where he would understand it. Thanks to Ralph Wedgwood for this second suggestion.

<sup>46</sup> At 75d6, MSS B, T, and W have *proshomologê(i)*, and F has *proshômologei*. In either case, the sense is ‘agree in addition’. Gedike proposed emending to *prohomologê(i)*, ‘agree in advance’; he is followed by E. S. Thompson, *The Meno of Plato* (London: Macmillan, 1901), Bluck, *Plato’s Meno*, 245–6, and Scott, *PM*, 35–6 n. 6, though not by Sharples, *Plato: Meno*. The main consideration that has been adduced in favor of Gedike’s conjecture is that, at least in Plato, *proshomologê(i)* seems to mean ‘agree in addition’, i.e. in addition to agreeing to something else. But it’s not clear what else the one being questioned agrees to. Rather, it has been thought, the force of *proshomologê(i)* here would have to be that, in addition to the answer’s being true, it must also be through things that the one being questioned agrees he knows; but, it has been thought, it’s not clear that Plato uses the word that way. Sharples thinks this line of argument is insufficient for rejecting the MSS reading, though he doesn’t say why he thinks this. Bluck, *Plato’s Meno*, 245–6, suggests that ‘not yet (*mêpô*) agreed’ in 79d3 (a passage that refers back to 75d) may support *prohomologê(i)*, though he doesn’t think that’s enough, in itself, to justify the emendation. In favor of accepting Gedike’s emendation is the fact that Socrates proceeds as though prior agreement is needed. (However, on ‘agreement’, see n. 66.)

And if my questioner were one of the wise and eristic<sup>47</sup> and contentious types, I would tell him: 'I've given my answer. If I'm not correct, it's your job to take hold of it and refute it.' But if, like you and me on this occasion, the parties were friends and wanted to have a dialogue (*dialogesthai*) with each other, they should answer more gently and dialectically (*dialektikôteron*). The more dialectical approach is, presumably (*isôs*), to answer not just by speaking the truth, but also through things<sup>48</sup> that the person being questioned first agrees he knows (*eidenai*). (75c8–d7; Scott trans. rev.)<sup>49</sup>

Socrates then says 'I too will try to speak in this way.' That is, he will try to speak not only truly but also through things that Meno agrees he knows.

This is the first statement of the Dialectical Requirement (DR).<sup>50</sup> There is also a second formulation in 79d1–4, which I discuss in section 9. For now, let's focus on the first formulation.

DR is sometimes thought to impose an epistemological constraint on correct answers to 'What is F?' questions: they can't be answered through things the interlocutor doesn't know. As Irwin puts it, 'if A defines x for B as "yz", and B does not know about y and z, A's definition is a bad one'.<sup>51</sup> If this were right, it would sit uneasily with the metaphysical demand required by the Oneness

Further, it would be easy for a sigma to have been intruded into the text. Hence I have accepted Gedike's emendation.

At 75d7, all the MSS have *erôtômenos* ('the one being questioned'). Cornarius emended this to *eromenos* ('the one who has asked a question'); Thompson proposed *erôtôn* ('the one asking a question'). The emendations are motivated by the thought that it is the person asking for a definition (in this case Meno, who asks Socrates what shape and color are) who must agree that he knows what the respondent says. However, though Meno asks Socrates what color and shape are, Socrates questions him in turn, asking him whether he grasps the things through which his answer is phrased; and it's at that point that DR kicks in. Hence I have retained *erôtômenos*. Cf. Scott, *PM*, 35 n. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. 80e2. On 'eristic', see Ch. 3, sect. 6.

<sup>48</sup> There is dispute about whether the things through which an answer is given are linguistic items (terms or sentences) or the things referred to by them. For a defense of the latter view, see L. Franklin, 'The Structure of Dialectic in the *Meno*', *Phronesis* 46 (2001), 413–39, at 417–18; cf. Scott, *PM*, 36. I'm inclined to think that both are at issue; we need not choose between them. So, for example, when Meno objects that the first definition of shape wouldn't help someone who didn't think she knew what color is, Socrates offers a second definition of shape that neither uses the term 'color' nor refers to color. When he gives his definition of color, he says that it appeals to Meno because it is phrased in terms that are familiar to him: here, terms are at issue. Or perhaps we should say that terms are always at issue, and that sometimes things are as well. If one can inquire whether e.g. goatstags exist, then it can't, or shouldn't, be a constraint on DR that the actual thing being inquired into exist. However, Socrates doesn't consider such cases here.

<sup>49</sup> καὶ εἰ μὲν γε τῶν σοφῶν τις εἶη καὶ ἐριστικὸν τε καὶ ἀγωνιστικὸν ὁ ἐρόμενος, εἴπομι' ἂν αὐτῷ ὅτι "Ἐμοὶ μὲν εἴρηται· εἰ δὲ μὴ ὁρθῶς λέγω, σὸν ἔργον λαμβάνειν λόγον καὶ ἐλέγχειν." εἰ δὲ ὥσπερ ἐγὼ τε καὶ σὺ νυνὶ φίλοι ὄντες βούλωντο ἀλλήλοις διαλέγεσθαι, δεῖ δὴ πρῶτον πῶς καὶ διαλεκτικώτερον ἀποκρίνεσθαι. ἔστι δὲ ἴσως τὸ διαλεκτικώτερον μὴ μόνον τᾷληθῆ ἀποκρίνεσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ δι' ἐκείνων ὧν ἂν προμολογῇ εἰδέναι ὁ ἐρωτώμενος.

<sup>50</sup> The term is due to T. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, 136.

<sup>51</sup> Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, 136.

Assumption. For there is no reason to think that the one property or form of F in virtue of which all F things are F will be known to any given interlocutor.<sup>52</sup>

However, DR is not a constraint on correct definitions. Socrates doesn't think the ultimately correct answer to a 'What is F?' question must be through things an interlocutor in a given dialectical setting knows or even thinks he knows. Rather, DR is a constraint on what it is appropriate to say if one is engaged in a dialectical inquiry—which is the sort of inquiry at issue here. Hence DR, unlike PKW, imposes a constraint on inquiry. It says that it is dialectically inappropriate to answer an interlocutor through things the interlocutor doesn't think she knows. If an interlocutor doesn't think she knows the things through which the ultimately correct answer to a 'What is F?' question should be given, it would be dialectically inappropriate to give that answer. Instead, the interlocutor must be brought, by easy stages, to a point where she thinks she knows the things through which F is correctly defined. If the interlocutor isn't yet at that stage, then the other participant in the discussion should not give the correct answer, but should say something else that is through things the interlocutor agrees she knows, and that will help her eventually understand the ultimately correct answer. Hence DR is not an epistemological demand on definitions that conflicts with the metaphysical demand imposed by the Oneness Assumption.

According to Myles Burnyeat, in formulating DR Socrates means 'that a definition should use terms which the other party agrees he knows; this may perhaps be taken as some recognition on his part that not everything can be explained by explicit definition'.<sup>53</sup> I don't think DR suggests this either. Rather, it says that, in a dialectical discussion, the other party must have an appropriate degree of familiarity with the things through which any given answer is given. That doesn't imply that anything can be fully and accurately explained without explicit definition in such a way as to confer knowledge. All that follows is that if a given interlocutor wouldn't understand something's definition, one should, at that stage, use terms that (or refer to things that), though they don't explain what the thing at issue really is, will enable the interlocutor to make progress towards the goal of understanding the correct explanation.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, sections 14, 107, and 115.

<sup>53</sup> 'Examples in Epistemology', 389.

<sup>54</sup> Similarly, in *Top.* 6.4, Aristotle says that a correct definition must be in terms of what is prior in nature. If it were in terms of what is prior to us, there'd be more than one definition of each thing, but there isn't; for definitions specify essences, and each thing has just a single essence. But if someone isn't in a position to understand something's definition, one should take steps towards enabling him to do so by using 'terms that are prior and more familiar' to that person (141a26). I return briefly below to Aristotle's distinction between what's prior or more familiar to us and what's prior or more familiar by nature.



DR is not restricted to what it is dialectically appropriate to say when searching for a definition. It is more general: in any dialectical exchange—and so in any inquiry of the sort we’re interested in—one should proceed through things one is familiar with.<sup>55</sup> Hence, from now on I shall say that DR imposes a constraint on inquiry. In this respect, it differs from PKW, which, as we’ve seen, is just about explanatory priority.

## 6. The Dialectical Requirement and knowledge

DR is sometimes thought to involve a foreknowledge principle. As we saw in Chapter 1, there are different foreknowledge principles. What if any sort is involved here? According to Scott, 75d commits Socrates to the following version of a foreknowledge principle: ‘in an inquiry we should only proceed in terms of what we already know’.<sup>56</sup> Suppose that’s so, and that the relevant sort of knowledge is P-knowledge: knowledge as Plato defines it in 98a.<sup>57</sup> We then seem to face the following problem. Socrates thinks he’s satisfied DR in offering his sample definitions of shape and color to Meno.<sup>58</sup> But he doesn’t think Meno has P-knowledge of the things through which they are defined. For example, we’ve seen that the first definition of shape mentions color. But, as we shall see, Socrates doesn’t think Meno has P-knowledge of color.

One might argue that, though DR requires prior knowledge, it doesn’t require prior P-knowledge, but only knowledge in a different and weaker sense of the term. When Socrates claims not to know what virtue is, he disclaims P-knowledge. But lacking (or disclaiming) P-knowledge is compatible with having (or taking oneself to have) knowledge in the sense required by DR.<sup>59</sup>

The view that Socrates uses ‘knowledge’ in different senses has been defended in accounts of the early dialogues, in an effort to render his various remarks about

<sup>55</sup> As we’ll see in the next chapter, in the geometrical discussion, Socrates begins by ascertaining that the slave is familiar with what squares are. He is ensuring that DR is satisfied, even though the context is not definitional.

<sup>56</sup> *RE*, 215; but see 29ff.

<sup>57</sup> This is the sort of knowledge that Scott seems to think foreknowledge involves: ‘Knowledge here should be taken in a strong sense as opposed to, for instance, mere true belief’ (*RE*, 29 n. 5). He takes this to be implied by 79d1–4. But he seems to think that 75d has the same view: *RE*, 28–9. In *PM*, by contrast, though he thinks 79d1–4 involves an application of DR that requires P-knowledge, he doesn’t think DR as stated at 75d requires P-knowledge.

<sup>58</sup> It’s true that Socrates offers the first definition of shape before formulating DR. But I assume he nonetheless took himself to be satisfying DR in offering it; certainly he didn’t offer it eristically.

<sup>59</sup> One might say that, in this context, Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge isn’t relevant; the question is whether Meno has knowledge. That’s true. But it’s clear that Socrates doesn’t think Meno has knowledge either.

knowledge consistent.<sup>60</sup> There are two ways in which one might seek to defend that view here. First, one might note that 98a defines *epistêmê*, whereas DR uses *eidenai*. One might then argue that he uses these terms nonsynonymously, such that one can *eidenai* something even if one doesn't have any *epistêmê* of it. However, in 96d5ff., Socrates speaks interchangeably of knowing (*eidenai*) something and of having *epistêmê* of it.<sup>61</sup> So this first strategy is not promising. Secondly, one might argue that each of these epistemic words is ambiguous: sometimes, as in 98a, they are used for P-knowledge; but sometimes, as in DR, *eidenai* is used in a different sense. However, Socrates certainly doesn't explicitly say that his epistemic words are ambiguous; and it would be misleading of him to define *epistêmê/eidenai* in just one way, if he thinks they are ambiguous and uses them in a different sense in DR.<sup>62</sup> If we can avoid the hypothesis of ambiguity, we should do so; and I shall suggest that we can avoid it.

One might argue that even if Socrates doesn't use epistemic terms in different senses, still, there can be different levels of knowledge in the same sense of the term. Perhaps Socrates disclaims just high-level knowledge of virtue, whereas DR requires just lower-level knowledge, where these are all knowledge in the same sense of the term. However, if 'knowledge' is univocal, presumably the relevant definition is the one given in 98a. That definition allows that, of two people, both of whom have knowledge, one might have deeper knowledge than the other. Perhaps, though they can both explain why a given proposition is true, one can offer a fuller explanation by integrating the proposition known into a fuller body of truths. Still, all knowledge has to meet the standard imposed by 98a; anything that doesn't do so falls short of being knowledge. So if DR requires knowledge, it has to require P-knowledge. But that's precisely what Socrates thinks he and Meno lack in the case of virtue. Hence appealing to different levels of knowledge is no more promising a solution than is appealing to different senses of 'knowledge'.

If, then, DR requires knowledge, it doesn't seem to be satisfied in practice, despite the fact that Socrates takes it to be satisfied. However, I shall now offer two arguments for the view that DR, as stated in 75d, doesn't require

<sup>60</sup> See e.g. G. Vlastos, 'Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge', *Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1985), 1–31. I discuss Socrates' disavowal of knowledge in the *Apology* in 'Does Socrates Claim to Know that He Knows Nothing?'.  
<sup>61</sup> See n. 12.

<sup>62</sup> One might think that the Oneness Assumption implies that 'knowledge' can't be defined in different ways in DR and in 98a. However, as we've seen, the Oneness Assumption leaves open the possibility that 'knowledge' is an ambiguous term.

knowledge.<sup>63</sup> If either of these arguments succeeds, that should lessen the temptation to favor the hypothesis of ambiguity.

First, perhaps Socrates uses 'know' loosely or colloquially, in a way that's familiar to Meno.<sup>64</sup> Strictly speaking, DR doesn't require knowledge, as Socrates eventually explains that notion. But he hasn't yet said what he takes knowledge to be; and doing so at this point would be a distraction. For the task at hand is to give Meno practice in satisfying the Oneness Assumption. Hence Socrates uses the term in a way that's familiar to Meno; in doing so, he satisfies DR. Were he to use the term in a way unfamiliar to Meno, he would violate DR. The point he wants to make is not that DR requires knowledge, but that it requires an appropriate degree of familiarity. Meno would willingly call this knowledge; for, at least initially, he seems to have low standards for knowledge. That's why he's surprised at Socrates' disclaimer of knowledge, and why he thinks it's easy to say what virtue is. Socrates speaks in a way that Meno thinks he understands; he feels free to do so, even though he's using 'know' incorrectly, since, in the immediate context, Meno's failure to understand what knowledge really is doesn't matter.

A disadvantage of this suggestion is that, on it, Socrates might seem to violate DR in mentioning PKW in 71b. For (or so I argued) it uses 'knowledge' for P-knowledge; yet it emerges that Meno doesn't (at least at this stage of the dialogue) grasp that notion of knowledge. However, at this early stage, Socrates has no reason to think that Meno doesn't grasp what he means by 'knowledge'; hence he uses it in his preferred way.<sup>65</sup> When Socrates realizes that Meno doesn't understand PKW, the time isn't right for pausing to explain what it is. For, again, the main task at that stage is to help Meno satisfy the Oneness Assumption in defining virtue, since doing so is a necessary condition for providing a correct answer to the question, 'What is virtue?', which is their main concern. Hence Socrates here, though not earlier (and not at various crucial later stages), uses 'know' loosely.

A second way of defending the view that, as stated in 75d, DR doesn't require knowledge is to note that Socrates doesn't actually say that it does. He says that it requires one to agree that one knows. Perhaps the force of 'agrees that one knows'

<sup>63</sup> Cf. A. Silverman, *The Dialectic of Essence: A Study of Plato's Metaphysics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), 41–6; Franklin, 'The Structure of Dialectic'.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Scott, *PM*, 58.

<sup>65</sup> As against this, however, one might think that the very fact that Meno thinks knowledge of what virtue is is easy to come by shows that he doesn't grasp that genuine knowledge is P-knowledge. Hence Socrates should, early on, see that Meno doesn't understand what knowledge is.

is that one must think that one knows.<sup>66</sup> It can't—or, at any rate, shouldn't—mean or imply that one does know. For, again, as Socrates conceives of knowledge, he doesn't think they have knowledge. But, as he is often at pains to point out, one can think one knows something that one doesn't in fact know. One is, however, unlikely to think one knows something if one has no views on the topic at all.

## 7. The Dialectical Requirement and further definitions

That DR doesn't require P-knowledge also seems clear from the discussion of shape and color. As we've seen, Socrates first defines shape as 'that which, alone among existing things, always follows color' (75b10–11).<sup>67</sup> But, as he goes on to make clear, he doesn't think Meno knows what color is. Socrates then provides a second account of shape, one that would be dialectically appropriate for someone who was in the same difficulty about color as he was in about shape (75c6–7). Before giving it, he asks Meno whether he calls something a boundary (*teleutê*) (75e1).<sup>68</sup> He explains that he means 'something like limit (*peras*) or end (*eschaton*)' (e1–2), and he says that, though he takes these to be the same, Prodicus might not do so; in any event, he doesn't mean anything complicated (*poikilon*) (75e1–5). Meno replies: 'I think I understand (*oimai manthanein*) what you're saying' (75e6). He doesn't say that he knows; he says that he thinks he understands. 'Understanding' might be less than knowledge. Whatever it means, in saying that he *thinks* he understands, Meno falls short of saying that he *does* understand.<sup>69</sup> The way in which Socrates continues the discussion suggests he thinks that he's satisfied DR—even though Meno hasn't said he knows, and even though Socrates doesn't think Meno knows.

<sup>66</sup> *Homologeîn* needn't imply agreement between two parties, and it doesn't do so here, since Socrates doesn't think Meno knows. All that's meant is that the interlocutor must think he knows. For the general point, I am indebted to unpublished work by Lesley Brown.

<sup>67</sup> Meno rephrases this as 'shape always follows color' (75c4–5): he omits the claim that shape is the *only* thing that does so. And, as we've seen, shape isn't the only thing that always follows color; hence it doesn't specify what 'shape' signifies or, a fortiori, the essence of shape.

<sup>68</sup> There's dispute about whether Socrates is asking Meno whether he thinks there is such a thing as boundary (an existential question), or whether he calls something 'boundary' (a linguistic question). This dispute doesn't matter for present purposes, where my concern is whether DR requires genuine knowledge.

<sup>69</sup> It's true that Socrates goes on to say that, from what he's said, Meno may understand (*mathois*, 76a4) what he says about shape. But this doesn't mean that Socrates thinks Meno has knowledge. Rather, the suggestion is that *if* Meno understands what Socrates goes on to say, he will understand what Socrates means by 'shape'. It doesn't follow that Meno does understand this. Further, as I say in the text, *manthanein* needn't be knowledge. Insofar as Socrates thinks Meno understands in a way that satisfies DR, it's not in a way that involves P-knowledge.

At 76a8, Meno asks Socrates what color is. Socrates says he'll answer in the style of Gorgias, since Meno would most easily follow that (76c4–5); the account is phrased in terms of the Empedoclean view that colors are effluences of things. This too is meant to satisfy DR. But Socrates doesn't think that he or Meno knows what color is. For knowing what color is requires knowing the real essence of color; but Socrates doesn't think the Empedoclean account specifies the real essence of color. On the contrary, he dismisses it as being theatrical (*tragikê*) (76e3) and says that Meno likes it because it's familiar to him (*sunêtheian*, 76d8); for his part, he thinks the definition of shape is better than the definition of color (76e6–7),<sup>70</sup> which implies that he doesn't take the definition of color to be correct, in which case it doesn't confer knowledge. He then says that Meno would agree about the relative merits of the definitions if he remained and was initiated into the mysteries. The clear suggestion is that Meno is wrong about the relative merits of the sample definitions precisely because he lacks knowledge. Socrates' discussion of the sample definitions of shape and color therefore supports my suggestion that DR doesn't require prior knowledge. For Socrates thinks he's satisfied DR; yet he doesn't think Meno has knowledge.

I suggest, then, that DR—at least as it is stated at 75d—doesn't require knowledge, as Socrates conceives of knowledge in 98a, which is the only conception of genuine knowledge he admits. Hence, DR doesn't commit Socrates to a *foreknowledge* principle (as he conceives of knowledge). Rather, it commits him just to a *prior-familiarity* principle. What degree of familiarity is required depends on the cognitive level of the inquirer, and on what is being inquired into. Less is required of a beginning inquirer than of a more advanced one; and less is required for elementary inquiries than for more advanced ones. Unfortunately, Socrates doesn't spell out what sort of prior familiarity is necessary for inquiry, either in general or in particular cases. He makes it clear that Meno and the slave have it, so far as the particular inquiries they are engaged in are concerned; but it doesn't follow that someone with a less good grasp than they have can't inquire. Though Socrates, both here and later, adverts to sufficient conditions for satisfying his prior-familiarity principle, he doesn't specify necessary conditions for doing so.

<sup>70</sup> Socrates doesn't make it clear which of the two definitions of shape he prefers, but I assume it is the second. Be that as it may, the key point here is that he isn't satisfied with the definition of color. For the view that Socrates prefers the second definition of shape, see V. Karasmanis, 'Definition in Plato's *Meno*', in L. Judson and V. Karasmanis (eds.) *Remembering Socrates*, 129–41, at 139–41. Contrast Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave*, 30–2.

Plato is anticipating Aristotle's distinction between what's *gnôrimon hêmin* and what's *gnôrimon phusei*: what's familiar to us and what's familiar by nature.<sup>71</sup> The latter is guaranteed to be true; and, when one grasps in the right way what's *gnôrimon phusei*, one has knowledge. But something can be *gnôrimon* to someone without that person's having any knowledge of it. What's *gnôrimon* to someone is what's familiar to the person, where the familiarity can, and often does, fall short of knowledge. Like Aristotle, Plato suggests that we begin with what's *gnôrimon* to us, and then inquire in an effort to grasp what's *gnôrimon phusei*.<sup>72</sup>

It's important to be clear about the differences between PKW and DR. As we've seen, PKW grounds one kind of knowledge, or knowledge of one kind of property, in another. It says that one can't know what something is like unless one knows what it is. PKW is a claim about explanatory, not chronological, priority. Further, though PKW says that one can't *know* what x is like unless one knows what x is, it doesn't say that one can't *inquire* what x is like unless one knows what x is. PKW isn't a principle about inquiry. DR, by contrast, requires prior *familiarity* for dialectical inquiry. But it doesn't require prior *knowledge* for inquiry or for anything else. If we fail to see that DR and PKW differ in these ways, we might be tempted to think that Socrates is committed to the view that one can't inquire what something is like unless one knows what it is. But, at least so far, he is not committed to this view.

It's just as well that Socrates hasn't required knowledge for inquiry. For he thinks they've been inquiring but lack knowledge.<sup>73</sup> If he required knowledge for inquiry, he wouldn't be justified in claiming, as he does, that they've been inquiring. Fortunately, however, his requirements on inquiry haven't yet been shown to conflict with his practice.

<sup>71</sup> See e.g. *Top.* 6.4; *APo.* 1.1, 71b33–72a5; *Phys.* 1.1; *Met.* 1029b3–12; *EN* 1095b2–4. These phrases are often translated as 'what's better known to us' and 'what's better known by nature'. But what's *gnôrimon* to one needn't amount to knowledge (as B1, 101 agrees): hence my alternative translation. I briefly discuss Aristotle's use of these phrases in Ch. 6.

<sup>72</sup> In 'Aristotle on Understanding Knowledge', in E. Berti (ed.), *Aristotle on Science, the 'Posterior Analytics'* (Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1981), 97–139, M. F. Burnyeat argues that Plato lacks Aristotle's distinction between what's *gnôrimon hêmin* and what's *gnôrimon phusei*. His reason seems to be that what's *gnôrimon hêmin* is knowledge; yet Plato doesn't allow knowledge of such a low-level sort. I agree that Plato doesn't allow knowledge of such a low-level sort; but I don't think what's *gnôrimon hêmin* needs to amount to knowledge; it can do so, but the two don't always coincide. *EN* 1.4, 1095a32–b4, suggests that Aristotle thinks Plato distinguished what's familiar to us from what's familiar by nature.

<sup>73</sup> In favor of thinking that Socrates thinks they've been inquiring, see the occurrences of *zêtein* at 73d1, 2; 74a11; cf. 80d3–4. See n. 31.

Further, if knowledge is P-knowledge, it wouldn't be reasonable to require knowledge for inquiry. For that would set too high a bar for inquiry. Most of us lack P-knowledge of most things; yet it seems reasonable to think that some people are in a position to inquire into at least some of these things. Scientists inquired into the nature of water before they knew it was  $H_2O$ . They didn't know its nature, and hence had no P-knowledge of water; and so, given PKW, they didn't know anything about water. Nonetheless, they were able to inquire into, and they eventually discovered, its nature.<sup>74</sup> Fortunately, not only do Socrates' requirements on inquiry not conflict with his practice, but neither has he imposed unreasonably demanding conditions on inquiry. At least, he hasn't done so yet. But we shall need to see whether he goes on to do so.

As we shall see in the next chapter, Charles thinks that, according to Meno, we need to know what 'F' signifies to inquire into F.<sup>75</sup> If this is Meno's view, he's wrong to hold it. For just as one doesn't need to know something's essence in order to inquire into it, so one doesn't need to know, or even have a true belief about, what 'F' signifies in order to inquire into F. Scientists inquired into the nature of gold not only before they knew, or had a true belief about, the real essence of gold but also before they were able to specify what 'gold' signifies; for their initial account of gold didn't distinguish gold from iron pyrites. Just as the cognitive condition one needs to be in to inquire can be less than P-knowledge, so the content one needs to grasp can be less than signification.

And, fortunately, Socrates—at least so far—agrees that we can inquire into something without knowing, or having a true belief about, what the relevant terms signify. For he says that he and Meno were inquiring what virtue is.<sup>76</sup> Yet neither of them specifies a feature true of all and only cases of virtue. First Meno defines virtue in terms of types of virtuous behavior. He then defines it as ruling over people (73d). These first two attempts at saying what virtue is involve inquiring into what virtue is. But neither answer specifies what 'virtue' signifies; neither is a feature true of all and only cases of virtue or even of all cases of virtue. For example, as Socrates points out, one can rule over others unjustly; but doing so isn't virtuous. Hence 'ruling over others' doesn't specify a feature true of all and only cases of virtue.

<sup>74</sup> This shows that one can inquire into, and discover, something, even if one doesn't antecedently have P-knowledge of it. It would take further argument to show that one could inquire into, or discover, something even if one began with no P-knowledge at all, that is, even if one lacked P-knowledge not only about what one is inquiring into, but about everything. I discuss this in Chapter 4.

<sup>75</sup> See Ch. 3, sect. 11; 'Paradox', 115–16.

<sup>76</sup> See nn. 31 and 73. Charles, by contrast, seems to think that, though Meno was talking meaningfully about virtue, he was not inquiring about it: 'Paradox', 118.

This is not to say that mere linguistic competence is sufficient for enabling one to inquire.<sup>77</sup> Meno, for example, suggests that virtue for a woman involves managing her household well. This is a substantive belief about virtue, one that goes beyond mere linguistic competence. He has a roughly accurate grasp of what's being talked about, where that includes but goes beyond having linguistic competence; and that is at least part of what enables him to inquire, even though he doesn't grasp what 'virtue' signifies.

The only condition Socrates has so far imposed on (dialectical) inquiry is DR. But DR—at least as it has been described so far—doesn't require a grasp of signification. A fortiori, neither does it require a grasp of essence or, therefore, P-knowledge. Fortunately, then, we need not say that, though Socrates claims that he and Meno were inquiring, they can't actually do so given Socrates' conditions on inquiry.

## 8. Definitions and circularity

After discussing DR and the sample definitions of shape and color, Socrates and Meno resume their inquiry into virtue.<sup>78</sup> Socrates repeats that he wants just one account that specifies what virtue as a whole (*kata holou*,<sup>79</sup> 77a6) is. Meno then suggests that virtue is having the power to acquire good things (*kala*) (77b4–5). At 78b9–c1, Socrates restates Meno's definition;<sup>80</sup> and Meno says that Socrates now grasps what he means (78c1–2). Socrates says they'll next investigate whether what Meno has said is true.<sup>81</sup>

This exchange contrasts interestingly with the discussion of the first definition of shape. There, Socrates says his answer is true. But he agrees that it wouldn't satisfy DR if it were offered to an interlocutor who wasn't familiar with color.

<sup>77</sup> Contrast Franklin, 'The Structure of Dialectic'. For the view, with which I agree, that more is both required and available, see also Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, 63–4; and Taylor, 'Socratic Ethics', 141–2.

<sup>78</sup> 77a5–7: 'try and tell me': *zêtein* isn't explicitly used. But Socrates thinks that Meno is now in a better position to answer the question 'What is virtue?', since Socrates has given him examples (*paradeigmata*, 77a9–b1). Presumably reflecting on them involves inquiry. It's true that Meno goes on to say what the poets say; and one might think that involves relying on authority rather than inquiring. However, perhaps his previous inquiry led him to think that what the poets say, rather than what he said before, is correct: as a result of inquiry, he modifies his views. Socrates proceeds to cross-examine him, which likewise involves him in inquiry. Meno isn't very thoughtful or open-minded; but that doesn't mean he isn't inquiring. He just isn't very good at it.

<sup>79</sup> The phrase anticipates Aristotle's term for a universal, *katholou*: see *De Int.* 7, 17a39.

<sup>80</sup> The main differences are that Socrates replaces '*kala*' with '*agatha*'.

<sup>81</sup> He says 'let's see' (*idômen*) whether what Meno has said is true. I take it that the way in which they try to see, i.e. ascertain, this is by inquiring. See nn. 71, 73, 78.



Here, by contrast, Meno first ascertains that his proposed definition of virtue satisfies DR with respect to Socrates; and then Socrates says they'll investigate whether it's true. In discussing the first definition of shape, truth is mentioned before DR is; here DR is first satisfied, then truth is investigated.<sup>82</sup> Further, earlier it was Socrates who had to satisfy DR in speaking to Meno; now it's Meno who has to satisfy DR in speaking to Socrates.

Socrates proceeds to reject Meno's latest definition of virtue. For, he says, acquiring good things without justice is not virtuous (78d1–79a1).<sup>83</sup> Hence Meno's definition is too broad; it doesn't cover only cases of virtue.<sup>84</sup> When Meno revises his definition to say that virtue is acquiring good things with justice, Socrates argues against that too.<sup>85</sup>

Doesn't it follow from what you agree to that this is virtue: doing whatever one does with a part of virtue? For you say that justice, and each of these things, is a part of virtue. Why do I say this? Because I asked you to say what virtue as a whole is; but, far from telling me what virtue is, you just say that an action is virtue if it is performed with a part of virtue, as if you had told me what virtue as a whole is, and I will thereby know that, even if you cut it into parts. So I think you must begin again with the same question, my dear Meno: what is virtue, if every action accompanied with a part of virtue is virtue? For that is what one is saying when one says that every action accompanied with justice is virtue. Do you not think you must face the same question again? Or do you think one knows what a part of virtue is if one does not know what virtue itself is? (79b4–c9)<sup>86</sup>

Socrates' argument has been thought to be of the following form:<sup>87</sup>

<sup>82</sup> If, as seems to be the case here, it can be ascertained that DR is satisfied before it is known whether the proposed account is true, DR can't, in general, require knowledge, since knowledge implies truth.

<sup>83</sup> Socrates says one would need to acquire goods with justice or with temperance or some other part of virtue (78d7–e2); but in what follows, he focuses just on justice, and I shall follow suit.

<sup>84</sup> Hence it doesn't specify what 'virtue' signifies; yet they were inquiring.

<sup>85</sup> Though Socrates focuses on the inadequacies of defining virtue in terms of one of its parts, it's not as though he'd be satisfied with defining it in terms of all of its parts—if indeed he thinks that's possible, which he might not do. For that would violate the Oneness Assumption: it wouldn't specify the one property because of which all and only cases of virtue so count.

<sup>86</sup> Οὐκοῦν συμβαίνει ἐξ ὧν σὺ ὁμολογεῖς, τὸ μετὰ μορίου ἀρετῆς πράττειν ὅτι ἂν πράττη, τοῦτο ἀρετὴν εἶναι· τὴν γὰρ δικαιοσύνην μόριον φῆς ἀρετῆς εἶναι, καὶ ἕκαστα τούτων. τί οὖν δὴ τοῦτο λέγω; ὅτι ἐμοῦ δεηθέντος ὅλον εἰπεῖν τὴν ἀρετὴν, αὐτὴν μὲν πολλοῦ δεῖς εἰπεῖν ὅτι ἐστίν, πᾶσαν δὲ φῆς πρᾶξιν ἀρετὴν εἶναι, ἐάνπερ μετὰ μορίου ἀρετῆς πράττηται, ὥσπερ εἰρηκῶς ὅτι ἀρετὴ ἐστὶν τὸ ὅλον καὶ ἥδη γνωσμένου ἐμοῦ, καὶ ἔαν σὺ κατακερματίζης αὐτὴν κατὰ μόρια. δείται οὖν σοι πάλιν ἐξ ἀρχῆς, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, τῆς αὐτῆς ἐρωτήσεως, ὦ φίλε Μένων, τί ἐστὶν ἀρετὴ, εἰ μετὰ μορίου ἀρετῆς πᾶσα πρᾶξις ἀρετὴ ἂν εἴη; τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν λέγειν, ὅταν λέγῃ τις, ὅτι πᾶσα ἡ μετὰ δικαιοσύνης πρᾶξις ἀρετὴ ἐστίν. ἢ οὐ δοκεῖ σοι πάλιν δεῖσθαι τῆς αὐτῆς ἐρωτήσεως, ἀλλ' οἶε τινα εἰδέναι μόριον ἀρετῆς ὅτι ἐστίν, αὐτὴν μὴ εἰδόντα;

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, Burnyeat, 'Examples in Epistemology', 390, though he is commenting on a parallel argument in the *Theaetetus*. He thinks '[w]e should be charitable towards this error. It is

- (1) A doesn't know what F is.
- (2) G is a part of F.
- (3) Therefore A doesn't know what G is.

It would be unfortunate if this were his argument, since it involves an invalid substitution into an opaque context. One could caricature this argument as follows: 'Socrates doesn't know what porridge is. Porridge is oats plus water. So Socrates doesn't know what oats and water are.'<sup>88</sup>

However, the argument needn't be so understood. First, Plato would presumably object that, while oats and water are what they are independently of porridge, justice isn't what it is independently of virtue. Hence, though the definition of justice must mention the whole of which it is a part, the definitions of oats and water don't need to mention porridge. Socrates' argument isn't meant to apply to all the parts of a thing, but only to those parts that are what they are by being parts of that thing.<sup>89</sup> Secondly, the argument assumes that to know what something is, is to know its definition.<sup>90</sup> We can therefore understand Socrates' argument as follows:

- (1) Socrates doesn't know what virtue is.
- (2) One can know what something is only if one knows its definition.
- (3) Virtue =<sub>df.</sub> acquiring good things justly. (= proposed definition)
- (4) Therefore Socrates knows what virtue is only if he knows what justice is.
- (5) Justice =<sub>df.</sub> a part of virtue.
- (6) Therefore Socrates knows what justice is only if he knows what virtue is.
- (7) Therefore Socrates doesn't know what justice is. (1, 2, 5)

If Socrates' argument is so understood, it is valid.<sup>91</sup>

from the vantage point of centuries of philosophical experience that we detect Plato having trouble with the many problems to which opaque contexts give rise'.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. L. Brown, 'Theaetetus: Knowledge and Definition, Parts, Elements and Priority', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 94 (1994), 229–42, at 233 ('Knowledge and Definition' hereinafter). My discussion is indebted to hers.

<sup>89</sup> As Brown, 'Knowledge and Definition', notes, the claim that justice needs to be defined in terms of virtue is controversial: it is sometimes thought that 'thick' concepts like justice can be understood independently of 'thin' concepts such as virtue. By contrast, as she also notes, in *Top.* 6.4 Aristotle argues that a genus can be defined without reference to its species, though the converse is not true. Socrates here seems to side with Aristotle.

<sup>90</sup> At least, Socrates thinks that to know what something is is to know its definition, if it has one. As we've seen (this chapter, sect. 2), he may think that, in some cases, one can know what something is without knowing its definition. But we can leave this possible complication to one side, since Socrates thinks that, to know what virtue and justice are, one must know their definitions.

<sup>91</sup> Which is not to say that it is sound.

One point of the argument is to show that Meno's definition is circular: it defines virtue in terms of justice, and justice in terms of virtue.<sup>92</sup> However, Socrates isn't arguing that all definitions are circular.<sup>93</sup> Suppose, for example, that a bachelor can be defined as an unmarried man. An unmarried man is someone who has the same marital status as a bachelor. It might then seem that the original definition can be rephrased as: 'a bachelor is a man with the same marital status as a bachelor'. If so, it seems to follow that all definitions are circular.

But this is not Socrates' argument. His argument is aimed only against any definition in which the definiens makes essential reference to the definiendum. Not all definitions do that. The definition of bachelor doesn't do so, since what it is to be unmarried, and to be a man, can be explained without reference to what it is to be a bachelor. Nor does the definition of porridge as water and oats do so, since what it is to be water and what it is to be oats can be explained without reference to porridge.

Though Socrates doesn't argue that all definitions are circular, he rejects Meno's definition because it is circular. Since he thinks there is a correct definition of virtue, he presumably thinks virtue can be defined in a way that *isn't* vulnerable to this objection. So he seems to be committed to the view that, just as one can define water and oats without reference to porridge, so one can define the things mentioned in the definition of virtue without reference to virtue.

Irwin argues that, at least in the early dialogues, Socrates thinks that virtue can be defined in undisputed terms that don't involve any reference to virtue.<sup>94</sup> If Socrates holds that view in the *Meno*, it would explain why he thinks virtue can be defined in a way that isn't vulnerable to the circularity objection. However, while holding that view is sufficient for avoiding the circularity objection, it isn't necessary for doing so. To avoid it, all Socrates needs to believe is that virtue can be defined through things that can be defined independently of virtue; these need not be things that are undisputed. For example, Socrates seems to think that virtue is identical to, and is definable (at least in part) as, knowledge of good and bad.<sup>95</sup> What knowledge, good, and bad are are disputed matters. Nonetheless,

<sup>92</sup> It doesn't follow that Socrates thinks that all circularity is bad. For example, the present argument doesn't preclude him from holding a coherentist view of justification. He's rejecting just the view that one can define *x* in terms of *y* and *y* in terms of *x*. This view is reasonable if definition is asymmetrical, such that the definiens explains the definiendum, but not conversely.

<sup>93</sup> The discussion that follows is indebted to Scott, *PM*, 59, though we come to different conclusions. See also my 'Enquiry and Discovery: A Discussion of Dominic Scott, *Plato's Meno*', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 32 (2007), 331–67, at 338, 347 ('Enquiry and Discovery' hereinafter); and Brown, 'Knowledge and Definition'.

<sup>94</sup> See Plato's *Moral Theory*, 72, 91, 137–8. Cf. *Plato's Ethics*, sect. 107.

<sup>95</sup> For the view that Socrates thinks virtue is identical to knowledge of good and bad, see T. Penner, 'The Unity of Virtue', *Philosophical Review* 82 (1973), 35–68.

if one can define them without reference to virtue, that definition of virtue wouldn't be vulnerable to the circularity objection.

So far, Socrates' argument hasn't appealed to DR. That's not surprising. For the argument concerns the correct definition of virtue. But DR isn't relevant to that. It concerns the conditions for engaging in dialectical inquiry: dialectical discussions should be 'through things' the interlocutor is familiar with. If the correct definition is through things the interlocutor isn't familiar with, one shouldn't yet mention the correct definition. Rather, one should help one's interlocutor get into a position in which she can understand the correct definition.

It's true that Socrates says that, in offering his definition, Meno assumes that Socrates 'will thereby know' (79c2, *êdê gnôsmenou*)<sup>96</sup> what virtue as a whole is; and that might seem to imply that Meno is striving, but has failed, to satisfy DR. And one might think that, if this is so, DR now requires knowledge. I argue in the next section that Socrates does indeed think that Meno's definition fails DR. But he makes that point in 79d1–4, not in 79c. Though it's often assumed that 'will thereby know' in 79c2 adverts to DR, there is an alternative. As my translation indicates, I take *êdê* to mean 'thereby', not (as it can also mean) 'already'.<sup>97</sup> Socrates' point is that Meno thinks that, in offering his definition, Socrates will thereby acquire knowledge of what virtue is. Socrates then points out that that's not so; for the definition is incorrect. He also notes, at 79c8–9, that, since he doesn't know what virtue is, he can't know what a part of virtue is. As we've seen, this is an instance of PKW (or a principle closely related to PKW). But it isn't DR.

## 9. The second statement of the Dialectical Requirement

Socrates goes on to say:

For, if you remember, when I answered you just now about shape, we rejected, I take it, the sort of answer that tries to answer through things still being inquired into and not yet agreed. (79d1–4)<sup>98</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Though *gignôskein* can be used for recognition in a sense that doesn't imply knowledge, it seems reasonable to think that genuine knowledge is at issue here. For Socrates is clearly familiar with virtue and justice; it's knowledge he thinks he lacks.

<sup>97</sup> That, in the present context, *êdê* means 'thereby' rather than 'already' is supported by the fact that *gnôsmenou* is future tense. Grube, however, translates the phrase as 'would already know'; Sedley and Long have 'I could already be expected to understand.'

<sup>98</sup> *Εἰ γὰρ καὶ μέμνησαι, ὅτ' ἐγὼ σοι ἄρτι ἀπεκρινάμην περὶ τοῦ σχήματος, ἀπεβάλλομέν· που τὴν τοιαύτην ἀπόκρισιν τὴν διὰ τῶν ἔτι ζητούμενων καὶ μήπω ὡμολογημένων ἐπιχειροῦσαν ἀποκρίνεσθαι.*

This refers back to DR, which was mentioned in 75d. As we saw, in 75d DR doesn't require prior knowledge for inquiry. All it requires is that the interlocutor have an appropriate degree of familiarity with the things through which a given question is answered.

It has been argued that, whether or not DR requires knowledge in 75d, Socrates takes it to require knowledge in 79d1–4. Scott, for example, says that here 'Socrates stipulates that one cannot explain anything by appeal to what is "not yet agreed and still under investigation", i.e. there must be no unresolved questions concerning the items that are to figure in the definition. Thus, if one is to define X by reference to a, b and c, one must already have acquired knowledge of a, b and c'.<sup>99</sup>

However, 79d1–4 doesn't explicitly mention knowledge. Rather, it says that one shouldn't answer a question 'through things' that are still being inquired into and that are not yet agreed. One inquires into something if one thinks one doesn't know it. As we've seen, Socrates doesn't think he knows what virtue is or, therefore, what justice is since, he's argued, the definition of justice must mention virtue. Hence it would be dialectically inappropriate for Meno to offer Socrates a definition of virtue that is phrased in terms of justice. As before, DR requires only that if A defines x for B in terms of y and z, A should do so through things B thinks he knows.

Socrates goes on to say:

Then also, my friend, you should not think that, when you are still inquiring what virtue as a whole is, you will make it clear to anyone by answering in terms of its parts or by saying anything else in the same way. (79d6–e1)<sup>100</sup>

According to Scott, this too relies on DR. The point, he thinks, is that Meno's definition doesn't satisfy DR in relation to anyone. It's not just that it fails to satisfy it in relation to Socrates. For no one knows what virtue is. Yet many people other than Socrates think they know what virtue is. So doesn't 74d6–e1 suggest that DR requires the interlocutor to have knowledge? Scott then asks why 75d requires just familiarity, whereas 79d requires knowledge. His answer is that, in defining shape, all Socrates wanted to do was to give Meno a sense of what a single definition, covering all and only the right cases, involves. But, Scott thinks, 'where virtue is concerned, Socrates expects neither of them to be satisfied with a

<sup>99</sup> PM, 85 n. 15. It's odd that Scott says that the one defining X needs to know a, b, and c. If DR is at issue, the crucial question is whether the one who is being offered the definition needs to know, or to think he knows, a, b, and c.

<sup>100</sup> *Μὴ τοίνυν, ὦ ἄριστε, μηδὲ σὺ ἔτι ζητουμένης ἀρετῆς ὅλης ὅτι ἐστὶν οἴου διὰ τῶν ταύτης μορίων ἀποκρινόμενος δηλώσει αὐτὴν ὁπωρὸν, ἢ ἄλλο ὅτιοῦν τοῦτω τῷ αὐτῷ τρόπῳ λέγων.*

definition that fails a strict application of the dialectical requirement. The reason lies in his insistence that they achieve a philosophical understanding of the nature of virtue before they investigate how it is acquired.<sup>101</sup> Hence, DR requires knowledge when one is defining virtue, but not when one is defining shape; the difference in topic explains the difference in what DR requires.

It's true that, in discussing shape, Socrates took DR to be satisfied even though Meno lacks knowledge. But the reason isn't that they were discussing shape rather than virtue. The reason is that they were at a preliminary stage of the discussion. Meno wasn't yet in a position to grasp the Oneness Assumption. The main immediate goal, at that stage, wasn't to provide the correct definition, but to get Meno to understand the Oneness Assumption; for doing so is a necessary condition for being in a position to provide the correct definition. DR is satisfied, for both virtue and shape, indeed for anything whatever, only if the interlocutors discuss the matter at hand through things they think they know. Meno thinks he knows the things through which Socrates 'defines' shape; so DR is satisfied in that context. Socrates doesn't think he knows what justice and virtue are. Hence Meno's definition of virtue in terms of justice doesn't satisfy DR with respect to Socrates.

It's also true that 79d6–e1 makes a point about knowledge. But it doesn't say that knowledge is needed for satisfying DR. Socrates' point is rather that, if one defines virtue in terms of its parts, one won't succeed in making its nature clear to anyone, because doing so won't confer knowledge of what virtue is. That's because such a definition would, as we've seen, be incorrect.<sup>102</sup>

Neither statement of DR, then, requires knowledge for inquiry.<sup>103</sup> Rather, DR requires just an appropriate degree of familiarity that can, and often does, fall short of knowledge. To say that inquirers must have an appropriate degree of familiarity is vague. It doesn't make it clear whether they must have true beliefs,

<sup>101</sup> PM, 58. Franklin, 'The Structure of Dialectic', agrees that DR as stated in 79 but not as stated in 75d requires knowledge, but he gives a different explanation: that in 75d, they are discussing beginning an inquiry, whereas in 79d, they are discussing completing one. So whereas Scott appeals to different domains, Franklin appeals to different stages of inquiry, whatever it is about. In addition to disagreeing with Franklin on this point, Scott also criticizes Franklin for, as Scott thinks, taking 75d and 79 to state different dialectical requirements; Scott objects that there are instead two different applications of some one abstract DR. But I think Franklin agrees. For example, he speaks of 'the DR' (417, emphasis added; cf. 419), and of different applications of it (420).

<sup>102</sup> There are, however, two difficulties for my interpretation. First, the *gar* at 79d1 suggests that 79d1–4, which adverts to DR, explains the preceding argument. Yet on my interpretation it doesn't do so. (Neither Grube, nor Sedley and Long, translate the *gar*.) Secondly, *toinun* at 79d6 suggests that the ensuing argument follows from 79d1–4. Yet on my interpretation it doesn't do so; rather, 79d6–e1 turns from DR to PKW.

<sup>103</sup> Neither does either statement require a grasp of signification.

or whether something less than that—say, roughly-accurate beliefs, none of which is strictly speaking true—would be sufficient. Nor does it make it clear what if any constraints there are on what sorts of contents must be familiar to one. Meno has some true and some false beliefs about virtue; and Socrates thinks the condition he's in allows him to inquire. But he doesn't make it clear whether being in a condition at least as good as Meno's is necessary for inquiry or is just sufficient for it.

## 10. The problem of discovery

In the previous section, I discussed Scott's interpretation of DR as it is formulated in 79d1–4. As we've seen, he thinks it requires knowledge. In particular, he thinks it shows that Socrates accepts a foreknowledge principle according to which 'knowledge must derive from pre-existent knowledge'.<sup>104</sup> As he explains:<sup>105</sup>

Recalling the dialectical requirement, Socrates stipulates that one cannot explain anything by appeal to what is 'not yet agreed and still under investigation', i.e. there must be no unresolved questions concerning the items that are to figure in the definition. Thus, if one is to define X by reference to a, b and c, one must already have acquired knowledge of a, b and c.

It will be helpful to explore in more detail exactly how Scott understands the principle that 'knowledge must derive from pre-existent knowledge'.

First, Scott thinks that the relevant prior knowledge is also *current* knowledge; it is not (just) knowledge one had at some prior time in one's life or prenatally. Secondly, he thinks that, at this stage of the dialogue, the relevant knowledge is conscious explicit knowledge.<sup>106</sup> Thirdly, there is a question about what the prior knowledge must be of. Scott suggests that the answer depends on what one is trying to discover. If one is trying to discover whether virtue is acquired, then, Scott thinks, all that's needed is knowledge of what virtue is: one first discovers what virtue is, and then uses that knowledge in an effort to discover whether it's acquired. In this case, the foreknowledge principle doesn't raise any special problem, aside from the fact that it's proved difficult to discover what virtue is.

<sup>104</sup> PM, 85.

<sup>105</sup> PM, 85 n. 15. This passage suggests that Scott thinks that, in Socrates' view, one needs to know the terms of the definiens in general, not just in the case of virtue. But that conflicts with his explanation, explored in the last section, of why DR allegedly requires knowledge in 79d but not in 75d (viz. because the subject is virtue rather than e.g. shape).

<sup>106</sup> Scott thinks unconscious latent knowledge is relevant at a later stage of the text; but he doesn't think it is at issue here. On the contrary, he thinks that introducing latent knowledge involves revising what is said here.

But Scott thinks a special problem arises when one is trying to discover what virtue is. He calls this the problem of discovery.<sup>107</sup> In the case of definitional discovery, '[t]here is, apparently, no pre-existent knowledge to fall back upon—except knowledge of the definition itself. But then one will not be discovering anything, as one already knows the object of inquiry.'<sup>108</sup> The reason the prior knowledge needs to be of the definition itself is, of course, because of PKW: it says that we can't know anything about F unless we know what F is—that is, unless we know the definition of F.

The problem, then, is this: on the one hand, Socrates thinks one can discover (i.e. come to know) something only if one has prior (and current) conscious explicit knowledge: he accepts a foreknowledge principle. At least in the case of attempting to discover definitions, the foreknowledge principle, coupled with PKW, requires one to have prior (and current) knowledge of the very definition one is trying to discover. But in that case, discovery of the definition isn't possible, since one can discover only what one doesn't already know. A necessary condition for discovering definitions therefore makes it impossible to do so. As Scott puts it, Socrates 'seems to have boxed himself into a corner where definitional discovery is concerned'.<sup>109</sup>

On the view I've defended, Socrates has not boxed himself into this corner. For, on my view, though he accepts PKW, he hasn't (yet) endorsed a foreknowledge principle. But suppose I'm wrong. Suppose that, as Scott believes, 79d implies that one can define X by reference to a, b, and c only if one already knows a, b, and c. Even so, Socrates would not have boxed himself into a corner. For even if we combine PKW with foreknowledge, that is not sufficient for the problem of definitional discovery to arise. In addition, Socrates needs to be committed to the view that one can define a, b, and c only by reference to X. Scott does not argue that Socrates thinks that the terms in the definiens of the correct definition of virtue must themselves be defined in terms of virtue. And I've argued that Socrates doesn't seem to think this. For, as we've seen, one reason he rejects the definition of virtue in terms of justice is precisely because it in effect defines

<sup>107</sup> *PM*, 83. Although Scott uses the label 'problem of discovery', he sometimes suggests there's a problem just in the case of definitional discovery (e.g. 87). However, as Brown points out in 'Review', the main passage Scott relies on comes at the end of the geometrical discussion with the slave, where the task is to answer a mathematical question, not to discover a definition. This suggests that Scott thinks, or is committed to thinking, that the problem of discovery goes beyond the problem of definitional discovery. Scott seems to characterize the problem of discovery in two different ways. On *PM*, 87, the problem seems to be about acquiring knowledge of what is in fact the correct definition. But on 83–4, the problem seems to be about how one can realize, or know (Scott uses both terms), that one has found the correct answer. I won't pause over this issue here.

<sup>108</sup> *PM*, 87.

<sup>109</sup> *PM*, 87.



justice in terms of virtue. The implication is that he thinks the correct definition of virtue *won't* require knowledge of what virtue is. The correct definition of virtue will be like the correct definition of porridge: it will be through things that one can know without knowing what the definiendum is.<sup>110</sup> Scott's problem of definitional discovery arises only if Socrates not only requires prior knowledge of the things through which the definiens is given, but also thinks that one can know those things only if one first knows the definiendum. Yet Scott doesn't argue that Socrates thinks this; and we've seen reason to believe that Socrates doesn't think this.

Here's another way of seeing why Scott hasn't shown that the problem of definitional discovery arises. In Chapter 1, I distinguished two versions of a foreknowledge principle: a matching version and a stepping-stone version. According to the matching version, a prerequisite for acquiring knowledge of *x* is prior knowledge of *x* itself. According to the stepping-stone version, knowledge of one thing, *x*, is a prerequisite for acquiring knowledge of another thing, *y*. Scott's problem of definitional discovery arises only if Socrates is committed to a matching version of foreknowledge, at least in the case of definitions. (In other cases, Scott thinks a stepping-stone version of foreknowledge will do. For example, if one wants to discover whether virtue is teachable, then, in his view, though Socrates thinks that one needs to know what virtue is, he doesn't think that one needs to know whether it is teachable.) But 79d doesn't commit Socrates to a matching version of foreknowledge, even in the case of definitional discovery. All it says is that one can't define *x* through things that are still being inquired into and are not yet agreed. Even if that implies that one can define *x* only through things that are already known (though I've argued that it doesn't do so), it doesn't imply that one can define *x* only if one already knows what *x* is. It leaves open the possibility that the things through which virtue is to be defined stand to virtue as water and oats stand to porridge. I conclude that, so far, Socrates doesn't face the problem of definitional discovery. First, so far he isn't committed to *any* version of a foreknowledge principle. But, secondly, if, contrary to my view, he is committed to a foreknowledge principle, it's just of the stepping-stone variety. So far, then, he isn't boxed into a corner.

However, Scott has another argument up his sleeve for the view that Socrates faces the problem of definitional discovery: he thinks that the best explanation of

<sup>110</sup> As we've seen, Scott himself notes that the circularity objection that Socrates raises in 79d doesn't impugn all definitions, but only ones in which 'one of the definientia cannot be understood prior to the definiendum' (59). In raising the problem of definitional discovery, he seems to ignore this point.

why Socrates posits the theory of recollection is that he is troubled by it. Though nothing Socrates has said so far makes the problem of definitional discovery pressing, perhaps he goes on to consider it. In Chapter 5, I ask what motivates the theory of recollection; in section 10 of that chapter, I discuss the problem of definitional discovery in connection with the theory of recollection.

## 11. Conclusion

I've argued that, so far at any rate, Socrates isn't committed to *any* version of a foreknowledge principle. PKW says that, to know anything about *x*, one needs to know what *x* is. But PKW doesn't say that one needs to know what *x* is, either to inquire or to discover what *x* is. PKW doesn't say anything about the necessary or sufficient conditions for inquiry or discovery; hence it doesn't specify a foreknowledge principle for inquiry or discovery. PKW isn't concerned with inquiry or discovery. It just grounds one kind of knowledge on another, where the priority is explanatory, not chronological. Hence it's not a *foreknowledge* principle of any kind. It's true that Socrates thinks one will be in the best possible position to discover whether virtue is teachable if one knows what virtue is. But to say that's the best way to find out whether virtue is teachable is not to say that it's the only possible way in which to do so.

Unlike PKW, DR does say something about the conditions for (dialectical) inquiry. According to it, one can inquire into something (dialectically) only if one thinks one knows the 'things' through which the discussion proceeds. However, DR doesn't require *knowledge* for dialectical inquiry. Rather, it says that one needs an appropriate degree of familiarity, which can, and in Meno's case does, fall short of knowledge. Unfortunately, it's not clear how minimal a degree of familiarity one can have while still being in a position to inquire. Meno is familiar with color and shape in that he grasps the conventional meaning of the terms and has some true beliefs about both color and shape. But it's not clear whether that's necessary, or just sufficient, for satisfying DR.

Though DR, unlike PKW, specifies a necessary condition on (dialectical) inquiry, DR and PKW are alike insofar as neither says anything about conditions for discovery. PKW just grounds one kind of knowledge on another, where, as we've seen, the priority is explanatory, not chronological. DR just concerns conditions for (dialectical) inquiry.

Just as Socrates hasn't committed himself to the view that one needs prior knowledge in order to inquire or to discover, so he hasn't committed himself to the view that one needs a prior grasp of what 'F' signifies in order to inquire about, or in order to discover something about, F. Just as he allows that being in a

weaker cognitive condition than knowledge is sufficient for inquiry (and, for all he's said so far, for discovery), so he allows that having available a content that is lower-level than signification is sufficient for inquiry (and, for all he's said so far, for discovery). And that's just as well. For Socrates thinks he and Meno are inquiring about virtue. Yet he doesn't think they have any (relevant) knowledge; nor do they specify what 'virtue' signifies. If he were to require knowledge, or a grasp of essence or even of signification, for inquiry, his theory and his practice would conflict. Fortunately, so far at least, they don't do so.

At the same time, it's easy to see why one might think that Socrates requires one to know what F is in order to inquire about F. For, though PKW and DR are initially mentioned separately, 79c–e doesn't distinguish between them as carefully as one would like. It would be easy to assimilate PKW and DR inappropriately, so as to arrive at the conclusion that Socrates thinks that one needs to know what F is in order to inquire about F, or in order to discover something about F. He isn't in fact committed to that view. But he doesn't do as much as he might have done to make that clear.

### 3

## Meno's Questions and Socrates' Dilemma

### 1. The torpedo fish

Despite his initial confidence, Meno is unable to answer Socrates' question, 'What is virtue?'. Frustrated by his failure, he turns to the offensive. Indicating his perplexity (*aporia*, 80a1, 4), he compares Socrates to a torpedo fish that numbs those who touch it.<sup>1</sup> Meno thinks Socrates has numbed him both in mind and tongue (80b1): not only is he tongue tied, but he no longer has any views about virtue at all: at least, none he can articulate or, as he thinks, rely on. Though he used to make many speeches about virtue, ones he thought were good, he can no longer say at all (*parapan*, 80b4) what virtue is.

In saying that he used to think his earlier speeches about virtue were good ones, Meno might mean to suggest that he initially thought he knew about virtue, whereas he now thinks he doesn't know about it. Socrates may take him up that way; for at 80d1–3 he says that perhaps Meno knew what virtue was before he came into contact with Socrates, even though, 'at present you are like (*homoios*) someone who doesn't know' (80d2–3).<sup>2</sup> Of course, Socrates doesn't think Meno

<sup>1</sup> *narkê* (80a6, 7, b1) means 'numbness'; the word is used for the fish now called the 'torpedo fish', 'numbfish', or 'electric ray'. The latter term is used because the fish emits an electrical charge that can numb those who come into contact with it. The technical name for this fish is *Torpedo marorata*, 'torpor' being the Latin translation of *narkê*, hence 'torpedo fish'. Some commentators use 'sting ray'. But as Aristotle notes in *HA* 620b, the sting ray is a different species of fish, which doesn't emit an electrical charge. According to Aristotle, the torpedo fish conceals itself. Perhaps Meno means to suggest that, similarly, Socrates conceals the source of his sorcery (80a2–3, b6–7). For discussion of Socrates as a sorcerer, see C. C. W. Taylor, 'Socrates the Sophist', in L. Judson and V. Karasmanis (eds.), *Remembering Socrates*, 157–68. The torpedo fish was used in antiquity to numb the pains of childbirth. It's then interesting to note that in the *Theaetetus* (though not in the *Meno*) Socrates compares himself to a midwife, helping others give birth to their ideas (149a–151d). So perhaps, even if Socrates is like a torpedo fish in numbing others, it doesn't follow that his effect on them is harmful, contrary to what Meno thinks.

<sup>2</sup> Scott, *PM*, 71, n. 4, thinks this anticipates the theory of recollection: externally Meno is like someone who doesn't know; but internally he isn't, since he knows latently. (Cf. 71c7–d8, which

once knew;<sup>3</sup> but his phrasing may suggest that he thinks Meno thought he did. If so, he is pointing out that Meno is yet another example of someone who initially thinks he knows something but, upon being cross-examined by Socrates, realizes that he doesn't.<sup>4</sup> Even if Meno initially thought he had just true beliefs, or beliefs (rather than knowledge) about virtue, still, he now realizes that he doesn't have adequate grounds for his previous beliefs, and so he abandons them, at least temporarily.

Whatever point Meno intends to make, Socrates says he'll accept the torpedo-fish image, but only if it's understood as saying that the torpedo fish not only numbs others but is also numb itself; it makes others numb by transmitting its own numbness to them. For Socrates doesn't know what virtue is any more than Meno does; indeed, he is more perplexed (80c8–9) than others are.

Socrates and Meno interpret the torpedo-fish image differently:<sup>5</sup> Meno takes himself to be perplexed and numb in the sense that he no longer has any views about virtue: he takes himself to be in a cognitive blank with respect to virtue.<sup>6</sup>

Scott thinks also anticipates the theory of recollection.) If there's an anticipation of the theory of recollection here, I think it should be understood differently: Meno lacks knowledge now (he is like one who doesn't know, precisely because he doesn't know: nothing so like as eggs); but according to the theory of recollection, he had prenatal knowledge, and so he knew at a time before he came into contact with Socrates, viz. prenatally. On this reading, there's no suggestion that Meno currently has latent knowledge, only that he had prenatal knowledge. But I think Socrates is simply reiterating his view that Meno lacks knowledge; he isn't anticipating the theory of recollection.

<sup>3</sup> More precisely, he doesn't think Meno had previous knowledge in this life. As we shall see, he thinks Meno (like all of us) had prenatal knowledge.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, Meno is an example of such an interlocutor; the issue is whether Socrates is making that point here.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. V. Politis, 'Is Socrates Paralyzed by his State of Aporia? *Meno* 79c7–80d4', in M. Erler and L. Brisson (eds.), *Gorgias—Meno: Selected Papers from the Seventh Symposium Platonicum* (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2007), 268–72, at 268–9. This is not the first time Meno and Socrates understand something differently. As we've seen, Socrates interprets PKW in terms of P-knowledge; but it's not clear that Meno does so, for it's not clear that he understands Socrates' conception of knowledge. Another difference between Meno's and Socrates' understanding of the torpedo-fish image, beyond the one discussed in the text, is that Meno doesn't say that Socrates is numb, just that he himself is, whereas Socrates says that they are both numb (though he interprets numbness differently from Meno). Meno's understanding of the image, but not Socrates', leaves open the possibility that Meno thinks that Socrates knows what virtue is, even though he now thinks that he himself lacks knowledge, and even belief, about virtue. However, though Meno's use of the image leaves this possibility open, the questions he goes on to raise make it clear that he accepts Socrates' claim that he too is numb.

<sup>6</sup> This is too quick. For even if Meno lacks not only knowledge but also beliefs about virtue, it doesn't follow that he is in a cognitive blank about it. Perhaps he has nondoxastic appearances about virtue: perhaps it seems to him that virtue is thus and so, though he doesn't believe that it is (or isn't) thus and so, just as it might seem to him that an oar is bent in water without, however, believing or even being inclined to believe that it is (or isn't). As we shall see in Chs. 10 and 11, Sextus exploits this sort of possibility in arguing that the Skeptics can inquire into something about which they have no beliefs. However, Meno doesn't seem to avail himself of this option. He thinks no mental contents

That's the sort of *aporia* (80a3) he thinks he's now in. But whereas Meno says that he can no longer even *say* anything about virtue, Socrates says instead that he doesn't *know* what it is. Socrates disavows knowledge; he doesn't say he has nothing to say about virtue. Indeed, he professes himself eager to continue inquiring what it is (80d3–4), which would involve his saying something about it. So whereas Meno takes numbness to involve having no views about the matter to hand, Socrates takes it to involve just lacking knowledge.

Though Socrates says that he and Meno are equally numb insofar as neither knows what virtue is, he suggests there is a difference between them: he is more perplexed, more at a loss, than Meno is or, more generally, than are those he numbs. Why so? Meno initially thought he knew the answer. He then decides he has no views about virtue but is in a cognitive blank with respect to it. Both conditions are impediments to inquiry. If one thinks one knows the answer, one has no incentive to inquire. As Sextus puts it:

those who agree that they do not know how objects are in their nature may continue without inconsistency to inquire into them, whereas those who think they know them accurately may not. For the latter, the inquiry is already at its end, as they suppose, whereas for the former, the reason why any inquiry is undertaken—that is, the idea (*nomizein*) that they have not found the answer—is fully present. (*PH* 2.11)

If, on the other hand, one is in a cognitive blank with respect to something, one isn't in a position to launch an inquiry; for one has no idea what the inquiry is about.

Socrates doesn't take himself to know what virtue is; so, in contrast to various over-confident interlocutors, he doesn't face the first impediment to inquiry. But neither is he in, nor does he take himself to be in, a cognitive blank with respect to virtue: he has views about it, even though he doesn't think they constitute knowledge. The fact that he has these views, but doesn't think they constitute knowledge, puts him in a good position to inquire. It also explains why he says that he is in a greater state of *aporia* than Meno is. Meno takes himself to be in a state of *aporia* in the sense that he takes himself to be in a state of blank puzzlement. Socrates' *aporia*, by contrast, involves being genuinely puzzled on the basis of having carefully considered various arguments and seeing that they are unsatisfactory. A physicist can be more puzzled about, say, quantum mechanics than a lay person can be, precisely because he has a deeper grasp of the phenomenon, though one that doesn't involve knowing, or thinking one knows,

are available to him that would allow him to inquire, or even to say anything, about virtue. So from his point of view, it's as though he is in a cognitive blank. The questions he goes on to raise (M1–M3) also suggest that he thinks that not knowing involves being in a cognitive blank.

all—or even any of—the answers. Andrew Wiles was once more puzzled about Fermat's Last Theorem than I ever was or could be.

This is why Aristotle, in a remarkable passage in *Met.* 3.1, says that:<sup>7</sup>

If we want to make progress (*euporêsai*), it is useful to go through the puzzles (*diaporêsai*) well. For we will be in a position to make progress later on only if we free ourselves from our earlier puzzles by solving them. But we cannot free ourselves from a bond we do not recognize (*agnountas*). But the puzzlement of the mind shows this in the matter at hand. For insofar as we are puzzled, our condition is similar to those who are in bonds, since in both cases it is impossible to progress forward. This is why we must have considered all the difficulties beforehand, both for the reasons mentioned and also because those who inquire before developing the puzzles are like people who do not realize what direction to walk in. Moreover, they do not even recognize whether or not they have found what they were inquiring about. For the goal (*telos*) is unclear to them, though it is clear to those who have previously raised the puzzles. Further, one is bound to be better equipped to judge (*krinai*) if one has previously listened to all the disputing arguments, like different sides presenting their cases. (995a27–b4)<sup>8</sup>

According to Aristotle, merely being aware of puzzles doesn't put one in a position to make progress. Perhaps Meno is, or at any rate takes himself to be, at that stage: he's aware of puzzles at least in the sense that he's aware of different views—his own initial ones, and ones he considers during his discussion with Socrates.<sup>9</sup> But he is still captive, and so he can't yet go forward. For he hasn't considered the puzzles carefully enough; yet one must do so in order to make progress.

Aristotle seems to suggest that considering the puzzles properly is necessary not just for making progress, but also for inquiry as such. For he says that one realizes where to go only if one considers the puzzles. In terms introduced in Chapter 1, section 3, we need to consider the puzzles in order to answer the

<sup>7</sup> My translation is indebted to those in T. Irwin and G. Fine, *Aristotle: Selections* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995); Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles*, sect. 40; A. Laks, in 'Aporia Zero', in M. Crubellier and A. Laks (eds.), *Aristotle's Metaphysics Beta* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 25–46, at 27; and V. Politis, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Aristotle and the Metaphysics* (London: Routledge, 2004), 64–5. In view of the importance that Aristotle here attaches to *aporiai*, it's interesting to note that he calls Meno's Paradox an *aporêma*: see Ch. 6.

<sup>8</sup> ἔστι δὲ τοῖς εὐπορήσαι βουλομένοις προὔργου τὸ διαπορήσαι καλῶς· ἡ γὰρ ὕστερον εὐπορία λύσις τῶν πρότερον ἀπορουμένων ἐστί, λύειν δ' οὐκ ἔστιν ἀγνοοῦντας τὸν δεσμόν, ἀλλ' ἡ τῆς διανοίας ἀπορία δηλοῖ τοῦτο περὶ τοῦ πράγματος· ἡ γὰρ ἀπορεῖ, ταύτη παραπλήσιον πέπονθε τοῖς δεδεμένοις· ἀδύνατον γὰρ ἀμφοτέρως προελθεῖν εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν. διὸ δὲ τὰς δυσχερείας τεθεωρηκένα πάσας πρότερον, τούτων τε χάριν καὶ διὰ τὸ τοὺς ζητοῦντας ἀνευ τοῦ διαπορήσαι πρῶτον ὁμοίους εἶναι τοῖς ποῖ δὲ βαδίζειν ἀγνοοῦσι, καὶ πρὸς τούτοις οὐδ' εἰ ποτε τὸ ζητούμενον εὕρηκεν ἢ μὴ γινώσκειν· τὸ γὰρ τέλος τούτῳ μὲν οὐ δῆλον τῷ δὲ προηπορηκότι δῆλον. ἔτι δὲ βέλτιον ἀνάγκη ἔχειν πρὸς τὸ κρίναι τὸν ὥσπερ ἀντιδίκων καὶ τῶν ἀμφισβητούντων λόγων ἀκηκοότα πάντων.

<sup>9</sup> If so, however, he shouldn't take himself to be in a cognitive blank. See n. 6.

Targeting Objection, which says that one can't inquire into something if one doesn't at all know what that thing is since, in that case, one won't have a target to aim at, and so one won't be able to specify what it is one wants to discover, and so won't be in a position to inquire. Aristotle also suggests that considering the puzzles is sufficient for answering the Targeting Objection. For he says that the goal is clear to those who have considered the puzzles: that is, if we consider them, we do have a goal, or target, to aim at.

Aristotle also seems to suggest that considering the puzzles is both necessary and sufficient for answering what we may call the Recognition Objection.<sup>10</sup> It urges that, if one doesn't initially know the thing one is inquiring into, one won't know, or realize, when one has found it, should one do so. Aristotle's suggestion is that even if we begin without knowledge of, or even any beliefs about, the answer, if we survey the puzzles properly we will have enough of a grasp of the relevant issues to allow us to work our way systematically towards the answer and to know, or realize, when we've found it. Hence Aristotle seems to give the same answer to both the Targeting Objection and the Recognition Objection; he doesn't think the latter objection requires a further, distinct response from the former. As we shall see, the same is true of Plato.

As our brief look at Meno's Paradox in Chapter 1 confirms, and as we shall shortly see in more detail, the passage just quoted from Aristotle echoes the three questions Meno goes on to raise that, along with Socrates' dilemma, constitute Meno's Paradox.

To return to Socrates and Sextus: they agree that intellectual complacency hinders inquiry. But Sextus may think that Socrates is nonetheless not in as good a position to inquire as Skeptics are. For Sextus seems to think that not only is taking oneself to know the answer an impediment to inquiry, but that so too is having any beliefs about that which one is inquiring into.<sup>11</sup> Whether or not Socrates takes himself to have beliefs about what virtue is, he certainly takes himself to have some beliefs about virtue; and he thinks that having them enables him to inquire about virtue, where that includes inquiring what it is.

The torpedo-fish image contrasts interestingly with Socrates' comparison of himself in the *Apology* (30e) to a gadfly: just as a gadfly might bite a sleeping horse and thereby rouse him, so Socrates' cross-examination of the Athenians rouses them from their slumbers. Just as the gadfly inflicts pain but, in doing so, rouses others, so Socrates inflicts pain, but doing so serves the useful purpose of

<sup>10</sup> The term is due to Matthews, *Socratic Perplexity*, 58; he uses it for Meno's third question. I discuss it further below.

<sup>11</sup> I discuss this further in Chs. 10 and 11.



rousing the Athenians, thereby putting them in a better position to inquire. The gadfly's bite doesn't render its victims numb or mute; it awakens them. The torpedo fish, by contrast, numbs others, and so it has a stultifying effect: one can't inquire if one is numb (at least, not if one is numb in the way Meno thinks he is). The gadfly image emphasizes the positive, if momentarily painful, benefits of being cross-examined by Socrates. Meno mentions only the destructive effects of being cross-examined by Socrates, and he overstates and misinterprets them. Both Socrates and Meno acknowledge the painful effects of coming into contact with Socrates; but Socrates emphasizes the positive value this has, whereas Meno just feels defeated.<sup>12</sup>

But, as we've seen, Socrates subtly revises Meno's account of the torpedo-fish image, by insisting that he too is numb, though only in the sense that they both lack knowledge. He thereby suggests that Meno has misinterpreted Socrates' method and failed to grasp its beneficial effects. As we shall see, Socrates makes the same point later, in cross-examining Meno's slave. Meno, it turns out, isn't as numb as he thinks he is.

## 2. Meno's first two questions

Though Socrates reiterates his eagerness to inquire what virtue is, Meno wonders whether he's in a position to do so:<sup>13</sup>

(M1) And how will you inquire into this (*touto*),<sup>14</sup> Socrates, when you don't at all know what it is? (M2) For what sort of thing,<sup>15</sup> from among those you don't know, will you put

<sup>12</sup> For comparison of the two images, see Matthews, *Socratic Perplexity*, 87–91.

<sup>13</sup> I insert '(M1)', '(M2)', and '(M3)' for ease of reference. Scott, *PM*, uses '(M1)' to cover my (M1) and (M2); and he uses '(M2)' where I use '(M3)'.

<sup>14</sup> I take 'this' to refer to virtue; so also Bluck (271) and Sharples (143). Dancy, by contrast, noting that *touto* is neuter, 'virtue' (*aretê*) feminine, suggests that *touto* is generic, i.e. refers to anything which is such that Socrates, or one, doesn't at all know what it is (*Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 218 n. 8). However, as he acknowledges, the difference in ending is not decisive.

At 80d3–4, Socrates says that he wants to inquire what virtue is (*hoti pote estin*); so one might think *touto* refers just to what virtue is. However, Meno seems to be asking, more generally, how Socrates can inquire into virtue, i.e. into anything at all about virtue, if he doesn't at all know what it is. He is presumably thinking of PKW, which says that if one doesn't know what x is, one can't know anything at all about x (though, as we've seen, that claim should be firmly distinguished from the view that, if one doesn't know what x is, one can't inquire about x). As such, what virtue is falls within the scope of *touto*; but the two aren't equivalent. Inquiring what virtue is is one case of inquiring into *touto*; but there are other cases as well. That this is so is also supported by the fact that the geometrical discussion, which constitutes part of the answer to Meno's questions, does not focus on the answer to a 'What is F?' question.

<sup>15</sup> *poion*. As we've seen, in 71b Socrates says that one needs to know what x is to know what x is like (*poion*). *poion*, in Meno's second question at 80d6, isn't being used so as to contrast with *ti*; rather, it's an interrogative. However, the interrogative means 'of what sort'. So Meno is asking not

forward as the thing you're inquiring into? (M3) And (ἐ)<sup>16</sup> even if you really encounter it, how will you know that this is the thing that you didn't know? (80d5–8)<sup>17</sup>

M1 asks how Socrates can inquire about virtue if he doesn't at all know what it is. M2 explains why the attempt to do so is problematic.<sup>18</sup> As we saw in Chapter 1, inquiry is a systematic, goal-directed activity. As such, one needs to be able to specify the target one is aiming at.<sup>19</sup> Meno suggests that, if one doesn't at all know the thing that one is inquiring into, one can't specify the target one is aiming at, and so one can't give direction to one's search. Yet, as we've seen, Socrates claims that he doesn't at all know what virtue is; and so, given PKW, he doesn't know anything at all about virtue. How, then, can he inquire about virtue? It seems to be a necessary condition for inquiring into something that one know what it is. But Socrates claims not to satisfy that condition. Meno is raising the Targeting Objection which, as we've seen, says that one can't inquire into something if one doesn't at all know what it is since, in that case, one won't have a target to aim at; yet one can inquire only if one does have a target to aim at. Since Socrates says he doesn't know anything about virtue, he seems vulnerable to the Targeting Objection.

Meno is right to think that one can inquire into something only if one can specify the target being aimed at. But is he right to think that one can specify the target being aimed at only if one knows what the thing one is inquiring about is? The answer depends on what he means by 'not know what it is'. Here there are two relevant issues, one about cognitive condition and one about content. What cognitive condition does one need to be in, to be in a position to inquire? And

just 'For which of the things you don't know...' (for which, with variations, see Dancy, *Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 218; and Day), but 'For what sort of thing, from among those you don't know...'. That is, *poion* is an interrogative that assumes that some description or other is needed, where, however, possible descriptions might specify *ti* rather than *poion*, as that distinction figures in 71b.

<sup>16</sup> There is dispute about whether M3 introduces a new issue. Sharples, note *ad loc.*; Scott, *PM*, 77–8; and Matthews, *Socratic Perplexity*, 58, think it does. Dancy, *Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 219, denies that it does. Correspondingly, there are different ways of dealing with 'ἐ'. Grube doesn't translate it. Sharples and Day have 'and'. Dancy uses 'otherwise' (218 n. 10). Sedley and Long, and Scott, have 'or'. I discuss the relations among Meno's three questions below.

<sup>17</sup> Καὶ τίνα τρόπον ζητήσεις, ὦ Σώκρατες, τοῦτο ὃ μὴ οἶσθα τὸ παράπαν ὅτι ἐστίν; ποῖον γὰρ ὧν οὐκ οἶσθα προθέμενος ζητήσεις; ἢ εἰ καὶ ὅτι μάλιστα ἐντύχοις αὐτῷ, πῶς εἴσῃ ὅτι τοῦτό ἐστιν ὃ σὺ οὐκ ᾔδησθα;

<sup>18</sup> This is clear from 'for' (*gar*) which, however, many translators (e.g. Grube, Sharples, Day, Scott, and Sedley and Long) unfortunately omit, thereby obscuring the logic of Meno's argument.

<sup>19</sup> Meno doesn't explicitly use the word 'target' (*skopos*), though *prothemonos* in 80d7 adverts to the notion. For *skopos*, see *Sis.* 391a3, 5, 6; 391a6 has *keimenos*. In their translations, Day, and Sedley and Long, use 'target' to capture the force of *prothemenos*. In the passage from *Met.* 3.1 quoted in the last section, Aristotle uses *telos*.

what sort of content must be available to one, if one is to be able to fix a target to aim at?

As we saw in Chapter 1, some commentators think that, to inquire, we need knowledge; and that's what Meno also suggests. For he thinks that Socrates' failure to know what virtue is implies that he can't inquire about virtue. We shall need to see whether Meno is right to require knowledge for inquiry and, if he isn't, what alternative cognitive conditions are necessary and/or sufficient for inquiry.

Commentators have suggested a bewildering variety of answers, either in their own right or as an interpretation of what Meno means, about what sort of content one must in some sense grasp in order to inquire. Charles, for example, thinks Meno is suggesting that, in the case of virtue, one needs to grasp what 'virtue' signifies, in the sense that one needs to specify a feature true of all and only cases of virtue.<sup>20</sup> According to Matthews, one needs a specification that distinguishes virtue from things that are easily confused with it.<sup>21</sup> Dancy thinks that what's needed is 'an ability somehow to represent' virtue to oneself; but he thinks this involves a 'watered down' version of what the text actually says, so as 'to make it plausible'.<sup>22</sup> Another possibility is that Meno thinks one needs to know the answer to a 'What is F?' question. After all, that's what they were looking for but failed to find; and it's their failure to find it that prompts his questions. Further, M1 clearly echoes Socrates' disclaimer in 71ab; and that disclaimer, as we've seen, involves disclaiming knowledge of the real essence of virtue.

Meno would be wrong to think that one can inquire into F only if one knows the essence of F or, failing that, only if one knows what 'F' signifies. As we've seen, both requirements are too demanding. Nor has Socrates imposed either requirement on inquiry; if Meno thinks Socrates has done so, he has misunderstood him. For Socrates has said that one needs to know the essence of F, not for *inquiring* into it, but just for *knowing* anything about it. As to signification, it hasn't yet played a role in the dialogue, though, of course, Meno could be introducing a new concern.

However, Meno doesn't seem to have any positive view about what sort of content must be available to one if one is to be able to specify a target to aim at. His focus is just on cognitive condition. He's worried that if one doesn't at all know what something (e.g. virtue) is—that is, if one is in a cognitive blank about it and so has no description available at all—one can't inquire into that thing. It's not that he thinks one must grasp what 'F' signifies, or the essence of F, to inquire

<sup>20</sup> 'Types', 117; 'Paradox', 115–16.

<sup>21</sup> *Socratic Perplexity*, 58.

<sup>22</sup> *Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 220; cf. 219–21.

into F. His point is that if one is in a cognitive blank about F, and so has *no* content available, one isn't in a position to inquire about F. If he thinks the only alternative to knowing is being in a cognitive blank, then he thinks not only that is he in a cognitive blank, but also that Socrates is too: for Socrates claims not to know at all what virtue is or, therefore, anything about virtue.

But when Socrates says that he doesn't know at all what virtue is, he means that he lacks P-knowledge of what virtue is (i.e. of the essence of virtue) and so, given PKW, he thinks he lacks all P-knowledge about virtue. Meno takes him to mean that he is in a cognitive blank about virtue. He then reasonably asks how Socrates can inquire into virtue if he doesn't at all know what it is—that is, if he is in a cognitive blank about it. Meno is right to think that one can't inquire into something if one is in a cognitive blank about it. His mistake is to think that they are in that position with respect to virtue. They lack P-knowledge about virtue; but that doesn't mean they are in a cognitive blank about it. There are many cognitive conditions that fall short of P-knowledge that don't involve being in a complete cognitive blank. One can, for example, have true beliefs, or roughly-accurate beliefs.<sup>23</sup> These fall short of P-knowledge, but don't make one clueless.

If Meno thinks Socrates is in a cognitive blank with respect to virtue, there's a simple answer to M1 and M2: it's true that if Socrates were in a cognitive blank with respect to virtue, he couldn't specify a target to aim at, and so couldn't inquire into virtue. But that's not his condition with respect to virtue. So, though M1 and M2 are good questions, Socrates need not be worried by them. For they assume that he is in a cognitive blank; but he isn't.

M1 and M2 suggest that Meno accepts a foreknowledge principle. In his view, one can't inquire into something unless one knows what it is. Let's call this 'Meno's Foreknowledge Principle'. Is it a matching or a stepping-stone version of a foreknowledge principle? It's not a general matching version. For it allows that one can inquire whether, for example, virtue is teachable so long as one knows what virtue is, where that needn't involve already knowing whether it's teachable. What, however, if one is inquiring what virtue is, where that means one is attempting to discover the real definition of virtue, what virtue really is, its essence? Meno's Foreknowledge Principle says that one can do so only if one already knows what virtue is. That might sound like a matching version, but it need not be. For Meno means just that one can't inquire what the essence of virtue is if one is in a cognitive blank about virtue. That leaves open the possibility

<sup>23</sup> One might think that there is also knowledge that falls short of P-knowledge. But, as we've seen, for Plato P-knowledge is the only sort of knowledge there is. If they lack P-knowledge, then, in his view, they don't have any knowledge at all.

that one can know what virtue is, in a way that allows one to inquire what its essence is, even if one doesn't already know what its essence is. Perhaps, in Meno's view, one can know what virtue is, without knowing what its essence is.<sup>24</sup> If this is right, then Meno is committed to no more than a stepping-stone version of a foreknowledge principle, at least where propositional inquiry is at issue.

I argued earlier that, so far, Socrates isn't committed to a *foreknowledge* principle, although, in accepting DR, he accepts a prior-*familiarity* principle for dialectical inquiry. It now emerges, however, that Meno accepts a foreknowledge principle for inquiry. It says that, to inquire into something, one must know what it is, in the sense that one can't be in a cognitive blank about it. Socrates would be well advised to accept Meno's Foreknowledge Principle. However, he wouldn't agree that it is a *foreknowledge* principle. For, in his view, merely failing to be in a cognitive blank about something isn't sufficient for having knowledge. If one has mere beliefs about something, one isn't in a cognitive blank about it; but neither does one know it. Meno's Foreknowledge Principle is, by Socrates' lights, a stepping-stone version of a prior-*cognition* principle for propositional inquiry. That is, Socrates would say that Meno is just requiring that one have some relevant prior cognition of what one is inquiring into; one can't be in a cognitive blank about it. Our discussion of DR shows that Socrates too accepts some version of a prior-cognition principle for dialectical inquiry, which is the only sort of inquiry at issue here. But, so far, he hasn't accepted a *foreknowledge* principle.

### 3. Meno's third question

Let's now look at M3. It might initially seem odd that Meno raises it. For it seems to assume that even if one doesn't at all know the thing one is inquiring into, one might find it. But according to M1 and M2, one can't inquire into something if one doesn't at all know that thing. How, then, if Socrates doesn't at all know what virtue is, can he find what he was looking for?

At least two answers are possible. First, perhaps Meno is waiving the point that one can't inquire into something if one doesn't at all know what it is. Perhaps he's asking: suppose, *per impossibile*, that Socrates got started. Still, even if he found, through inquiry, the thing he wanted to inquire into but didn't initially know, how would he know that the thing he found is the thing he wanted to inquire into

<sup>24</sup> Of course, Socrates doesn't think one can know what virtue is without knowing what its essence is. But, as we saw in the last chapter, it's not clear that Meno understands PKW as Socrates does for, among other things, he's not clear that all knowledge is P-knowledge.

but didn't know? Secondly, perhaps he found the thing he was looking for by chance, rather than through inquiry.<sup>25</sup> Inquiry, after all, is just one way in which one can discover something.<sup>26</sup> Both answers make it reasonable to raise M3. I don't see any way of choosing between them.

Suppose, then, that one is looking for an answer to the question, 'What is virtue?'. And suppose that one happens upon, or somehow arrives at, the view that virtue is x, y, and z; and suppose further that 'virtue is x, y, and z' is the correct answer to the question, 'What is virtue?'. M3 asks whether, if one didn't initially at all know what virtue is, one would know that one had found what one was looking for.

M3 can be read *de re*.<sup>27</sup> That is, Meno might be asking whether one now knows that virtue = x, y, and z. After all, what one was looking for was the answer to the question, 'What is virtue?'; and that's what one has found. On this view, M3 asks how one can come to know what virtue is if one doesn't antecedently at all know what it is. How, if one initially doesn't at all know what something is, could one ever emerge from that condition so as to come to know what it is?<sup>28</sup>

But it's more likely that M3 should be read *de dicto*. On this reading, Meno asks not just whether one now knows that virtue = x, y, and z (though that's part of it); he also asks whether one knows that that's the thing one didn't know but wanted to find.<sup>29</sup> His thought is that if one begins with no knowledge at all of

<sup>25</sup> Matthews writes: 'Wouldn't it be possible, however, one might ask oneself, to have a search that was successful, not because it was targeted properly, but rather because the search just *happened* to hit its target?' (*Socratic Perplexity*, 58); cf. Scott, *PM*, 77. However, if one just happens to hit one's target, one hasn't done so through inquiry. One has hit one's target in the way in which Apelles eventually managed to create the sort of picture he wanted (see Ch. 1, sect. 2).

<sup>26</sup> As Plutarch notes, 'we say that someone who comes upon something also discovers it' (215e). It's worth noting that Meno doesn't explicitly mention discovery (*heuristic*), though discovery is plainly at issue.

<sup>27</sup> My distinction between the *de re* and *de dicto* readings of M3 is indebted to discussion with Lesley Brown.

<sup>28</sup> Scott sometimes seems to interpret M3 this way. He says, for example, that its point is that 'if you are in a cognitive blank about some object, you cannot make a discovery about it by means of inquiry' (*PM*, 77). However, what he goes on to say is closer to the *de dicto* interpretation that I go on to discuss in the next paragraph.

<sup>29</sup> Meno uses *eidenai* (80d8), which is generally translated as 'to know'. But since Meno hasn't yet grasped what Socrates means by knowledge, it's unlikely that he uses *eidenai* just for P-knowledge; and earlier he seems to use it more broadly. The fact that it's not clear precisely what Meno means by knowledge leaves it correspondingly unclear whether his concern here is just whether one would realize, or be aware, that one had succeeded in finding what one was looking for but didn't initially at all know; or whether he has in mind knowing that one has done so, in a stronger sense. Either way, he is not adverting to the KK principle, according to which, if one knows that p, one thereby knows that one knows that p. He isn't asking whether, in general, if one knows that p, one knows that one knows that p. He's asking the more specific question of how one could know, or realize, one has found something one was looking for but didn't antecedently know.

what one is looking for—which he thinks means one is in a cognitive blank about it—then, even if one discovers what virtue is (whether by inquiry or by other means), one won't know that one has discovered the thing one was looking for.<sup>30</sup> Meno is raising the Recognition Objection: if one doesn't antecedently know the thing one is inquiring into, one won't be able to know, or realize, one has found it if one manages to do so.

If this is how we read M3, it stems from the same worry as gives rise to M1, which is conveyed by M2: just as one can't inquire about something if one is in a cognitive blank with respect to it, so, if one is in a cognitive blank about something, one won't know, or realize, that one has found it, even if one does so. For if one was initially in a cognitive blank about the thing one was looking for, one had no specification of it at all, and so one wouldn't be in a position to know, or realize, one had found it.

If M3 is so understood, it asks a different question from M1.<sup>31</sup> M1 asks how one can get started on, and engage in, an inquiry, if one doesn't at all know the thing one is inquiring into. M3 asks how, if one finds that which one was looking for, one will know, or realize, that one has found it if, at the outset, one didn't know it was the thing one was looking for. But, though M1 and M3 raise different questions, they are both motivated by the same underlying thought, which is conveyed by M2: that to begin and engage in inquiry, and to know or realize one has found what one was looking for but didn't initially know, one has to know the thing one is inquiring into. So, though M3 raises a different question from M1, it can be answered in the same way: if one is in a cognitive blank with respect to virtue, then, even if one discovers what virtue is, one won't know, or realize, that that was what one was looking for.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, one wouldn't even have any grounds for believing that it is the thing one didn't initially know but was looking for. In this sense, M3 challenges not just the view that one could know, or realize, that

<sup>30</sup> Another way to capture the distinction between the two readings of M3 would be to distinguish knowing the answer from knowing the answer *as such*: not just knowing that *p* is true, but knowing that *p* is true and answers the question under consideration. Cf. J. Schaffer, 'Knowing the Answer', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 75 (2007), 383–403.

<sup>31</sup> Contrast Dancy, *Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 218–21. He thinks Meno, in M1–3, is arguing just that one can't inquire successfully if one lacks knowledge at the outset; whereas I think M1 asks about the possibility of inquiry, whether or not it's successful. Nor is it clear that M3 is just about successful inquiry; for as we've seen, Meno might also or instead have in mind discovering what one was looking for by chance. Others who think Meno and/or Socrates consider just successful inquiry include White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality*, 41; Dimas, 'True Belief in the *Meno*', 10–23.

<sup>32</sup> Scott, *PM*, 77, agrees that this is how Meno intends M3. But he thinks M3 'is capable of a deeper reading' (77). Though this deeper reading is not a reading Meno intends, it is what the theory of recollection is designed to respond to. On this deeper reading, M3 raises the problem of (definitional) discovery, for which see Ch. 2, sect. 10. I discuss this in Ch. 5, sect. 10.

one had found what one was looking for if one doesn't antecedently know the thing one is inquiring into; it also challenges the rationality of believing that one has done so. But, though Meno is right about that, he need not have been worried. For, again, Socrates is not in a complete cognitive blank with respect to virtue. That gives us a reason to hope that the condition he is in is sufficient for allowing him to specify the target he is aiming at, in such a way that he can inquire into it, and can, if he finds what he was looking for, realize that he has done so.

#### 4. Meno's argument

Though Meno just asks questions, they hint at an argument. It will be helpful to reformulate his questions so as to make the underlying argument clear:<sup>33</sup>

- (1) Socrates doesn't at all know what virtue is.
- (2) If one doesn't at all know what virtue is, one can't specify it in such a way that one has a target to aim at.
- (3) If one can't specify the target one is aiming at, one can't inquire.
- (4) If one can't specify the target one is aiming at, then, even if one finds what one was looking for but didn't know, one won't know, or realize, one has done so.
- (5) Therefore, Socrates can't inquire into virtue; and even if he finds what he was looking for, he won't know, or realize, that he has done so.

If the key terms are used univocally, this argument is valid. We've seen that, in raising his questions, Meno takes not knowing to involve being in a cognitive blank. If not knowing is so understood, (2) is true. Further, (3) and (4) are plausible. And, as we've seen, Socrates claims not to know at all what virtue is. However, (1) is false if it means that Socrates is in a cognitive blank about what virtue is. It is true only if it means that Socrates lacks P-knowledge of what virtue is. But if we read (1) so that it is true, and continue to read (2) in terms of being in a cognitive blank, the argument equivocates. If, however, we revise (2) to mean that if one lacks P-knowledge of what virtue is, one can't specify the target aimed at, it is false. Though having P-knowledge of what something is is sufficient for specifying a target to aim at, it isn't necessary for doing so. Again, scientists inquired about the essence of water before they knew it was H<sub>2</sub>O. They inquired successfully on the basis of something less than P-knowledge of what water is.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, 130–2; Dancy, *Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 219–21.



It seems, then, that if the argument is valid, either (1) or (2) is false. Though there is a reading of (1) on which it is true, Meno understands it in a way that makes it false. He is right to think that Socrates couldn't inquire into virtue, or know he'd found what he was looking for even if he should find it, if he were in a complete cognitive blank with respect to virtue. His mistake is to think that's the condition Socrates is in.

## 5. Meno's mistake

I've suggested that Meno raises his three questions because he thinks Socrates is in a cognitive blank with respect to virtue; and he sees that, if that's Socrates' condition, he can't inquire into virtue and wouldn't know he'd found it even if he did so. I've also suggested that Meno is wrong to think that Socrates is in a cognitive blank with respect to virtue. Though Socrates lacks P-knowledge about virtue, and so doesn't know anything at all about virtue, he isn't in a cognitive blank about virtue.

Why might Meno have misunderstood Socrates in this way? One possibility is that he overreacts to their failure to discover what virtue is. He is unduly despairing, and decides that if they haven't yet discovered what virtue is, the reason is that they are in a cognitive blank with respect to virtue. A related possibility is that Meno is confused about what knowledge is. He doesn't grasp that all knowledge is P-knowledge, and that lacking it doesn't imply that one is in a complete cognitive blank. There are also true beliefs, and roughly-accurate beliefs. If Meno is confused in this way, Socrates must share some of the blame. For one thing, Socrates hasn't yet explained what he takes knowledge to be. Nor has he explained that there are ways of not knowing that don't involve being in a cognitive blank. Nor, as we've seen, does he do as much as he should to distinguish PKW from DR. He hasn't made it sufficiently clear that PKW involves P-knowledge and is a claim about explanatory rather than chronological priority, whereas DR is a claim about chronological priority, but one that requires, not knowledge, but just an appropriate degree of familiarity. Nor has he made it clear that PKW isn't about inquiry, but just grounds one kind of knowledge on another. DR governs (dialectical) inquiry; but it doesn't require knowledge for inquiry. Though Socrates has satisfactory replies to Meno's questions, he hasn't done as much as he should have done to explain why Meno shouldn't be troubled by them.

But perhaps I'm being too uncharitable to Meno, and too sympathetic to Socrates. Perhaps we shouldn't assume that Socrates is clear about the subtle distinctions I've drawn between explanatory and chronological priority, and

among different cognitive conditions. To decide about that, let's look first at Socrates' reformulation of Meno's questions, and then at his reply to both Meno's questions and his own reformulation of them.

## 6. Socrates' dilemma

Before replying to Meno's questions, Socrates reformulates them:<sup>34</sup>

I understand the sort of thing you want to say, Meno. Do you see what an eristic argument (*eristikos logos*) you're introducing,<sup>35</sup> (S4) that it's not possible for someone to inquire either into that which (*ho*)<sup>36</sup> he knows or into that which he doesn't know? For (S2) he wouldn't<sup>37</sup> inquire into that which he knows (for he knows it, and there is no need for such a person to inquire); nor (S3) into that which he doesn't know (for he doesn't even know what (*hoti*) he'll inquire into). (80e1–5)<sup>38</sup>

Let's first ask what Socrates means in saying that Meno has introduced an eristic argument. 'Eristic' can be used in different ways. In *Sisyphus* 388d5–7, Ps.-Plato uses the term for an argument or consideration that is offered not with a view to discovering the truth, but merely for the sake of discussion. That is also a familiar contemporary use of the term; and it's how Socrates uses it in 75c9, when he contrasts discussing something dialectically with discussing it eristically.<sup>39</sup> Though this use of 'eristic' might well capture Meno's motives in raising his questions, I don't think it's what Socrates means in saying that Meno has introduced an eristic argument. He isn't trying to make Meno's motives clear to him. He's saying something about the nature of the considerations Meno raises. 'Eristic' is also sometimes used for a mere sophism; and it has been

<sup>34</sup> I insert '(S2)', '(S3)', and '(S4)' for ease of reference. I supply the implicit (S1) later.

<sup>35</sup> *katageis*. This might be a metaphor for spinning (which is how Sedley and Long translate it), in which case perhaps the idea is that Socrates is spinning out, i.e. drawing out or developing, Meno's questions; or for fishing, in which case it presumably alludes to the torpedo-fish image; or for magic, in which case it presumably alludes to the fact that Meno compares Socrates not only to a torpedo fish but also to a magician or sorcerer: 80b7. These options are not mutually exclusive. Cf. Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, note *ad loc.*

<sup>36</sup> See Ch. 1, n. 22.

<sup>37</sup> Or 'couldn't'. Plato uses the optative, which Grube, Day, and Dancy all translate as 'couldn't', and which Sharples, Scott, and Sedley and Long all translate as 'wouldn't'. I discuss its force here in sect. 9.

<sup>38</sup> *Μανθάνω οἷον βούλει λέγειν, ὦ Μένων. ὁρᾷς τοῦτον ὡς ἐριστικὸν λόγον κατάγεις, ὡς οὐκ ἄρα ἔστιν ζητεῖν ἀνθρώπῳ οὔτε ὃ οἶδε οὔτε ὃ μὴ οἶδε; οὔτε γὰρ ἂν ὃ γέ οἶδεν ζητοῖ—οἶδεν γάρ, καὶ οὐδὲν δεῖ τῷ γε τοιοῦτῳ ζητήσεως—οὔτε ὃ μὴ οἶδεν—οὐδὲ γὰρ οἶδεν ὅτι ζητήσει.*

<sup>39</sup> This is how White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality*, 41, understands *eristikos* here. He translates it as 'contentious' and suggests that Socrates' point is that Meno is raising the argument just to be 'obstructionist'.

thought that Socrates uses the term in that way here.<sup>40</sup> However, the fact that Socrates offers such a long and serious reply suggests that he takes the argument seriously. And other, more appropriate, uses of the term are available. For example, in *Sophistici Elenchi* (SE) 165b Aristotle describes an eristic argument as one that deduces, or appears to deduce, a conclusion from premises that appear to be, but in fact are not, plausible (*endoxa*). If, as I think, that's how Socrates uses the term here, then he takes the argument to be either invalid or unsound; and it's clear that's his view, since he says the argument isn't a good one (81a1–3). But he needn't be implying that he doesn't take it seriously. After all, it can be quite difficult to detect and diagnose the flaw in an argument; and the attempt to do so can increase our understanding of fundamental issues. Socrates' reply suggests that he takes the argument seriously; and I hope that what follows will persuade the reader that we should do so too. For it raises important questions about the nature of knowledge and inquiry.<sup>41</sup>

Before looking at Socrates' dilemma in detail, we should note some differences between it and Meno's questions. There are at least five differences:<sup>42</sup>

- (1) There is a difference in form: Meno asks questions; Socrates formulates a dilemma.
- (2) Meno asks how *Socrates* can inquire into *virtue*, if he doesn't at all know what it is. Socrates generalizes this worry. He asks how *anyone* can inquire about *anything*, if one doesn't know that thing.
- (3) Meno asks how Socrates can inquire into virtue, if he *doesn't* at all know what it is. Socrates also asks how one can inquire into something if one *does* know that thing. He raises a question Meno doesn't mention.
- (4) Meno asks whether, if Socrates found what he wanted to inquire into but didn't initially know, he would know, or realize, that he had done so.

<sup>40</sup> See e.g. G. Ryle, 'Many Things are Odd about our *Meno*', 4.

<sup>41</sup> 'Eristic' can also be used to indicate the destructive nature of a consideration or argument; and that would also be an appropriate use of the term here. If this is how Socrates uses the term, it doesn't imply that the argument is invalid or unsound; for there can be sound arguments that are destructive. However, even if Socrates' use of 'eristic' doesn't imply that he takes the argument to be at least unsound, his reply makes it clear that he thinks this. For discussion of the force of 'eristic', see Thompson, *The Meno of Plato*, Excursus V, 272–85.

<sup>42</sup> A sixth possible difference is that Meno has in mind a relative-clause sense of 'what one is inquiring into' whereas Socrates, at least in supporting S3, has in mind an indirect-question sense. This may be M. M. McCabe's view in 'Escaping One's Own Notice Knowing: Meno's Paradox Again', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 109 (2009), 233–56. She suggests that Meno focuses on what she calls external conditions for inquiry (the objects of inquiry), whereas Socrates focuses on what she calls internal conditions (the cognitive condition of the inquirer); she takes these to be different but complementary. I discuss the distinction between the relative and interrogative uses of 'what' in sect. 10.

Socrates doesn't explicitly mention this problem. So Socrates not only raises an issue that Meno doesn't raise; he also fails to mention an issue that Meno mentions.

- (5) Meno asks how Socrates can inquire into virtue if he doesn't know *at all* (*parapan*) what it is. Socrates omits 'at all'.

Let's consider these differences in turn, to see what if any significance they have.

The first difference is not significant.<sup>43</sup> For, as we saw in section 4, Meno's questions can easily be put into the form of an argument. The crucial question is how that argument compares with Socrates' dilemma. I explore this issue below.

Nor is the second difference significant. Meno focuses on the case of Socrates inquiring into virtue, because that's the case to hand. But presumably he thinks that anyone who is in a condition relevantly like Socrates' can't inquire.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, he's come to think that he can't inquire about virtue either, precisely because he now thinks that he, like Socrates, doesn't at all know what it is. But whether or not Meno thinks his worry can be generalized, it can in fact be generalized in the way in which Socrates generalizes it. Doing so is helpful. For it allows us to see that Meno's questions aren't restricted to the special case of Socrates' ability to inquire into virtue; it arises for anyone who attempts to inquire into something about which he lacks all knowledge.

The third difference suggests that there may be a more serious difficulty about the possibility of inquiry than Meno acknowledges. For all Meno says, it might be possible to inquire if one knows the thing (e.g. virtue) that one is inquiring into. Socrates' formulation blocks this reply, by arguing that even if one knows the thing one is inquiring into, inquiry is still impossible. As with the second difference, this one also has the effect of making the possibility of inquiry look, if anything, more problematical: there is a problem not only about Socrates' ability to inquire into virtue, given that he doesn't know what it is; there is also a problem about anyone's ability to inquire into anything, whether they do or do not know the thing they're inquiring into.

The fourth difference might seem troubling. Isn't Socrates making things easier for himself in failing to mention Meno's third question, M3? Doesn't M3 raise a serious issue that Socrates should confront? We've seen, however, that, as Meno understands M3, it can be answered in the same way as M1 and M2. So if

<sup>43</sup> But see the Appendix to Ch. 1, where I consider the view that it is significant.

<sup>44</sup> Contrast Weiss: '[t]he paradox is an attack on Socrates. It is no accident that it is phrased in the second person. Meno has no interest in theoretical questions about how knowledge is acquired; he knows the answer; one goes to a teacher. But Socrates is no teacher. The paradox challenges Socrates to defend his practice' (*Virtue in the Cave*, 52).

Socrates answers M1 and M2, he thereby answers M3, whether or not he mentions it separately.

The fifth difference has been taken to be significant.<sup>45</sup> Meno asks how one can inquire into something if one doesn't know *at all* (*parapan*) what it is; Socrates doesn't repeat 'at all'. Yet one might think it is one thing not to know what something is, and another not to know *at all* what it is. If so, and if Socrates addresses the case of not knowing, but not the case of not knowing at all, he doesn't address Meno's concern. Or perhaps Socrates doesn't repeat 'at all' because he concedes that if one doesn't know *at all* what something is, one can't inquire into it; but he wants to argue that one can inquire into something if one doesn't know what it is, so long as the not knowing doesn't amount to not knowing at all. In this case, he doesn't sweep Meno's concern under the carpet. Rather, he tacitly concedes that Meno is right to think that one can't inquire into something if one doesn't at all know what it is, so he focuses instead on the question of whether one can inquire if one doesn't know, without its thereby being the case that one doesn't know at all.

But it's not clear that the omission of 'at all' is significant. For one thing, it's not as though Meno consistently uses it, whereas Socrates consistently omits it. Rather, both of them sometimes use it and sometimes omit it. Let's trace the relevant usages.

In first broaching PKW in 71a5–7, Socrates initially uses, but then omits, 'at all'. He begins by saying that he doesn't know at all what virtue is, and so doesn't know at all about virtue. But then he asks how one can know what something is like, if one doesn't know what it is. To illustrate why that is so, he says that someone who doesn't know at all who Meno is doesn't know whether he's handsome, and so on, either. The casual way in which he moves between speaking of 'not knowing' and 'not knowing at all' suggests this is just stylistic variation; 'at all' simply emphasizes that he really, in fact, doesn't know. Further, Meno's initial response, in 71b9–c2, asks Socrates whether he really means to say that he doesn't know what virtue is: he doesn't ask whether Socrates really doesn't

<sup>45</sup> Moravcsik, for example, thinks that Meno is asking how one can inquire if one is '*altogether ignorant*'; and he thinks Socrates omits *parapan* because 'the intended solution covers only those cases in which we in a sense know what we are searching for. The recollection thesis is no answer to a paradox that assumes that the object of inquiry is not known in any way whatsoever at the start of the investigation' ('Learning as Recollection', 57). Similarly, Thomas writes that omitting 'at all', as Socrates does in 80e1–5, 'destroys the thrust of the original puzzle for, lacking *parapan*, the crucial premise reads "if a man does not have some knowledge" rather than "if a man has no knowledge whatsoever"' (John E. Thomas, *Musings on the Meno* (The Hague: Springer, 1980), 123, 128–9; cited in Nehamas, 'Meno's Paradox and Socrates as a Teacher'). However, if 'at all' is omitted, the crucial premise reads, not as Thomas phrases it, but as 'if one does not have knowledge', which does not imply that one has some knowledge. I ask later whether Socrates' reply suggests that we have some knowledge after all and whether, if so, he means to hint at that in his occasional omission of *parapan*.

know at all. This suggests that Meno doesn't think that not knowing at all is somehow worse than merely not knowing.

At 80d1, Socrates again says that he doesn't know what virtue is; he then professes himself eager to inquire with Meno what it is. He doesn't say that he doesn't know at all what virtue is. Meno then raises his questions. M1 asks how one can inquire into something if one doesn't at all know what it is; M2 and M3 omit 'at all'. Yet M2 gives Meno's reason on behalf of M1 and M3. This suggests that he uses 'at all' just for emphasis: he's wondering whether Socrates really doesn't know what virtue is.<sup>46</sup>

## 7. The structure of Socrates' dilemma

Let's now look more closely at Socrates' formulation. Two premises are explicit:<sup>47</sup>

- (S2) If one knows x, one cannot inquire into x.
- (S3) If one does not know x, one cannot<sup>48</sup> inquire into x.

The conclusion is also explicit:

- (S4) Therefore, for any x, one cannot inquire into x.<sup>49</sup>

S2 and S3 don't imply S4. For the inference to S4 to be valid, we need to supply an unstated, but presumably implicit, premise:

- (S1) For any x, one either knows, or does not know, x.

Before asking how Meno or Socrates understands the argument, it will be helpful to consider it on its own, in the abstract.

On one reading, the argument is a constructive dilemma of the following form:

*Formulation 1:*

- p or not p.
- p implies q.
- not-p implies q.
- Therefore q.

<sup>46</sup> This isn't to say that Socrates doesn't reply to Meno's Paradox by saying that we know in one way but not in another. It's just to say that, if he does so, 'at all' doesn't provide a clue. I ask in the next two chapters whether Socrates does, or doesn't, reply in this way.

<sup>47</sup> Socrates also supports S2 and S3. I consider their support below.

<sup>48</sup> Or: would not. I discuss this in sect. 9.

<sup>49</sup> That this is the conclusion is clear from 80e2-3: 'it isn't possible for one to inquire either into that which one knows or into that which one doesn't know'. Dancy, *Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 219, agrees that this is what Socrates says, but he doesn't think it captures what Socrates means. Cf. Scott, *RE*, 29-31.

On this reading, the argument is valid, and S1 is an instance of the Law of the Excluded Middle (LEM):  $p$  or not  $p$ ; *tertium non datur*. S2 and S3 then argue that, whichever of these exclusive and exhaustive options obtains, inquiry is impossible. If this is how we read the argument, S1 is not a promising candidate for rejection. So, since the argument is valid, we can avoid its conclusion only if at least one of S2 and S3 is false.

Let's assume for now that the argument is of this form, and that S1 is an instance of LEM. To say that S1 is an instance of LEM is not to say how knowing and not knowing are conceived. It is only to say that, however they are conceived, they are exclusive and exhaustive options. Yet how they are conceived is a crucial factor in determining whether the argument is sound; for that is relevant to determining whether S2 and S3 are true or false. Another relevant factor is whether the argument concerns inquiring into propositions, things (broadly construed so as to include domains), or both. Let's consider some possibilities, beginning with S3.

Let's assume, to begin with, that one is inquiring whether a given proposition  $p$  is true. Let's also assume that not knowing something involves being in a cognitive blank about it. In that case, not only does one not know whether  $p$  is true; but, also, one doesn't even have a minimal grasp of what it means. So read, S3 seems true. For, as we've seen, if one is in a cognitive blank with respect to something, one can't inquire into it.

What if one is inquiring into a domain such as virtue? Then S3 is still true, if not knowing something is being in a cognitive blank with respect to it. One can't inquire into virtue if one is in a cognitive blank about it.

There are, however, other possible readings of S3. Suppose, for example, that one is inquiring whether  $p$  is true and that not knowing, here, means just that one doesn't know whether it's true. For all that, one might know what it means, and that might put one in a good position to inquire whether it is true. So understood, S3 seems false.

Suppose that one is inquiring into a domain such as virtue, and that one doesn't know what virtue is, in the sense that one doesn't have P-knowledge of its nature. In that case, given PKW, one doesn't know anything at all about virtue. So understood, S3 is again false. For lacking all P-knowledge about virtue doesn't imply that one can't inquire into it. For even if one lacks all P-knowledge about virtue, and so doesn't know anything at all about virtue, one might have and rely on relevant true beliefs about virtue; and one might think that doing so is sufficient for being able to inquire into it. If so, having P-knowledge isn't necessary.

Considered on its own, then, S3 can be read so as to be true; it can also be read so as to be false. I ask shortly whether there are good reasons to single out any particular reading, given the overall context. But before doing so, let's turn to S2.

If 'not know', in S3, means 'being in a cognitive blank', then, for the argument to remain an instance of Formulation 1, 'know' in S2 has to mean 'not being in a cognitive blank'. Suppose that we are inquiring whether *p* is true and that we are not in a cognitive blank with respect to *p*. Perhaps, for example, we grasp what *p* means. S2 is then false: it doesn't follow from the fact that one grasps what *p* means that one can't inquire whether *p* is true.<sup>50</sup> As before, knowing what *p* means might put one in a good position to inquire whether it's true. If, on the other hand, one already knows that *p* is true, one can't inquire whether it's true. At least, that's so on the assumption that one can inquire into something only if one doesn't already know it. For then, if one knows that *p* is true, the inquiry into whether it's true is already over.<sup>51</sup>

If one is inquiring into a domain such as virtue, S2 is false if 'know' means 'not being in a cognitive blank'. For suppose I am not in a cognitive blank with respect to virtue, but have some roughly-accurate beliefs, or true beliefs, or some but not all knowledge, about it. That might put me in a good position to inquire about virtue.

Suppose that one is inquiring whether *p* is true, and that to know something is to know everything there is to know about it: one knows that *p* is true, what all its implications are, what its place in logical space is, and so on. Then S2 is true; for if one is in that condition with respect to *p*, there's nothing left about *p* for one to inquire into. Similarly, if one is inquiring into a domain such as virtue, and to know virtue—that is, to know what virtue is—is to know everything there is to know about virtue, then S2 is again true: if one knows everything there is to know about virtue, there's nothing left to inquire into about it.

So just as there are readings of S3 on which it is true and other readings of it on which it is false, so there are readings of S2 on which it is true and other readings of it on which it is false. If we read S2 so that it is true—so that, say, knowing something is knowing everything there is to know about it—then, for the argument to remain an instance of Formulation 1, S3 would have to say that, if one doesn't know everything there is to know about something, one can't inquire

<sup>50</sup> At least, this is true in general. But it has been argued that if one grasps what an analytic proposition means, one knows that it is true; hence inquiry into whether it's true wouldn't be possible.

<sup>51</sup> Here and in what follows, I leave the modest knower (who knows something but doesn't think she does) to one side: see Ch. 1, sect. 2.



into it. But that's false. Even if one lacks complete knowledge about virtue, one can inquire so as to fill in the gaps in one's knowledge.

I've considered a variety of readings of S2 and S3. Both premises can be read so as to be true, and so as to be false. Suppose we read each premise so that it is true. Suppose, for example, that S2 says that, if one has complete knowledge about something, one can't inquire into it; and that S3 says that, if one is in a cognitive blank about something, one can't inquire into it. Then S2 and S3 are both true.<sup>52</sup> S1 is also true, if it is an instance of the Law of the Excluded Middle. However, though the argument now has all true premises, it is invalid, since it equivocates on 'know'. The argument is now of the following form:

*Formulation 2:*

p or not-p  
p implies q  
r implies q  
Therefore q.

But perhaps S1 is not an instance of the Law of the Excluded Middle? Perhaps it says that one either knows (in the sense that one has complete knowledge of) something or doesn't know it (in the sense that one is in a cognitive blank about it)? The argument would then be of the following form:

*Formulation 3:*

p or q  
p implies r  
q implies r  
Therefore r

So read, the argument is valid, but S1 is no longer guaranteed to be true. Indeed, so far from being guaranteed to be true, it is false. For it is not the case that, for any x, one either has complete knowledge about it or is in a cognitive blank with respect to it. There is partial knowledge; there are also beliefs, including true beliefs. So if we read the argument in this way, it is valid but unsound.

The attempt to make the argument sound is like the attempt to smooth out some carpets: eliminating one bump just creates another one. If all the premises are true, the argument is invalid. If the argument is valid, at least one premise is false.

<sup>52</sup> This is so whether the something at issue is a proposition, or a domain such as virtue. If S2 and S3 are read in this way, they involve what, in Ch. 1, I called an all-or-nothing model of knowledge: one either has complete knowledge of something or is in a cognitive blank about it. Formulation 3 likewise involves such a reading. Formulation 1, by contrast, does not do so.

## 8. Three clues

So far we've seen that when Socrates' dilemma is considered in the abstract, it can be read in a variety of ways. But how do Meno and Socrates understand it? Do they have one of the readings we have considered in mind? Or do they understand the argument in different ways? After all, Meno but not Socrates thinks it's a good argument.

There are at least three clues we can pursue that might help us decide how Meno and Socrates understand the argument. First, Socrates aims to reformulate Meno's worries. So we can ask which reading of the argument best does so. Secondly, Socrates supports S2 and S3; we can ask which reading of them he seems to support. Thirdly, Socrates replies to the argument. We can ask what argument he seems to reply to. I consider Socrates' reply in the next two chapters. But we can pursue the first two clues here.

We've seen that Meno thinks they don't know what virtue is, in the sense that they are in a cognitive blank with respect to virtue; and he worries that, if that's so, they can't inquire into virtue. We might think that, if S3 correctly captures Meno's worry, it should use 'not know *x*' to mean being in a cognitive blank about *x*. However, I think we should resist that thought. Rather, S3 says just that, if one doesn't know *x*, one can't inquire into *x*. Meno accepts that premise, because he thinks that if one doesn't know *x*, one is in a cognitive blank about *x*. Someone else, with a different understanding of what not knowing involves, might also accept—or reject—S3. S3 doesn't itself provide an analysis of what not knowing is. We need to leave open the possibility that Meno and Socrates understand it differently. All we should say at this point is that, given how Meno understands it, we can see why he thinks it is true.

The first clue—Meno's views as expressed so far—perhaps suggests that he views S1 as an instance of LEM. At least, he doesn't suggest that Socrates both does and doesn't know what virtue is, or that he neither knows nor doesn't know what it is. Rather, initially he seems to assume that Socrates knows what it is: that's why he asks him whether it can be taught, and why he's surprised when Socrates disclaims knowledge. Faced with Socrates' disclaimer of knowledge, he takes him at his word and abandons his initial view that Socrates knows what virtue is—or, therefore, given PKW, anything at all about virtue.

To say that Meno assumes that Socrates either does, or doesn't, know what virtue is doesn't tell us what he thinks knowing and not knowing consist in. We've seen, however, that, at least by the time he raises his questions, Meno takes not knowing something to be being in a cognitive blank about it. So perhaps—if he thinks that knowing and not knowing are exclusive and

exhaustive options—he thinks it's sufficient for knowing something that one have a clue about it. In that case, he reads the argument so that it is an instance of Formulation 1, on which S1 and S3 are true, but S2 is false. For if he so understands S2, it says that if one has a clue about *x*, one can't inquire into it; but that's false. Perhaps this is why his questions don't advert to S2: he thinks it's false, whereas he thinks S1 and S3 are true.<sup>53</sup>

But it's not clear that Meno thinks that having a clue about something is sufficient for knowing it, or what it is. It's true that, at the beginning of the dialogue, he assumes that Gorgias knows what virtue is, and he assumes that Socrates does so too. And he's amazed when Socrates says he's never met anyone who knows what virtue is. Meno also thinks it's easy to say what virtue is (71e). All of this suggests that, at least initially, Meno thinks knowledge is easy to come by. However, that doesn't imply that he thinks it's so easy to come by that having a clue is sufficient for having knowledge. If he thought that, he wouldn't need to ask Socrates whether virtue is teachable. But whatever his initial view was, he may have abandoned it by the time he poses his questions. For by then he thinks that neither he nor Socrates knows anything at all about virtue. Perhaps he's come to think that, if he and Socrates don't know anything at all about virtue, knowledge is difficult to come by. Perhaps he now thinks that knowledge is complete knowledge. If he thinks S2 involves complete knowledge, it is true. Further, we've seen that he thinks that not knowing involves being in a complete cognitive blank. So perhaps he reads the argument so that S2 and S3 are both true. He could still take the argument to be valid, and understand S1 as an instance of LEM, if he assumes two ancillary premises:

(AP1) For any *x*, if one knows *x*, one knows everything there is to know about it.

(AP2) For any *x*, if one doesn't know *x*, one is in a cognitive blank about it.

Though AP1 and 2 are false, perhaps Meno isn't sufficiently clear about knowing and not knowing to see that they are false. Be that as it may, if he accepts them, we can see why he thinks the overall argument is a good one. For the argument so understood is valid; and Meno takes its premises to be true.

But Meno doesn't make it clear exactly why he thinks the argument is a good one. Perhaps he hasn't thought much about its logical structure and hasn't evaluated all its premises. Or perhaps he thinks it's a good argument because he's focusing on just part of it, S3, which captures his main worry. All that seems

<sup>53</sup> He might also or instead fail to mention S2 because he thinks it's irrelevant to their concerns, since they don't know.

clear is that he reads S3 so that it is true, such that not knowing involves being in a complete cognitive blank.

Our first clue, then, is of limited help in adjudicating among the different formulations (1–3) canvassed above. However, it does suggest that Meno, at any rate, accepts S3 because in his view, not knowing what *x* is implies that one is in a cognitive blank about it. We shall need to see whether this is also how Socrates understands 'does not know *x*'.

## 9. Socrates' support for S2 and S3

Let's turn next to our second clue: Socrates' support for S2 and S3.

Before Socrates supports S2, he rephrases it. S2 says that one *can't* inquire into something if one knows it. Socrates rephrases S2 so that it says that one *wouldn't* inquire into something if one knows it. Yet it's one thing to say that one can't do something, and another to say that one won't do it. (Of course, the former implies the latter; but the converse isn't true. There are many things I won't do that I could do.) If we take S2 to say that one wouldn't inquire into that which one knows, then the conclusion of the dilemma isn't (as I have assumed so far) that inquiry is impossible. Rather, the conclusion would be that it is either impossible to inquire (if one doesn't know) or pointless to do so (if one does know).<sup>54</sup>

There is, then, an important question about how to read S2. Perhaps looking at Socrates' reason on its behalf will allow us to answer the question. His reason is that there is no need for such a person to inquire. The fact that someone doesn't need to do something doesn't imply either that he won't, or that he can't, do it. There are many things I don't need to do that I can and will do. I don't need another ice cream cone, but, for all that, I can and will have one. So Socrates' reason on behalf of S2 doesn't support either the view that one can't, or the view that one won't, inquire into something one knows.

I'm inclined to think that, despite the use of the optative, S2 should be taken to mean that, if one knows something, one can't inquire into it. For 80e2–3 unequivocally says this. Further, though the optative is perhaps most naturally translated as 'wouldn't', it can have the force of 'couldn't'. For now, then, I'll assume that S2 says that one can't inquire into something if one knows it. But we

<sup>54</sup> Plutarch may interpret the argument this way. For he takes Meno's Paradox to say that if one knows, inquiry would be pointless (*mataion*, 215f). However, it's not clear whether he means that it would be pointless though possible to inquire, or that it would be vain to do so, where that means that it would be impossible to do so. Cf. *perittê* (odd, superfluous) in his discussion of the Epicureans. I discuss this in Ch. 9. Barnes (B1, 95) takes the conclusion of Meno's Paradox to be that inquiry is either pointless ('inane') or impossible.

should be open to the possibility that we'll need to revise this view, once we look at Socrates' reply.

Socrates supports S3 by saying that 'he doesn't even know what (*hoti*) he'll inquire into'. On the interpretation I favor, this adverts to M2. M2, we've seen, asks which of the things that one doesn't know one will put forward as the thing one is inquiring into. Similarly, Socrates explains that, if one doesn't know something, one can't inquire into it, because one doesn't know the thing that one seeks to inquire into.<sup>55</sup>

I've now considered our first two clues. I've suggested that Meno accepts S3 because he thinks that not knowing *x* implies being in a cognitive blank about *x*; and he's right to accept S3 when it is so understood. There is also some (non-compelling) reason to think that he favors Formulation 1. But perhaps he hasn't given much thought to the overall structure of the dilemma. Perhaps he just focuses on his main concern, which is S3. I've also suggested that, though the support Socrates gives for S2 is weak, the support he provides for S3 captures M2 which, we've seen, motivates both M1 and M3. In this sense, Socrates' dilemma captures Meno's concerns.

We have yet to consider our third clue: Socrates' reply. I consider it in the next two chapters. But before doing so, I consider two further interpretations of Meno's Paradox, one by Gilbert Ryle and one by David Charles.

## 10. Ryle on the ambiguity of 'know what one is inquiring into'

In 'Many Things are Odd about our *Meno*', Gilbert Ryle argues that there's a crucial ambiguity in the phrase 'know what one is inquiring into',<sup>56</sup> between the relative-clause and interrogative uses of 'what'.<sup>57</sup> Understood in the first way, the

<sup>55</sup> On this interpretation, *hoti* introduces a relative clause. However, *hoti* can also introduce an indirect question. I ask in the next section whether (contrary to the interpretation I've just suggested) it does so here, and how, if it does so, that would affect our understanding of the argument.

<sup>56</sup> Ryle speaks of inquiring, looking, and searching; I shall stick with inquiry.

<sup>57</sup> Ryle uses both 'adjectival' and 'relative'; I will use 'relative'. Though Ryle thinks that Meno's Paradox equivocates as between the relative-clause and interrogative uses of 'what', he notes that 'Latin and Greek avoided a good deal of this ambiguity' (7). Although he explains how this is so for Latin, he doesn't explain how it is so for Greek.

Though Matthews doesn't mention Ryle, he draws the same distinction in other terms and says that 'this diagnosis of equivocation is an excellent response to the Paradox of Inquiry conceived in its most general form'. However, he thinks that in the special case of philosophical inquiry, such as the inquiry into what virtue is, more needs to be said. See *Socratic Perplexity*, 59–60. Moravcsik makes essentially the same point in 'Learning as Recollection', 54–5. Weiss thinks the argument equivocates in the way Ryle suggests. Unfortunately, she uses 'interrogative' where she should use 'adjectival' (or,

phrase means that one knows the answer to the question under consideration (RK). Understood in the second way, it means that one knows what question is being asked—that is, one understands the question, one knows what it means (IK).

The phrase 'one doesn't know what one is inquiring into' is also ambiguous as between the relative and interrogative clause. Understood in the first way, it means not knowing the answer (RnotK). Understood in the second way, it means that one doesn't understand the question (InotK).

So, for example, if I say 'I know what you know', I might mean (a) I know that you know (say) physics (interrogative); or I might mean (b) Like you, I too know physics' (relative clause). Similarly, if I say 'I don't know what you know', I might mean (a) I don't know whether you know physics; or I might mean (b) Though you know physics, I don't.

It's reasonable to think that, to inquire about something, one must understand the question being considered. But it's not reasonable to think that one needs to know the answer. If one doesn't understand the question, the inquiry can't begin. But if one knows the answer, the inquiry is at an end.<sup>58</sup>

Though Ryle claims that Meno's Paradox equivocates between these two ways of understanding 'know what one is inquiring into', he unfortunately doesn't say exactly where he thinks it does so. Further, he speaks of 'Meno's dilemma'; yet it is Socrates, not Meno, who raises a dilemma. So it's not clear whether he thinks Meno's questions and/or Socrates' dilemma equivocates.

On the interpretation I have suggested, Meno doesn't equivocate. For if one is in a cognitive blank about virtue, not only does one not know the answer to the question, but neither does one know what question is being asked. Meno thinks they are in a cognitive blank about virtue; and he thinks that prevents them from inquiring into it. So he straightforwardly thinks they don't know what they are inquiring into, in either the relative-clause or interrogative sense. And he's right to think that, if one is in a cognitive blank about virtue, one lacks both sorts of knowledge-what about virtue. But what he says is compatible with his thinking

as I prefer, 'relative') and 'adjectival' where she should use 'interrogative'. See *Virtue in the Cave*, 54–5. Ryle's interpretation is also discussed by M. Canto-Sperber in *Platon: Ménon* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993), 66–74 ('(2b)' on the bottom of p. 73 should be '(2a)', and '(1b)' should be '(1a)').

In describing Ryle's view, I have benefitted from D. Scott's PhD thesis, *Recollection and Its Rivals* (Cambridge University, 1988). However, Scott argues that Plato equivocates in the way Ryle suggests, whereas I shall argue that he doesn't do so. (Neither *RE* nor *PM* discusses Ryle's charge one way or the other.) I have also benefitted from many discussions with Lesley Brown.

<sup>58</sup> I again ignore the modest knower.

they could inquire into virtue if they understood the question, 'What is virtue?', but didn't know the answer; and that that's a possible situation to be in.

Nor do Meno's questions display syntactic ambiguity. They involve three unambiguous uses of the relative pronoun (*touto ho*, at 80d5; *poion hôn*, at 80d6; and *ho*, at 80d8). His concern is just how one can single something out as the thing that one is inquiring into, if one doesn't know what that thing is, in the sense that one is in a cognitive blank about it.

Even if Meno doesn't equivocate, perhaps Socrates' dilemma does so. In that case, there would be a significant difference between Meno's questions and Socrates' dilemma. So let's now ask about that.

Here is one possibility: perhaps S2 says that one can't inquire into something if one already knows what one is inquiring into, in the sense that one already knows the answer to the question; and perhaps S3 says that one can't inquire into what one doesn't already know, in the sense that one doesn't even understand the question. On this view, S2 should be read as (RK), and S3 as (InotK). We could then say that each of these premises is true, but that they equivocate on 'what one is inquiring into'.

However, both S2 and S3 unambiguously use just the relative pronoun, *ho*—that which (or the thing which, or the thing that). S2 says unambiguously that if one knows the very thing that one is inquiring into, one can't inquire into it; and S3 says unambiguously that if one doesn't know the very thing that one is inquiring into, one can't inquire into it. There is no equivocation as between the relative pronoun and the interrogative uses of 'what' as between S2 and S3, for the simple reason that neither of them uses the interrogative. Like Meno's questions, S2 and S3 use just the relative pronoun. That's what we'd expect, given that Socrates aims to reformulate Meno's questions.<sup>59</sup>

There is, however, one remaining possibility: perhaps an equivocation arises as between S3 and its support.<sup>60</sup> S3 uses just the relative clause. It says that one can't inquire into something if one doesn't know that very thing. In supporting S3, however, Socrates uses *hoti*, which can mean either 'what' in the indirect-question sense or 'that which', introducing a relative clause. On the interpretation I suggested in the last section, Socrates uses *hoti* just in the second way. So

<sup>59</sup> If, like most of the English translations I've seen, one translates *ho* as 'what', it's all too easy to think that S2 and S3 equivocate between these two different uses of 'what'. This is why, in translating Socrates' dilemma, I used 'that which' for *ho*. That makes it clear that the interrogative is not used in S2 or S3. See Ch. 1, n. 22.

<sup>60</sup> Dancy, *Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 220–1, suggests that one might read this passage as equivocating in the way Ryle suggests; but, like me, he thinks Socrates is being 'laconic' and has just Meno's concerns in mind. However, he makes things easier for a Rylean interpretation than he needs to by rendering both *ho* and *hoti* as 'what', without noting that he's doing so.

understood, his reason for S3 captures M2, which is Meno's reason for M1, which, in turn, is captured by S3. It is an advantage of this reading that, on it, Socrates fairly restates Meno's questions. But it is a consequence of this reading that the interrogative sense of 'what' doesn't come into the picture.

However, other readings of Socrates' support for S3 are possible. First, one might argue that Socrates equivocates, using one and the same occurrence of *hoti* in both the relative-clause and interrogative sense. He would confusedly be suggesting that the reason one can't inquire into that which one doesn't know (*ho*; S3) is that one doesn't know what one is inquiring into, where that somehow at once repeats S3 (or perhaps adverts to M2) but also means that in that case one wouldn't even grasp what question is being considered. If we can avoid saying that Socrates uses one and the same occurrence of *hoti* in two different ways, we should do so; and we can do so. Above, I suggested that all it does is to introduce a relative clause.

But there is a third option (beyond saying that *hoti* is either confusedly used in both ways or else just introduces a relative clause): perhaps *hoti* functions just as an interrogative. On this interpretation, S3 unambiguously uses just the relative clause, and its support uses just the interrogative. There is no syntactic equivocation. But one might argue that, even so, the underlying thought is nonetheless confused. For the basic idea would be that the reason one can't inquire into that which one doesn't know in the relative-clause sense is that one wouldn't, in that case, know what question one was considering: a failure to know-what in the relative-clause sense implies a failure to know-what in the interrogative sense. But since one must know-what in the latter sense in order to inquire, a failure to know-what in the relative-clause sense prevents one from inquiring. And one might think that involves confusion, if not at a syntactic level, then at a semantic level. For example, surely I can know that the question I'm considering is 'How do I get to Larisa?' without already knowing how to get there? At least for empirical inquiries, it seems that one can know-what in the interrogative sense without knowing-what in the relative-clause sense. If Socrates' support for S3 suggests otherwise, Socrates is either confused in his own right or is suggesting that Meno is.

Several replies are possible. First, one might argue that even if there is this clear distinction in the case of empirical inquiries, the distinction is less clear-cut in some non-empirical inquiries; and they are Socrates' main concern.<sup>61</sup> Secondly,

<sup>61</sup> This seems to be Moravcsik's and Matthews' view; see n. 57. They seem to think that in the case of (what Moravcsik calls) a priori inquiries, there is a genuine question about whether one can understand a question without already knowing that it is true.



we should remember that Meno thinks that, if one doesn't at all know what virtue is in the relative-clause sense, one is in a cognitive blank with respect to virtue. If one is in a cognitive blank about virtue, one doesn't know what it is even in the interrogative sense. If *hoti* is used in the interrogative sense here, perhaps that's the point Socrates is making. In this case, he is still adverting to M2. But he probes more deeply, explaining that, given Meno's views about what not knowing is, inquiry can't get started because, if they're in a cognitive blank about virtue, they can't even frame a question about it to consider. Perhaps Socrates switches from *ho* to *hoti* to make this point.

It's worth noting that there is a sense in which Socrates thinks that, if one lacks relative-clause knowledge about virtue, one doesn't know-what in the interrogative sense either: for that follows from PKW. According to it, if one doesn't know what virtue is, in the sense that one lacks P-knowledge of its real essence, one doesn't know anything at all about virtue. Hence one lacks P-knowledge-what in the interrogative sense. However, Socrates doesn't think it follows that one can't inquire into something if one doesn't know what it is in the interrogative sense; for he doesn't think one needs knowledge to inquire. One must understand the question; but doing so doesn't require having any P-knowledge.

I conclude that Meno's questions don't involve equivocation, at either the syntactic or semantic level. Nor do S1–S4 do so. If there is an equivocation or ambiguity, it is between S3 and Socrates' support for it. But, though this is a possible reading, better readings are available.

However, we should reserve final judgment on Ryle's allegation of equivocation until we look at our third clue, which is Socrates' reply. If his reply is confused on this score, it would not be surprising if his reasoning on behalf of S3 were also confused in this way. Alternatively, if his reply diagnoses the ambiguity, we might well think that, somewhere or somehow, Meno's Paradox involves it. It's just that, in this case, Socrates duly points that out. In that case, the Paradox is confused, but Socrates isn't. Another possibility is that Socrates' reply, while not confused on this score, doesn't focus on the issue either. That would tell in favor of the interpretation I suggested, on which the alleged ambiguity or equivocation doesn't play a role in motivating Meno's questions, Socrates' dilemma, or his support for any of the premises of the dilemma. Rather, the concern throughout is just with knowing-what or not knowing-what in the relative-clause sense. But we can choose among these options only once we've investigated Socrates' reply.

Before leaving Ryle, it's worth noting that he uses 'know' loosely or broadly, such that understanding a question is sufficient for knowledge. However, we've seen that, for Socrates, to know something is to have P-knowledge of it. For

Socrates, understanding a question—if that involves just what an ordinary competent speaker of a language grasps—falls short of knowledge, since it doesn't imply that one has P-knowledge. The sort of 'knowledge' Ryle discusses doesn't amount to knowledge as Socrates conceives of it.<sup>62</sup>

## 11. Charles on signification and Meno's Paradox

I now turn to Charles's interpretation.<sup>63</sup> As we saw in Chapter 2, section 5, he argues that, in asking what shape and color are, Socrates fleetingly distinguishes, but ultimately confuses, the signification and the essence questions. I suggested, against this, that rather than adverting to the signification question, Socrates asks only the essence question. What Charles thinks of as good answers to the signification question, Socrates views as inadequate answers to the essence question that are nonetheless good first steps towards a satisfactory answer to that question, steps he hopes Meno will be able to take in due course in saying what virtue is.

But even if—as I think—the distinction between the signification and essence questions doesn't play a role in the earlier discussion, it might play a role in motivating Meno's Paradox; and Charles thinks it does. He suggests that Meno asks his questions because he thinks that:

if (as Socrates professes) one does not know at all what virtue is, one does not even know what (in reality) is signified by the term 'virtue'. However, if one lacks even this amount of information, one cannot search for the nature of virtue. For without an account of what the term signifies, one will not know what thing or feature it is whose nature one is seeking. Indeed, as Meno notes, one would not even know that one had found it if one came across it (80d6–8). One must know what the term signifies before one can search for the nature of the thing (or feature) in question. ('Paradox', 115–16)

However, Charles thinks that Socrates reformulates Meno's questions in an 'all or nothing' way, such that:<sup>64</sup>

either one has a full account of what virtue is or one altogether lacks such an account. In the former condition, not mentioned by Meno, enquiry is impossible since one already

<sup>62</sup> We've seen that Meno also seems to use 'knowledge' more broadly than just for P-knowledge.

<sup>63</sup> Charles discusses Meno's Paradox in both 'Types' and 'Paradox'. In 'Signification', I discuss 'Types' ('Paradox' wasn't yet published). Here I focus on 'Paradox'. I insert page references in the text.

<sup>64</sup> Charles notes that Scott also suggests that Meno's Paradox involves an all-or-nothing view; but he thinks Scott takes this as a starting assumption, whereas he tries to explain it by appealing to an alleged confusion between signification and essence. See 'Paradox', 116, n. 2.

knows what virtue is. But in the latter condition enquiry is also impossible because one does not know what one is searching for. ('Paradox', 116)

It's true that one either has, or lacks (i.e. doesn't have), a full account of what virtue is. If that's what the first premise of the dilemma says, we should accept it; and we should go on to argue that one can inquire without a full account of what virtue is, as Meno and Socrates did. Nor would Meno's Paradox, in this case, involve an all-or-nothing model of knowledge. However, Charles makes it clear that by 'altogether lacks such an account', he means that 'one knows (or grasps) nothing at all about' the thing ('Paradox', 116, n. 2). And of course it is controversial—indeed false—to think that one either knows a full account of what virtue is, or grasps nothing at all about virtue. Perhaps one lacks a full account, but has some true or roughly-accurate beliefs about virtue. Or perhaps one doesn't know what virtue is, but grasps what 'virtue' signifies.

Charles thinks this latter possibility is exploited by Aristotle, who uses it to respond to Meno's Paradox in a way that is not available to Plato. He argues that Aristotle distinguishes three stages in scientific inquiry. At Stage 1, one knows what 'F' signifies. At Stage 2, one knows that Fs exist. At Stage 3, one discovers the essence of F. One can be in Stage 1 without being in Stage 2; and one can be in Stage 2 without being in Stage 3. With the help of this three-stage view:<sup>65</sup>

Aristotle can avoid Meno's paradox . . . , which seems to show that genuine discovery is impossible. The paradox requires that it be a condition of knowing the signification of the relevant term that one knows of the existence or nature of the kind signified. And this is precisely the premiss which the three-stage view rejects.

So whereas Meno at least allows, and Aristotle believes, that one can know, or grasp, what 'F' signifies without knowing, or grasping, the essence of F, Meno's Paradox disallows this; so too does Plato in his own right. The reason is that he confuses signification and essence, or at least thinks one can't grasp the former without grasping the latter. Since a grasp of signification is needed for inquiry, so too is a grasp of essence. But that's just what they don't have.

This isn't quite an all-or-nothing model of knowledge, if that model says that, for any x, either one knows everything there is to know about x or else is in a cognitive blank about it. For one can know what something's essence is without knowing everything there is to know about that thing. The all-or-nothing model precludes inquiry; merely requiring a grasp of essence doesn't do so. If I know the essence of virtue, I can use that knowledge to inquire whether virtue is teachable.

<sup>65</sup> AME, 76. I discuss this three-stage view in a bit more detail in Ch. 6.

Still, let's leave this issue to one side, and look at Charles's account of why Socrates reformulates Meno's questions as he does. Charles's suggestion is that Plato makes three assumptions' ('Paradox', 117–18):<sup>66</sup>

[A] One cannot start a successful inquiry into what virtue is without having an account of what 'virtue' signifies.

[B] One cannot possess an account of what 'virtue' signifies without grasping the essence of virtue.

[C] Inquiry is the successful acquisition of information one does not possess.

First we should note that, though sometimes Charles speaks of needing to *know* what virtue is, or what 'virtue' signifies (as e.g. on 'Paradox', 116, cited above), [A]–[C] speak instead of 'having', 'possessing', and 'grasping' signification or essence. I agree that Socrates thinks that one can't *know* what 'F' signifies without *knowing* what F is. But does he also think that one can't 'possess' an account of what 'F' signifies without grasping an account of what F is? Mightn't he think that one can possess an account of what 'F' signifies as a matter of belief, without grasping, as either a matter of belief or knowledge, what F is?

Charles rejects this suggestion. He says that the paradox arises even if we revise [A]–[C] as follows ('Paradox', 118):

[A\*] One cannot start an inquiry into what virtue is without believing a complete true account of what 'virtue' signifies.

[B\*] One cannot believe a complete true account of what 'virtue' signifies without having the complete set of true beliefs about the essence of virtue.

[C] Inquiry is the successful acquisition of information one does not possess.

He goes on to say that '[s]ince the paradox arises whether true belief or knowledge is involved, it cannot be overcome solely by separating these states. For if the enquirer begins with the complete set of true beliefs about the essences in question he cannot acquire any more information about what virtue is in the course of the enquiry' ('Paradox', 119).

The last sentence just quoted may well be true. But it doesn't follow that one can't inquire further about virtue at all. One couldn't inquire further about its essence. But, as noted above, one could inquire whether it is teachable. Nor does Charles say why he thinks Socrates is committed to [A\*] and [B\*]. Be that as it may, I've in effect argued that Socrates rejects both [A] and [A\*]. For he and

<sup>66</sup> Charles thinks not just that the dilemma involves these assumptions, but also that Plato accepts them in his own right.

Meno inquired into virtue even though they didn't say what 'virtue' signifies. Not only do they not know what it signifies; but neither do they have a true belief about what it signifies. At least, neither of them expressed such a belief. For example, some of Meno's accounts of virtue were too narrow; others were too broad.

Since, in my view, Socrates doesn't discuss signification, it's difficult to assess whether he's committed to [B] or [B\*]. But it seems unlikely to me that he is committed to either of them. For he thinks he and Meno have some true beliefs about virtue: for example, they agree that virtue is good; and they can identify some examples of virtuous behavior. As the first part of the dialogue suggests, and as we shall see in more detail in the next chapter, he also thinks that having and relying on these true beliefs enables them to inquire. He doesn't suggest that these beliefs provide a complete true account of what virtue is or of what 'virtue' signifies; and they don't do so. They fall short of that.

Nor should we accept [C]: alas, not all inquiries are successful; nor does Socrates think they are. He does, however, accept [C\*]:

[C\*] Successful inquiry involves acquiring information one didn't previously possess.

[C\*] doesn't require a successful inquiry to terminate in knowledge. If, through inquiry, one acquires new true beliefs, one has inquired successfully even though, at the same time, there is room for further inquiry, in an effort to convert one's true beliefs into knowledge.

Of course, one might agree that Meno's Paradox involves these assumptions, without thinking that Socrates, or Plato, believes, or is committed to, them. After all, Socrates proceeds to reply to the Paradox; perhaps his reply will show that he thinks it involves confusions, which he duly uncovers. So even if Socrates, earlier in the dialogue, doesn't confuse signification and essence, it doesn't follow that Meno's Paradox doesn't do so. But if signification doesn't play a role earlier in the dialogue, it's not clear what would motivate Plato to introduce it at this stage. One might argue that he does so to make it clear that one needs to distinguish signification and essence; if so, one would expect him to go on to do so, though Charles thinks that Plato's reply, no less than Meno's Paradox, confuses them. But on the view I've suggested, that distinction doesn't come into the Paradox. Meno is worried by the thought that if they don't know what virtue is, they are in a cognitive blank about virtue. His confusion rests on a failure to understand the nature of knowledge. Nor does Meno use the language that Charles thinks is associated with signification as opposed to essence. Rather, he uses the language

Charles thinks is associated with essence.<sup>67</sup> Nor does Socrates' dilemma advert to signification. So just as I don't think the earlier stages of the dialogue advert to signification, so I don't think signification plays a role in Meno's Paradox. Further, though we've seen that Socrates' dilemma can be understood in terms of an all-or-nothing model of knowledge, I've also considered other readings, such as Formulation 1; and I've argued that, so far, we have some reason to favor it.

Still, we have yet to look at our third clue, Socrates' reply. Perhaps it will lead us to change our minds.

## 12. Conclusion

We've now looked at both Meno's questions and Socrates' dilemma. We've seen that Meno's worry is how one can inquire into something if one is in a cognitive blank about it, and how one could know, or realize, one has discovered what one was inquiring about if, at the outset, one was in a cognitive blank about it. He's right to think one can't inquire into something, or know or realize one has found what one was inquiring into, if one is in a cognitive blank about it. His mistake it to think they're in that position with respect to virtue. That mistake rests on misunderstanding of the nature of knowledge.

Socrates reformulates Meno's questions. On the interpretation I suggested, S3 restates M1; and Socrates supports it as Meno did, by adverting to M2. This interpretation assumes that *hoti* introduces a relative clause. It also assumes that 'not knowing at all' and 'not knowing' are equivalent. But a full decision on this must wait until we've looked at Socrates' reply.

Socrates doesn't mention M3 explicitly. But that need not be an attempt to ignore an important question. For, as we've seen, though M3 raises a different question from M1, it stems from the same worry, which is expressed in M2. If Socrates answers M2, he thereby answers both M1 and M3.

Though Socrates captures Meno's concerns—and so can lay fair claim to restating them—he also extends them, by arguing that just as there's a problem about inquiry if one doesn't know, so there's also a problem about inquiry if one does know.

Socrates' reformulation of Meno's questions can be understood in various ways. On one of them (Formulation 1), the argument is valid and S1 is guaranteed to be true. If this is how we understand the argument, Socrates can reject the conclusion only if he rejects at least one of S2 and S3. We might expect him to reject S3. For he claims that he is inquiring into virtue even though he doesn't

<sup>67</sup> See 'Types', 112–15; 'Paradox', 117. I discuss the relevant language in 'Signification'.

know anything at all about it. Perhaps he goes on to explain how he can do so, contrary to what Meno now supposes. But perhaps the argument shouldn't be understood in terms of Formulation 1. Whether or not it should be so understood, Socrates might not reply by rejecting S3. In the next two chapters, I explore Socrates' reply, to see whether we can decide about these issues.

I noted in the Appendix to Chapter 1 that there is dispute about whether 'Meno's Paradox' is a misleading label for the conjunction of Meno's questions and Socrates' dilemma. I noted that it has been argued that the label is misleading because Meno raises more than one paradox (so that the singular is misleading). It has also been argued that the label is misleading because Meno and Socrates raise different paradoxes (in which case not only is the singular misleading, but so too is 'Meno'). There is room for discussion about what the appropriate criteria are for individuating paradoxes; the finer-grained they are, the more likely it is that more than one paradox is at issue. But I've suggested that it's reasonable to think that Meno raises a single (if complex) paradox, captured in the argument laid out in section 4. I've also suggested that it's also reasonable to think that Socrates captures Meno's concerns, even if, at the same time, he extends them by arguing that just as there's a problem about inquiring if one doesn't know, so there's a problem about inquiring if one does know. Nor does he ignore an allegedly separate worry about discovery. Rather, insofar as Meno raises a worry about discovery, it is motivated by M2; and Socrates' dilemma captures M2. If the interpretation suggested so far is correct, the label 'Meno's Paradox' is apt, insofar as it's reasonable to think that Meno introduces a single, if complex, paradox that Socrates then amplifies and clarifies. But the important issue is not how many paradoxes we find here, but how to understand Meno's and Socrates' concerns.

# 4

## Socrates' Three-Stage Reply:

### The First and Second Stages

#### 1. Socrates' three-stage reply

Now that we've looked at Meno's questions and Socrates' dilemma, let's look at Socrates' reply. How, and how well, does he respond to M1–M3? Does he decide, as the dilemma would have it, that inquiry is impossible? Or does he defend its possibility and, if so, exactly how? Does he reject any premise or inference of the dilemma? How exactly does he understand its premises and conclusion? Which, if any, of the three formulations we've looked at does he favor?

Though Meno thinks that Socrates' dilemmatic argument is a good one (*kalôs*, 81a1), Socrates demurs (81a3). His reply comes in three stages. In the first stage, he describes a theory of recollection.<sup>1</sup> When Meno professes not to understand, Socrates says he'll explain (*epideixômai*, 82b2; cf. *endeixai*, 82a6). This leads to the second stage of his reply: he cross-examines one of Meno's slaves about a geometrical problem. In the third stage, he restates the—or a—theory of recollection.<sup>2</sup> How do these three stages fit together? How, and how well, does the three-stage reply respond to Meno's questions and to Socrates' dilemma?

In this chapter, I consider the first and second stages; in the next chapter, I turn to the third stage.

<sup>1</sup> This suggests that, *pace* Scott (*PM*, 79–83), the theory of recollection is supposed to disarm the dilemma. To be sure, it is also supposed to answer Meno's questions. That's not surprising. For, as we've seen, Socrates thinks Meno's questions introduce the dilemma; the dilemma formulates more precisely what Meno had in mind.

<sup>2</sup> The two statements of the, or of a, theory of recollection differ in various ways. For discussion of some differences, see Dancy, *Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 234–5.



## 2. The first stage: the initial statement of the theory of recollection

Socrates first mentions a view he ascribes to priests and priestesses, which, among other things, posits the immortality of the soul and reincarnation. He then infers:

So, since the soul is immortal, has been born many times, and has seen all things both here and in the underworld, there is nothing it has not learned (*memathêken*). So it is not at all surprising that it can recollect the things it knew before (*êpistato*), both about virtue and other things. For since the whole of nature is akin, and the soul has learned (*memathêkuias*) everything, nothing prevents one, having recalled just one thing—which people call learning—from discovering (*aneurein*) everything else for oneself, if one is brave and does not tire of inquiring. For inquiring and learning are, as a whole, recollection. So one shouldn't be persuaded by that eristic argument; for it would make us lazy, and it is pleasant for fainthearted people to hear. But this one [sc. the argument just described] makes them hard working and eager to inquire. Being convinced that it is true, I want to inquire with you into what virtue is. (81c5–e2)<sup>3</sup>

The first statement of the theory of recollection raises several interesting issues.

First, as we saw in Chapter 1, Socrates is sometimes thought to reply by conceding that we can't inquire; rather, we recollect instead. According to Gilbert Ryle, for example, Socrates thinks that '[o]ur ordinary notions of learning, enquiring and teaching are empty. There is instead of acquisition just retrieval of what is there but submerged. So Meno's dilemma was not a sophism after all, but rather a valid proof of the now Revealed Truth that enquiry cannot occur.'<sup>4</sup> On this view, recollection is an *alternative* to inquiry, not an account of what it consists in or essentially involves; and though inquiry isn't possible, recollection is.

The first stage of Socrates' reply counts against this view. For he says he is eager to inquire because the theory of recollection is true. This suggests that

<sup>3</sup> Ἄτε οὖν ἡ ψυχὴ ἀθάνατός τε οὐσα καὶ πολλάκις γεγονυῖα, καὶ ἑωρακυῖα καὶ τὰ ἐνθάδε καὶ τὰ ἐν Ἄιδου καὶ πάντα χρήματα, οὐκ ἔστιν ὅτι οὐ μεμάθηκεν· ὥστε οὐδὲν θαυμαστόν καὶ περὶ ἀρετῆς καὶ περὶ ἄλλων οἰόν τ' εἶναι αὐτὴν ἀναμνησθῆναι, ἃ γὰρ καὶ πρότερον ἤπίστατο. ἄτε γὰρ τῆς φύσεως ἀπάσης συγγενούς οὐσης, καὶ μεμαθηκυῖας τῆς ψυχῆς ἅπαντα, οὐδὲν κωλύει ἐν μόνον ἀναμνησθέντα—ὁ δὲ μᾶθῃσιν καλοῦσιν ἄνθρωποι—τάλλα πάντα αὐτὸν ἀνευρεῖν, ἐάν τις ἀνδρείος ᾗ καὶ μὴ ἀποκάμνη ζητῶν· τὸ γὰρ ζητεῖν ἄρα καὶ τὸ μαθάνειν ἀνάμνησις ὅλον ἐστίν. οὐκ οὖν δεῖ πείθεσθαι τοῦτω τῷ ἐριστικῷ λόγῳ· οὗτος μὲν γὰρ ἂν ἡμᾶς ἀργούς ποιήσειεν καὶ ἔστιν τοῖς μαλακοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἡδὺς ἀκοῦσαι, ὅδε δὲ ἐργατικούς τε καὶ ζητητικούς ποιεῖ· ὃ ἐγὼ πιστεύω ἀληθεῖ εἶναι ἐθέλω μετὰ σοῦ ζητεῖν ἀρετῇ ὅτι ἐστίν.

<sup>4</sup> 'Many Things are Odd about our Meno', 4. Cf. Dancy, *Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 209. As we saw in the last chapter, it is misleading of Ryle to speak of 'Meno's dilemma' and of a 'sophism'. I take it that in saying that Socrates thinks the argument is valid, Ryle means that he thinks it is sound. For if Socrates thought it was valid but unsound, he wouldn't need to accept its conclusion; he could reject a premise or inference instead.

recollection *enables* inquiry; it explains how it is possible. It's true that Socrates says that 'inquiring and learning are, as a whole, recollection' (81d4–5). But that's not to say that there is no such thing as inquiry or learning, but only recollection instead. Rather, inquiry and learning consist in recollection.<sup>5</sup> Once we understand the true nature of inquiry and learning—that they consist in recollection—we will see that and how they are possible. To say that inquiry and learning are recollection is like saying that water is H<sub>2</sub>O, not like saying that witches are hysterical women. Socrates is not offering an eliminative account, dispensing with inquiry and replacing it with something else; he is telling us what inquiry and learning really are.<sup>6</sup>

But if that's so, why does Socrates say that we shouldn't accept the eristic argument because doing so would make us idle, and that we should instead believe the theory of recollection because it would make us hardworking and eager to inquire? Doesn't this mean that we should believe that we can inquire, not because it's true that we can do so, but just for pragmatic reasons? That, in turn, might suggest that Socrates thinks the dilemma is sound; he nonetheless doesn't accept it for other reasons.<sup>7</sup>

However, Socrates says that he is convinced that the theory of recollection is true (81e1–2): *that's* why we should believe it.<sup>8</sup> Further, its truth shows how inquiry is possible. If inquiry is possible, the dilemma is unsound. If the theory of

<sup>5</sup> Or, at least, learning through inquiry does so: see further below.

<sup>6</sup> One might argue that if one recollects something, one knew it previously, whereas, if one learns something, one comes to know it for the very first time; hence learning can't consist in recollection. This may be Aristotle's view; for in *De Mem.* 451b7–10 he insists that not even learning for a second time counts as recollection. (However, Aristotle thinks that recollection is a type of inquiry: *De Mem.* 453a12. It's just that, in his view, it's a different type of inquiry from learning.) Perhaps Aristotle is criticizing Plato: the point would be that what Plato views as learning that consists in recollection is better described as learning for a second time. I discuss this a bit further in the next chapter.

<sup>7</sup> For the view that recollection has only an incentive function, see D. Scott, 'Socrate prend-il au sérieux le paradoxe de Ménéon?' *Revue philosophique* 181 (1991), 627–41. However, he rejects this view in *RE*, 32, and in *PM*, 79–83. For the view that Socrates doesn't accept the theory of recollection, but just offers it as something that will persuade Meno, see T. Ebert, 'The Theory of Recollection in Plato's *Meno*: Against a Myth of Platonic Scholarship', in M. Erler and L. Brisson (eds.), *Gorgias—Meno: Selected Papers from the Seventh Symposium Platonicum* (Sankt Augustin: Akademie Verlag, 2007), 184–98.

<sup>8</sup> In 86b6–c2 Socrates says: 'I wouldn't altogether take a stand on the argument. But that we will be better and more manly and less idle if we think one should inquire into what one doesn't know than if we think it isn't possible to discover what we don't know and that we don't need to inquire into it—that is something I would certainly fight for to the end, if I could, in both word and deed'. One might think this suggests that he doesn't accept the argument. However, I take him to mean that, though he isn't entirely convinced of its details, he is convinced that we can and should inquire, and that the theory of recollection is the best explanation he can think of as to why that is so. He leaves open the possibility that there is a better explanation, or that the precise way in which he's explained recollection is open to challenge. He is not qualifying his belief that inquiry is possible.

recollection is meant to explain how inquiry is possible, then Socrates doesn't introduce recollection as an alternative to inquiry. In saying that the eristic argument isn't a good one, he doesn't mean that the dilemma is a bad argument for a true conclusion. He means that it fails to establish its false conclusion. Hence he thinks it is either unsound or invalid.

*Secondly*, in the first stage of his reply Socrates says that the theory of recollection explains not only how inquiry is possible but also how discovery is possible. For he says that once one recalls one thing, one can discover (*aneurein*, 81d3) other things as well. We noted in the last chapter that Socrates' dilemma doesn't mention M3, which asks how, if one finds what one was looking for, one would know, or realize, one had done so if, at the outset, one didn't at all know what one was looking for; and we wondered whether, in failing to mention M3, he was quietly shelving it. The fact that Socrates says that the theory of recollection explains how discovery is possible suggests he hasn't forgotten about M3.<sup>9</sup>

*Thirdly*, Socrates mentions not only inquiry and discovery but also learning. As we saw in the Appendix to Chapter 1, Meno's questions and Socrates' dilemma are sometimes called 'the learner's paradox'; yet that seems odd, given that neither mentions learning. Here, however, Socrates links inquiry and learning. How exactly does he do so? I take it that when Socrates says that 'inquiry and learning are, as a whole, recollection', 'and' is epexegetic. Socrates' claim is that inquiry—or, more precisely, successful inquiry—is a type of learning, one that consists in recollection. This leaves open the possibility (though it doesn't imply) that not all inquiry consists in recollection: perhaps completely failed inquiries, in which one doesn't learn anything at all, don't do so. It also leaves open the possibility (though it doesn't imply) that not all learning comes through inquiry and that such learning doesn't involve recollection.<sup>10</sup> Be that as it may, if we can

<sup>9</sup> However, as we've noted, M3 doesn't explicitly use the term 'discovery' (*heuriskein*). Further, 'discovery' is ambiguous as between simply finding something, on the one hand, and knowing, or realizing, that one has found what one was looking for, on the other hand. If, in speaking of discovery, Socrates merely has in mind finding something, even if one doesn't know or realize that one has done so, he would be thinking of at most part of M3. We also saw that M3 is unclear about whether one has found what one was looking for by chance or through inquiry. The present passage suggests that, whatever Meno might have meant, Socrates, at any rate, is concerned with discovery through inquiry.

<sup>10</sup> For the view that not all learning involves recollection, see G. Grote, *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates*, 4 vols. (New York: Burt Franklin Reprints, 1973), vol. 2, 249; G. Vlastos, 'Anamnesis in the *Meno*', *Dialogue* 4 (1965), 143–67, at 143 n. 1; Moravcsik, 'Learning as Recollection', 53–4; Dancy, *Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 222–3. For the view that Socrates restricts genuine learning to learning that comes through inquiry, see Nehamas, 'Meno's Paradox and Socrates as Teacher', 10–11. Moravcsik's reason for thinking that not all learning involves recollection is that he thinks that only learning that takes the form of inquiry is at issue; learning non-intellectual skills, or learning by being told, are not at issue. Nehamas thinks that all learning is at issue, not because he

recollect—as Socrates thinks we can—we can inquire; indeed, we can inquire successfully. As we’ve seen, Meno’s Paradox challenges the possibility of inquiry as such. If Socrates explains how successful inquiry is possible, he does more than enough to overturn the conclusion of Meno’s Paradox. I shall use the phrase ‘zetetic learning’ for learning that comes through inquiry (or, equivalently, for successful inquiry, that is, for inquiry in which one learns something).<sup>11</sup>

One can learn something through inquiry without finding what one was looking for and without acquiring knowledge. One might, for example, acquire new true beliefs that don’t involve finding what one was looking for but that put one in a better position to do so than one was previously in. This would involve learning something, though it would fall short of achieving one’s ultimate goal; it would be an intermediate discovery. Meno inquires and learns in this way. He doesn’t discover the answer to the question, ‘What is virtue?’. But he makes progress in understanding the Oneness Assumption; and in that sense he learns something. The only sort of inquiry that doesn’t involve learning is inquiry that completely fails, inquiry in which one learns absolutely nothing, not even that one doesn’t know what one thought one knew. Though Meno’s Paradox aims to rule out the very possibility of inquiry, inquiries that completely fail aren’t of as much interest as successful inquiries are; so Socrates focuses on the latter. He also focuses on them because he thinks they are not only possible but also actual.

We saw earlier that Scott thinks Plato considers two paradoxes, one about inquiry and one about discovery, which he sharply opposes to one another. He says, for example, that ‘Socrates is really concerned with a problem of discovery *rather than* inquiry.’<sup>12</sup> But Socrates doesn’t oppose inquiry and discovery in this way. He is concerned with successful inquiry, inquiry in which one improves one’s cognitive condition, where that includes not just coming to know (and knowing, or realizing, that one knows) the answer to the question under consideration, but also acquiring new true beliefs that put one in a better position to reach one’s ultimate goal. Inquiry is a process. Discovery, in the sense of realizing or knowing that one has found what one was looking for, is its end point; but

thinks that learning non-intellectual skills and learning by being told are at issue, but because he thinks that Socrates wouldn’t count these as cases of learning. Dancy’s reason for thinking that not all learning is recollection is that, if it were, there’d be a regress (*Plato’s Introduction of Forms*, 223). Below, I suggest that Socrates would not be bothered by that regress. But even if he wouldn’t be, he might have other reasons for thinking that not all learning comes through inquiry or involves recollection.

<sup>11</sup> For the phrase ‘zetetic learning’, see S. LaBarge, ‘Aristotle on “Simultaneous Learning” in *Posterior analytics* 1.1 and *Prior analytics* 2.21’, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2004), 177–215, at 190 n. 13, though I’m not sure we use it in exactly the same way.

<sup>12</sup> *PM*, 83; emphasis added.

there are intermediate stages along the way that also count as learning and discovering, and they fall within the scope of Socrates' concern. Socrates is interested in the whole process, not just in the achievement of the ultimate goal. Indeed, as we shall see, he devotes more attention to the earlier stages of inquiry than to its final stages. Recollection is meant to explain the whole process, not just the final stage; in this sense, it explains not just discovery but also inquiry. Socrates thinks that each stage can be explained in the same way, as involving a further application of recollection. We shall see later how this works.

*Fourthly*, we should ask how the soul acquired, or had, its prenatal knowledge. There are two possibilities. First, the soul might have had its prenatal knowledge for the whole of its prenatal existence, without ever having acquired it. In this case, it didn't learn, in the sense that it didn't go through a process of learning. Rather, the soul, for the whole of its prenatal existence, was in a learned condition; that is, it was in the condition of being learned, i.e. of knowing. Secondly, the soul might have acquired its prenatal knowledge at some time during its prenatal existence, having not had it prior to that. If Socrates favors this second view, we need to ask how the soul acquired its prenatal knowledge. Did it do so by inquiry or in some other way? If it did so in some other way, then it seems that we can inquire and discover in this life only because we acquired knowledge prenatally in some other way.<sup>13</sup> This might seem to make recollection otiose: if we once acquired knowledge without it, why can't we do so again?<sup>14</sup> If, on the other hand, the soul acquired its prenatal knowledge by inquiring, and if those inquiries required or consisted in recollection, then it seems that at any prenatal time  $t_1$  at which I successfully inquired whether something is true, there must be a prior time,  $t-1$ , at which I already had some knowledge; for one can recollect something only if one once knew it.<sup>15</sup> As Leibniz points out, we then seem launched on an infinite regress:<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> What might this other way be? At 81c6, Socrates says that we 'saw' (*heōrakuia*) everything, both here and in Hades. I don't think he means that we had either sense perception or some special sort of intellectual acquaintance with everything (or with some range of things) that conferred knowledge. Rather, 'see' just means 'know'. If so, the claim that the soul saw all things before doesn't give a reason for the claim that 'there is nothing it has not learned'. If Socrates thinks we acquired our prenatal knowledge in some way other than through inquiring and so through recollecting, he doesn't tell us what it is.

<sup>14</sup> One possible answer is that our incarnate state prevents us from doing so.

<sup>15</sup> In fact, it seems that one can recollect something that one has only a prior true belief about. But since, according to the theory of recollection, we knew prenatally, I set this point to one side.

<sup>16</sup> *New Essays on Human Understanding*, 79 (trans. and ed. Remnant and Bennett). The passage is also cited by Scott, *PM*, 116; he also notes that Plato wouldn't view the regress as vicious. Cf. Hunter and Inwood, 'Plato, Leibniz, and the Furnished Soul', 430–1.

The Platonists thought that all our knowledge is recollection, and thus that the truths which the soul brought with it when the man was born—the ones called innate—must be the remains of an earlier explicit knowledge. But there is no foundation for that opinion; and it is obvious that if there was an earlier state, however far back, it too must have involved some innate knowledge, just as our present state does: such knowledge must then either have come from a still earlier state or else have been innate or at least created with [the soul]; or else we must go to infinity and make souls eternal.

Leibniz is right to say that if *all* knowledge is recollection, the regress he describes arises. One might think that Socrates wants to avoid this regress and that, to do so, he denies that all knowledge is recollection. Rather, only knowledge that we acquire through inquiry is recollection; we acquire some knowledge in other ways, without recollecting. Or perhaps we always had knowledge or were created with it. An alternative is that Socrates thinks that all knowledge involves recollection; he happily accepts the consequence that our souls have existed for an infinitely long time in the past. For him, the regress would be virtuous, not vicious.

So far as I can see, the first statement of the theory of recollection is not committed to any of these options. It posits prenatal knowledge. But it doesn't say whether this prenatal knowledge was acquired (let alone how) or whether it was had for an infinitely long time in the past.<sup>17</sup> I return to this issue in the next chapter, since it arises acutely in the second statement of the theory of recollection.

*Fifthly*, we should ask what the first stage of Socrates' reply tells us about the nature and scope of our prenatal knowledge. Though Plato doesn't say so explicitly, it seems reasonable to think that he takes it to have been conscious and explicit. For he thinks we recollect our prenatal knowledge; and it seems reasonable to think that one can recollect previous knowledge only if, at some previous time, it was known consciously and explicitly.<sup>18</sup>

It's less clear what the range of our prenatal knowledge is. At 81c6 and d1, Socrates says that, according to the theory of recollection, we once knew

<sup>17</sup> It's often assumed that the first statement of the theory of recollection says that we acquired our prenatal knowledge. See, for example, Sharples, note on 81c6; Scott, *PM*, 96–7; Dancy, *Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 222–3. Presumably their idea is that 'saw' (81c6) indicates past episodes of learning that conferred knowledge. However, the perfect participle 'saw' need not indicate episodes of 'seeing'; it might indicate that we were in the state of having seen, i.e. of knowing, for the whole of our prenatal existence. See n. 13.

<sup>18</sup> See Hunter and Inwood, 'Plato, Leibniz, and the Furnished Soul', 425. As the passage cited above from Leibniz makes clear, he also thinks that Plato takes our prenatal knowledge to have been explicit. For the view that Socrates does not assume that our prenatal knowledge was conscious and explicit, see L. Brown, 'Connaissance et réminiscence dans le *Ménon*', *Revue Philosophique* 181 (1991), 603–19.

everything. It is sometimes inferred that, according to the theory of recollection, we are or were omniscient.<sup>19</sup> If so, we knew prenatally not only, say, what virtue is but also whether it will rain on December 20, 2501 and what the 65th President of the United States will wear on his tenth day in office. However, Socrates goes on to say that our prenatal knowledge enables us to recollect 'virtue and other things' (81c7–9). Of course, if we once literally knew everything, we once knew virtue and other things. But perhaps the latter remark is meant to restrict the former: we didn't literally know everything, but just virtue and things relevantly like it.<sup>20</sup>

Suppose our prenatal knowledge is restricted to virtue and things relevantly like it: say, to organized, systematic disciplines or bodies of knowledge. What did this knowledge consist in? Did we once know every truth about virtue and other things? An alternative is that we once knew what virtue and things relevantly like it are: we knew the answers to 'What is F?' questions but not everything there is to know about every F; we knew what virtue is, and so had P-knowledge of what it is, but didn't know every truth about virtue. Perhaps we didn't know whether it is teachable, or whether the third person born in 2140 will be virtuous. Rather, our knowledge of what virtue is puts us in a good position to inquire and discover whether it is teachable, or instantiated by a given person.

<sup>19</sup> See Grote, *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates*, vol. 2, 246–8; Ryle, 'Many Things are Odd about our *Meno*', 4; G. Vlastos, 'The Socratic Elenchus', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1983), 27–58, reprinted in G. Fine (ed.), *Plato 1: Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 36–63, at 61 (latter pagination); R. Kraut, *Socrates and the State* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 298 n. 79. *Eud.* 293c–294a argues that if one knows even one thing, one knows everything; and that if there is anything one doesn't know, one doesn't know anything at all. So one either knows everything there is to know or else lacks knowledge altogether. The first part of this claim might be thought parallel to the claim that, if one recollects just one thing, one can recollect everything. Be that as it may, the *Meno* doesn't defend its claim in the way in which the seemingly similar claim in the *Eud.* is defended.

<sup>20</sup> See Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, Ch. 6, n. 17. If this is right, then even if one can inquire about how to get to Larisa, and even if doing so involves recollecting, it doesn't involve recollecting how to get to Larisa; rather, it would involve recollecting something else that is suitably relevant to learning the way to Larisa. Plato doesn't say what this might involve. Nor does he say precisely what the scope of recollection is. Moravcsik agrees that Plato puts no explicit restriction on the scope of recollection, but he thinks that it is 'reasonable to assume that both the paradox and its proposed solution are interpreted by Plato to apply to a priori contexts only' ('Learning as Recollection', 57). He goes on to say that the paradox 'calls into question any inquiry into those subjects for which the senses can furnish no relevant evidence' (64). I am reluctant to say that Plato thinks that all moral truths are wholly a priori, though, admittedly, the notion of the a priori has been explained in many different ways and, on some of them, the scope of the a priori is quite extensive. But if Moravcsik takes a truth to be a priori just in case the senses provide no evidence for it at all, then I would say that Plato doesn't restrict the scope of recollection to a priori truths. He doesn't think the senses are sufficient for knowledge of moral truths; but neither does he take them to be wholly irrelevant. If, as I am inclined to think, he takes the scope of recollection to be rather broad, then his view is not that (successful) inquiry consists wholly in recollection, but that it all essentially involves recollection.

Be that as it may, Socrates clearly thinks that our having had some range of prenatal knowledge plays a crucial role in explaining our ability to inquire and discover in this life. He doesn't tell us here why he thinks this; but he does so in the transition from the second to the third stage of his reply. I discuss this in the next chapter.

If Socrates thinks that we can inquire and discover in this life only because we had some range of prenatal knowledge, he accepts a foreknowledge principle, which I shall call *Prenatal Foreknowledge*: We can inquire and discover in this life only if we had prenatal knowledge.<sup>21</sup> Is Prenatal Foreknowledge a matching or a stepping-stone version of a foreknowledge principle? If the range of our prenatal knowledge is as limited as I suggested, then Prenatal Foreknowledge is not an unrestricted matching version; it doesn't commit Plato to the view that, in general, one can inquire into or discover something only if one already knows that very thing. But does Prenatal Foreknowledge commit Plato to a restricted version of a foreknowledge principle? Does it commit him to the view that there are some things that we can inquire into or discover only if we know or knew those very things? For example, does it commit him to the view that we can inquire and discover what virtue is only if we had prenatal knowledge of what it is? That depends on exactly how we understand Prenatal Foreknowledge. If it says just that we need to have had some range of prenatal knowledge in order to inquire and discover in this life, then it does not commit him even to a restricted matching version of a foreknowledge principle. He would in this case be committed just to a stepping-stone version of a foreknowledge principle. If, however, Prenatal Foreknowledge says that we need to have had prenatal knowledge of definitions in order to inquire about and discover definitions, then it would seem to involve a restricted matching version of foreknowledge: one can inquire into and discover definitions only if one had prenatal knowledge of them.

Whatever we decide about this issue, it's important to be clear that to say that we can inquire and discover in this life only if we had some range of prenatal knowledge is not to say that we can inquire and discover in this life only if we *currently* have knowledge or only if we have innate knowledge. For all the first statement of the theory of recollection says, we might have entirely forgotten our prenatal knowledge in such a way that we no longer know at all. I return to this issue in the next chapter.

<sup>21</sup> Thanks to Dominic Scott for getting me to see that, despite our differences, I too think Socrates accepts a foreknowledge principle. However, the foreknowledge principles that Scott attributes to Socrates go beyond Prenatal Foreknowledge.



Prenatal Foreknowledge is quite different from the sort of foreknowledge principle that has sometimes been thought to be at issue in 79d. Scott, for example, thinks that 79d posits a foreknowledge principle that requires us to have conscious, explicit knowledge in this life, and not just at any old time in this life, but when we inquire. On his view, 79d assumes not just a *foreknowledge* principle but also a *current-knowledge* principle. I argued, however, that 79d doesn't assume *any* version of a foreknowledge (or current-knowledge) principle; nor does Socrates assume any version of a foreknowledge principle in any other passage prior to the first statement of the theory of recollection.<sup>22</sup> Accepting Prenatal Foreknowledge is a new move in the dialogue; prior to it, no version of a foreknowledge or current-knowledge principle has been endorsed.<sup>23</sup> Even now, no version of a *current-knowledge* principle has been endorsed, just a version of a *foreknowledge* principle. Though endorsing Prenatal Foreknowledge is a new move, it doesn't require Socrates to revise or abandon any of his earlier claims. For prenatal knowledge wasn't previously at issue one way or the other; it was neither endorsed nor precluded.

We've now looked at the first stage of Socrates' reply. According to it, we can inquire, and discover through inquiry, because we can recollect some range of things that we knew prenatally; hence Socrates accepts Prenatal Foreknowledge. Since we can inquire, the dilemmatic argument is unsound; since we can find what we were looking for and realize we've done so, M3 is also answered.<sup>24</sup> But Socrates hasn't yet said what premise or inference of the dilemma he wishes to challenge. Let's now turn to the second stage of Socrates' reply—the geometrical discussion—to see whether we can make any headway here.

### 3. Teaching, learning, and recollection

Meno professes not to understand what Socrates means in saying that (as Meno but not Socrates puts it) 'we do not learn, but what we call learning is recollection'

<sup>22</sup> Scott, *PM*, 84, says that for the clearest statement of a foreknowledge principle, we have to turn to 85d (in the transition from the second to the third stage of Socrates' reply). But he thinks 79d1–4 also has a foreknowledge principle (85 n. 15). He thinks the two foreknowledge principles differ in that 79d involves conscious explicit knowledge, whereas 85d posits just latent knowledge. In the last chapter, I argued that 79d1–4 is not committed to a foreknowledge principle. I've now argued that one is at issue in the first statement of the theory of recollection—though a different one from the one Scott thinks is at issue. I discuss 85d in the next chapter.

<sup>23</sup> We saw in the last chapter that Meno accepts what I called Meno's Foreknowledge Principle; and I suggested that Socrates presumably accepts it too. However, I also said that, by his lights, it is not a genuine *foreknowledge* principle.

<sup>24</sup> However, see n. 9.

(81e3–4); he asks Socrates to ‘teach’ him that this is so (81e5). Socrates replies: ‘You now ask me if I can teach you, though I say there is no teaching, but recollection, in order to be seen to be contradicting myself straightaway’ (82a1–3). Meno demurs, saying he spoke that way from habit. He willingly rephrases his request, asking Socrates to ‘somehow show’ (*pôs endeixesthai*) him what he means (82a5–6). Socrates says he will try to show this (*epideixômai*, 82b2). He does so by cross-examining one of Meno’s slaves<sup>25</sup> about a geometry problem. So the discussion with the slave is (among other things) supposed to show that and how the theory of recollection is true.

I argued in the last section that the first statement of the theory of recollection doesn’t say that learning is impossible; rather, it says that learning consists in recollection.<sup>26</sup> In saying that what we call ‘learning’ is recollection, Socrates means to offer a reductive account (learning consists in recollection), not an eliminative account (what people take to be learning isn’t learning but, rather, recollection; for there is no such thing as learning, but only recollection instead, which people mistake for learning.) One might think that 82a1–3 counts against that interpretation. For doesn’t it say that there is no such thing as teaching, but only recollection instead? And if there’s no such thing as teaching, then, one might think, there’s no such thing as learning either; for, one might think, teaching and learning are co-relatives.<sup>27</sup> One might seek to support the view that Socrates thinks there is no such thing as teaching by noting that, during the course of his cross-examination of the slave, he insists that he isn’t teaching the slave (82e4–5); rather, he just asks him questions. If Socrates doesn’t think there is such a thing as teaching, it would be clear why he denies that he is teaching the slave; for no one can teach anyone anything.

However, I think we should resist this conclusion. For one thing, when, in 87a, they resume their discussion of whether virtue is teachable, Socrates doesn’t say: ‘Of course it isn’t! We’ve already seen that teaching isn’t possible.’ To be sure, he goes on to argue that virtue isn’t teachable (89e–96d). But he also argues that it is teachable (87c–89c); and there is dispute about which if either argument he accepts.<sup>28</sup> Be that as it may, if he’s already argued that there is no such thing as

<sup>25</sup> *pais*. This is often translated as ‘slave boy’ or ‘boy’; but the word can be used for a slave of any age. There is no evidence that the slave is young.

<sup>26</sup> At least, zetetic learning does so. And the claim may be that it essentially involves recollection, rather than that it consists wholly in recollection.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Philoponus, in *Aristotelis Analytica Posteriora Commentaria cum Anonymo in Librum II*, 4.16–22, in M. Wallies (ed.), *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* 13.3 (Berlin: Reimer, 1909).

<sup>28</sup> For the view that he thinks virtue is teachable and that he does not accept the argument for the claim that isn’t, see Irwin, *Plato’s Moral Theory*, 317 n. 22; *Plato’s Ethics*, 140–1. For the view that he accepts the argument for the claim that virtue is not teachable, see Kraut, *Socrates and the State*,

teaching, it's not clear why he would go on to discuss at such length the question of whether virtue is teachable; for the answer would already be clear. Further, Socrates says that another way to ask whether virtue is teachable is to ask whether 'as we were just saying, it is recollectable: let it make no difference to us which of the two names we use' (87b7–c1). Since he clearly thinks that some things are recollectable, it seems that he thinks some things are teachable after all.

There are at least two ways of avoiding contradiction. According to one popular view, Socrates uses 'teach' in two different ways or senses. On one version of this view,<sup>29</sup> the two senses of 'teach', or kinds of teaching, are (a) a 'Socratic' sense or kind, according to which A teaches B that p if A causes B to recollect that p; and (b) a 'sophistic' sense or kind, according to which A can teach B that p merely by telling B that p is so: B can passively absorb the information that p is true, in such a way as to count as having learned, or as having come to know, it; B need not reason it out for herself (in contrast to recollection, which involves working things out for oneself). For Socrates, (a) is genuine teaching, but (b) is not, though it captures a conventional account of teaching, and one Meno is tempted by. Armed with this distinction, we can say that at 82a1–3 Socrates means that there is no such thing as teaching, if we understand teaching in the second, sophistic, way. Similarly, when he says at 82e4–5 that he doesn't teach the slave, but merely asks him questions, he means that he doesn't teach him in the second way: he asks questions; but he doesn't impart information, assuming that the slave will thereby, simply on that basis, passively acquire knowledge. When, however, he says at 87b7–c1 that it

297–8, n. 79. In my view, Socrates doesn't accept the argument for the claim that virtue is not teachable. Hence we need not search, as is sometimes done, for a special sense of 'teach', or kind of teaching, such that Socrates believes there is no such thing as teaching.

<sup>29</sup> This is essentially D. Devereux's account, in 'Nature and Teaching in Plato's *Meno*', *Phronesis* 23 (1978), 118–26. Similarly, Bluck, *Plato's Meno*, 296–7, says that Socrates doesn't teach the slave if teaching is understood in a narrow, sophistic way, though he does teach him 'in the best modern way'; cf. Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, 150. Moravcsik argues that Plato employs two different senses of 'learn' ('Learning as Recollection', 62). Devereux's view is endorsed by Scott, *PM*, 142–4, but rejected by Kraut, *Socrates and the State*, 297–8, n. 79. The view that there are two senses of 'teach', or two kinds of teaching, has ancient credentials. Proclus, for example says that "to teach" is two-fold. The one consists of as much as of a person who speaks from without instills in the person who is learning—for example, in dancing or painting. The other consists of as much as is summoned to knowledge through recollection in the soul which is purified. For the soul is not like a writing tablet without writing, and it has the things [i.e. forms] not potentially, but actually, though they are obscured' (in *Crat.* 61.5–9, trans. Duvick, modified; Proclus is commenting, not on the *Meno*, but on *Crat.* 391a). The Proclus passage is quoted by C. Helmig, in *Forms and Concepts: Concept Formation in the Platonic Tradition* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 267. For the view that Plato doesn't think the soul is a blank writing tablet, but has hidden writing in it, see also the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* 10.20 Westerink. If one thinks the soul isn't, from birth, like a blank writing tablet then, it would seem, one accepts some form of innatism. For Plato on innatism, see Ch. 5. For more on the soul compared to a writing tablet, see Ch. 6, sect. 18.

doesn't matter whether they speak of something's being 'teachable' or 'recollectable', he is using 'teachable' in his favored way.

I am tempted by an alternative solution, according to which Socrates uses 'teaching' just in his favored way, which I take to be: A teaches B that p only if (i) A knows that p; and (ii) A causes B, in the appropriate way, to recollect that p.<sup>30</sup> One might think that it is an obstacle to this solution that Socrates denies that he teaches the slave: for doesn't he cause the slave—and in an appropriate way, by systematically questioning him—to recollect? Yes. But he doesn't think he has the knowledge necessary for teaching. Though (ii) is satisfied, (i) is not; hence he isn't teaching the slave. To be sure, it is often assumed that Socrates has knowledge (or takes himself to have knowledge) in the geometrical case.<sup>31</sup> But he never says that he does; and given his demanding standards for knowledge, it's not clear that he takes himself to have geometrical knowledge even of the answer to the question he asks the slave. He has, and takes himself to have, a well-founded true belief about the answer; but that doesn't mean he takes himself to know it. Further, if he did, the geometrical case would be disanalogous to the moral inquiry, where Socrates explicitly disavows knowledge; yet it is desirable that the two cases be analogous. On this view, when Socrates denies that he is teaching the slave, he is using 'teaching' in his favored way. He doesn't mean that he doesn't teach, if we understand teaching in the 'sophistic' way, as (a) above. He means that he doesn't teach, because he lacks the knowledge necessary for doing so.

What, however, about 82a1–3? Doesn't Socrates say here that there is no such thing as teaching, but only recollection instead? To explain this claim, don't we need to assume that there's a second sense of 'teaching', or kind of teaching that doesn't involve recollection? I think the passage does say that there is no such thing as teaching, but only recollection instead.<sup>32</sup> However, we need to

<sup>30</sup> For (i), see e.g. the *Apology*: when Socrates is accused of teaching, part of his defense is a disclaimer of knowledge. *Meno* 96b likewise assumes that A can teach B that p only if A knows that p. It's true that Socrates proceeds to argue that true belief is as good a guide to correct action as knowledge is. But he doesn't say that someone with mere true belief can teach. The ability to teach requires more than the ability to act correctly. As to (ii), not every way of causing B to recollect counts as teaching; if one accidentally causes B to recollect, one doesn't teach (hence 'appropriate way').

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Devereux, 'Nature and Teaching', 119; Kraut, *Socrates and the State*, 297; Grgic, 'Plato's *Meno* and the Possibility of Inquiry', 21–2, 30. Perhaps Socrates doesn't take himself to know the answer to the geometrical question he poses because he thinks that knowledge is synoptic, such that one can't know one thing in isolation from others; and that, in the case of geometry, knowing requires proving. Perhaps he thinks he can't prove enough in the geometrical case, and doesn't have a synoptic enough grasp of geometry, to count as having any geometrical knowledge.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Barnes, in 'Knowledge is Teachable' (unpub.), suggests that in 82a1–3 Socrates means—not that there is no teaching, but only recollection instead, but—that there is no teaching except for

understand the remark in its context. In 81e3–5, Meno asks Socrates to teach him what he means in saying that we do not learn, but recollect. In asking this, Meno shows that he has misunderstood Socrates' claim, in 81d2–3, that what people call learning is recollection. Socrates meant that learning consists in, or essentially involves, recollection. Meno's remark in 81e3–5 shows that he wrongly took Socrates to mean that there is no learning, but only recollection instead. In 82a1–3, Socrates rephrases what Meno says. Rather than saying, as Meno does, that there is no learning, but only recollection instead, he says that, according to Meno, he said that there is no teaching, but only recollection instead. He doesn't affirm this in his own right; he is explaining how Meno has understood him. He then teases Meno for asking him to teach him that there is no such thing as teaching. He doesn't mean to endorse the view that there is no such thing as teaching, but only recollection instead. Nor does he mean that there's a second sense of 'teaching' on which teaching is opposed to recollection. Rather, he is, in a light-hearted way, teasing Meno, perhaps in an effort to bring home to him his misunderstanding. This isn't the first time Meno has misunderstood Socrates. We've seen that he also misunderstands PKW, DR, and Socrates' disclaimer of knowledge; that's what leads him to introduce Meno's Paradox. He mistakenly thinks that, in disclaiming knowledge, Socrates takes himself to be in a cognitive blank; he also mistakenly thinks that PKW and DR imply that one needs knowledge for inquiry. In the present case, he mistakenly takes a reductive or explanatory claim to be an eliminative one instead. These mistakes are quite natural; Meno isn't the only one to have made them. But in having Meno make them, Plato seeks to warn us against doing so ourselves.

But how can the slave recollect, if he isn't taught? For aren't teaching and learning co-relatives? If they are, and if Socrates doesn't teach the slave, we might be tempted to say that the slave teaches himself. However, that won't do, since the slave doesn't have knowledge either, and so he isn't in a position to teach himself. Rather, we should say that (contrary to what Meno thinks), teaching and learning aren't co-relatives. Since the slave recollects, he learns (for learning, or at least zetetic learning, consists in, or essentially involves, recollection). But he learns without teaching himself and without Socrates or anyone else teaching him. Not all learning requires a teacher.

recollection. Though we disagree about how to interpret this passage, our general interpretations of Socrates on teaching in the *Meno* are in other respects very similar. Thanks to Barnes for letting me refer to his paper, which I have benefitted from reading.

## 4. The second stage: the geometrical discussion

Let's now turn to the second stage of Socrates' reply: his discussion with the slave which, according to Leibniz, is 'a fine experiment'.<sup>33</sup> Socrates first asks Meno whether his slave speaks Greek (*hellênizei*, 82b4). Having ascertained that he does, he asks the slave whether he realizes (*gignôskeis*, 82b9) that a square is like this, or is this sort of thing; presumably Socrates has drawn a square and is pointing at it. He then asks the slave whether squares have four equal sides (82b9–c2); the slave correctly says they do. The square Socrates has drawn has sides that are two-feet long. Socrates asks the slave what, in that case, its area is; the slave correctly says it has an area of four square feet (82b–d).<sup>34</sup> Socrates then asks the slave to determine the size of a square whose area is double that of the original square (82d–e).<sup>35</sup> The slave initially thinks he knows the answer; but he gives the wrong answer. Upon being questioned further, he realizes that he doesn't know the answer after all: he doesn't know what he thought he knew. He has acquired an instance of what, in the *Apology*, Socrates calls human wisdom, which consists, at least in part, in not thinking one knows what one doesn't know.<sup>36</sup> In ridding himself of a false belief and in coming to realize that he doesn't know something he thought he knew, the slave is benefitted, not harmed. For he is now able to inquire better.

And indeed, upon being questioned further, the slave arrives at the right answer. Socrates says that the slave still doesn't know the right answer; he just has a true belief about it (85b–d). However, Socrates also says that, if the slave were questioned further, he could acquire the knowledge he lacks:

and now these beliefs have just been stirred up in him<sup>37</sup> as if in a dream. But if someone asks him these same things many times and in many ways, you know that eventually he will know about these things no less accurately than anyone. (85c9–d1)<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *Discourse on Metaphysics* 26. For the passage in which this remark occurs, see Ch. 5, sect. 1.

<sup>34</sup> The slave just says 'four feet'; but see Sharples, note *ad loc.*

<sup>35</sup> This square seems not to be drawn. Perhaps this suggests that, in just the same way, we can inquire and discover in the moral sphere even if there are no literal examples. Of course, the drawn square in a way isn't a literal example either, insofar as it isn't perfectly square. Perhaps this suggests that relying on roughly-accurate initial beliefs will do.

<sup>36</sup> I discuss human wisdom in the *Apology* in 'Does Socrates Claim to Know that He Knows Nothing?'. It's important to be clear that Socrates doesn't say that the slave *knows* that he lacks knowledge. Nor, in the *Apology*, is human wisdom characterized as knowing that one doesn't know (at least, not in any sense that involves contradiction).

<sup>37</sup> Alt.: 'for him'.

<sup>38</sup> *Καὶ νῦν μὲν γε αὐτῷ ὥσπερ ὄναρ ἄρτι ἀνακεκίνηται αἱ δόξαι αὐταί· εἰ δὲ αὐτόν τις ἀνερῆσεται πολλάκις τὰ αὐτὰ ταῦτα καὶ πολλαχῇ, οἷσθ' ὅτι τελευτῶν οὐδενὸς ἤττον ἀκριβῶς ἐπιστήσεται περὶ τούτων.*

Before turning to the details of how the geometrical discussion replies to Meno's questions and Socrates' dilemma, four related points are worth noting.

First, at the beginning of the inquiry, Socrates ensures that the slave understands the question being asked. He also ascertains that the slave has some relevant true beliefs; for example, the slave realizes that squares have four equal sides. However, he doesn't yet know the answer to the question. Does the slave then 'know what he is inquiring into' in the interrogative sense, without knowing it in the relative-clause sense? Yes and no. Yes, in that he understands the question and has enough relevant true beliefs to enable him to inquire into the answer to the question. But no, in that he lacks P-knowledge and so, by Plato's lights, lacks knowledge, period (he doesn't have what Plato views as genuine knowledge though of a lower-level sort). Ryle focuses on a potential ambiguity in 'what' in the phrase 'know what one is inquiring into'. But we should also ask how knowledge is being understood. If we understand it as P-knowledge, the slave doesn't know what he is inquiring into, even in the interrogative sense. He grasps what he is inquiring into in the interrogative sense; but his grasp falls short of P-knowledge.<sup>39</sup>

Still, the fact that Socrates ascertains that the slave understands the question but doesn't know the answer suggests that he isn't seduced by the ambiguity that Ryle thinks infects Meno's Paradox.<sup>40</sup> Ryle notes that Plato lacked the technical terminology that would enable him to explain the ambiguity in technical terms. But he adds that Plato could nonetheless 'show' the relevant distinction, though he doesn't think Plato does so. However, Socrates does do so, insofar as the geometrical discussion makes it clear that the slave understands the question well enough to inquire about and discover the right answer without yet knowing the answer. This isn't to say that the dilemma involves the ambiguity, which Socrates now duly dispels.<sup>41</sup> The point is rather that he is unlikely to be taken in by the ambiguity. That doesn't imply that the dilemma involves it. And, as we saw in the last chapter, though the dilemma can be so understood, it doesn't have to be and

<sup>39</sup> Ryle suggests that, in the phrase 'know what one is inquiring into', 'know' is ambiguous as between *connaître* and *savoir*, though he thinks this ambiguity is far less important than the ambiguity in 'what'. By contrast, I think that for Socrates the crucial issue is about the nature of knowledge. However, the crucial distinction isn't between *connaître* and *savoir*, but between having P-knowledge and knowing in some weaker way—which we, or Meno, might allow but that Socrates disallows; for in his view, such allegedly weaker knowledge is at best true belief. Of course, not all true beliefs are equal; some are better justified than others. But they can still be mere true beliefs; they can still fail to pass the bar required for being knowledge.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave*, 54–5.

<sup>41</sup> Nor is it to say that understanding the question is sufficient for inquiry. We've seen that the slave also has some substantive true beliefs. For example, he has the true belief that squares have four equal sides. These substantive true beliefs play a crucial role in his ability to inquire.

isn't best so understood, since, if it is so understood, it doesn't capture Meno's concerns.

*Secondly*, in showing how the slave can improve his cognitive condition through inquiry, Plato is defending the use of the elenchus in earlier dialogues, as well as earlier in the *Meno*.<sup>42</sup> In earlier dialogues, and earlier in the *Meno*, Socrates cross-examines an interlocutor and gets him to realize that he doesn't know what he thought he knew. The exposure of ignorance is sometimes thought to be negative and destructive. As we've seen, that's Meno's view: that's why he compares Socrates to a torpedo fish. Socrates now points out that discovering that one doesn't know what one thought one knew is beneficial, not harmful. Indeed, it's so beneficial that, in the *Apology*, Socrates claims that the fact that he, in contrast to others, has human wisdom—that is, that he differs from others in that he is free from false pretenses to knowledge, either in general or at least about the most important things (such as virtue)—means that he is closer to having genuine wisdom, and so genuine virtue, than anyone else is.<sup>43</sup>

*Thirdly*, the early dialogues typically end at this stage, with an interlocutor realizing that he doesn't know what he thought he knew. That's also where the inquiry with Meno about the nature of virtue ended earlier. But Socrates questions the slave further; and the slave eventually discovers the right answer.<sup>44</sup> This shows that using the elenchus enables one to do more than expose inconsistency and reveal a lack of knowledge. It also enables one to acquire new, conscious, explicit true beliefs, as the slave does.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, as we've seen, Socrates claims that

<sup>42</sup> As we've seen, the elenchus is a prime example of inquiry. Hence a defense of the elenchus is a defense of the possibility of inquiry.

<sup>43</sup> See *Ap.* 20d–24a.

<sup>44</sup> The correct answer is an irrational number (the square root of 8 = 2.8284...), which, however, is not explicitly mentioned. At 83e11–84a1, Socrates says that if the slave can't give the answer as a number (*arithmein*, 84a1; Grube has 'if you do not want to work it out'), he could point to a line that would give the desired area. At first the slave says that he doesn't know how to do this. But he eventually realizes that the side of a square double the area of a given square is the diagonal of the given square. (See Dancy, *Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 228.) Though he can point to this line, Socrates has to tell him that it is called 'the diagonal'. The correct answer is therefore indicated in geometrical rather than in numerical terms. M. Brown, 'Plato Disapproves of the Slave-Boy's Answer', in M. Brown (ed.), *Plato's Meno* (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1971; originally published in *Review of Metaphysics* 29 (1967), 57–93), 198–242, thinks this explains why the slave has just a true belief rather than knowledge (which, in his view, would require a numerical answer). Contrast Sharples, notes *ad loc.* Another possibility, compatible with Brown's suggestion but not requiring it, is that the slave couldn't on his own explain why the answer he now believes is correct; nor could he defend it against objections or relate it to a wider body of truths.

<sup>45</sup> The logical form of the elenchus doesn't by itself enable one to do so. But if one uses the elenchus, and is in a cognitive condition at least as good as the slave is initially in, one can get beyond the exposure of contradiction and ignorance. I consider the slave's cognitive condition more fully in what follows.



relying on the elenchus—and hence inquiry—can get one all the way to knowledge.<sup>46</sup>

*Fourthly*, it is sometimes objected that the slave can inquire even though he lacks knowledge only because Socrates has the relevant knowledge.<sup>47</sup> That would be cold comfort to Meno, who wants to know how moral inquiry is possible, given that no one has the relevant knowledge. However, I've suggested that Socrates doesn't take himself to have geometrical knowledge. He never says he has it; and given his demanding standards for having knowledge, it's reasonable to think that he doesn't take himself to have it. Nor is it clear how crucial a role Socrates thinks he plays in the slave's progress in inquiry. To be sure, he asks the slave leading questions. But he doesn't feed him the answers. On the contrary, he emphasizes that the slave should not rely on anyone's say-so, but should say what he himself believes (83d). This point is brought home by the fact that the slave twice gives the wrong answer by relying uncritically on Socrates: Socrates misleads the slave, to emphasize that he needs to work things out for himself.<sup>48</sup> The slave's progress ultimately depends on his own independent reflection. At each stage, he resolves a conflict in his views—or in claims that are put on the table—by discarding the beliefs, or claims, that seem less reasonable to him, or that are less well entrenched—just as the interlocutors engaged in moral inquiry do. Socrates' grasp of geometry enables the elenchus—the inquiry—to proceed more smoothly and quickly; but it isn't essential to the main point, which is that one can inquire and discover even if one lacks all knowledge (and isn't aided by someone who has it).

A similar reply may be made to a related objection: that the slave can make progress in the geometrical case because geometry is a deductively closed system, consisting of necessary, a priori truths. But morality isn't like that. So even if Socrates shows how geometrical inquiry is possible—and thereby disarms the dilemma, which challenges the possibility of inquiry—he doesn't respond to Meno's worry, which is how Socrates can inquire *into virtue* in particular if, as he claims, he doesn't know what it is. But here we can reply that it's not clear that the geometrical and moral cases are as dissimilar, in the relevant respects, as the objection assumes. Even if geometry but not morality is reasonably described as

<sup>46</sup> For the view that the 'positive' phase of the discussion doesn't involve the elenchus, see G. Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 118–26. For a convincing reply, see J. Gentzler, 'Recollection and "The Problem of the Socratic Elenchus"', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 10 (1994), 257–95 ('Recollection' hereinafter).

<sup>47</sup> See n. 31.

<sup>48</sup> See 82e1–2 and 83d4–e1. This point is made by Vlastos, 'Anamnesis', 159.

above, that's not what Socrates emphasizes about it.<sup>49</sup> He describes geometrical and moral inquiry in similar terms. In both cases, we begin with a variety of beliefs (or consider a variety of claims), some true, some false. When confronted with a conflict among our beliefs (or among the claims considered), we tend to reject the false ones and retain the true ones; and, if we do so, we make progress in inquiry. It's the fact that we have and tend to rely on true beliefs that explains our ability to inquire and to make progress in inquiry; and this fact is common to moral and geometrical inquiry as Socrates conceives of them.

According to this reply, it's the fact that we have and tend to rely on true beliefs (or claims) that explains our ability to inquire and to make progress in doing so. It's sometimes objected that we don't know which of our beliefs (or which claims) are true, which are false: beliefs don't wear their truth or falsity on their faces. So what's to stop us from relying on the false ones? Having true beliefs doesn't guarantee progress in inquiry, if we aren't aware of which of our beliefs are true.<sup>50</sup>

That's true. However, all Socrates argues is that one can inquire and discover if one in fact has and relies on relevant true beliefs. He doesn't say that one must know (or have a true belief about) which of one's beliefs are true. We make progress if we in fact rely on relevant true beliefs; we don't need to be aware that we are doing so. Nor does Socrates think it's guaranteed that everyone will always rely on true beliefs; not everyone is guaranteed to make progress in every inquiry. But if even the untutored slave can inquire successfully in geometry, it's reasonable to think that we can do so in moral inquiry as well. As in science, one can follow a false lead; an element of luck may sometimes be involved. But Socrates assumes that everyone—or everyone rational—has the ability to inquire and to make progress in doing so. We will in fact make progress if we inquire in a sufficiently reflective way, on the basis of true beliefs; and he seems to think everyone has some true beliefs.<sup>51</sup> This is an optimistic and substantial claim about human nature—one that, as we shall see in the next chapter, the theory of recollection is designed to explain and defend.

<sup>49</sup> One might also challenge the claim that geometry should be viewed in this way. See e.g. T. Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

<sup>50</sup> For this objection, see Nehamas, 'Meno's Paradox and Socrates as Teacher', 15–17.

<sup>51</sup> Which is not to say how or when we acquire such beliefs. In the next chapter, I ask whether Socrates posits innate true beliefs. Nor is it to say that we have true beliefs about everything. The point isn't that each of us is currently in a position to inquire about everything that can be inquired into; the point is rather that, given that each of us has some true beliefs, each of us is in a position to do some inquiring.

## 5. How has Socrates replied?

Inquiry and discovery are possible, then: just as Socrates said they were in his first statement of the theory of recollection. For (like Meno) the slave inquires. He also (unlike Meno) discovers the right answer, at least in the sense that he reaches a true belief about it; and he does so through inquiry, not by chance.<sup>52</sup> And, though this isn't explicitly said, it seems reasonable to assume that he realizes he's given the right answer. This is suggested by the quick and confident way in which he asserts the right answer. It's true that he answered quickly, but sometimes wrongly, earlier. But he has since been jolted out of his easy self-confidence. Once he realizes that he doesn't know what he thought he knew, he is more careful; and all the answers he goes on to give are true. At this stage, when he isn't sure of the answer, he says so; when he does answer, he answers correctly. The slave doesn't P-know that he has a true belief about the answer; but he knows that he has a true belief, as Meno intended 'know' in M3: the slave realizes, in a sense that falls short of P-knowing, that he has found the right answer. Though the slave doesn't yet have P-knowledge of the answer, Socrates says he could acquire it if he were questioned further; and it's reasonable to think he would realize when he's done so.

So, contrary to the conclusion of the dilemmatic argument, inquiry is possible; for we have just witnessed a case of it. Discovery through inquiry is also possible. For, again, we have just seen a case of it: the slave finds the right answer, if only as a matter of true belief; and he realizes that he's done so. Socrates says that further inquiry would convert the true belief into knowledge. Hence, even if one doesn't initially know what one is looking for, one can find what one was looking for and can realize that one has done so; for, again, the slave does just that.

Since Socrates thinks that inquiry is possible, he rejects the conclusion of the dilemmatic argument. So he must think that the argument is either invalid or has at least one false premise. And he has in fact rejected one of the dilemma's premises, namely, S3. For the slave was inquiring even though he lacked knowledge.<sup>53</sup> The geometrical discussion doesn't, however, reject any other premise of the argument.<sup>54</sup> Nor does Socrates suggest that the argument is invalid. If he

<sup>52</sup> This is not to say that one can discover only through inquiry. But that's how the slave discovered the right answer.

<sup>53</sup> In the next section, I ask how extensive his lack of knowledge is.

<sup>54</sup> Which is not to say that Socrates couldn't or doesn't do so. And we've seen that he rejects S2 in the sense that he thinks that even if one knows what virtue is, one can inquire about virtue; one can inquire, for example, whether it's teachable. But he doesn't appeal to this point in replying to the paradox, presumably because Meno is worried about how one can inquire if one *doesn't* know. Saying how one can inquire if one does know wouldn't address that worry.

thought it was invalid, we might expect him to say so; and if that were his view, he would not need to reject any of its premises—though, of course, he might think the argument is not only invalid but also has at least one false premise, and he might want to point that out. Still, the fact that he rejects a premise as false and doesn't say that the argument is invalid suggests that he thinks it is valid but unsound. Coupled with the fact that he rejects just S3, it seems reasonable to think that he favors Formulation 1.<sup>55</sup> I return to this point later.

However, when Socrates says that the slave inquires even though he lacks knowledge, he doesn't mean that one can inquire into something even if one is in a cognitive blank. For even at the outset, the slave isn't in a cognitive blank. As we've seen, he understands the question and has the true belief that squares have four equal sides. He also has views about the answer and, though they are wrong, they are not wildly off base.<sup>56</sup> So, on the one hand, the slave isn't in a cognitive blank; but, on the other hand, he doesn't have knowledge. Socrates is pointing out that there are ways of not knowing that permit inquiry, but that don't involve being in a cognitive blank. The slave doesn't know the answer, because he lacks P-knowledge of it; indeed, initially he doesn't even have a true belief about the answer. But he isn't in a cognitive blank.

Socrates is pointing out that, though Meno was right to accept S3, as he, Meno, understands 'not knowing', there is another way of understanding the phrase on which S3 is false, and Socrates plumps for it: one can inquire into something even if one lacks P-knowledge of what it is. The reason he does so, of course, is that he's said that he doesn't at all know what virtue is; yet he claimed to be inquiring into it. He's pointing out that he didn't mean he could inquire about virtue even though he was in a cognitive blank about it. He meant he could inquire about virtue even though he has no P-knowledge about virtue, not about what it is or about anything else about virtue either. Similarly, the slave doesn't at all know the answer to Socrates' question. Nor, as we shall see shortly, does he have other relevant knowledge; he lacks all relevant P-knowledge. Yet he could inquire.

If not knowing involves being in a cognitive blank, one can't inquire if one doesn't know. If, however, not knowing is merely not having P-knowledge, inquiry is not thereby precluded. Socrates and Meno, it emerges, understand

<sup>55</sup> The way in which he rejects S2 (though not in replying to the paradox) doesn't undermine this view. See previous note.

<sup>56</sup> For the correct numerical answer, see n. 44. Dancy (*Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 227, n. 43) remarks that for Greek mathematicians of the period, the only number between two and four was three; so when the slave answers 'three', he gives the best available numerical answer, even though it turns out to be false.

'not know' differently. Meno thinks one can't inquire if one doesn't know, because he rightly thinks one can't inquire if one is in a cognitive blank. Socrates points out that one can inquire if one doesn't know, because he takes knowledge to be P-knowledge; and he rightly thinks that lacking it doesn't preclude inquiry. Meno raised his questions because he misunderstood Socrates' disavowal of knowledge. Once we are clear about what it involves, we can see that lacking knowledge doesn't prevent inquiry.

We noted earlier that Meno asks how one can inquire if one doesn't *at all* know what one is inquiring into, whereas Socrates' dilemma omits 'at all'; and we wondered whether that was significant. Might Socrates be tacitly conceding that one can't inquire if one doesn't know *at all*, but also be suggesting that one can inquire into what one doesn't know, where that falls short of not knowing *at all*? Whatever may be true elsewhere in the dialogue—and I ask about further passages later—that is not what he is saying here. He has not argued or suggested that the slave knows in one way but not in another, or that he knows to some extent. Rather, the slave doesn't know, period; he doesn't know at all—for all Socrates has said so far. His point is that one can entirely fail to know something without being in a cognitive blank about it; for, like the slave, one might have beliefs instead. In that case, one doesn't have any knowledge—one doesn't know at all. But neither is one in a cognitive blank. So far, then, there's no reason to think that the dilemma's omission of 'at all' is significant.

We also noted earlier that Meno's Paradox is sometimes said to involve an all-or-nothing model of knowledge, according to which one either has complete knowledge (S2) or is in a cognitive blank (S3). We've seen that the bare statement of Meno's Paradox is abstract; it can be read that way, and Meno might read it that way, though I've suggested that it's not clear that he does so. All that's clear is that he takes S3 to mean that one can't inquire if one is in a cognitive blank. Be that as it may, Socrates doesn't seem to be concerned with an all-or-nothing model of knowledge. If he were concerned with it, one might expect him to point out that there are intermediate conditions between knowing and not knowing which permit inquiry. But that is not what he does. Rather, he distinguishes two ways of understanding S3. Read one way—such that not knowing involves being in a cognitive blank—it's true that one can't inquire if one doesn't know. Read another way—as lacking P-knowledge—it's false to say that one can't inquire if one doesn't know. Meno thinks they can't inquire if they don't know, because he reads S3 in the first way. Socrates thinks they can inquire even though they don't know, because he reads S3 in the second way. Distinguishing these two ways of not knowing is quite different from saying that there are intermediate conditions

between knowing and not knowing. Socrates follows the first strategy, not the second one.<sup>57</sup>

To say that S3 is true as Meno understands it but not as Socrates understands it is not to say that it, or the paradox, equivocates on 'know'. Rather, the point is that 'know' can be understood in different ways; and how we read it affects our understanding of the argument. Meno is persuaded by it because he understands 'know' in one way. Socrates is not persuaded by it because he understands 'know' in a different way. Neither of them takes the argument to equivocate; nor do we need to do so. 'Know' is used univocally; it's just that we will assess the overall argument differently, depending on what univocal reading we supply.

In addition to rejecting the dilemma as unsound by rejecting S3, Socrates has also answered all of M1–M3. M1 asks how one can inquire into something if one doesn't at all know what it is. M2 explains why it is problematical to think that one can do so: if one doesn't know that which one is inquiring into, one won't be able to fix the target one is aiming at. Socrates shows that it is possible to fix a target to aim at, even if one lacks all relevant knowledge. For, though the slave doesn't at all know the thing he is inquiring into, in the sense that he lacks all P-knowledge of it, he can nonetheless inquire on the basis of his beliefs. Knowledge isn't necessary, since beliefs are sufficient.

But exactly what beliefs are either necessary or sufficient for fixing the target? As we've seen, commentators have a variety of views about what is in fact necessary or sufficient for doing so, and about what Socrates thinks is necessary or sufficient for doing so. Unfortunately, Socrates isn't very precise about this. He argues just that one doesn't need to know what F is (or, therefore, have any knowledge about F at all), in the sense of having P-knowledge, to fix the target, that is, to inquire about F; for he thinks one can inquire on the basis of beliefs. If the Targeting Objection urges that one can't inquire if one lacks knowledge, Socrates will say that, as he understands knowledge, the objection rests on a false assumption.

Though Socrates isn't precise about what sorts of beliefs are necessary or sufficient for fixing a target, if we think about what beliefs Meno has about virtue, and what beliefs the slave has in the geometry discussion, we can make some reasonable inferences about what sorts of beliefs Socrates thinks are at any rate sufficient for inquiring into something. I discuss this in the next section. For now, it will do to say that he has argued that one can fix the target one is aiming at even if one lacks all P-knowledge about it.

<sup>57</sup> As we shall see in Ch. 6, this contrasts interestingly with Aristotle, who replies by distinguishing ways of knowing.

M3 asks how, if one doesn't at all know the thing one is inquiring into, one can know, or realize, one has found it, if one manages to do so. Socrates replies by showing that even though the slave didn't initially know that which he was inquiring into, he nonetheless realizes he's found what he was looking for when he does so. To be sure, he couldn't have done so if he were initially in a cognitive blank. But Socrates points out that that's not the only way of not knowing. The slave didn't know; but he had and relied on his beliefs (or on various claims put forward). These were a mixture of true and false beliefs; but even the false beliefs were roughly accurate. He also tended to favor his true over his false beliefs when contradictions among his beliefs (or among various claims) were uncovered. His ability to reason well, and his tendency to rely on true over false beliefs, explain how he is able to realize when he's found the right answer. This answers the Recognition Objection. As we saw in Chapter 3, Aristotle, in *Met.* 3.1, offers a similar reply: if one is aware enough of the various puzzles in a given area, one will be able to realize when one has reached one's goal.

Socrates doesn't suggest that one method, or set of conditions, explains how inquiry is possible, and that another method, or set of conditions, explains how, when one finds what one was looking for but doesn't initially know, one will realize one has done so. On the contrary, he says that if the slave is questioned further in the same way, he will acquire knowledge: the same method that enables him to engage in inquiry also enables him to complete his inquiry.<sup>58</sup> In both cases, it's sufficient if one begins with, and relies on, a stock of true and roughly-accurate beliefs. These beliefs need not be about what the answer is; one doesn't need to start off with any beliefs, let alone with a true belief or knowledge, about the answer in order to fix a target to aim at. One just needs suitably relevant beliefs. Here it's important to emphasize that inquiry is a process. If one inquires successfully, one increases one's stock of true beliefs. That, in turn, allows one to make further progress towards one's goal, in such a way that it's reasonable to think that one will realize when one has reached it, though there are no guarantees here.

## 6. The slave's cognitive condition and its content

To say that Socrates thinks one can inquire whether *p* is true (or for the answer to a question) even if one doesn't already know whether it is true (or what the

<sup>58</sup> It's true that Socrates doesn't describe the final stage of the inquiry, in which we acquire knowledge. But he says clearly that the same method will enable us to do so. Presumably he doesn't focus on this last stage because it's so far in the future. Meno's primary worry is how he can engage in inquiry at all; hence Socrates focuses on that. Nonetheless, he indicates that he doesn't think there is a further, different, problem of discovery.

answer is) shows that he rejects a general matching version of a foreknowledge principle for propositions. At least, that's so if the knowledge at issue is conscious explicit P-knowledge and is restricted to current knowledge. But that's compatible with Socrates thinking the slave could inquire about, and discover, the answer only because he (consciously and explicitly, and in this life) knows other things. If that is his view, he accepts a stepping-stone version of a foreknowledge principle for propositions: one can inquire, and discover, whether *p* is true (or what the answer to a given question is) only if one relies on other, related propositions that one knows, e.g. propositions that imply *p* (or the answer).<sup>59</sup>

In the last section, I suggested that Socrates doesn't think the slave has any relevant knowledge; but I didn't defend the view in any detail. And it has been argued that Socrates takes the slave to have some relevant knowledge. David Charles, for example, says that, at the beginning of the geometrical inquiry, Socrates ascertains that the slave knows (*gignôskei*) what a square is (82b9–10) and 'understands what "diagonal" signifies (85b5–6)'.<sup>60</sup> He also says that '[b]eginning with these bits of knowledge he shows how the slave can come to possess (occurently) other bits of knowledge. In both cases, his knowledge of Greek seems to be enough to get the discussion going.'<sup>61</sup> On this view, the slave begins with some knowledge—he knows how to speak Greek, and he knows what a square is and what 'diagonal' signifies. This favors a stepping-stone version of a foreknowledge principle: though the slave doesn't initially know the answer, he knows other things that enable him to inquire into, and to discover, the answer.

It would be unfortunate if Charles were right. For, as he says:<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Prenatal Foreknowledge doesn't show that Socrates is committed to this view, for it doesn't posit current knowledge.

<sup>60</sup> 'Types', 119. By contrast, in 'Paradox', 129, he translates *gignôskeis* as 'grasps'; and he doesn't press the suggestion that the slave has knowledge.

<sup>61</sup> 'Types', 119. Charles says that the slave knows what a square is and what 'diagonal' signifies. If knowing what a square is involves knowing the real essence of square, then the slave knows the answer to an essence question. But I assume that by 'knows what a square is', Charles means 'knows what "square" signifies'. However, Socrates doesn't here use the language that Charles associates with the signification question. Charles also says that the slave's knowledge of Greek is enough to get the discussion going. Yet Charles seems to think one can know Greek without knowing what a term signifies. If knowledge of Greek is enough to get the discussion going, but falls short of knowing what a term signifies, then it seems that Plato thinks one can inquire on the basis of less than grasping what the relevant terms signify: contrary to what Charles argues. (However, perhaps Charles would reply that the discussion doesn't amount to an inquiry: see Ch. 3, sect. 11.) Further, if Socrates says that one can inquire on the basis of less than grasping what the relevant terms signify, then, contrary to Charles, Socrates *does* reply appropriately to Meno, as Charles understands him. The reply would be that, contrary to Meno, one doesn't need to know what a term signifies in order to inquire; linguistic competence will do.

<sup>62</sup> 'Types', 119.



While this way of proceeding may point to an answer to Socrates' own puzzle, it cannot address Meno's question, since he was focusing on the cases where one does not know an account of what the term 'virtue' signifies (and so lacks an answer of the desired form to [the signification question]) even though one knows Greek and can make fluent and well-received speeches about virtue (80b4–6). His puzzle (how one can enquire into virtue without knowing an identificatory account of what the term 'virtue' signifies) seems to have been dropped at this point in this discussion.

I've already argued that Meno doesn't ask how one can inquire into F if one doesn't know what 'F' signifies. His concern is broader or more general; he wants to know how one can inquire into F if one is in a cognitive blank about F. If Meno isn't asking how one can inquire into F if one doesn't know what 'F' signifies, Socrates need not answer that question. Nonetheless, Charles raises an important point. Meno asks how one can inquire into virtue if one doesn't at all know what it is, and so has no knowledge of virtue at all. If, as Charles thinks, Socrates replies by arguing that one can inquire if one knows Greek and what the relevant terms signify, he doesn't address Meno's worry. He'd be explaining how one can inquire if one has some knowledge, not how one can inquire if one lacks knowledge.<sup>63</sup>

But is Charles right to say that Socrates takes the slave to have some knowledge? As we've seen, one of Charles's reasons for thinking this is that Socrates says that the slave *hellênizei*, which Charles translates as 'knows how to speak Greek' (119).<sup>64</sup> But I doubt that Socrates means to attribute *knowledge* of Greek to the slave. Here it may be significant that he uses *hellênizei* (82b4) rather than *epistasthai hellênizein*.<sup>65</sup> The slave speaks Greek: there's something he can do. But it's unlikely that Socrates thinks that having this ability involves anything he would call knowledge. For, again, in his view knowledge requires being able to explain why what one knows is true. The slave has linguistic competence. It doesn't follow, and Socrates doesn't say, that this involves knowledge, as he

<sup>63</sup> Earlier I mentioned the view that the geometrical discussion doesn't show that inquiry is possible without knowledge, since Socrates has knowledge, even if the slave doesn't. The present suggestion is that the slave does, after all, have some relevant knowledge.

<sup>64</sup> M. Frede, by contrast, may suggest that speaking Greek involves having (not knowledge, but) true belief: see his 'Introduction' in M. Frede and G. Striker (eds.), *Rationality in Greek Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1–28, at 10.

<sup>65</sup> See Lyons, *Structural Semantics*, 184–5. It's worth mentioning that the *-izein* ending in *hellênizein* indicates action: there is something the slave *does* (he speaks Greek). Cf. *mêdizein*, to go over to the Persians. Thanks to David Sedley for this point. Proclus distinguishes three ways of understanding *hellênizein*: observing customary usage; being accurate in the use of the Greek language and pronouncing it correctly; and assigning the legitimate usage of terms that are naturally appropriate to their subjects. He says that many people can *hellênizein* in the first way; the second is characteristic of the person who knows (*eidenai*) grammar; the third is the philosopher. See Proclus, in *Alc.* 258.21–259.12, quoted in Helmig, *Forms and Concepts*, 325. I take it that the slave speaks Greek just in the first way.

understands that notion. We often speak of knowing a language. And it's often thought that the ability to speak a language presupposes, consists in, or confers knowledge. But these views are controversial.<sup>66</sup> Be that as it may, given Socrates' views about knowledge in the *Meno*, it's unlikely that he thinks that the slave's ability to speak Greek involves his having any knowledge.<sup>67</sup>

Charles also notes the use of *gignôskein* at 82b9. However, though this word can be, and often is, used for knowledge, it can also be used for recognition that falls short of knowledge.<sup>68</sup> And I think that's how it's used here. For, as we've seen, at 98a Socrates defines *epistêmê* as true belief that is tied down with reasoning about the explanation (*aitias logismos*): one has *epistêmê* that p if and only if one believes that p, p is true, and one can explain why p is true. He uses various cognitive words interchangeably with *epistasthai*<sup>69</sup>—e.g. *eidenai* and *phronein*—and contrasts them all with mere true belief. (Significantly, *gignôskein* is not used interchangeably with these words. This reinforces my suggestion that its use isn't restricted to knowledge here.<sup>70</sup>) The clear suggestion is that *all* genuine knowledge requires an explanatory account of why what one knows is true. Any cognitive condition that falls short of that demanding standard is at best true belief. Whatever may be true in other dialogues, the *Meno* leaves no room for a weaker sort of knowledge than the one described in 98a.<sup>71</sup> Hence, if the slave *knows* what a square is like, he can explain why it is true that a square is that sort of thing; to do that, he must be able to explain what the real nature of a square is.<sup>72</sup> But it seems unlikely that the slave can do this. He's

<sup>66</sup> For the view that being able to speak a language doesn't involve knowledge of the language, see e.g. M. Devitt, *Ignorance of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); S. Stich, 'What Every Speaker Knows', *Philosophical Review* 80 (1971), 476–96.

<sup>67</sup> Charles also suggests that the Dialectical Requirement supports the view that the slave and Meno have knowledge. I argued against that view in Ch. 3.

<sup>68</sup> According to Lyons (*Structural Semantics*, 177), Plato frequently uses *gignôskein* interchangeably with *eidenai* (though not with *epistasthai*)—and so, I take it (or, at any rate, shall allow here), for knowledge. I agree about that. My claim is not that Plato *never* uses *gignôskein* for knowledge. It is that he *doesn't always* do so; sometimes he uses it more broadly. So, for example, at *Meno* 76b4 and c1, *gignôskein* need not mean anything more than recognition or true belief. For passages outside the *Meno* where *gignôskein* seems to be used for less than knowledge, see *Ap.* 25d9, 33d2. Cf. *Rep.* 375e3 (*gnôrimous*) and 376a6 (*gnôrimon*). On Plato's use of *gnôrizēin* and the cognate noun, see Lyons, *Structural Semantics*, 200; cf. 177 (d). Here I draw on my 'Does Socrates Claim to Know that He Knows Nothing?', esp. 83.

<sup>69</sup> See Ch. 2, sect. 6.

<sup>70</sup> *to gnônai* is used at 96e4, but not interchangeably with *epistasthai*; here too it need not mean more than 'recognize' or 'realize'. However, I suggested in Ch. 2, sect. 8, that *gnôsomenou* in 79c2 means 'know'.

<sup>71</sup> See my 'Knowledge and True Belief in the *Meno*'.

<sup>72</sup> As we've seen, 71b says that one needs to know what F is, to know anything else about F. So, to know what a square is like, the slave must know what a square is. To know what a square is requires knowing its real essence. To be sure, I suggested earlier that Socrates might think that one can know

familiar with squares; he can identify them; he has some true beliefs about them. But he doesn't *know* what a square is or, therefore, anything at all about squares. To be sure, he may know what a square is on *some* conceptions of knowledge. But the issue here is whether Socrates thinks the slave has knowledge, as Socrates conceives of knowledge in the *Meno*. And the answer to *that* question is 'No'.

So I don't think Socrates ascribes *any* knowledge to the slave.<sup>73</sup> The slave not only doesn't know the answer to the question under consideration, but neither does he have any other relevant knowledge. So far as the geometrical discussion considered on its own goes, what enables the slave to inquire and discover isn't the fact that he has knowledge—he isn't said to have any—but the fact that he has and relies on relevant true beliefs. His initial true beliefs are not about the answer (initially he has a false belief about it, though, as we've seen, it's not wildly false); rather, they are about other, related propositions. The geometrical discussion therefore doesn't commit Socrates to either a matching or a stepping-stone version of a *foreknowledge* principle. That this is so is also supported by the fact that, at 85c6–7 (cf. c4), Socrates says: 'So one who doesn't know has within himself true beliefs about the things he doesn't know'. The use of the plural suggests that it's not just the answer that the slave doesn't know; his lack of knowledge is more extensive than that.

Charles thinks that if the slave isn't accorded knowledge, there is a difficulty:<sup>74</sup>

Either the slave knows an account of what 'diagonal' signifies or he does not. If he does not, it seems that he can use the term and carry out an enquiry without possessing an account. But, if so, his procedure runs contrary to the assumption which drives the earlier part of the dialogue and is made explicit by Meno in 80d5–8. If one can proceed in this way, there can be no objection to Meno's seeking the essence of virtue without grasping an answer to [the signification question]. This possibility would mark a major volte-face in the dialogue. ('Types', 120)

That is, earlier it was assumed that one can inquire what virtue is only if one knows what 'virtue' signifies. If Socrates now abandons that assumption, that would be a significant development. It has been argued that, in the light of

who Meno is, in a way that allows one to know whether he's wealthy or well born, without knowing his real essence. But we've seen that Socrates thinks that to know what virtue is is to know its real essence. It's reasonable to think that in just the same way, one can know what a square is only if one knows its real essence. For otherwise, the geometrical and moral inquiries aren't parallel; yet they are meant to be.

<sup>73</sup> Hence, though the slave understands the question, he doesn't *know* what he is inquiring into, even in the interrogative sense.

<sup>74</sup> Charles speaks interchangeably of *knowing*, *possessing*, and *grasping*, an account. As we saw in Ch. 3, sect. 11, in 'Paradox' (though not in 'Types') Charles argues that the difference is unimportant; but I took issue with that view.

Meno's questions, Socrates revises his views in roughly this way.<sup>75</sup> However, we've seen that, before Meno raises his questions, Socrates isn't committed to the view that one needs to know, or grasp, what 'virtue' signifies in order to inquire; Socrates and Meno inquired into virtue on the basis of less than that.

But does Socrates ascribe a higher-level *content* to the slave than he ascribes to Meno? If so, the slave's ability to inquire about the answer to the geometrical question wouldn't show that Meno was able to inquire about virtue. Maybe the slave can inquire because he specifies what 'shape' signifies, and that's sufficient for the inquiry he's engaged in. But since Meno didn't get that far with respect to virtue, showing that the slave could inquire wouldn't help buttress the claim that Meno was inquiring.

However, just as neither Meno nor Socrates specifies what 'virtue' signifies, so neither the slave nor Socrates specifies what 'square' or 'diagonal' signifies. As we've seen, Socrates first ascertains that the slave speaks Greek. He then asks him whether 'a square is like this'; he is presumably pointing at a particular square. These first stages of the geometrical discussion don't involve grasping what 'square' signifies: they don't specify a feature true of all and only squares. Rather, the slave's linguistic competence gives him some understanding of the relevant terms, where 'understanding' is used for ordinary linguistic competence. There is no suggestion that such understanding gets as far as a grasp of signification. Nor does the fact that the slave can identify examples of the phenomenon in question show that he grasps signification either.

Socrates then asks whether a square is a figure that has four equal sides. This doesn't specify a feature true of all and only squares either, since rhombi also have four equal sides.<sup>76</sup> Hence there's still no reason to think the slave grasps what 'square' signifies. But he inquires. So Socrates still doesn't seem to think that inquiring requires a grasp of signification. Just as neither Meno nor his slave has knowledge of that which they are inquiring into, so neither of them grasps what the terms at issue signify. Just as the slave inquires, and makes progress in doing so, without grasping what 'square' signifies, so Meno inquires, and makes progress in doing so, without grasping what 'virtue' signifies. Both Meno and his slave can inquire, not because they know, or even grasp, what the relevant terms signify (they don't do so), but because they have linguistic competence; because they can identify relevant examples (of virtuous actions, of squares); and because they can make

<sup>75</sup> In *PM*, for example, Scott argues that Socrates initially favors one version of a foreknowledge principle, but abandons it in favor of a different one. I discuss this in 'Enquiry and Discovery'.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Bluck, *Plato's Meno*, 293, though he adds that the drawn square would make it clear that Socrates was talking about a square. Cf. Vlastos, '*Anamnesis*', n. 8.

some general statements that perhaps come close to specifying what the terms at issue signify, though they don't succeed in specifying what they signify, since they don't specify a feature true of all and only the relevant phenomenon.

Socrates, then, rejects Meno's suggestion that, to inquire, one has to know the thing one is inquiring into. In his view, the Targeting Objection rests on a false assumption, since, to inquire, one doesn't need any knowledge at all. Nor does one even need to have a true belief, or indeed any belief, about the answer to the question one is considering. It's sufficient for answering the Targeting Objection that one have relevant true beliefs. (This might satisfy Meno: he thought knowledge was required because he thought that the only alternative to knowing was being in a cognitive blank. Once he understands the nature of knowledge, perhaps he will abandon the suggestion that knowledge is needed for inquiry.) Nor does one need to grasp what the relevant terms signify, even as a matter of belief. Socrates' conditions on the contents one must grasp, in order to inquire, are weaker than that. So too are his conditions for answering the Recognition Objection; for he answers it in the same way as he answers the Targeting Objection.

Charles therefore attributes to the slave not only a higher-level cognitive condition than is warranted (knowledge rather than mere true belief), but also a higher-level content than is warranted (signification, rather than something that falls short of that). This makes Socrates' reply to Meno stronger than it would otherwise be. For, in his view, just as one doesn't need *knowledge* for inquiry (since true belief is sufficient), so one doesn't need to grasp *signification* for inquiry (since grasping a lower-level content will do).<sup>77</sup> Even if one 'grasps' just lower-level contents, one can still inquire and make progress in doing so. It's good that this is Socrates' view. For just as knowledge is difficult to achieve (if knowledge is understood as Socrates understands it), so signification (as Charles thinks Socrates understands it) is difficult to grasp (whether as a matter of knowledge or belief). Fortunately, we don't need either to inquire. Having linguistic competence, and some relevant true beliefs, including the ability to identify some salient examples, will do: just as Socrates argues.

## 7. Conclusion

The geometrical discussion shows that one can inquire and discover whether *p* is true (or what the answer to a question is) even if one has *no* knowledge; for one

<sup>77</sup> There is, however, an important asymmetry between the two cases. For Socrates explicitly emphasizes the difference between knowledge and true belief; but he doesn't explicitly focus on the difference between signification and essence. In my view, that's because the latter distinction doesn't play a role either in generating or solving Meno's Paradox.

can inquire and discover on the basis of one's true beliefs. If having and relying on relevant true beliefs is sufficient for inquiry and discovery, knowledge isn't necessary. This rejects S3 by saying that one can inquire without knowing that which one is inquiring into, indeed without knowing anything at all. Socrates has also replied to all of M1–3. He replies to M1 and M2 by saying that even if one doesn't *know* the target one is aiming at, one can aim at it; for one can fix the target with relevant true beliefs. Since relying on such beliefs is sufficient, knowledge isn't needed. He replies to M3 by showing that one can realize one has found what one was looking for but didn't initially know, if one initially has and relies on relevant beliefs; hence, again, knowledge isn't needed.

To say that Socrates rejects S3 is not to say that he accepts S2. The geometrical reply doesn't discuss S2. Nonetheless, we can see from elsewhere in the dialogue that he rejects it. At least, that's so if we read S2 with P-knowledge. For S2 then says that, if one has P-knowledge of *x*, one can't inquire into *x*. We've seen that Socrates rejects that view. To be sure, if one knows what *F* is, one can't inquire what *F* is; for one can inquire only into what one doesn't know (or thinks one doesn't know). But one could know what *F* is, and still inquire about *F*: one might know what virtue is and inquire whether it's teachable. Indeed, Socrates would prefer that they inquire whether virtue is teachable only once they know what it is. That's why, when Meno asks whether virtue is teachable, Socrates turns instead to a discussion of what virtue is. So he thinks S2 is false if it says that, if one has P-knowledge of what something is, one can't inquire further about it (if a domain, such as virtue, is what one is inquiring into). But that point isn't relevant here. For they lack P-knowledge, and Socrates wants to explain to Meno how they can nonetheless inquire and discover. He is not concerned with the argument in the abstract, so much as with its relevance to their condition.

We can now see that, at least in the geometrical discussion, Socrates takes his dilemma to be an instance of Formulation 1: S1 is an instance of the Law of the Excluded Middle, according to which, for any *x*, one either does or doesn't know *x*; that is, one either does or doesn't have P-knowledge of *x*. S2 and S3 then say that, whichever of these options obtains, inquiry is impossible. So read, the argument is valid, and S1 is true; but Socrates rejects both S2 and S3, though in the geometrical discussion he explains only why he rejects S3. If we read the argument this way, it doesn't equivocate. Nor does it rely on the false premise that, for any *x*, one either knows everything there is to know about *x* or else is in a cognitive blank about *x*.

Socrates' reasons for rejecting S3 in the geometrical discussion are good ones. P-knowledge isn't needed for inquiry or discovery; having and relying on relevant true beliefs is sufficient for both. His reply is also complete, in the sense that it

exposes the dilemma as unsound and identifies a false premise.<sup>78</sup> It also replies satisfactorily to Meno's three questions. What, then, is the role of the theory of recollection? We considered this briefly in looking at the first statement of the theory of recollection. But we haven't yet considered this issue in sufficient detail. Nor have we asked exactly how the theory of recollection fits with the geometrical discussion. In the next chapter, I consider these issues, among others.

<sup>78</sup> It is, however, incomplete insofar as it is not as precise or detailed as one might like it to be about exactly what beliefs one must have in order to be in a position to inquire or discover.

# 5

## The Third Stage:

### The Second Statement of the Theory of Recollection

#### 1. Preliminaries

We've now looked at the first two stages of Socrates' three-stage reply: the initial statement of the theory of recollection and the geometrical discussion. We've seen that the geometrical discussion not only answers all of M1–M3 but also responds to Socrates' dilemma by rejecting S3: we can inquire even if we have no knowledge at all. For even if we don't have any knowledge, we might have and rely on relevant true beliefs; and that's sufficient for us to set a target to aim at, and to be able to inquire. It's also sufficient for enabling us to discover, through inquiry, the answers to our questions and to realize that we've done so.

It's not yet clear, however, exactly what role the theory of recollection plays in answering either Meno's questions or Socrates' dilemma. Though Socrates begins his reply by mentioning recollection, Meno professes not to understand, whereupon Socrates embarks on the geometrical discussion. It's only in the third stage of his reply that he relates the geometrical discussion to the theory of recollection, which now also receives a fuller account. Before exploring this account, it will be helpful to make some preliminary points.

*First*, the theory of recollection is generally thought to posit both prenatal and innate knowledge. Both statements of the theory of recollection clearly posit prenatal knowledge: we've seen that the first statement does so, and we shall shortly see that the second statement does so as well. By contrast, the first statement of the theory of recollection doesn't posit innate knowledge, though neither does it say anything incompatible with positing it; the issue isn't



broached. We shall have to see whether the second statement of the theory of recollection differs from the first one in positing innate knowledge.

Prenatal knowledge and innate knowledge are in principle independent of one another: one could posit one without being committed to positing the other. Leibniz, for example, famously posits innate knowledge (or, at least, innate ideas) but rejects prenatal knowledge (or ideas).<sup>1</sup> In *Discourse on Metaphysics* 26 for example, he says that we have certain:<sup>2</sup>

forms in our mind; we even have forms from all time, for the mind always expresses all its future thought and already thinks confusedly about everything it will ever think about distinctly. And nothing can be taught to us whose idea we do not already have in our mind, an idea which is like the matter of which that thought is formed. This is what Plato so excellently recognized when he proposed his doctrine of reminiscence, a very solid doctrine, provided that it is taken rightly and purged of the error of preexistence and provided that we do not imagine that at some earlier time the soul must already have known and thought distinctly what it learns and thinks now. Plato also strengthened his view by way of a fine experiment, introducing a little boy, whom he leads insensibly to extremely difficult truths concerning incommensurables without teaching him anything, merely by asking appropriate questions in proper order. This demonstrates that our soul

<sup>1</sup> By contrast, in *Tusculan Disputations* 1.57 Cicero, in discussing the geometrical discussion in the *Meno*, says that we couldn't have the *insitae notiones* (= *ennoiai*) that we have unless, before being incarnate, our souls were active in acquiring knowledge (*cognitio*). Though *insitae* need not mean 'innate', it probably means that here; if it does, Cicero infers from innate to prenatal knowledge. Unfortunately, he doesn't spell out precisely why he thinks this inference is justified. Scott agrees that innate knowledge doesn't on its own imply prenatal knowledge. But he thinks Plato makes the inference with the aid of what he calls Assumption (A): 'if knowledge is in someone, then he must either be aware of that knowledge or have been aware of it' ('Innatism', 127). He thinks Plato takes us to have latent innate knowledge, and so he accepts the antecedent of this conditional; he then infers that we must have had conscious, explicit prenatal knowledge. For an anticipation of principle (A), see Hunter and Inwood, 'Plato, Leibniz, and the Furnished Soul', 425. Below I suggest a different motivation Plato might have for positing prenatal knowledge, one that, so far from positing latent innate knowledge, relies on not doing so.

<sup>2</sup> G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, ed. and trans. R. Ariew and D. Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989). Several points about the passage are worth noting: (1) Leibniz, like many others, assumes that the slave is a 'little boy'. But, as I've mentioned (Ch. 4, n. 25), *pais* can be used for a slave of any age; there is no reason to think the slave is young. (2) Leibniz assumes that Plato takes prenatal knowledge to be conscious and explicit. (3) By contrast, he takes innate knowledge to be latent or 'virtual'. (4) Though he says that the geometrical demonstration shows that our soul knows 'all these things' (i.e. all the geometrical truths the slave learns), he also speaks of the soul's having various ideas on which those truths depend; this suggests innate knowledge is less extensive. (5) Though he says that we *know* 'virtually', he also speaks of innate *ideas*; yet having innate *ideas* might fall short of having innate *knowledge*.

Though Leibniz eschews pre-existence in the passage just cited, Grote, *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates*, cites a passage in which Leibniz accepts it; see vol. 2, 248, n. 1, Letter to Bourguet, p. 731. Grote doesn't say what edition he is using, but the letter may be found in vol. 3 of *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, 7 vols., ed. C. I. Gerhardt (Berlin: Weidmann, 1875–90; reprinted Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1966), 578–83 (Hanover; 5 August, 1715). Thanks to Paul Lodge for tracking down the Gerhardt reference.

knows all these things virtually and requires only *attention* to recognize truths and that, consequently, it has, at the very least, the ideas upon which these truths depend. One can even say that it already possesses these truths, if they are taken as relations of ideas.

Just as having innate knowledge does not imply having prenatal knowledge, so having prenatal knowledge does not imply having innate knowledge. One might lose knowledge one once had in such a way that one no longer knows at all. Perhaps we entirely forget our prenatal knowledge on being born, with the result that we no longer know at all. However, though prenatal knowledge doesn't *on its own* imply innate knowledge, one might argue that it does so given the additional assumption that, when we inquire, we are *recollecting* prenatal knowledge. We shall see below that Plato argues that we do recollect prenatal knowledge when we inquire.<sup>3</sup> I ask below whether he thinks that implies that we have innate knowledge.

*Secondly*, the theory of recollection might seem to conflict with the main moral of the geometrical discussion, which is that one can inquire and discover even if one lacks knowledge, if one has and relies on relevant true beliefs. For, as we've seen, the theory of recollection is usually thought to posit innate knowledge. If the geometrical discussion claims that we don't know, whereas the theory of recollection claims that we do know, they seem to conflict.

There are at least three ways of attempting to disarm the seeming contradiction. First, one might argue that in saying that we lack knowledge, Socrates is speaking loosely; the ensuing discussion makes it clear that he thinks we all have knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, one might argue that Socrates means that we lack conscious explicit knowledge, but have latent innate knowledge; we lack one sort of knowledge but have another.<sup>5</sup> Thirdly, one might argue that Socrates thinks that we lack knowledge now; by contrast, when he speaks of knowledge, he sometimes has in mind prenatal knowledge, at other times the knowledge we can in due course acquire.<sup>6</sup> The first view discounts Socrates' claim that the slave lacks knowledge. The second and third views accept that Socrates both posits and disclaims knowledge, but they seek to make these claims consistent. The second view does so by invoking different kinds of knowledge (latent vs. explicit); the

<sup>3</sup> Or, at least, when we inquire successfully: see Ch. 4, sect. 2.

<sup>4</sup> See White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality*, 47.

<sup>5</sup> See, among many others, Moravcsik, 'Learning as Recollection', 63; Scott, *PM*, ch. 9; Matthews, *Socratic Perplexity*, ch. 6. To say that Plato thinks that we know in one way but not in another need not be to say that he takes S1 to be false; and it's not clear that any of these authors means to say that he takes S1 to be false.

<sup>6</sup> I defend this view briefly in 'Inquiry in the *Meno*' and 'Enquiry and Discovery', and in more detail below.

third view does so by emphasizing different times (lack of current knowledge vs. actual prenatal and possible future knowledge). On the first and second views, Socrates posits innate knowledge; on the third view, he doesn't do so.

*Thirdly*, Meno asks how, if one lacks knowledge, one can either inquire or realize one has found what one was looking for should one do so. If the theory of recollection aims to explain how we can inquire and discover because we *do* know, it doesn't address Meno's worry.<sup>7</sup>

*Fourthly*, we've seen that the geometrical discussion seems to be a good, and complete, reply to Meno's questions and Socrates' dilemma. Why, then, does Socrates introduce the theory of recollection? It seems unnecessary, since the geometrical discussion seems sufficient.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Varieties of innatism

One crucial question is whether the second statement of the theory of recollection posits not only prenatal but also innate knowledge. For if it doesn't do so, some of the problems discussed in the last section are solved. Further, the issue of whether Socrates posits innate knowledge is relevant to understanding his full reply to Meno's questions and Socrates' dilemma. But before we can profitably ask whether Socrates posits innate knowledge, we need a clearer account of what innatism amounts to. For, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, there are varieties of innatism.<sup>9</sup> This is so in two ways. First, there are different accounts of what it is for something to be innate. Secondly, different things have been taken to be innate. Before looking at what Socrates says, it will be helpful to disentangle these issues. The distinctions I draw in this section will also be relevant when we ask whether Aristotle, the Epicureans, and/or the Stoics are innatists.

Various things have been held to be innate: for example, knowledge, belief, and concepts. If one takes knowledge to be innate, presumably one also takes beliefs and concepts to be innate. But one might take beliefs and concepts to be innate

<sup>7</sup> As we've seen, the same problem confronts the geometrical discussion if (unlike me) one thinks Socrates takes the slave to have some knowledge.

<sup>8</sup> In 'Inquiry in the *Meno*', 214, I suggest that neither does the theory of recollection seem sufficient for dissolving the paradox. Cf. Scott, *PM*, 80.

<sup>9</sup> In what follows, I expand on the briefer account given in Ch. 1, sect. 10.

<sup>10</sup> This is too quick. For example, one might think that knowledge and belief are exclusive, and so think that having innate knowledge doesn't imply having innate beliefs. (However, I don't know of anyone who argues that Plato posits innate knowledge but not innate true belief; and those who think he posits innate true beliefs but not innate knowledge do not defend this view by arguing that he thinks knowledge and belief are exclusive.) Or again, though it is common to think that one can

without thinking that knowledge is innate. By contrast, innate beliefs and innate concepts go hand in hand.<sup>10</sup>

But what does it mean to say that knowledge, beliefs, or concepts are innate? I shall distinguish three varieties of innatism: *cognitive-condition innatism*, *content innatism*, and *dispositional innatism*. Let's ask first what it means for knowledge to be innate in these ways. It will be useful, to begin with, to distinguish the *cognitive condition* of knowledge from its *content*: there is both the cognitive condition of the knowing person, and the content of that condition. When we ask whether Socrates took himself to have knowledge, we are speaking of knowledge in the first way. When we speak of the sum of human knowledge, we are speaking of it in the second way. If someone knows in the cognitive-condition sense, she has knowledge in the content sense. As Plato says in *Republic* 5, if one knows, one knows something: the cognitive condition has content (476e7). However, a given content that is suitable for being the content of knowledge could be in one, without one's being in the cognitive condition of knowing it. We might put this somewhat paradoxically by saying that knowledge can be in one without one's knowing.<sup>11</sup>

How, one might ask, could something suitable as the content of knowledge be in one without being the content of knowledge? One possibility is that it is in one as the content of true belief. Another possibility is that, though it is suitable as the content of both knowledge and true belief, it doesn't actually so function since one isn't in either of these cognitive conditions with respect to it. Leibniz, for example, posits *petites perceptions*, which are actual perceptions of monads; but most monads lack knowledge and even belief. *Petites perceptions* accurately express or represent features of the universe and (at least in certain monads) are the contents of psychological or mental states; but these states can fall short of knowledge and even of belief.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, one might hold, for various philosophical reasons, that if a given content is in one and is suitable as the content of knowledge, one thereby has knowledge. But there is philosophical room for resisting that inference.

have concepts if and only if one has beliefs, it has been held that one can have concepts without having beliefs. (As we shall see, the Skeptics might mention this view.) Such a person might posit innate concepts without positing innate beliefs. (However, I don't know of anyone who argues that Plato does so or that the Skeptics do so.) However, if one posits innate beliefs, presumably one would also posit innate concepts.

<sup>11</sup> See Dancy, *Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 228–36.

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. the Preface to the *New Essays on Human Understanding*, 53ff. It's not always clear whether *petites perceptions* are contents or states, though they generally seem to be the former. Be that as it may, the crucial point is that they often fail to be or constitute knowledge or belief.

We can now distinguish cognitive-condition from content innatism about knowledge. According to the first, we are, from birth, in the cognitive condition of knowing (where the knowing could be either explicit or latent, that is, either conscious or unconscious).<sup>13</sup> According to the second, from birth we have contents in our minds that are suitable as the contents of knowledge, whether or not we are actually in the cognitive condition of knowing them. If one is a cognitive-condition innatist about knowledge, one is also thereby a content innatist about knowledge. However, one could in principle be a content innatist about knowledge without thereby being a cognitive-condition innatist about knowledge.

Just as we speak of knowledge in both the content and cognitive-condition sense, so we speak of belief in these same two ways: we say both that I believe that thus and so and also that these are my beliefs. Hence, just as we can distinguish cognitive-condition innatism from content innatism about knowledge, so we can distinguish cognitive-condition innatism from content innatism about belief. One might argue that, from birth, we are in the cognitive condition of true belief. Or one might argue that, from birth, there are truths in us that are suitable for serving as the content of the cognitive condition of belief, whether or not we actually believe them from birth.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to cognitive-condition and content innatism, there is also dispositional innatism. It has been understood in different ways; hence, someone might be a dispositional innatist on one understanding of it, but not on another way of understanding it. On one account, the view maintains that we have 'pre-dispositions or potentialities to form certain beliefs rather than others... the mind is innately disposed to form a certain set of ideas whatever its experience'.<sup>15</sup> On this

<sup>13</sup> 'Latent knowledge' is used in different ways. Scott, for example, uses it in two different ways in *PM*. Sometimes he uses it for unconscious knowledge, whether or not it is innate (129). But sometimes he uses it for innate knowledge (e.g. 108). By contrast, in 'Innatism' and in *RE* he uses it for the view that we have innate knowledge which, however, we've *never* been aware of. Since Scott thinks Plato holds that we were aware of our innate knowledge prenatally, he says in 'Innatism' and *RE* that Plato *doesn't* favor a theory of latent or implicit innate knowledge. In *PM*, by contrast, he says that Plato posits latent knowledge. This is a change in Scott's terminology, not in his view. In all these works, he thinks Plato posits the existence of innate knowledge that we're not aware of in this life but were aware of prenatally. I shall use 'latent knowledge' for actual but unconscious knowledge, whether or not it is innate. We have latent innate knowledge if we have actual but unconscious knowledge from birth.

<sup>14</sup> Those who posit innate beliefs take those beliefs to be true; so in speaking about innatism about beliefs I shall focus on innate true beliefs.

<sup>15</sup> Scott, 'Innatism', 130; cf. *PM*, 108–9. In the passage quoted in the text, Scott mentions belief and ideas; but there is also dispositional innatism about knowledge. I shall focus on knowledge and belief, without discussing ideas separately. 'Whatever its experience' might indicate (a) any conceivable experience; or (b) any experiences one has, given human nature as it is. I assume Scott intends (b); and I'll understand dispositional innatism accordingly.

view, we don't literally have innate knowledge or belief. It's the *disposition* to acquire knowledge or belief of certain specific items rather than others that is innate. (Hence I shall say that, on this view, knowledge and belief are not innate; only the disposition is.) Those who favor dispositional innatism sometimes speak of knowledge or belief being in one. But, on this version of dispositional innatism, that is shorthand for the view that we are predisposed to know or believe certain specific truths.<sup>16</sup>

To say that we are innately disposed to know or believe certain specific truths is not to say merely that we can know or believe them. The disposition at issue is a determinate disposition, not a bare capacity. Locke famously argues that innate knowledge is either conscious explicit knowledge or else amounts to no more than having a bare capacity to learn whatever we do learn. In the first case, it's obvious that we lack innate knowledge. In the second case, we have it, but the claim is trivial. Leibniz, however, appeals to innate dispositions as a third option that avoids (or at any rate is meant to avoid) the horns of Locke's dilemma.<sup>17</sup>

I have also used the analogy of a veined block of marble, as opposed to an entirely homogeneous block of marble or to a blank tablet—what the philosophers call a *tabula rasa*. For if the soul were like such a blank tablet then truths would be in us as the shape of Hercules is in a piece of marble when the marble is entirely neutral as to whether it assumes this shape or some other. However, if there were veins in the block which marked out the shape of Hercules rather than other shapes, then that block would be more determined to that shape and Hercules would be innate in it, in a way, even though labour would be required to expose the veins and to polish them into clarity, removing everything that prevents their being seen. This is how ideas and truths are innate to us—as inclinations, dispositions, tendencies, or natural potentialities, not as actions.

<sup>16</sup> However, Leibniz, for example, may identify ideas with dispositions; and, as we shall see in Ch. 8, it is sometime suggested that for the Stoics, or for some of the Stoics, prolepses (a subset of concepts) are innate because they are dispositions and the dispositions are innate. On this version of dispositional innatism, ideas are literally innate—but they are nothing over and above dispositions.

<sup>17</sup> *New Essays*, 52. For Locke, see his *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), Bk. 1.1. In *Met.* 1048a32–3, Aristotle says that 'we call potentially, for example, Hermes in the wood'; but his point is different from Leibniz's. Aristotle seems to mean just that Hermes can be carved from the wood, whereas Leibniz's point is that there are specific veins that make it more likely that a statue of Hercules will result than a statue of someone else. Descartes says that 'the true triangle is contained in the figure only in the way in which a statue of Mercury is contained in a rough block of wood' (Fifth Replies, AT 7.381–2/ CSM 2.262). The similarity between his metaphor and Aristotle's perhaps suggests that he has Aristotle's rather than Leibniz's point in mind.

<sup>18</sup> It's not clear whether Descartes identifies innate ideas and truths with dispositions or thinks that an innate idea is one that is suitably caused by an innate disposition (and that is neither adventitious nor made up). See Jolley, *The Light of the Soul*, 50.

Similarly, Descartes says that in speaking of innate ideas, he means no more than that we have the power of thinking, and that some of our thoughts are neither adventitious (derived from sense experience) nor made up by us, but 'come solely from the power of thinking within' us (CSM I 303/AT VIII B 357–8).<sup>18</sup> To explain this view, Descartes sometimes uses the analogy of diseases that might be said to be innate. He explains that he doesn't mean that babies actually have the disease when in their mother's womb, 'but simply that they are born with a certain faculty or tendency to contract them' (CSM I 303/AT VIII B 358). And in a Letter to Voetius (CSM III 222/AT VIII B 166–7), in replying to the objection that his arguments for the existence of God 'have force only for those who already know that he exists, since they depend simply on notions that are innate within us', Descartes says:<sup>19</sup>

It is to be noted that all those things of which the knowledge is said to be implanted in us by nature, are not thereby expressly known by us; but are only such that we can know them without any sense-experience through the powers of our own mind. All geometrical truths are of this sort, not only the very obvious ones but also the rest, however abstruse they may seem. And thus Socrates in Plato, by questioning a boy about the elements of geometry and by thus bringing it about that the boy drew out truths from his own mind, which he had not previously noticed to be in it, tried to prove his doctrine of recollection. And the knowledge of God is of this kind; and when you infer that there is no one who is speculatively an Atheist, you were not less silly than if from the fact that all Geometrical truths are in the same way innate in us, you had said that there is no one in the world who does not know Euclid's elements.

So according to Descartes, some truths are innate in the sense that 'we come to know them by the power of our own native intelligence'.

<sup>19</sup> Translation by Jolley, *The Light of the Soul*, 50, but substituting 'recollection' for 'reminiscence'. Descartes speaks both about knowing something through the power of one's mind and also about drawing out truths already in the mind. The first suggests dispositional innatism, but the second might be taken to imply that the truths are already there. However, perhaps, in speaking of drawing out truths from one's own mind, Descartes means no more than that one has the power to believe or know them. It's debated whether Descartes has a single, consistent view of innatism and, if he does, what it is. Whether or not he always intends just dispositional innatism, that seems to me to be one strand of his thought.

In the Fifth Meditation Descartes says that 'there are countless particular figures regarding shape, number, motion and so on, which I perceive when I give them my attention. And the truth of these matters is so open and so much in harmony with my nature, that on first discovering them it seems (*videar*) that I am not so much learning something new as recollecting (*reminisci*) what I knew before; or it seems like noticing for the first time things which were long present within me although I had never turned my mental gaze on them before'. (AT 7.63–4/CSM 2.44). Descartes doesn't think we *are* recollecting in such cases; rather, he says just that it *seems* to him that he is doing so. Perhaps he is alluding to what is sometimes called quasi-recollection, the feeling that one knew something before. As we shall see (in Ch. 6, sect. 16), Aristotle seems to allude to this phenomenon in *APr.* 2.21.

Just as one can be innately disposed to acquire a disease without ever actually contracting it, so, one might think, one can be innately disposed to know or believe something without ever actually knowing or believing it. However, those who discuss dispositional innatism sometimes characterize it as the view that we will inevitably come to know or believe whatever we are innately disposed to know or believe. So, for example, Dominic Scott says that, according to dispositional innatism, we *do* form certain notions, whatever our experience.<sup>20</sup> It's not merely that we are predisposed to do so, though we may fail to do so; rather, we will in fact acquire certain 'notions', whatever experiences we have. Similarly, Jon Miller takes dispositional innatism to be the view that 'innate properties are not items of knowledge or belief or concepts or behaviour but dispositions to form certain knowledge or beliefs or concepts or behaviour. On this view, the soul is structured in such a way that it will inevitably come to possess certain properties although it does not have them at birth'.<sup>21</sup>

Let's call the view that we are innately disposed to acquire knowledge or belief of certain specific truths, whatever our experience, where that doesn't guarantee that we will acquire that knowledge or those beliefs, *weak dispositional innatism*. And let's call the view that we will inevitably, whatever our experience, acquire the knowledge or beliefs we are innately disposed to acquire *strong dispositional innatism*. Presumably, even on strong dispositional innatism, someone might fail to acquire the knowledge or beliefs we are innately disposed to acquire if, for example, they die soon after being born. So we should take strong dispositional innatism to be the view that we will inevitably acquire the knowledge or beliefs we are innately disposed to acquire, if we have any experiences at all and also reach a certain age. For the Stoics, this would be the age of reason, which is either seven or fourteen.<sup>22</sup>

Three further issues about dispositional innatism should be mentioned. *First*, though it is often formulated as the view that we are innately disposed to know or believe *certain specific truths*, according to a weaker version it is sufficient for being an innate dispositionalist that one be innately inclined to have some knowledge or true beliefs or other, without its being implied that one is innately inclined to know or believe certain specific truths.

<sup>20</sup> 'Innatism', 139. Scott speaks of an innate predisposition to acquire beliefs or ideas; this is dispositional innatism about beliefs and ideas. But it's clear he (also) means to describe dispositional innatism about knowledge.

<sup>21</sup> 'Innate Ideas in Stoicism and Grotius', 144.

<sup>22</sup> See Ch. 8, sect. 2.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, M. Fara, 'Dispositions', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring, 2013), ed. E. N. Zalta, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/dispositions/>>.



*Secondly*, there is room for debate about what exactly a disposition is, and what it takes to have a disposition to F in particular. Dispositions have been explained in different ways.<sup>23</sup> In a passage quoted above, Scott explains them in terms of potentiality. But there are different sorts of potentialities. Aristotle, for example, distinguishes first from second potentiality. So, for example, an infant has a *first potentiality* to know language, in that she can do so, where this means, not just that it is possible for her to do so, but that there is some permanent, or relatively permanent, state of her that explains how she can do so.<sup>24</sup> Someone who knows French but is not attending to it at a time has a *second potentiality* (or what is also called a *first actuality*) to speak French.<sup>25</sup> Though infants have a first potentiality to know language, they don't have a first potentiality to know French in particular. Similarly, even if we have an innate disposition to know language, we don't have an innate disposition to know French. Further, whether someone acquires a second potentiality to know French depends on contingent facts about the environment they grow up in.

*Thirdly*, it is sometimes held that it is not sufficient for being a dispositional innatist that one posit one or more innate dispositions. Rather, in addition, they must play a sufficiently robust explanatory role. Scott, for example, thinks that Aristotle posits some innate dispositions, but he declines to call him a dispositional innatist since, in Scott's view, when Aristotle explains our cognitive development, he focuses not on innate dispositions but on perception, memory, and experience.<sup>26</sup> This restriction on what it takes to be an innate dispositionalist has the advantage that, with it, the view isn't so broad that everyone who thinks the mind has some structure at birth that inclines it in various ways counts as a dispositional innatist. On the other hand, the restriction as phrased leaves room for dispute about how robust an explanatory role innate dispositions must play before someone counts as a dispositional innatist.

Dispositional innatism can, then, be understood in different ways. Merely saying that someone is a dispositional innatist therefore leaves it indeterminate what sort of dispositional innatist he is.

<sup>24</sup> Here and in what follows, in discussing potentiality I am indebted to T. H. Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 225–37.

<sup>25</sup> For the distinction between first and second potentiality, see, for example, *De Anima* 2.5. In 2.1, Aristotle also distinguishes two sorts of actuality. In addition to first actuality (which is the same as second potentiality), there is also second actuality, which consists in my exercising my first actuality: if e.g. I know how to speak French, and then speak it on a given occasion.

<sup>26</sup> *RE*, 100.

<sup>27</sup> Miller, 'Innate Ideas in Stoicism and Grotius', 144.

Plato is generally held to be an innatist in the *Meno*. Indeed, according to one recent commentator, he is ‘in many respects an arch innatist’.<sup>27</sup> On what is probably the most common version of this view, he is a cognitive-condition innatist about knowledge. Scott, for example, says that ‘we have latent knowledge of these principles’ [i.e. of answers to ‘What is F?’ questions], that is, we stand in the cognitive condition of knowing them.<sup>28</sup> Because this is the most prominent view, I shall focus on it.<sup>29</sup> But other positions have also been held. Dancy, for example, thinks that Plato in the *Meno* is a dispositional innatist about both true belief and knowledge.<sup>30</sup> Vlastos sometimes suggests that Plato thinks that true belief, but not knowledge, is innate.<sup>31</sup> Gentzler thinks that Plato in the *Meno* is either a content or a dispositional innatist about true beliefs; she doesn’t say he posits innate knowledge.<sup>32</sup> Descartes and Leibniz may take Plato to be a dispositional innatist.<sup>33</sup> But according to Scott, dispositional innatism is ‘a very un-Platonic kind of innateness’.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *PM*, 108. See 110 and 111 for what seem to be further statements of cognitive-condition innatism about knowledge.

<sup>29</sup> However, we shall have occasion to explore dispositional innatism further later, when we consider Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Stoics. I shall also touch on it later in this chapter.

<sup>30</sup> *Plato’s Introduction of Forms*, 228–36.

<sup>31</sup> At least, this is one possible reading of what he says in ‘*Anamnesis*’, 153 n. 14, though not everything he says in that note is congenial to that view. Be that as it may, this may be the view he thinks Plato holds in the *Gorgias*: see his ‘The Socratic Elenchus’, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1983), 25–58, reprinted in his *Socratic Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 23 (latter pagination). (However, though he says there that, according to Plato, anyone who has any beliefs is guaranteed to have ‘covert’ true beliefs, he doesn’t commit himself to saying that Plato thinks we have any innate beliefs.) In ‘Is the “Socratic Fallacy” Socratic?’, however, he may ascribe content innatism about knowledge to Plato in the *Meno* (*Socratic Studies*, 79). In ‘Socrates “contra” Socrates in Plato’, in his *Socrates*, he takes the *Meno* to say that ‘all knowledge is innate’ (54; emphasis in the original), though he doesn’t say what sort of knowledge innatism he thinks Plato holds.

<sup>32</sup> See ‘Recollection’. She doesn’t choose between content and dispositional innatism about true belief, but thinks he is committed to one of these positions. Nor does she take a stand on weak as opposed to strong dispositional innatism. I discuss Gentzler below.

<sup>33</sup> For Descartes, see the passage quoted above from the Letter to Voetius. In *New Essays*, 47, Leibniz says that he and Plato both believe that ‘the soul inherently contains the sources (*princeps*) of various notions and doctrines which external objects merely rouse up on suitable occasions’. There’s room for dispute about what these ‘sources’ are. But if, as is possible, they are dispositions, then, since Leibniz says that Plato holds the same view as he does, he takes Plato to be a dispositional innatist. Though 47 doesn’t mention knowledge, in *Discourse* 26 Leibniz says that we knew all these things virtually; and here he mentions the geometrical discussion in the *Meno*. So perhaps he takes Plato to be an innate dispositionalist about knowledge (not just ideas).

<sup>34</sup> *RE*, 162.

### 3. Plato's argument for the immortality of the soul, and steps 1–2

The main passage in the *Meno* in which Socrates has been thought to be committed to some form of innatism is 85d3–86c2. Before considering it, it will be useful to recall the conclusion of the geometrical discussion, which will be of concern to us later:

What do you think, Meno? Is there any belief he gave in reply that wasn't his own?

No, they were his own.

And yet he did not know, as we said awhile ago.

That's true.

But these beliefs were in him (*enêsan*, imperfect), weren't they?

Yes.

So someone who doesn't know, whatever the things may be which he doesn't know, has in him (*eneisin*, present) true beliefs about things he doesn't know?

Apparently.

At present, these beliefs have just been stirred up in him, like in a dream. But if someone questions him about these same things often and in many ways, you know that in the end he will know about these things no less accurately than anyone. (85b8–d1)<sup>35</sup>

In the last chapter, we saw that in the geometrical discussion Socrates argues that one can inquire into, and discover, something one doesn't know. For the slave lacks knowledge, yet he inquires; he also discovers the right answer and realizes he's done so. If Socrates replies to the paradox by explaining how one can inquire and discover even if one lacks knowledge, then, we might be tempted to infer, he doesn't posit innate knowledge.<sup>36</sup>

However, this argument is too quick. For one might say that Socrates means only that the slave can inquire and discover even though he lacks conscious explicit knowledge. For all that, the slave might have latent innate knowledge; and perhaps it explains how he can inquire and discover. Though neither the first statement of the theory of recollection nor the geometrical discussion says this, it's often thought that the second statement of the theory of recollection does so.

<sup>35</sup> {ΣΩ.} Τί σοι δοκεῖ, ὦ Μένων; ἔστιν ἡγνια δόξαν οὐχ αὐτοῦ οὗτος ἀπεκρίνατο; {ΜΕΝ.} Οὐκ, ἀλλ' αὐτοῦ. {ΣΩ.} Καὶ μὴν οὐκ ἦδει γε, ὡς ἔφαμεν ὀλίγον πρότερον. {ΜΕΝ.} Ἀληθῆ λέγεις. {ΣΩ.} Ἐνῆσαν δέ γε αὐτῷ αὐται αἱ δόξαι· ἢ οὐ; {ΜΕΝ.} Ναί. {ΣΩ.} Τῷ οὐκ εἰδότει ἄρα περὶ ὧν ἂν μὴ εἰδῇ ἔνεισιν ἀληθεῖς δόξαι περὶ τούτων ὧν οὐκ οἶδε; {ΜΕΝ.} Φαίνεται. {ΣΩ.} Καὶ νῦν μέν γε αὐτῷ ὥσπερ ὄναρ ἄρτι ἀνακεκίνηται αἱ δόξαι αὐται· εἰ δὲ αὐτόν τις ἀνερῆσεται πολλάκις τὰ αὐτὰ ταῦτα καὶ πολλαχῇ, οἷσθ' ὅτι τελευτῶν οὐδενὸς ἤττον ἀκριβῶς ἐπιστήσεται περὶ τούτων.

<sup>36</sup> However, he might, for all that, posit innate true beliefs; and he is sometimes thought to do so in the passage just cited. I discuss this in sect. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Trans. Sedley and Long, revised. I insert numbers for ease of reference.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *ex hautou*, Aristotle, *De Mem.* 452a11. Thanks to David Bronstein for this reference.

So let's turn next to it. It constitutes the third and final stage of Socrates' three-stage reply to Meno's Paradox.

Socrates proceeds to say:<sup>37</sup>

- (1) Won't he know without having been taught by anyone, but <only by> being questioned, taking up (*analabôn*) the knowledge himself from himself (*autos ex hautou*)<sup>38</sup>? (85d3–4) Yes.
- (2) Isn't it the case that to take up (*analambanein*) knowledge oneself in oneself (*auton en hautô(i)*) is to recollect (*anamimnêskesthai*)? (85d6–7) Certainly.
- (3) Isn't it the case that he either acquired the knowledge which he now has at some time, or else always had (*aei eichen*) it? (85d9–10). Yes.
- (4) If, then, he always had it, he was always a knower. (5) But if he acquired it at some time, it wasn't in this life. (6) Or has someone taught him geometry? For he will achieve the same results in every branch of geometry and in all the other branches of knowledge (*mathêmata*). So is there anyone who has taught him everything? For I suppose you ought to know, since he was born and brought up in your household.—I certainly know that no one ever taught him.—(7) But does he have these beliefs, or not?—It's apparent that he must have them, Socrates.—(8) But if he didn't acquire them in this life, isn't it then clear that he had (*eiche*) them and learned them (*ememathêkei*) at some other time?—So it appears.—Then isn't this the time when he was not a human being?—Yes.—(9) If, then, these true beliefs are in him both at the time when he was a human being, and at the time when he was not, a human being, beliefs that, when stirred by questioning, will become knowledge, will not his soul for all time be in the condition of having learned (*ar'oun ton aei chronon memathêkuia estai hê psuchê autou*)? (10) For it's clear that for the whole of time (*ton panta chronon*), he either is or is not a human being.—So it appears.—(11) Then if the truth about beings is always in the soul, won't the soul be immortal, (12) so that you must confidently try to inquire into, and recollect, what you don't happen to know now: that is, what you don't remember?—It seems

<sup>39</sup> {ΣΩ.} Οὐκοῦν οὐδενὸς διδάξαντος ἀλλ' ἐρωτήσαντος ἐπιστήσεται, ἀναλαβὼν αὐτὸς ἐξ αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐπιστήμην; {ΜΕΝ.} Ναί. {ΣΩ.} Τὸ δὲ ἀναλαμβάνειν αὐτὸν ἐν αὐτῷ ἐπιστήμην οὐκ ἀναμνησκεισθαί ἐστιν; {ΜΕΝ.} Πάνυ γε. {ΣΩ.} Ἄρ' οὐν οὐ τὴν ἐπιστήμην, ἣν νῦν οὗτος ἔχει, ἥτοι ἔλαβεν ποτε ἢ αἰεῖ εἶχεν; {ΜΕΝ.} Ναί. {ΣΩ.} Οὐκοῦν εἰ μὲν αἰεῖ εἶχεν, αἰεὶ καὶ ἦν ἐπιστήμων· εἰ δὲ ἔλαβεν ποτε, οὐκ ἂν ἔν γε τῷ νῦν βίῳ εἰληφώς εἴη. ἢ δεδιδαχέν τις τοῦτον γεωμετερεῖν; οὗτος γὰρ ποιήσει περὶ πάσης γεωμετρίας ταῦτά ταῦτα, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων μαθημάτων ἀπάντων. ἔστιν οὖν ὅστις τοῦτον πάντα δεδίδαχεν; δίκαιος γάρ που εἰ εἰδέναι, ἄλλως τε ἐπειδὴ ἐν τῇ σῇ οἰκίᾳ γέγονεν καὶ τέθραπται. {ΜΕΝ.} Ἄλλ' οἶδα ἔγωγε ὅτι οὐδεὶς πώποτε ἐδίδαξεν. {ΣΩ.} Ἐχει δὲ ταύτας τὰς δόξας, ἢ οὐχί; {ΜΕΝ.} Ἀνάγκη, ὦ Σώκρατες, φαίνεται. {ΣΩ.} Εἰ δὲ μὴ ἐν τῷ νῦν βίῳ λαβὼν, οὐκ ἤδη τοῦτο δῆλον, ὅτι ἐν ἄλλῳ τινὶ χρόνῳ εἶχε καὶ ἐμεμαθήκει; {ΜΕΝ.} Φαίνεται. {ΣΩ.} Οὐκοῦν οὗτός γέ ἐστιν ὁ χρόνος ὅτ' οὐκ ἦν ἄνθρωπος; {ΜΕΝ.} Ναί. {ΣΩ.} Εἰ οὖν ὃν τ' ἂν ἢ χρόνον καὶ ὃν ἂν μὴ ἢ ἄνθρωπος, ἐνέσσονται αὐτῷ ἀληθεῖς δόξαι, αἷ ἐρωτήσει ἐπεγερεῖσθαι ἐπιστήμῃ γίγνονται, ἀρ' οὐν τὸν αἰεὶ χρόνον μεμαθηκυῖα ἔσται ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ; δῆλον γὰρ ὅτι τὸν πάντα χρόνον ἔστιν ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄνθρωπος. {ΜΕΝ.} Φαίνεται. {ΣΩ.} Οὐκοῦν εἰ αἰεὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια ἡμῖν τῶν ὄντων ἔστιν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, ἀθάνατος ἂν ἡ ψυχὴ εἴη, ὥστε θαρροῦντα χρὴ ὁ μὴ τυγχάνεις ἐπιστάμενος νῦν—τοῦτο δ' ἔστιν ὁ μὴ μεμνημένος—ἐπιχειρεῖν ζητεῖν καὶ ἀναμνησκεισθαι; {ΜΕΝ.} Εἰ μοι δοκεῖς λέγειν, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως. {ΣΩ.} Καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ ἐμοί, ὦ Μένων. καὶ τὰ μὲν γε ἄλλα οὐκ ἂν πάνυ ὑπὲρ τοῦ λόγου διωχυρισαίμην.

to me that you're right, Socrates; but I don't know how.—(13) And I think so too, Meno. As far as the other points (*ta alla*) are concerned, I wouldn't altogether take a stand on the argument. But that we will be better and more manly and less idle if we think one should inquire into that which one doesn't know than if we think it isn't possible to discover what we don't know and that we don't need to inquire into it: that is something I would certainly fight for to the end, if I could, in both word and deed. (85d12–86c2)<sup>39</sup>

Let's ask first about the force of *analambanein*, which occurs at both 85d4 (= (1)) and 85d6 (= (2)). It can mean 'to recover'. But it can also mean, and is sometimes used by Plato to mean, 'to take up', in a sense that is compatible with, though it doesn't imply, learning for the first time.<sup>40</sup> In 85d3–4 (= (1)), Plato contrasts the slave's *analambanein* knowledge with his being taught by someone. If he means that the slave is not being taught by anyone but is taking the answer up for himself—that is, he is working the answer out for himself, using his own resources—then Plato is just emphasizing one of the main morals of the cross-examination of the slave. He is thinking of what he's just said, namely, that if the slave is questioned further, he will in the end acquire knowledge. On this reading, (1) says that the slave will acquire this knowledge, not by being taught, but by working things out for himself. So read, (1) follows on quite naturally from the preceding discussion. If, however, Socrates means that the slave is recovering knowledge he already has or once had, the remark comes out of the blue and is wholly unjustified.<sup>41</sup> This gives us a reason to suppose that *analambanein*, in 85d4, means 'to take up'.

In 85d6–7 (= (2)), Plato says that to *analambanein* knowledge in the way the slave has done is to recollect. If this means that to recover knowledge is to recollect, the remark is a near tautology. An alternative is that, in 85d6–7, Plato is saying that the slave's ability to work things out for himself is best explained on the assumption that he is recollecting. Plato doesn't provide an argument for this highly controversial claim. But if we read 85d3–4 and 85d6–7 as just suggested, they fit better with the preceding discussion than they would do if 85d3–4 just announced that the slave is recovering knowledge he has or once had.

ὅτι δ' οἰόμενοι δεῖν ζητεῖν ἂν μή τις οἶδεν βελτίους ἂν εἶμεν καὶ ἀνδρικώτεροι καὶ ἡττον ἄργοι ἢ εἰ οἰοίμεθα ἂν μή ἐπιστάμεθα μηδὲ δυνατὸν εἶναι εὐρεῖν μηδὲ δεῖν ζητεῖν, περὶ τοῦτου πάνν ἂν διαμαχοίμην, εἰ οἶός τε εἶην, καὶ λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ.

<sup>40</sup> LSJ, sv. *analambanō*. This point is made by Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, 132–6, and 372, n. 15. As examples of the second use, he cites *Ap.* 22b2; *Symp.* 185e1; *Rep.* 606e4; *Tht.* 203a1; *So.* 255e9; and *Pol.* 261c5. Cf. also *M.* 87e5, where *analambanontes* doesn't imply prior knowledge.

<sup>41</sup> It doesn't come out of the blue, insofar as the theory of recollection has already been mentioned. However, the point is that here Socrates is trying to prove that the theory of recollection is true; hence it shouldn't simply be assumed.

This is the place where Plato connects the geometrical discussion to the theory of recollection. He claims that the slave's ability to inquire as he does is best explained on the assumption that he is recollecting. This, then, is how the geometrical discussion 'shows' the truth of the theory of recollection: the theory of recollection is the best explanation of the facts made clear in the geometrical discussion. The geometrical discussion shows *that* inquiry and discovery are possible, by providing an example of both. The theory of recollection explains *how* they are possible.<sup>42</sup>

As I read (1) and (2), then, one thing they say is that the slave has the ability to work things out for himself in such a way that, if all goes well, he will eventually acquire knowledge. At this point, what's said to be in the slave isn't knowledge, but his *analambanein* knowledge: the process of working things out for himself in a way that can eventuate in knowledge. (2) then makes the highly-controversial claim that the slave's ability to work things out for himself is best explained by saying that he is recollecting. It follows that the slave *once* knew. For one can recollect only what one once knew. But, as we've seen, to say that one once knew doesn't imply that one *now* knows: one can forget what one once knew in such a way that one no longer knows it at all. We've also seen that the first statement of the theory of recollection posits prenatal but not innate knowledge. So far, then, there is no reason to import innate knowledge here either.<sup>43</sup>

This might be challenged. For, it might be thought, if we recollect what we once knew, surely there must be a persisting entity that causally relates our prior knowledge to our recollection of it? Otherwise, it would seem that, rather than recollecting, we are learning for a second time.<sup>44</sup> Yet, as Aristotle says in *De Memoria*, even learning for a second time differs from recollection: 'the same

<sup>42</sup> Similarly, in the *Phaedo*, when Cebes mentions the theory of recollection, Simmias defends it by saying that 'when people are questioned, provided someone questions them well, they themselves come up with true statements about everything. And yet, they wouldn't be able to do this, if knowledge and a correct account were not in them' (73a7–10; trans. Sedley and Long, somewhat revised). Here too, the fact that people can work things out for themselves is explained by recollection. I discuss this passage briefly below, in sect. 11.

<sup>43</sup> For a different interpretation of (1) and (2), see Scott, *PM*, 110; for my reply, see 'Enquiry and Discovery', 356–8. Socrates says that 'to *analambanein* knowledge oneself in oneself is recollection'. I take this to mean, not that knowledge is in one, but that taking things up oneself in a way that (if all goes well) eventuates in knowledge is recollection. The knowledge that is mentioned in 85d4 and 6 is the future knowledge that 85c9–d1 says the slave will have if he is questioned further. I take 'oneself in oneself' in 85d6 to have the same force as 'himself from himself' in 85d4, which I interpret to mean that the slave himself works things out by, or for, himself. (The first passage mentions just the slave; the second generalizes.)

<sup>44</sup> This is what Moravcsik calls 'the entitative feature of remembering' ('Learning as Recollection', 58).

person can learn and discover the same thing twice. Hence recollecting must differ from these cases; and it must be that people recollect because of a principle (*archê*) that is in them, one that goes beyond that from which they learn' (451b9–12, Sorabji trans., somewhat modified). This principle, it might be thought, must be some sort of persisting entity; and surely the persisting entity must be knowledge? If it persists, surely we have innate knowledge?

Let's grant that recollection requires something to persist, something that plays a suitable causal role linking our prior knowledge to our recollection. Even so, the persisting entity doesn't need to be *knowledge*, in either the cognitive-condition or content sense. Perhaps the persisting entity is a disposition to reacquire the knowledge we once had, or a disposition to favor truths over falsehoods; or perhaps it is something about the structure of the mind, which grounds, or gives rise to, a disposition. If, as I think, that's sufficient for satisfying the entitative feature, then recollection doesn't require content or cognitive-condition innatism about knowledge. Nor does it require strong dispositional innatism about knowledge; for weak dispositional innatism about knowledge is sufficient for satisfying the entitative feature. Indeed, perhaps it will do if our minds are structured in a way that allows us to acquire appropriate dispositions.

Be all that as it may, whatever *we* think is implied in saying that we recollect, it's another thing to say what *Plato* thinks is implied. We need to see whether he accepts the entitative feature and, if he does so, what sort of persisting entity he posits: something about the structure of the mind that grounds a disposition (and if so, what disposition it grounds), knowledge in the content or cognitive-condition sense, or something else again. But perhaps he doesn't accept the entitative feature. If recollection requires the entitative feature, but Plato doesn't think it does, and if that's Aristotle's view, then perhaps Aristotle distinguishes learning for a second time from recollecting precisely because he thinks Plato doesn't do so. Yet another possibility is that Plato doesn't commit himself one way or the other about the entitative feature; perhaps he doesn't say enough for us to be able to know whether he accepts it or, if he does, what he posits to satisfy it. We shall need to see. So far, all Plato has said is that, in working things out for ourselves in the way the slave has done, we recollect. He hasn't told us what is involved in recollecting.

<sup>45</sup> For this view, see e.g. Sharples, note *ad loc.*; Scott, *PM*, 110–13. Sharples thinks the view that Socrates is positing latent knowledge here fits best with (4) (= 85d12). That is not so on my interpretation of (4), for which see below.

## 4. Steps 3–6

In (3), Socrates speaks of ‘the knowledge which he [the slave] now has’ (85d9). Socrates has been emphasizing the fact that the slave *lacks* knowledge. Why, then, does he say that the slave *now has* knowledge? One possibility is that he means that, though the slave doesn’t have explicit knowledge, he has latent knowledge.<sup>45</sup> However, Socrates doesn’t explicitly mention latent or explicit knowledge. He simply says that the slave lacks knowledge and then, at 85d9, that he has it.<sup>46</sup> We need not infer either that Socrates contradicts himself or that, in saying earlier that the slave lacks knowledge, he was speaking loosely. Nor do we need to invoke both explicit and latent knowledge to avoid contradiction. For the context makes it clear that ‘now’ (*nun*) is forward-referring, to the time when the slave will acquire the knowledge he has just been said to lack.<sup>47</sup> The slave doesn’t have knowledge in the present; but he will acquire it in the future, if all goes well.<sup>48</sup>

(3) mentions two options. They are usually taken to be:

(3a) the slave acquired his knowledge at some time  
and:

(3b1) the slave has knowledge for all time.<sup>49</sup>

Plato is then thought to eliminate (3a) and to infer that the soul is immortal. If the soul has knowledge for the whole of time, it has it now and so it has it innately.<sup>50</sup>

If Socrates argues for immortality in this way, we should be disappointed. For (3a) and (3b1) are not exhaustive options; hence disproving (3a) would not entitle us to infer that the soul is immortal. Another possibility, in addition to (3a) and (3b1), is that the slave neither acquired his knowledge at some time nor exists for the whole of time, but has knowledge for as long as he exists. And in

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Vlastos, ‘Anamnesis’, n. 14; Dancy, *Plato’s Introduction of Forms*, 226.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, the future tense at 85d4–5. For the suggestion that ‘now’ is future tense, see my ‘Inquiry in the *Meno*’, 223, n. 40; *Plato on Knowledge and Forms*, 5 n. 9; Irwin, *Plato’s Ethics*, 372 n. 14. For criticism of this suggestion, see Scott, *PM*, 109–12. I reply in ‘Enquiry and Discovery’, 358–61. In ‘Plato’s Epistemology’, in G. Fine (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 165–190, C. C. W. Taylor grants that ‘now’ ‘may be’ future referring; but he thinks that the overall argument ‘still requires that the slave has never acquired knowledge but has always possessed it’ (172, n. 8). I ask in what follows whether that is so.

<sup>48</sup> Even if Socrates says that the slave presently has *latent* (i.e. unconscious) knowledge, it would take further argument to show that he also thinks the slave has *innate* knowledge. Perhaps he acquired his latent knowledge at some time after he was born. This is rightly noted by Scott, *PM*, 110–12; contrast *RE*, 16.

<sup>49</sup> I use ‘(3b)’ for the second option, whatever it turns out to be. (3b1), (3b2), and (3b3) are three interpretations of the second option.

<sup>50</sup> See, with variations, Bluck, *Plato’s Meno*, 313; Scott, *PM*, 105–20; and Dancy, *Plato’s Introduction of Forms*, 233.



fact, we need not take ‘always had’ (*aei eichen*) in 85d10 to mean that the soul knows for the whole of time. We can take it to mean that:

(3b2) the slave always has knowledge for as long as he exists.

Of course, (3b2) also posits innate knowledge. The point, for now, is just that we shouldn’t be too quick to assume that (3b1) correctly states the second option Socrates has in mind; for (3b2) is also possible.

There is also a third possible interpretation of (3), which is the one I favor. Socrates has said that, if the slave acquires knowledge in the future, he will do so by recollecting. It follows that he previously had knowledge; for one can recollect knowledge only if one once had that knowledge but has since forgotten it.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps (3) is asking about the slave’s prior knowledge: did he acquire it, or did he have it for the whole of that previous time, until he forgot it? On this interpretation, (3b) should be read as:

(3b3) the slave had knowledge for the whole of his prior existence (until he forgot it).

If the slave had knowledge for the whole of his prior existence (until he forgot it), then either he was created that way or else he was not created but had his prior knowledge for an infinitely long time in the past (until he forgot it).

If we understand (3) as (3b3), it mentions exhaustive options: the slave either acquired his prior knowledge or always had it (until he forgot it). That is an

<sup>51</sup> In the *Meno*, Socrates doesn’t explicitly say that we lost our prior knowledge, but I think he assumes this. In *Phd.* 75c4–76d4, Socrates explicitly says that we lose our prenatal knowledge when we are born. (3), however, isn’t explicitly about our prenatal knowledge; it’s just about our prior knowledge. It emerges only later that the prior knowledge Socrates has in mind is prenatal. For the assumption that one can recollect only what one has forgotten, see e.g. Damascius, *Commentary on the Phaedo*, 253, 262, 267 (Westerink).

<sup>52</sup> With (3b2), (3) also mentions exhaustive options. To say that (3b3) fits well with the rest of the argument is not to say that, with it, the argument is sound or even valid. A third consideration in favor of (3b3), beyond the two mentioned in the text, is the use of the imperfect (*eichen*) in 85d10. If Plato meant that the slave always *has* knowledge for all time, or for as long as he exists, one might have expected him to use the present or perfect. At 81c9, Socrates speaks of recalling what one previously knew (*proteron épistato*). The use of the aorist would be odd if he thinks we still have knowledge. The implication again seems to be that the slave once had knowledge, but no longer has it. One might argue that what he once had was conscious explicit knowledge and that, though he no longer has that, he has unconscious latent knowledge. But Plato doesn’t mention or imply this. In section 9, I shall suggest he doesn’t intend it.

<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, some interpretations are worth mentioning. Weiss thinks that (4) is part of a *reductio* of (3b): Socrates has told us that the slave doesn’t currently know (85c2); hence he isn’t always a knower; hence he doesn’t always have knowledge. See *Virtue in the Cave*, 114. However, Weiss assumes that (3b) is either (3b1) or (3b2) whereas, on my view, it is (3b3). (4), coupled with 85c2, is not a *reductio* of (3b3). Rather, it just says that the slave was always a knower (until he forgot the knowledge he had).

advantage of so reading (3). Another advantage of this reading is that, as we shall see, it fits quite well with the rest of the argument.<sup>52</sup>

Step 4 says that (3b) (however we in the end interpret it) implies that the slave was always a knower. It's not entirely clear how we should interpret this under-discussed premise. But so far as I can tell, nothing in what follows hangs on a precise interpretation, so I shall pass it by.<sup>53</sup>

Steps 5–6 turn to (3a). They say that if the slave acquired his knowledge, he didn't do so in this life. So if he acquired his knowledge, he did so prenatally—though this isn't explicitly said at this point.<sup>54</sup> At first this seems odd: we might have expected Socrates to say that the slave acquires his knowledge for the first time at that future time when, after further questioning, he converts his true beliefs into knowledge. However, as we've seen, (2) says that the slave was recollecting knowledge. If he was recollecting knowledge, he must have had that knowledge at some previous time. So perhaps (5)–(6) ask when the slave acquired his prior knowledge, if he acquired it at all. If that's what (5)–(6) are asking, it would be natural to interpret (3b) as (3b3). Socrates wants to know whether the slave acquired his prior knowledge or had it all along (until he forgot it).

## 5. Steps 7–10

In the just-preceding steps, Socrates asked whether the slave acquired, or always had, his prior *knowledge*. (7) turns abruptly to *belief*. Its phrasing reinforces the point that the slave doesn't currently have knowledge: *but (de)* he has beliefs.

Dancy thinks Socrates accepts not just the conditional in (4) but also its antecedent and so its consequent. But he seems to think the slave is always a knower just in the sense that 'once he has answered these questions, put in different ways, a number of times, he will know' (*Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 232).

Thompson, *The Meno of Plato*, note *ad loc.*, says that 'he was always a knower' 'may be going too far. The knowledge may be there but latent or potential' (141). This suggests that he thinks that if one is always a knower, one always has conscious explicit knowledge; since the slave doesn't always have that sort of knowledge, Thompson infers that Socrates exaggerates. In fact, I argue below that Socrates does seem to be skeptical about latent knowledge. But with (3b3), we need not say that he is exaggerating. For Socrates seems to think that our prenatal knowledge was conscious and explicit. Here I agree with Scott in e.g. 'Innatism', 128–33, though I do not agree with his argument for the claim, which involves his Assumption (A), for which see above, n. 1. Brown agrees with me that the *Meno* doesn't use Assumption (A). However, unlike me, she doesn't think the dialogue takes our prenatal knowledge to have been conscious and explicit: see 'Connaissance et réminiscence dans le *Ménon*', 616–19.

<sup>54</sup> Weiss thinks Socrates overlooks the possibility that if the slave acquired his prior knowledge, he did so prenatally; and she uses that view to argue that (5)–(6) are a *reductio* of (3a). See *Virtue in the Cave*, 114, n. 80. If, as I think, Socrates does not overlook that possibility, then he is not offering a *reductio* of (3a).

Step 8 says that if the slave didn't acquire these beliefs in this life, he had them (*eiche*, imperfect, 86a1) and had learned them (*ememathêkei*, pluperfect, 86a1) at some other time—hence prenatally. We might accept this conditional but reject its antecedent. Why not say that the slave first acquired these beliefs at various times in this life? Perhaps he learned for the first time earlier in this life that squares have four equal sides; and perhaps he first acquired other beliefs during his discussion with Socrates. The fact that he wasn't formally instructed in geometry doesn't imply that he didn't learn for the first time in this life that all squares have four equal sides. Yet Socrates seems to assume that, just as the slave's future knowledge would need to be explained in terms of recollection, so his current beliefs need to be explained in terms of recollection of what he knew in a prior life. Probably the best way to explain this is to note that Socrates says that 'he will achieve the same results in every branch of geometry and in all the other branches of knowledge (*mathêmata*)' (85e1–3): what's true of the beliefs Socrates has elicited from the slave is true of a large variety of propositions. So the slave would have had to have acquired all such beliefs earlier in this life; yet it's not reasonable to think that he did so.<sup>55</sup>

Step 8 can be understood in two ways. It might mean:<sup>56</sup>

(8a) If the slave didn't acquire his beliefs in this life, he acquired them at some other time, viz. prenatally.

Or it might mean:

(8b) If the slave didn't acquire his beliefs in this life, he had them for the whole of some other time, viz. for the whole of his prenatal existence.

That is, just as (4)–(6) don't choose between the always-had-prenatally vs. the acquired-prenatally options for knowledge, so (8) isn't clear about which of these

<sup>55</sup> So Scott, *PM*, 113. Notice that if this is right, then the theory of recollection explains more than how we move from belief to knowledge. It also explains how we acquire some of our beliefs. It doesn't follow that recollection is involved in all concept formation; nor does Socrates commit himself to that view in the *Meno*.

<sup>56</sup> Where I have 'prenatally', Socrates has 'when he was not a human being'.

<sup>57</sup> And it is perhaps suggested by the use of the pluperfect, 'had learned' (*ememathêkei*), and by the mention of 'at some other time' (86a1), which perhaps picks up 'at some time' (*pote*) in (3a).

<sup>58</sup> Here it's worth noting a difference between the way in which (3b) is formulated and the way in which the consequent of (8) is expressed: (3b) has *aei* (always), whereas the consequent of (8) has 'at some other time'. If the consequent of (8) is considering (3b), this change in phrasing reinforces the suggestion that (3b) is (3b3): the 'other time' in (8) is the slave's prenatal existence. If (8) is so read, it might seem to conflict with 81c–e, which is often taken to imply that the soul acquired its prenatal knowledge (and so beliefs, since knowledge implies belief). However, for all the first statement of the theory of recollection says, the soul might have had knowledge for the whole of its prenatal existence: see Ch. 4, sect. 2.

two options it intends in the case of belief. (8a) is a natural reading.<sup>57</sup> But it is far from secure. For one thing, in 86a1 Socrates uses the imperfect (*eiche*), which he also uses in 85d10 to express the *second* option in (3), which *contrasts* with acquiring prior knowledge at some time. So perhaps he means that the slave didn't acquire these beliefs prenatally but, rather, had them for the whole of his prenatal existence. That would favor (8b).<sup>58</sup>

Or perhaps Socrates just wants to stress the fact that the slave had beliefs prenatally, without committing himself as to whether the slave acquired them or had them all along prenatally.<sup>59</sup> In support of this suggestion is the fact that he hasn't given any argument in favor of either option, either for knowledge or for belief.

Step 9 seems to be inferred from both (8) and (10).<sup>60</sup> We've looked at (8); let's now look at (10). If 'the whole of time' in (10) means 'all time', then (10) assumes that the soul always exists. It then begs the question in favor of immortality. An alternative is that it means that, for as long as the slave exists (i.e. whenever he exists), he either is or is not a human being. That this is all (10) means is suggested by the antecedent of (9), which says (among other things) that true beliefs are in him both when he is and when he is not a human being. Given the context, this implies that he, or his soul, exists prenatally; but it doesn't imply that he, or his soul, is immortal.<sup>61</sup>

Let's now turn to (9). It is a complex conditional. Let's look at its antecedent first. One thing it says is that the slave has true beliefs both when he is and when he is not a human being. This is ambiguous. It might mean that, at every time at which he exists, both when he is and when he is not a human being, he has beliefs. This is the usual reading.<sup>62</sup> But an alternative is that all that's meant is that the slave has beliefs both when he is and when he is not a human being—though not necessarily for the whole of the time when he exists. That is, there is a time when

<sup>59</sup> Thanks to Lesley Brown for this suggestion and for helpful discussion of the argument as a whole.

<sup>60</sup> That (10) is part of the support for (9) is suggested by 'for' (*gar*) in 86a9.

<sup>61</sup> Contrast Scott, *PM*, 113ff.; Dancy, *Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 233ff. If, as I've suggested, *aei* in (3) refers just to the soul's prenatal existence, but *ton panta chronon* in (10) refers either to the whole of time or to the whole of the slave's existence, then the two phrases are used differently. See n. 67.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, Sharples, note *ad loc.*

<sup>63</sup> These two options are compatible: it might be true both that the slave acquired his beliefs prenatally and that he doesn't have them for the whole of his human existence. Dancy would reject the second option, since he thinks that 85c4 and 6 imply that the slave has true beliefs 'all along' (*Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 231). However, though 85c4 and 6 say that various beliefs were in him, it's not clear that means that they were in him for as long as he exists. They might have been in him prenatally, then forgotten, then reacquired during the conversation with Socrates. I return to this issue below.

he is human and has these beliefs; and there is a time when he is not human and has these beliefs. That leaves open the possibility that he does not have these beliefs at every moment of his existence. Perhaps he didn't have them for part of his prenatal existence, but acquired them at some point during it. Or perhaps he didn't have them for part of his human existence: perhaps he lost them on being born but at some point reacquired them.<sup>63</sup> On the first reading, the antecedent of (9) commits Socrates to the existence of innate true beliefs, in some sense of 'innate'. On the second reading, there is no such commitment. I return to this point later.

In addition to saying that the slave has true beliefs both when he is and is not a human being, the antecedent of (9) also says that these beliefs can become knowledge.<sup>64</sup> To say that they can become knowledge implies that they are not yet knowledge. So this part of (9) repeats what we've been told several times: the slave has true beliefs, but he doesn't yet have knowledge, though he can acquire it.

The consequent of the conditional in (9) is one of the main passages that have been thought to show that Plato posits innate knowledge. For it is usually taken to say that the slave's soul knows for the whole of time. If the slave's soul knows for the whole of time, it has innate knowledge.

However, it would be odd if Socrates were to say this. For in the antecedent of the conditional, he implies that the slave *doesn't* know, but just has true beliefs. On the usual reading of 86a8–9, Socrates seems to infer from the fact that the slave has true beliefs that can become, but are not, knowledge, that he always knows. That would be an odd argument.

One might attempt to mitigate the oddness by saying that Plato means that, given that the slave lacks conscious explicit knowledge, his ability to transform his true beliefs into conscious explicit knowledge can be explained only on the assumption that he always has implicit or latent knowledge. If this were what Plato meant, it would have been clearer if he had done something to indicate that two different sorts of knowledge are at issue. He could have said that the slave potentially knows, or latently or implicitly knows, or knows in one way but not in another. But he says none of these things.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, in (2) he says that the

<sup>64</sup> The text at 86a6–7 is vexed. I accept Burnet's reading. For discussion, see Bluck, *Plato's Meno*, note *ad loc.*

<sup>65</sup> By contrast, we shall see in the next chapter that Aristotle explicitly discusses different ways in which one can know and not know the same thing; he also explicitly discusses knowing something potentially (which is not to say that he posits innate knowledge).

<sup>66</sup> Even if we say that not only does the slave have prenatal knowledge but, also, he recollects, it still doesn't follow that he has innate knowledge. The most that follows (if we accept the entitative feature) is that there is some trace of the prenatal knowledge; but the trace doesn't need to be knowledge.

slave can work things out for himself—not because he has innate or latent knowledge, but—because he is recollecting. If he is recollecting, he once knew; as Plato goes on to argue, he knew prenatally (though this knowledge has since been forgotten). But, as we’ve seen, having prenatal knowledge doesn’t imply having innate knowledge; and so it doesn’t follow from the fact that the slave has prenatal knowledge that he knows now.<sup>66</sup>

There is an alternative to the view that *ton aei chronon* in (9) refers either to the whole of time or to the whole of the soul’s existence: perhaps it refers just to the whole of the soul’s prenatal existence.<sup>67</sup> On this reading, 86a8–9 says that the soul ‘had learned’—that is, presumably, knew—for the whole of its prenatal existence. Socrates would then be endorsing (3b3) over (3a).<sup>68</sup>

So read, (9) fits well with the argument so far: Socrates is again telling us that the fact that the slave can convert his true beliefs into knowledge means that he knew before, in particular, he knew prenatally. He now tells us that the slave’s ability to convert his true beliefs into knowledge can be explained only on

<sup>67</sup> Plato uses *aei* in both 86a8 and 85d10. In 86a8, but not in 85d10, it occurs as part of the phrase *ton aei chronon*. I’ve suggested that in 85d10 Plato might be speaking just about the slave’s prenatal existence. I’m now suggesting that the phrase *ton aei chronon* at 86a8 does so as well—in contrast to *ton panta chronon* in 86a9, which clearly refers both to the time when the slave is, and to the time when he is not, a human being, and so not just to his prenatal existence. See n. 61.

<sup>68</sup> As we’ve seen, Plato points out in *Eud.* 277e3–278a5 that *manthanein* is ambiguous as between ‘to learn’ and ‘to understand’ or ‘to know’, that is, as between the process of learning and its product (which in the ideal case is knowledge). It probably means ‘to know’ here. For it’s not clear what it would mean to say that, for the whole of time (whether that’s the whole of the soul’s prenatal existence, the whole of its existence, or the whole of time as such), the soul acquired knowledge. For if the soul acquired knowledge, it didn’t always have it. Yet Vlastos, in ‘*Anamnesis*’, 153 n. 14, translates as follows: the soul ‘has been for ever in the condition of *having* [once] *acquired* knowledge’ (emphasis and brackets in the original). It’s not clear how the soul could *forever* be in the condition of having *once* acquired knowledge. If it acquired knowledge, there is a time when it didn’t have it, in which case it didn’t have it forever. My translation is, however, a variant of Vlastos’: ‘will not his soul for all time be in the condition of having learned?’ I take this to mean that, for the whole of his prenatal existence, he had knowledge (hence he didn’t acquire it prenatally). One might object that *memathêkuia* is a perfect participle, and so it indicates a present state, in which case the slave now knows. See, for example, Sharples, note *ad loc.* However, the present state need not be one of currently knowing. Perhaps the slave’s present state is that it is now true of him that he knew for the whole of his prenatal existence. The thought would be that it’s that fact about his current state that enables him to (re)acquire knowledge.

A related possibility (helpfully suggested to me by a referee) would be to say that *memathêkuia* indicates that the soul (for as long as it exists) is in a condition that reflects either knowledge or prior learning. In its prenatal existence, this is reflected in the possession of actual knowledge (whether it was at some point acquired or had all along). In its postnatal state, it is reflected in the slave’s soul being in a condition that enables it to acquire knowledge. So understood, *memathêkuia* doesn’t refer just to the soul’s prenatal knowledge; but neither does it imply that the soul has innate knowledge.

<sup>69</sup> Perhaps he is tacitly relying on an indifference argument: there is no reason why he would have acquired his prenatal knowledge 2,000 rather than 4,000 years ago; so, given that he had it for at least some of his prenatal existence, he had it for the whole of his prenatal existence. Alternatively,

the assumption that the slave had knowledge for the whole of his prenatal existence. In (3), Socrates said that the soul either acquired or always had its prenatal knowledge; he didn't choose between these options. In (9), he endorses the second option (= (3b3)). He seems to think that it is implied by the slave's ability to convert his true beliefs into knowledge. Unfortunately, it's not clear why he thinks this.<sup>69</sup>

If we read (9) as I've suggested, it does not posit innate knowledge. Rather, the consequent of (9) says only that the slave knew for the whole of his prenatal existence.

## 6. Innate true belief?

One might argue that even if Socrates hasn't posited innate knowledge, he has posited innate true belief. Let's now ask about this. We've seen that Socrates denies that the slave has knowledge. However, he says that various beliefs were, and are, in him (85c4, 6).<sup>70</sup> According to Dancy, Socrates means that the beliefs were "in him" all along...; this is unavoidable; it is simply what Socrates says'.<sup>71</sup> Gentzler also thinks that this passage posits innate true beliefs.<sup>72</sup>

What sort of innatism do Dancy and Gentzler think Plato favors for true belief? Gentzler mentions two options, which she doesn't choose between: 'Socrates is claiming that there are literally true beliefs within the slave's soul of which he is not conscious prior to recollection. However, these beliefs might be explicit, in the sense that there is an actual mental representation of a particular state of affairs within one's soul... Alternatively, these true beliefs may be merely implicit, in the sense that they are mere propensities to give mental assent to true propositions.'<sup>73</sup> So Gentzler thinks that the slave has innate true beliefs either in the sense that there are true mental representations in him from birth or else in

perhaps we should endorse the suggestion mentioned in the last paragraph of the previous note. Either way, (9) doesn't posit innate knowledge.

<sup>70</sup> At 85c4 he uses the imperfect; at 85c6 he uses the present tense.

<sup>71</sup> *Introduction of Forms*, 231. Dancy thinks that Socrates also posits innate knowledge.

<sup>72</sup> 'Recollection', 293. She doesn't say (or deny) that he posits innate knowledge.

<sup>73</sup> 'Recollection', 281, n. 49. Cf. 293.

<sup>74</sup> See 'Recollection', 291–3 for further discussion of the sort of innatism Socrates allegedly accepts. So far as I can see, this further discussion doesn't choose between the two interpretations I mention in the text. It's worth noting that Gentzler formulates dispositional innatism differently from me. As I formulated it, it says that the disposition to form beliefs (or to form specific beliefs) is innate, though the beliefs themselves are not innate. Gentzler, by contrast, identifies the beliefs with innate propensities, in which case the beliefs are literally innate. Similarly, we shall see that (some of) the Stoics are sometimes taken to think that certain beliefs are innate because they are identical to innate propensities.

the sense that he has innate propensities. I'm not sure whether the first option is just content innatism about true belief (we have true mental representations in us from birth, whether or not we are in the cognitive condition of belief with respect to them) or cognitive-condition innatism about true belief (we are in the cognitive condition of true belief, though these beliefs are unconscious). Her second option is dispositional innatism about true belief.<sup>74</sup>

Though Gentzler is undecided as between these two options, Dancy seems to think that Socrates takes true beliefs to be innate just dispositionally. For he says that the beliefs were "in him" all along ... [but] it cannot be that they were in him as things that he believed. They come from him only in the sense that, once he considers the questions they answer, he has no need of anyone else's help: he can see, by himself, the truth of the matter.<sup>75</sup>

Should we agree with Dancy and Gentzler that Socrates posits innate true beliefs?

Dancy, we've seen, thinks that 85c4 and 6 say that the beliefs were in the slave all along (i.e. either for all time or for the whole of the slave's existence).<sup>76</sup> However, these two passages are compatible with the view that the beliefs were in the slave prenatally and are in him now—because he has reacquired them while conversing with Socrates. The passages need not be taken to say that the beliefs are in him all along and so are innate.

The antecedent of (9) might be taken to say that the slave has beliefs in him for the whole of his existence. On this reading, it implies that the slave has innate true beliefs. But I suggested that all that's meant is that the slave has true beliefs both when he is, and when he is not, a human being, in the sense that at some time during his current existence, and at some time during his prenatal existence, he has true beliefs. If we read the antecedent of (9) in this way, it does not imply that the slave has innate true beliefs.

<sup>75</sup> Plato's *Introduction of Forms*, 231.

<sup>76</sup> According to Ebert, conceding that these beliefs are in the slave is Meno's 'first and fatal mistake' ('The Theory of Recollection in Plato's *Meno*', 193). He takes the point to be 'that the specific proposition about the square's diagonal was somehow in' the slave, when all that's true is that he 'brings along some capabilities' (*ibid.*). That is, he thinks Meno wrongly accepts the view that there are specific contents in the slave, when he should accept just the view that the slave has certain capacities.

<sup>77</sup> Dancy, *Plato's Introduction of Forms*, 231, agrees. So, though he thinks that that 85c4 and 6 posit innate true beliefs, he doesn't think that 85c9–d1 does so.

<sup>78</sup> Scott, *PM*, 118, suggests that 'it would be very strange if [Socrates] were to claim that the soul possesses true beliefs (rather than knowledge) on all subjects for all eternity: for at 97e2–98a8 he will insist that true belief is by its nature unstable'. Scott's thought seems to be that if the soul always has true beliefs, they are thereby stable, and hence constitute knowledge rather than mere true belief.



Socrates also says that the slave has beliefs that were ‘stirred up’ in him as if in a dream. This needn’t imply that the beliefs were there all along. It might mean that the slave has only just (re)acquired the beliefs.<sup>77</sup>

The passages just discussed are the ones that are thought to show that Socrates posits innate true beliefs. I’ve suggested a different reading of them on which they do not do so.<sup>78</sup> Nor, I’ve suggested, has Socrates said anything so far that commits him to positing innate knowledge.

## 7. Step 11

In (11) Socrates says that if the truth<sup>79</sup> about beings (*ta onta*) is always in our soul, the soul is immortal; and he plainly thinks he has established that the truth is always in the soul. Hence he now infers that the soul is immortal. Up to now, Socrates has focused on the slave in particular; he now generalizes to all humans.

Before asking precisely how to interpret (11), we should note that the argument for immortality begins by speaking about *knowledge*; it then turns to *true beliefs*; now it mentions just *truth*. Knowledge implies true belief and truth; and true belief implies truth. But true belief doesn’t imply knowledge. Nor does truth imply either knowledge or true belief: there are truths that are neither known nor believed. I return to the possible significance of this below.

But first let’s ask what Socrates means in saying that the truth is always in the soul. There are at least three possibilities:

- (11a) the truth is in the soul for the whole of time;
- (11b) the truth is in the soul for as long as the soul exists;
- (11c) the truth is in the soul for the whole of its prenatal existence.

Each option has something to be said in its favor—though, equally, each is also problematic.

With (11a), the inference to immortality is valid. Further, we’ve seen that on the usual interpretation of the argument, (3) says that either the soul acquired its knowledge or had it for all time; Socrates is then thought to eliminate the first option in favor of the second. If one reads the argument that way, one might well favor (11a). That pushes the problem back a step; for as we’ve seen, if we read (3)

Hence, Socrates couldn’t hold that we always have mere true beliefs; if we always have true beliefs, they are true beliefs that constitute knowledge. However, the sort of stability that Socrates thinks is necessary for knowledge isn’t (just) longevity; hence even if we have true beliefs in us forever, that wouldn’t by itself imply that they are knowledge. See my ‘Knowledge and True Belief in the *Meno*’.

<sup>79</sup> Earlier Socrates spoke about true beliefs (in the plural). Here he uses the singular, ‘truth’, and he doesn’t repeat ‘belief’.

in that way it doesn't state exhaustive options; and so inferring (3b) from the falsity of (3a) would not be warranted. Be that as it may, I've argued that Socrates hasn't argued that the soul has knowledge for the whole of time. He has argued only that the soul had knowledge for the whole of its prenatal existence. If that's all he's argued, we should be reluctant to read (11) as (11a).

With (11b), the inference to immortality is invalid: it doesn't follow from the fact that the truth is in the soul for as long as it exists, that the soul exists for all time. Perhaps the soul exists for just thirty years, and so the truth is in it for just thirty years. But perhaps this invalidity shouldn't stop us from reading (11) in way (b).<sup>80</sup> For Plato makes the same fallacious inference in the final argument for immortality in the *Phaedo*.<sup>81</sup> As against this reading, however, there is the fact that, just as Socrates hasn't defended (a), so he hasn't defended (b).

With (11c), the inference to immortality also fails. Indeed it so obviously fails that one might doubt that Plato could intend (c): how could anyone infer from 'for all of the soul's prenatal existence' to 'for all time'? Yet in the *Phaedo*, Plato says that appealing to recollection doesn't prove the immortality of the soul, but only its pre-existence (76e–77c). He is presumably correcting what he says in the *Meno*, which suggests that (c) may be the right reading after all, since it involves an error that the *Phaedo* detects.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, if (11) is read in way (c), it fits very well into the preceding argument as I have been reading it.

I favor (11c). However, it doesn't posit any sort of innatism. It just says that the truth was in the soul for the whole of its prenatal existence.

Though I don't favor (11a) or (11b), it's worth asking whether they commit Plato to some sort of innatism. They don't commit him to any form of cognitive-condition innatism; for they say only that *truth* is in the soul. Nor, I think, do they commit him to content innatism. For (11) doesn't say *how* the truth is in the soul:

<sup>80</sup> Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, note *ad loc.*, favors (11b).

<sup>81</sup> See *Phd.* 105e2–107a1. The fallacy is neatly diagnosed in *Eud.* 296a–297a. As Socrates says, 'I'm afraid that this word "always" may trip us up'. For a more sympathetic account of the *Phaedo* argument see N. Denyer, 'The *Phaedo*'s Final Argument', in D. Scott (ed.), *Maieusis: Essays in Ancient Philosophy in Honour of Myles Burnyeat* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 86–96.

<sup>82</sup> At 73a2–3 Cebes says that recollection would seem to prove immortality (or perhaps that it makes immortality likely: *eikos*). Perhaps he intends to express some hesitation about whether it does so. Whatever he initially thinks, Socrates goes on to argue that recollection doesn't prove immortality. By contrast, in his *Didaskalikos I* (= *Handbook*), Alcinoüs says that 'If, again, acts of learning are instances of recollecting, then the soul is immortal' (177.45–178.1; Dillon trans., but substituting 'recollecting' for 'remembering'). This seems to make the same fallacious inference I take (11) to make. The fact that Alcinoüs does so supports the suggestion that so too does Plato. I discuss Alcinoüs briefly in Ch. 9, sect. 2.

as a mental content or just as a disposition. I would be reluctant to say that (11a) and (11b) imply strong dispositional innatism. For Plato doesn't think that we will inevitably come to know or believe all the truths we knew prenatally. He thinks that we *can* do so; but he also thinks that most of us will never in fact do so. Perhaps, however, (11a) and (11b) commit Plato to some form of weak dispositional innatism. Be that as it may, on the reading of (11) that I prefer—(11c)—it doesn't commit him to any form of innatism.

## 8. Summary of the argument

Let's now summarize some of the key points. The argument for immortality is unclear in at least three ways.<sup>83</sup> First, it's not clear whether Plato means to say that the slave *acquired*, or *always has* or *had* knowledge, true belief, or the truth. Secondly, it's not clear whether 'always' means 'always for all time', or 'always for as long as the soul exists', or 'always for the whole of the soul's prenatal existence'. Thirdly, it's not clear whether Plato wants to say that the slave, or his soul, *acquired*, or *always has* (or *always had*) (for all time, or for as long as he or it exists, or prenatally), *knowledge*, *true belief*, or the *truth*.

On the view I've suggested, Plato argues as follows: the slave's ability to work things out for himself implies, or is best explained by saying, that he is recollecting, in which case he once knew. For one can recollect only what one once knew. Since the slave doesn't know now, and didn't know earlier in this life, either, he, or his soul, must have known prenatally; indeed, he, or his soul, knew for the whole of his, or its, prenatal existence; and so he, or his soul, is immortal.

The argument, so read, can be challenged in various places. One key place to jib is premise (2), the controversial claim that working things out for oneself implies, or is best explained by, recollection, in particular, by positing prenatal knowledge. As we shall see, Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Epicureans all reject (2): they think we can fully explain how we can inquire and discover, without positing prenatal knowledge. We should also resist the inference in (9), to the conclusion that the slave, or his soul, knew for the whole of his, or its, prenatal existence. And of course, even if he, or it, did so, it doesn't follow that he or his soul is immortal.

For our purposes, however, the main point is that, though the argument posits prenatal knowledge, it doesn't posit any form of innatism. I mentioned earlier that recollection requires a persisting entity; otherwise, recollection can't be distinguished from learning for a second time. On the interpretation I've suggested, the argument doesn't posit one. That's not to say that Plato rejects the

<sup>83</sup> Cf. White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality*, ch. 2, sect. 5.

entitative feature. It's just that he doesn't discuss it. What he says is compatible with his accepting the entitative requirement (though not with every way of satisfying it); but he doesn't explicitly commit himself to doing so.

In a way, that's not surprising. His main concern is to show that we can inquire, and can make progress in inquiry. To show this, he focuses on Meno's slave, whose condition is supposed to be relevantly analogous to Meno's condition, and to ours, with respect to virtue. He doesn't ask what the slave is like at birth. He takes the slave as he is, and explains how, given his beliefs and his reasoning ability, he can inquire in a fruitful way. He argues that he can do so only if he recollects; hence he recollects. But Plato doesn't spell out the details of *how* recollection plays this explanatory role. In particular, he doesn't commit himself to the view that doing so requires satisfying the entitative feature. All we can say is that *either* Plato rejects the entitative feature and so can't explain why we are recollecting rather than learning for a second time *or* he accepts it but leaves a serious lacuna in his argument by not explaining what it is.<sup>84</sup>

It's worth noting that in (12) Plato tells us that he remains committed to the view that one can inquire into things one doesn't know, whereas in (13) he distances himself from all the other points he's just made.<sup>85</sup> He's clear that the conclusion of Meno's Paradox is false, and that the culprit is S3: contrary to it, we can and do inquire into things we don't know. But, though he offers what he takes to be the best explanation of that ability, he's less clear about its success than he is about the ability itself. Perhaps he fails to say how recollection works because he's even less sure about that.

<sup>84</sup> Perhaps Plato aims to fill this lacuna in the *Phaedo*, where, in contrast to the *Meno*, he lays out specific conditions for recollecting. It's then interesting to note that one of the central objections to his argument there is that what he trumpets as a sufficient condition for recollection isn't sufficient: one could satisfy the antecedent of the relevant conditional, yet be learning for the first time rather than recollecting. For discussion of the *Phaedo*'s conditions on recollection, see e.g. J. L. Ackrill, 'Anamnesis in the *Phaedo*: Remarks on 73c–75c' in E. N. Lee *et al.* (eds.), *Exegetis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos, Phronesis*, suppl. vol. 1 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1973), 175–95; D. Gallop, *Plato: Phaedo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), notes *ad loc.*

<sup>85</sup> He seems to distance himself from everything he's just said, except for the claim that one can inquire into things one doesn't know. For he contrasts that claim with 'the other things' (*ta alla*, 86b6); perhaps the force of the definite article is to indicate that he distances himself from *all* the other points he's made. In distancing himself from them, however, I take him to mean just that he's more tentative about them; it's not that he doesn't take them seriously. See Ch. 4, n. 8.

<sup>86</sup> Chomsky himself compares his views with Plato's. He describes what he calls 'Plato's problem' as follows: 'How was the slave boy able to find truths of geometry without instruction or information?' (*Language and Problems of Knowledge: The Managua Lectures* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press,

## 9. Why posit prenatal but not innate knowledge?

Why might Plato posit prenatal but not innate knowledge? I shall now suggest an explanation on which the answer is that he doesn't think we have innate knowledge—at least, not in the cognitive-condition or content sense. That would explain why he doesn't mention either of them. Heretofore, I've argued only that he isn't committed to them; I haven't argued that what he says is incompatible with them. Now I'll suggest that he may reject them.

Here a comparison with Chomsky will prove helpful.<sup>86</sup> Chomsky argues that our remarkable ability to acquire language, and to understand sentences we haven't previously heard, can't be a brute fact and can't be wholly explained by ordinary processes of learning, such as induction and experience. Rather, he thinks, it can only be explained, or is best explained, by innate knowledge of the rules of grammar.

Like Chomsky, Plato thinks that certain abilities we have can't be brute facts and can't be wholly explained by 'ordinary' learning. Also like Chomsky, he thinks they must be explained, or are best explained, in terms of knowledge. But

1988), 4. He thinks an analogous question arises for understanding how we acquire linguistic competence. He takes Plato's solution to be that '[t]he knowledge was remembered from an earlier existence and was reawakened in the slave boy's mind through the questions Socrates posed to him' (4). He goes on to say that '[a] modern variant would be that certain aspects of our knowledge and understanding are innate, part of our biological endowment, genetically determined, on a par with the elements of our common nature that cause us to grow arms and legs rather than wings' (4).

<sup>87</sup> A further, and important, difference between Chomsky and Plato is that Plato thinks we had prenatal P-knowledge, whereas the sort of innate knowledge Chomsky posits is not P-knowledge. Indeed, he sometimes says that it would be better to say that we have innate *cognition* than to say that we have innate *knowledge*. Thanks here to Matti Eklund. For the view that we have innate knowledge, see e.g. N. Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1965), 27, where he says that children have tacit knowledge of linguistic universals. For his suggestion that it would be better to speak of innate cognition, see *Rules and Representations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 92. Even in *Aspects*, he sometimes seems to hold a weaker view than that we literally have innate knowledge; on 25, for example, he speaks of a child's innate predisposition. He also uses 'knowledge' in *Language and Problems of Knowledge*.

<sup>88</sup> For discussion of one version of an accessibility condition on knowledge, see T. Nagel, 'Linguistics and Epistemology' in G. Harman (ed.), *On Noam Chomsky: Critical Essays* (Garden City, N.J.: Anchor Books, 1974), 219–28; originally published in S. Hook (ed.), *Language and Philosophy* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 171–82. Nagel appeals to it in order to argue against Chomsky's view that we have innate knowledge of the rules of grammar. M. Wilson, *Descartes* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 163, argues that Descartes sometimes seems to suggest that one doesn't really know something unless one explicitly knows it. In 'What Every Speaker Knows', Stich argues that we don't have innate knowledge of the rules of grammar. Indeed, he argues, more strongly and in a way that I think Plato would find congenial, that even most competent speakers lack knowledge of the rules of grammar: not only is such knowledge not innate, but most people don't ever have it.

unlike Chomsky, Plato thinks we lack innate knowledge, at least in the cognitive-condition sense. Hence he is forced to posit prenatal knowledge.<sup>87</sup>

Perhaps Plato reasons as follows. It's clear that we don't have conscious explicit innate knowledge. For, according to the *Meno*, one knows something only if one can explain why it is so. In the cases that primarily interest Plato, such as that of virtue, this involves being able to answer a relevant 'What is F?' question. Since we can't do this from birth, we don't have conscious explicit innate knowledge. So if we have innate knowledge, it would have to be latent. But Plato seems to accept an accessibility condition on knowledge: if A knows that p, A can relatively easily explain why p is true.<sup>88</sup> To be sure, he presumably doesn't think that one must be able to explain straightaway why what one knows is true. At the very least, he presumably thinks that one can know something even if one isn't currently attending to it. But he seems to think that if one can't explain, relatively easily, why something is so, one doesn't know it at all. That's why he says, in 85b–d, that the slave doesn't yet know: the slave lacks knowledge because he can't easily explain why his correct answer is correct.<sup>89</sup> He means just what he says: the slave

If, as I think, Plato accepts an accessibility condition on knowledge, then he presumably thinks that content innatism about knowledge implies cognitive-condition innatism about knowledge. However, since it's not clear that he accepts an accessibility condition on belief, he could, so far as that sort of consideration goes, accept content innatism about belief without being committed to cognitive-condition innatism about belief. However, as I've understood Plato's argument, it isn't committed to that view.

<sup>89</sup> Brown, 'Connaissance et Réminiscence dans le *Ménon*', 618, agrees that the slave doesn't satisfy Plato's criteria for knowledge; but she nonetheless thinks that Plato takes the slave to have innate knowledge. In *Know How* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Jason Stanley asks: 'What theory of knowledge imposes the...condition that one has an accurate and informative verbal description of the proposition that p, in order to know that p? What puzzles in epistemology would this...condition on knowledge solve?' (163). In answer to his first question, I'd say that Plato imposes such a condition. In answer to his second question, I'd say that Plato does so partly to make it clear why he finds fault with the idea of latent *knowledge*, and partly to draw a sharp distinction between knowledge and mere true belief. As we've seen, Chomsky is also sometimes reluctant to speak of innate knowledge, as opposed to cognition; Plato's condition on knowledge helps us to see why the notion of innate knowledge is problematic. It also helps to make it clear why he says he lacks knowledge.

<sup>90</sup> If this is right, it supports my earlier claim that *parapan* is used just for emphasis, not to indicate a difference between not knowing, on the one hand, and not knowing at all, on the other. If one thought Plato posited innate knowledge, one might also take him to think that we know in one way, but not in another, or know to some extent, insofar as we know latently. But, on my view, he doesn't think this. He thinks we once knew, and can come to know again; but he doesn't think we (generally) know now. We don't both know and not know; nor do we know to some extent.

<sup>91</sup> Contrast Scott, who says that 'the existence of latent knowledge in the soul... points to a prior state of awareness' (*PM*, 116). He doesn't say why that is so, but perhaps he is thinking of what, in 'Innatism', he calls Principle (A), for which see n. 1.

doesn't know, period. Hence he doesn't have latent innate knowledge any more than he has conscious explicit innate knowledge.<sup>90</sup> So, since inquiry and discovery require prior knowledge, that knowledge must be prenatal. So far from inferring from latent innate knowledge to prenatal knowledge, Plato posits prenatal knowledge, in part, precisely because he *rejects* the existence of innate knowledge, at least in the cognitive-condition and content senses.<sup>91</sup> Hence, if he thinks recollection requires a persisting entity, he presumably favors some form of dispositional innatism, or something even weaker than that.

Chomsky and Plato are not alone in thinking that our ability to inquire, or learn, either in general or in certain domains, must be rooted in (for Chomsky) innate or (for Plato) prenatal knowledge. As we shall see in Chapter 9, Plutarch shares this sort of view; it explains why he thinks the theory of recollection is the only satisfactory reply to Meno's Paradox.<sup>92</sup>

## 10. The problem of discovery and the theory of recollection

In Chapter 2, section 10, we looked at what Scott calls the problem of discovery. According to it, at least in the case of definitional discovery, Socrates is committed to a matching version of a foreknowledge principle: we can discover what virtue is only if we already know what it is. But if we already know what it is, we can't discover what it is; for we can discover only what we don't already know. A necessary condition for definitional discovery—satisfying the matching version of foreknowledge, where the knowledge is conscious, explicit, and current—makes definitional discovery impossible. Scott thinks that what Socrates says in 79a–e makes him vulnerable to this problem. I argued that he is not vulnerable to it in 79a–e. For, I argued, he isn't there committed to any version of foreknowledge. I also argued that if, contrary to my view, the passage does commit him to a foreknowledge principle, it commits him only to a stepping-stone version. The most the passage implies is that, in order to be able to discover what F is, one must know the things through which F is defined—say, G and H. If one can know what G and H are without knowing what F is, the problem of definitional discovery doesn't arise. And, I suggested, Socrates indicates that he doesn't think that, to know the things through which virtue is defined, one must know what virtue is. Similarly, one can know what porridge is only if one knows what

<sup>92</sup> Various other Platonists also think that recollection is needed to explain our cognitive development, though, in contrast to Plutarch, their defense of this view isn't tied specifically to Meno's Paradox. See Ch. 9.

oats and water are; but one doesn't need to know what porridge is to know what oats and water are.

However, I noted that even if 79a–e doesn't make Socrates vulnerable to the problem of discovery, Scott has another reason for thinking that Socrates is concerned with it: he thinks the theory of recollection is designed to solve it. The solution is as follows: Socrates retains a foreknowledge principle; and, at least in the case of definitional discovery, he accepts a matching version of it. However, whereas he initially thinks the relevant foreknowledge has to be conscious and explicit, he now concedes that, at the conscious level, all we have are beliefs. Foreknowledge is still required, and we have the relevant foreknowledge. But, according to the theory of recollection, our current (as opposed to prenatal) foreknowledge is latent, not explicit. We can now solve the problem of discovery: we have the foreknowledge that is needed for discovery; but since it is latent, discovery is possible after all. It consists in making explicit what is now merely latent, though it was once explicit.<sup>93</sup>

One might be tempted to follow Scott if one could find no other role for the theory of recollection to play. And indeed, one of his reasons for his view is that he thinks the theory of recollection is neither necessary nor sufficient for disarming Socrates' dilemma;<sup>94</sup> hence he wants to find 'an epistemological problem commensurate with recollection'.<sup>95</sup> However, on the interpretation I've suggested, the theory of recollection plays a crucial role both in disarming the dilemma and in answering M1–M3. To be sure, Socrates also relies on his distinction between knowledge and true belief to do this. But, as we've seen, he doesn't think that the fact that we have and tend to rely on relevant true beliefs can be a brute fact; it requires further explanation. Nor does he think that all of our cognitive progress can be wholly explained in terms of our experiences in this life. The theory of recollection is brought in as the deep explanation of what

<sup>93</sup> *PM*, 87.

<sup>94</sup> Interestingly, whereas Scott thinks that the theory of recollection plays no role in disarming the dilemma (or in disarming Meno's questions as Meno understands them), Grgic, in 'Plato's *Meno* and the Possibility of Inquiry', 21 (though see 23: 'primarily') and 31–9, argues that the theory of recollection disarms the dilemma but doesn't answer Meno's questions; he thinks the hypothetical method, mentioned later in the dialogue, does that. He takes Meno's questions and Socrates' dilemma to be substantially different such that they 'cannot be resolved by the same argument' (21). I've already argued for a closer connection between Meno's questions and Socrates' dilemma; and, on my view, the theory of recollection responds to both of them.

<sup>95</sup> *PM*, 83.

<sup>96</sup> Scott says '[u]ltimately, Socrates concludes that any act of learning must be explained by the existence of conscious knowledge in a previous life' (*PM*, 85). I agree. But it doesn't follow that we also need to invoke innate knowledge; and I've explained why Plato doesn't do so. In this life, we (generally) have no knowledge—as Socrates conceives of knowledge.



makes this possible. It says that it is best explained, or can only be explained, by the fact that (successful) inquiry involves recollecting prenatal knowledge. Though we no longer have knowledge, the fact that we are recalling our prenatal knowledge explains how we are able to reason in the ways we do.<sup>96</sup>

Scott, however, thinks that the theory of recollection is brought in, not to disarm the dilemma or to answer Meno's questions (in the sense in which Meno intends them), but to answer a version of M3 that Meno didn't have in mind. As we've seen, when Meno raises M3, he is asking how, if one finds what one was looking for (or what one was claiming to look for), one would know, or realize, that one had done so if, at the outset, one was in a cognitive blank about the thing one is inquiring into. So understood, M3 can be answered by saying that if one is in a cognitive blank, one couldn't know, or realize, that one had found the thing one was looking for but didn't initially know. However, if one lacks knowledge, but has and relies on relevant true beliefs, one can do so.

Although Scott agrees that this is a satisfactory answer to M3 as Meno understands it, he thinks it isn't a satisfactory answer to a different reading of M3; and it's this alternative understanding of it that Scott thinks the theory of recollection is designed to respond to. This new reading of M3 allows that, if we begin with mere true beliefs, we might find the right answer. But it asks: 'unless you already know that the specification [of your target] is correct, how can you know that this proposed answer is the right one, even if it happens to be?'<sup>97</sup> Distinguishing knowledge from true belief doesn't answer this question. If Socrates and Meno have just relevant true beliefs at the outset, 'all they can claim is that this answer matches their *beliefs* about virtue. But why should this amount to *knowing* that the definition is true of virtue?'<sup>98</sup> If we start with mere true beliefs, we 'will always be trapped within a circle of belief'.<sup>99</sup> We can escape this circle only if we already have knowledge: 'discovery or learning is a process of realising that one thing matches something that one already knows'.<sup>100</sup> Notice the present tense: the knowledge must be current, not merely prenatal.

<sup>97</sup> PM, 84.

<sup>98</sup> PM, 84.

<sup>99</sup> PM, 84.

<sup>100</sup> PM, 84. Notice that Scott seems to suggest that all discovery, not just definitional discovery, requires a matching version of foreknowledge. Just as Scott argues that Socrates thinks we could never emerge from a circle of beliefs to knowledge and so we must have knowledge at the outset, so Frede argues that the Stoics hold this, or a related view: see 'Stoic Epistemology', in K. Algra *et al.* (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 295–322, at 296–8. (I refer to this volume hereinafter as *CHHP*.) However, whereas Scott thinks Socrates posits innate P-knowledge, Frede thinks the Stoics posit just *katalêpsis*, which is weaker than P-knowledge (and than *epistêmê* as the Stoics conceive of it). If one is impressed by the circle-of-beliefs objections—though I don't think one should be—it's not clear why one would think *katalêpsis* is any better than mere true belief in enabling us to acquire *epistêmê*.

We should be disappointed if the role of the theory of recollection is to answer a question that Meno doesn't ask and that isn't captured in Socrates' dilemma either. Further, we've seen that the theory of recollection is trumpeted as explaining not only discovery (in some sense of the term) but also the possibility of (successful) inquiry (81de, 86bc), where that includes finding, and realizing one's found, the answer to the question under consideration. On my interpretation, the theory of recollection has a broader, and more relevant, role to play than it does on Scott's reading: it explains how we are able to inquire and discover as we do. It does so by appealing to prenatal, but not to innate, knowledge. If we restrict our attention to us as we are in this life, Socrates would be unmoved by the circle-of-beliefs objection; that is, he doesn't think we need to have knowledge, in this life, in order to escape the circle of beliefs. Rather, he thinks that, even though we lack knowledge in this life, we can successfully inquire, and realize when we've found what we were looking for but didn't antecedently know, because we have and tend to rely on relevant true beliefs. We can move from beliefs to knowledge by practicing the elenchus well, over a sufficiently long period of time. That's why he says that the slave will acquire knowledge if he continues to inquire in the same way he's been doing; doing so will enable him to move from his mere true beliefs to knowledge. It's true that he supplements this argument by insisting that the remarkable fact that we can move from belief to knowledge in this way can only be explained, or is best explained, by positing prenatal knowledge. To that extent, he thinks we can emerge from the circle of beliefs only if we once had knowledge. But he doesn't think we need to have knowledge in this life, in order to escape the circle of beliefs.

Here it's important to remember that inquiring, and zetetic learning, are processes. The slave's initial beliefs, and his ability to reason as he does, are sufficient to enable him to engage in them. Once launched on the journey, he is able, by rational reflection, to acquire further beliefs, which enable him to improve his cognitive condition. His initial true beliefs, and his ability to reason as he does, enable him to begin the process, and to make progress along the way. They do so partly by enabling him to discard his false beliefs and to acquire new true beliefs; these new true beliefs, coupled with his ability to reason as he does, will eventually, if all goes well, enable him to find what he was looking for and to

<sup>101</sup> For a recent explanation of how we can move from rudimentary initial beliefs to a full grasp of a concept, and to the realization that we've acquired it, see E. Margolis and S. Laurence, 'Learning Matters: The Role of Learning in Concept Acquisition', *Mind and Language* 26 (2011), 507–39. For an earlier argument along similar lines, see R. M. Hare, 'Philosophical Discoveries', *Mind* 69 (1960), 145–62.

<sup>102</sup> For this argument, see Brown, 'Connaissance et Réminiscence dans le *Ménon*'.

realize when he's done so.<sup>101</sup> It's just that Plato thinks that we can do all this only because we had prenatal knowledge.

## 11. Evidence outside the *Meno*: two passages

I've argued that the *Meno* doesn't posit innate knowledge. But it has been argued that two passages from outside the *Meno*—one from the *Phaedo* and one from the *Theaetetus*—allude to, or recall, the *Meno* in a way that suggests that it does after all posit innate knowledge.<sup>102</sup> Perhaps looking at these passages will cause us to reconsider our views about the *Meno*.

The first passage is *Phaedo* 73a, which clearly refers back to the *Meno*. Cebes says that:

when people are questioned, provided someone questions them well, they give the right answer about everything. And yet they wouldn't be able to do this unless knowledge (*epistēmē*) and a correct account were in them (*enousa*). (73a7–10)

Surely this shows that Plato thinks the slave currently has knowledge and indeed has innate knowledge?<sup>103</sup>

However, Cebes doesn't say *when* the knowledge was in us. Perhaps he means only that it was in us prenatally.<sup>104</sup> That this is all he means is suggested both by what precedes and by what follows the remark. Just before it, Cebes mentions Socrates' view that learning is recollection, and he says:

Besides, Socrates, also according to that theory (*logos*) that you yourself habitually propound, that learning, for us, is in fact nothing but recollection, according to it too, if it's true, we must presumably have learned in some previous time what we recollect now. And that would be impossible if our soul did not exist somewhere before it was born in this human form. So in this way, too, the soul seems to be something immortal. (72e3–73a3; Sedley and Long trans., rev.)

That is, if learning is recollection, we must have prenatal knowledge. The passage doesn't posit any sort of innate, but only prenatal, knowledge. Simmias then asks for a proof of the view that learning is recollection, and Cebes replies with the disputed passage from 73a. If it is to explain what was just said, it should mean that we couldn't give the right answers unless we had prenatal knowledge.

<sup>103</sup> See Brown, 'Connaissance', 615; Scott, *RE*, 16 n. 2.

<sup>104</sup> See my *Plato on Knowledge and Forms*, 5 n. 9; and Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, 372 n. 14. *Enousa* is the present participle of *einai*. *Einai* lacks both an aorist and a perfect participle. This makes it difficult to know what time *enousa* is being used to indicate. We can decide when the relevant knowledge is in us only by considering the surrounding text.

Just as the passage preceding 73a doesn't posit any sort of innate knowledge, so the argument that follows it doesn't do so. Socrates tells Simmias that if the consideration just adduced—that giving the right answers is possible only if we had prenatal knowledge—doesn't convince him of the truth of the view that learning is recollection, he has another argument to offer in its favor. He proceeds to give a complicated argument, many of whose details will not concern us here. But, beginning at 73b, Socrates lays down various conditions on recollection, one of which is that, if one recollects something, one must have known it before. Socrates proceeds to argue that an experience we have—thinking that sensible equals are inferior to equality itself—shows that we had knowledge of equality before birth (74a–75c). Hence a necessary condition for recollection is satisfied. Then, at 75d7–11, Socrates says:

If, after getting [knowledge], we have not forgotten it each time, we must always be born knowing and must always know throughout our life. For this is knowing: having got knowledge of something, to have it and not have lost it. Or isn't it loss of knowledge that we call forgetting? (Sedley and Long trans., rev.)

He then says that we did forget it. For someone who knows can give an account; but that's precisely what we can't do. Here Plato appeals to his accessibility condition on knowledge. Since it isn't satisfied at birth, we lack knowledge at birth. Hence we don't have innate knowledge. One might say he means only that we don't have conscious innate knowledge, which is compatible with our having latent innate knowledge. Or one might say that he means that, though we aren't in the cognitive condition of knowing, we have innate knowledge in the content sense. But he doesn't say that we have any sort of knowledge. He just says that we don't know. We should take him at his word. He proceeds to emphasize again that we don't have knowledge at birth (see e.g. 75cd), and he repeats that we had prenatal knowledge. These passages would be misleading if he meant to posit some sort of innate knowledge; but they are quite straightforward if he posits prenatal, but not any sort of innate, knowledge.<sup>105</sup>

The only reason to think that the *Phaedo* posits innate knowledge is 73a. But as I read the passage, it posits just prenatal knowledge; and that reading fits better with what precedes and follows the remark than it would do if it posited innate knowledge.

<sup>105</sup> This is compatible with dispositional innatism. For, on it, we don't have innate knowledge; rather, we are innately disposed to acquire knowledge we don't have. Though what Plato says is compatible with dispositional innatism, he doesn't mention it or say anything that commits him to it.

<sup>106</sup> See Brown, 'Connaissance', 615.

The second passage is from the *Theaetetus*, where Plato famously compares the mind to an aviary. And he uses *analambanein* (198d6), a word he also uses in steps 1 and 2 of the argument for recollection and the immortality of the soul (discussed in section 3 above). Yet in the *Theaetetus* he uses it to mean recovering knowledge one *has*, not just knowledge one once had. Given the parallel between this passage and the *Meno*, shouldn't we suppose that, contrary to what I have argued, that is how Plato uses *analambanein* in the *Meno* too?<sup>106</sup>

Before answering that question, we should note that Plato compares the mind to an aviary that is empty at birth, though it is eventually stocked with various birds. These represent items of knowledge. It's usually said that the aviary therefore differs from the *Meno* since, in the *Meno*, the mind is not empty at birth but is stocked with innate knowledge. On my view, however, the *Meno* doesn't say that we have innate knowledge. If this is right, then in this respect the aviary is closer to the *Meno* than it is sometimes thought to be.

Plato goes on to distinguish two senses of 'having', or two ways of having, a bird in one's aviary.<sup>107</sup> One might have a bird in one's hand; or one might have it somewhere in one's aviary without having it ready to hand. In the second case, one must *analambanein* to get the piece of knowledge—the bird—in one's hand again. As in *Meno* 85d, Plato uses *analambanein*. Yet, as just noted, in the *Theaetetus* he makes it clear that the bird is in one's aviary; to *analambanein* it is to recover knowledge one has, not just knowledge one once had; nor does it just mean working things out for oneself.

I agree that that is how *analambanein* is used here.<sup>108</sup> But I don't think we should infer that that's how it's used in the *Meno*. For there are various differences between the two contexts that make it reasonable to think that they use *analambanein* differently. Here are some of them.

<sup>107</sup> It's sometimes said that he distinguishes two senses of 'knowledge' or two kinds of knowledge. Against this, see M. F. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1990), 106 and n. 41.

<sup>108</sup> However, if Burnyeat is right to say that the aviary says that to possess knowledge is just to have a capacity, and that Plato's distinction is between having a capacity and exercising it, then it is not so clear that I should concede this. Having a capacity isn't the same as having specific items of knowledge in one's mind; nor is it clear that it requires or implies having such knowledge. However, though I am tempted by Burnyeat's suggestion, Plato seems to view the birds as items of knowledge (*epistēmai*), the having of which confers a capacity. This is not to say that Plato thinks one can have an innate disposition to know only if it is grounded in items one actually knows innately. The point is rather that if one has acquired knowledge of, for example, French or mathematics, there are specific sentences of French, or specific mathematical claims, that one knows, whether or not one is currently considering them at a given time.

<sup>109</sup> In *APr.* 2.21, Aristotle also asks how someone with knowledge can make mistakes; and he refers to the *Meno*'s view that learning is recollection. I discuss this passage in Ch. 6, sect. 16.

- (1) The *Meno* focuses on a slave and his ability to inquire; and it emphasizes that he has not learned geometry in this life. The *Theaetetus*, by contrast, focuses on an expert mathematician who has learned mathematics in this life.
- (2) Not surprisingly, then, the *Meno* asks how one can inquire when one lacks knowledge. The *Theaetetus* asks instead how someone who has expert knowledge can make mistakes.<sup>109</sup>
- (3) The *Meno* emphasizes the distinction between knowledge and true belief. The aviary, by contrast, is part of Plato's discussion of how false belief is possible. That discussion is predicated on the assumption that knowledge is true belief. Hence the aviary has no room for the *Meno*'s crucial distinction between knowledge and true belief. Not surprisingly, then, it doesn't mention true belief.<sup>110</sup>
- (4) The mathematician can easily access the birds in his aviary; the slave cannot do so. I've suggested that Plato imposes an accessibility condition on knowledge. If he does so, that would explain why he says that the mathematician has knowledge, whereas the slave lacks it. For the mathematician's knowledge is readily accessible to him, whereas the slave can't readily articulate what he allegedly knows—and so he doesn't know it.<sup>111</sup>
- (5) The mathematical mistake at issue in the aviary is elementary, whereas the geometrical problem discussed in the *Meno* is more complex. All the more reason, then, to think the expert mathematician has the relevant mathematical knowledge, whereas the inexperienced slave does not.

In view of these important differences, we should be reluctant to use the *Theaetetus* to interpret the *Meno*. In the *Meno*, the slave recollects knowledge he once had but no longer has. In the *Theaetetus*, the expert mathematician tries to recover knowledge he has but fails, for a time, to access, though he can readily access it. Given the differences between the expert mathematician and the uneducated slave, it's not surprising that Plato takes the first but not the second to know.

Neither the passage from the *Phaedo* nor the one from the *Theaetetus*, then, should cause us to reconsider the view that the *Meno* doesn't posit innate knowledge (or true belief).

<sup>110</sup> See my 'False Belief in the *Theaetetus*', *Phronesis* 24 (1979), 70–80; reprinted, with minor modifications, in *Plato on Knowledge and Forms*, 213–24.

<sup>111</sup> D. Bostock, *Plato's Theaetetus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 190–2, also suggests that the expert mathematician discussed in the aviary passage can readily access his knowledge, whereas the slave cannot. Unlike me, however, he thinks the slave has unconscious innate knowledge.

## 12. Conclusion

We've now seen how the geometrical discussion and the theory of recollection fit together, and how they respond to M1–M3 and to Socrates' dilemma. In the geometrical discussion, Socrates shows that S3 of the dilemma is false. Contrary to it, one can inquire about that which one doesn't know, indeed, even if one has no knowledge of anything at all. For the slave inquires into that which he doesn't know; nor does he have other relevant knowledge. He can inquire because, though he lacks knowledge, he has linguistic competence as well as conscious explicit true beliefs (e.g. that squares have four equal sides). He also has the ability to work things out for himself; and he tends to favor truths over falsehoods.

In addition to rejecting S3, the geometrical discussion also responds to M1–M2. We can inquire even if we don't at all know that which we are inquiring into; for having and relying on relevant true beliefs is sufficient. If we were in a cognitive blank, we couldn't inquire; but being in a cognitive blank isn't the only way to lack all knowledge. If one has just true beliefs, one lacks all knowledge (one doesn't know at all); and that's the way in which we lack knowledge, at least in many spheres.

The geometrical discussion also answers M3: it shows that we can discover what we were looking for, and realize we've done so, even if we lack all knowledge at the outset. For, again, this is what the slave does, so far as true belief is concerned. Socrates also says that if the slave reasons further, in the same sort of way, he will eventually come to know the right answer; and it's reasonable to think he will realize he's done so.

Though the geometrical discussion shows *that* S3 is false, and *that* inquiry, and discovery through inquiry, are possible even if one doesn't initially (in this life) have any knowledge at all, it doesn't show *how* they are possible. Ultimately, Socrates thinks, we can explain our remarkable ability to inquire and discover only by positing knowledge. Since we don't (typically) know in this life, we must have known prenatally. The fact that we had prenatal knowledge of some range of things that we can recollect explains, or grounds, our ability to inquire and discover in this life.

The theory of recollection replies to the dilemma by rejecting its conclusion: inquiry is in fact possible, because inquiry (more precisely, successful inquiry) consists in, or essentially involves, recollection, which is possible. It also buttresses the geometrical discussion's rejection of S3, by showing how it is possible to inquire and discover even if one doesn't have any knowledge in this life. This isn't to say that we know in one way but not in another; nor is it to invoke a condition intermediate between knowing and not knowing. Rather, we don't at

## PART II

### Aristotle and After





# 6

## Aristotelian Inquiry

### 1. Introduction

Although Aristotle often seems to have Meno's Paradox in mind,<sup>1</sup> he explicitly mentions the *Meno* just twice: once in the *Posterior Analytics* (*APo.* 1.1) and once in the *Prior Analytics* (*APr.* 2.21); and I'll largely restrict my attention to these two passages. In the first, Aristotle describes what he calls the *aporêma* (puzzle) of the *Meno* and provides his own solution. In the second, he provides a similar solution in different terms; he also mentions recollection.

### 2. The implicit and explicit replies

I begin with *APo.* 1.1. The chapter may be divided into two parts. From the beginning to 71a17, Aristotle offers what I'll call his implicit reply. In the rest of the chapter, he offers what I'll call his explicit reply. I begin with the implicit reply.

Aristotle begins 1.1 by saying that:<sup>2</sup>

All teaching and intellectual learning come from prior *gnôsis*. (71a1–2)<sup>3</sup>

According to Christopher Taylor, this is:<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Among many passages that might be mentioned, see esp. *APo.* 2.1–2, 8–10; 19; *Met.* 1.9, 992b18–993a10; *Met.* 3.1, 995a27–b4 (discussed briefly in Ch. 3, sect. 1). For an illuminating discussion of *APo.* 2 that recalls, but doesn't explicitly mention, the *Meno*, see J. L. Ackrill, 'Aristotle's Theory of Definition: Some Questions on *Posterior Analytics* II 8–10' in E. Berti (ed.), *Aristotle on Science*, 359–84. For a penetrating account of how *APo.* 2 replies to the Paradox, see Charles, *AME*, esp. Ch. 3, and 'Paradox'.

<sup>2</sup> My translations from the *APo.* generally rely on those in B1 and B2, and on those in Irwin and Fine, *Aristotle: Selections*, though I have sometimes altered them without comment. I leave *gnôsis* untranslated for now; I discuss the word below. Cf. Plato, *Phd.* 74e3, *proeidota*; 74e9, *proeidenai*; 73c2, *proteron epistasthai*; and Aristotle, *APr.* 67a22, *proepistasthai*.

<sup>3</sup> Πᾶσα διδασκαλία καὶ πᾶσα μάθησις διανοητικὴ ἐκ προϋπαρχούσης γίνεται γνώσεως.

<sup>4</sup> 'Aristotle's Epistemology', 119, n. 8. (He adds: 'But for a complication see Barnes'. He doesn't say what the complication is. But presumably he is thinking of the passage that leads Barnes to say that Aristotle thinks learning requires prior knowledge of the very thing being learned. See further

a response to the difficulty about the possibility of enquiry raised in Plato's *Meno* 80d–e, to the effect that either you know the object of your enquiry already, in which case you can't look for it, or you don't, in which case you can't look for it either, as you don't know what you are looking for. Plato's response is to accept the first horn of the dilemma, and to reconstrue enquiry as the attempt to revive pre-existing knowledge. Aristotle's alternative is to accept the valid point underlying the difficulty, that enquiry starts from pre-existing knowledge, while rejecting Plato's characterization of enquiry as the attempt to recover *that very* knowledge.

So according to Taylor, both Plato and Aristotle think that knowledge, so far from precluding inquiry, is necessary for it: they both accept a foreknowledge principle for inquiry. But Taylor thinks they accept different versions of such a principle. Plato, in his view, accepts a matching version (one needs to know the very thing one is inquiring into); Aristotle accepts just a stepping-stone version. In particular:<sup>5</sup>

when one learns by deduction, one must know (the truth of) the premises from which the conclusion one learns is deduced, and when one learns by induction one must know the truth of the particular instances from which one derives the inductive generalisation.

Like Taylor, Jonathan Barnes thinks that in his implicit reply at the beginning of *APo.* 1.1, Aristotle accepts just a stepping-stone version of a foreknowledge principle, according to which 'if *a* teaches *b* at *t* that *P*, then before *t* *b* had knowledge of something other than *P* on which his learning that *P* depends'.<sup>6</sup> But he thinks that in his explicit reply later in the chapter, Aristotle, allegedly like Plato, defends a matching version: 'Having explained that the learner must already know the premisses, Aristotle now adds that he in a sense also knows the conclusion.'<sup>7</sup> He then relates this to Meno's Paradox:<sup>8</sup>

below.) Cf. D. W. Hamlyn, 'Aristotelian Epagoge', *Phronesis* 21 (1976) 167–84, at 174. Taylor seems to believe *in propria persona* that knowledge is needed for inquiry. Whether he's right to think this depends on how we conceive of knowledge, an issue I discuss below.

<sup>5</sup> 'Aristotle's Epistemology', 119. As the quotation makes clear, Taylor has propositional inquiry or learning in mind.

<sup>6</sup> B1, 89 = B2, 81. As the quotation makes clear, Barnes has in mind learning that a proposition is true. Interestingly, Barnes says only that the learner must have prior knowledge; he doesn't say that the teacher must have it. In looking at teaching and learning in the *Meno*, we saw that Socrates thinks the teacher must have knowledge, but he doesn't think the learner has to have it. At least, he doesn't need to have *P*-knowledge.

<sup>7</sup> B1, 94.

<sup>8</sup> B1, 95 = B2, 98. I'm not sure whether Barnes means that Aristotle thinks that in *every* case of learning, the learner must know (or in fact knows) what he is learning, or whether he means that Aristotle thinks this is so only in the particular case under discussion. On the one hand, Barnes writes as though Aristotle's claim is continuous with his earlier discussion, which (as Barnes agrees) is about all intellectual learning. B2, 83, also makes it sound as though he thinks Aristotle believes that in every case of learning, the learner knows the conclusion in advance. See also his synopsis of

Plato's problem is this: if someone wants to know what *X* is, then either (a) he already knows what *X* is—in which case he will learn only what he already knows and his search is inane; or else (b) he does not yet know what *X* is—in which case he cannot seek successfully, for he will know neither what he is looking for nor whether he has found it. Plato in effect accepts the bad argument in limb (b) of the dilemma and rejects the good argument in (a) . . . And Aristotle follows him, maintaining that the seeker does in a sense already know what he is looking for.

Taylor and Barnes agree, then, that Plato accepts a matching version of a foreknowledge principle for inquiry or learning. They also agree that Aristotle, in his implicit reply at the beginning of 1.1, accepts just a stepping-stone version. But Barnes thinks that, in his explicit reply later in the chapter, Aristotle endorses a matching version.

I've already disagreed with Taylor's and Barnes's account of Plato: in my view, Plato is not committed to either a matching or a stepping-stone version of a foreknowledge principle for inquiry—at least, not for us as we are in this life, and not if knowledge is *P*-knowledge, which is how Plato conceives of knowledge in the *Meno*. For he doesn't think that inquiry requires us to have any prior knowledge (as he conceives of knowledge) in this life; we can inquire on the basis of true beliefs.<sup>9</sup> But what about Aristotle? Does he accept either a stepping-stone or a matching version of a foreknowledge principle?

1.1 (B1, 89). On the other hand, he says that Aristotle is here concerned with 'a special case of the celebrated dispute over "*petitio principii* and the syllogism"' (B1, 94; B2, 87).

Barnes says that the learner *must* know the conclusion in advance: not that he *must* do so. However, he also says that the learner *must* know the premises in advance, and that knowing them implies (at least in the case under discussion) knowing the conclusion in advance. So at least in this sense, he commits Aristotle to the view that the learner must know the conclusion in advance. The way in which he compares Aristotle's solution to Plato's also suggests that's what he means. For he says that Aristotle follows Plato in accepting 'the bad argument' (B1, 95; B2, 88), according to which if one doesn't already know that which one is inquiring into, one can't inquire into it. But then, if one can inquire—and Barnes thinks Aristotle thinks one can—one *must* have knowledge; and here it's knowledge of the conclusion that's at issue. Hence Barnes seems to think that Aristotle *requires* prior knowledge of the very thing one is inquiring into; one doesn't just happen to have it. Unfortunately, Barnes doesn't say why he takes (a) to be a good argument, (b) a bad argument.

Three points about Barnes' account of 'Plato's problem' are worth noting. First, he takes the first limb (if one knows) to show that inquiry is 'inane', which perhaps means 'pointless' rather than 'impossible'. As we've seen, there is dispute about whether the conclusion of Socrates' dilemma is that inquiry is impossible, or that it is either pointless or impossible. Secondly, he takes the second limb (if one doesn't know) to concern just successful inquiry, whereas I argued that it concerns inquiry as such. Thirdly, he thinks M2 and M3 both support M1, whereas I argued that M2 supports M1 and M3, each of which raises a different question.

<sup>9</sup> As we've seen, Plato accepts a *prenatal* foreknowledge principle. But in discussing Plato in this chapter, I focus on his views about us as we are in this life, leaving aside his view that what's true of us in this life is best explained by positing prenatal knowledge. When Barnes and Taylor say that Plato accepts a foreknowledge principle, I take it that they mean that Plato thinks we must have not only prenatal knowledge, but also current knowledge in this life.

### 3. Teaching, intellectual learning, and inquiry

Before attempting to answer that question, we should note that whereas Meno's Paradox asks about the possibility of *inquiry*, in the opening sentence of *APo.* 1.1 Aristotle mentions—not inquiry, but—*teaching and intellectual learning*.<sup>10</sup> We need to know how these are related to the sort of inquiry at issue in the *Meno*. For if they are sufficiently different, it may prove difficult to say how Aristotle replies to Meno's Paradox.<sup>11</sup> So before asking whether Aristotle endorses a foreknowledge principle for intellectual learning,<sup>12</sup> we should ask what if any connection it has to inquiry as it is conceived of in the *Meno*.

Though Meno's Paradox mentions inquiry but not learning, we've seen that at 81d4–5 Socrates says that 'inquiry and learning are, as a whole, recollection'. I suggested he has zetetic learning in mind: zetetic learning is learning through inquiry, where learning involves improving one's cognitive condition, even if doing so falls short of acquiring knowledge of the answer to the question one is considering. Socrates' claim is that that sort of inquiry—i.e. zetetic learning—consists in, or is best explained by, recollection. That's the sort of learning Meno and his slave engaged in. Meno rid himself of some false beliefs and became clearer about the Oneness Assumption; the slave acquired a new true belief, about the answer to a geometrical question.

Though Plato is therefore interested in a kind of learning, one might nonetheless think that the fact that Aristotle links intellectual learning with teaching shows that his concerns are different from Plato's. For, as we've seen, Socrates denies that he teaches the slave. However, when Socrates denies that he teaches the slave, he is not denying that he teaches in the sense of teaching that Aristotle has in mind. When Socrates denies that he teaches the slave, he means that he lacks the knowledge that is necessary for teaching. But the sort of teaching that Aristotle has in mind doesn't require a teacher with P-knowledge. Rather, as he conceives of teaching here, it includes the sort of 'teaching' Socrates engages in

<sup>10</sup> Not only does Aristotle not mention inquiry in the opening sentence of 1.1, but neither does he do so anywhere else in 1.1. However, he mentions inquiry elsewhere in the *APo.* at e.g. 89b24, 90a24. Similarly, though he doesn't explicitly mention discovery in 1.1, he does so elsewhere in the *APo.* at e.g. 89b27, 93a25.

<sup>11</sup> Even if intellectual learning and inquiry are different, Aristotle might impose the same conditions on both of them. This is Philoponus' view: see his *in Aristotelis Analytica Posteriora Commentaria*, 12.1–15. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Philoponus in this chapter are to this commentary.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle might accept a foreknowledge principle for teaching, in the sense that he might believe that A can teach B that p only if A knows that p. I've suggested that Plato accepts that view. But the crucial question here is whether Aristotle thinks the learner or inquirer must have prior knowledge.

(asking pertinent questions), even if Socrates doesn't count what he does as teaching. For example, as we shall see, Aristotle says that dialectic teaches. But one can engage in dialectical teaching without having P-knowledge; and it's reasonable to count what Socrates does as dialectical teaching. Further, even if Socrates doesn't teach the slave, the slave learns: as Socrates conceives of learning in the *Meno*, one can learn without being taught by someone who has P-knowledge. The same seems true here. For dialectical teaching doesn't require a teacher with P-knowledge. Aristotle also says that deductive and inductive arguments teach; he means that one can learn by considering such arguments, just as the slave learns by considering Socrates' questions.

So far, then, it seems reasonable to say that zetetic learning, as it is conceived of in the *Meno*, falls within the scope of the sort of learning that Aristotle has in mind.

#### 4. APO. 71a2–11 and Plato's conditions on inquiry

Let's now look at Aristotle's conditions on intellectual learning and at how they compare with Plato's conditions on inquiry—or, more precisely, on zetetic learning—in the *Meno*. Aristotle explains the opening sentence of APO. 1.1 as follows:

This is clear if we examine all the cases. For this is how the mathematical sciences (*epistēmai*) and all the other crafts (*technai*) are acquired. Similarly too with both deductive and inductive arguments (*logoi*). For they both effect their teaching by relying on *proginōskomena*: the former assuming <premises> as from those who grasp them (*lambanontes hōs para sunientōn*), the latter proving the universal through the particulars being clear. Rhetorical arguments also persuade in the same way, since they rely either on examples (which is induction) or on enthymemes (which is deduction). (71a2–11)<sup>13</sup>

In speaking of deductive and inductive arguments, Aristotle seems to have in mind either dialectic in particular,<sup>14</sup> or else (as I'm inclined to think) deductive

<sup>13</sup> φανερόν δὲ τοῦτο θεωροῦσιν ἐπὶ πασῶν· αἳ τε γὰρ μαθηματικά τῶν ἐπιστημῶν διὰ τούτου τοῦ τρόπου παραγίνονται καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἐκάστη τεχνῶν. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ περὶ τοὺς λόγους οἳ τε διὰ συλλογισμῶν καὶ οἳ δι' ἐπαγωγῆς· ἀμφότεροι γὰρ διὰ προγινωσκομένων ποιοῦνται τὴν διδασκαλίαν, οἳ μὲν λαμβάνοντες ὡς παρὰ ξυνιέντων, οἳ δὲ δεικνύντες τὸ καθόλου διὰ τοῦ δήλου εἶναι τὸ καθ' ἕκαστον. ὡς δ' αὐτῶς καὶ οἱ ῥητορικοὶ συμπερίθουσιν· ἢ γὰρ διὰ παραδειγμάτων, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐπαγωγή, ἢ δι' ἐνθυμημάτων, ὅπερ ἐστὶ συλλογισμός.

<sup>14</sup> This is the interpretation favored by, among others, Aquinas, in Lecture 1 on Book 1 of his commentary on the *Analytics*. (Unless otherwise noted, all references to Aquinas in this chapter are to his commentary on the APO.) It is also favored by W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Prior and Posterior Analytics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), 504. Cf. M. Mignucci, *L'Argomentazione dimostrativa in Aristotele* (Padua: Antenore, 1975), 1–7. G. R. G. Mure actually translates as follows: 'and so are the two forms of dialectical reasoning, syllogistic and inductive'; but 'dialectical' is not explicit in the text. Mure's translation may be found in W. D. Ross (ed.), *The Works of Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), vol. 1.

and inductive argumentation in general (which includes but isn't limited to dialectic).<sup>15</sup> Either way, dialectic is included within its scope; and dialectic, as Aristotle conceives of it, includes Socratic inquiry.<sup>16</sup> We still have reason to think, then, that zetetic learning—the sort of inquiry Plato is primarily concerned with in the *Meno*—counts as a kind of learning, as Aristotle conceives of learning here.

One might object that even if some zetetic learning is included within the scope of Aristotle's concerns, Meno's and the slave's zetetic learning isn't, because Aristotle is concerned only with learners at a higher cognitive level. M. F. Burnyeat, for example, says that 'to the extent that Aristotle is moved by an educational interest [in the *APo.*], one should think of this not in terms of a teacher imparting new information to virgin minds but in terms of an advanced university course in mathematics or biology'.<sup>17</sup> If Burnyeat is right, neither Meno's nor the slave's learning is relevant here.

But if my interpretation of what Aristotle means in saying that deductive and inductive arguments teach is right, it suggests that, at least at this point in the *APo.*, he has more than advanced university courses in mind. For deductive and inductive argumentation is used outside such courses. Further, as I've mentioned

<sup>15</sup> Philoponus, 5, favors this interpretation. B1, 89 = B2, 81 seems to favor a third interpretation, on which the reference to deduction and induction doesn't include dialectic. For, he says, 'dialectic and rhetoric are more properly contrasted with teaching than taken as species of it'. However, dialectic seems to count as a kind of teaching here. First, as Barnes agrees (B1, 91), Aristotle uses the language of dialectic. Secondly, the fact that he mentions deductive and inductive arguments at least doesn't imply that he doesn't have dialectic in mind. For example, at *Apr.* 68b13–14, he says that everything we are convinced of (*pisteuomen*) comes through either deduction or induction; so clearly induction and deduction can have quite a broad scope. At *Apr.* 24a22ff., he says there are both demonstrative and dialectical deductions. *Top.* 105a10ff. makes it clear that dialectic uses both deduction and induction; cf. *Top.* 157a18ff. Nor are demonstration and questioning necessarily opposed. *APo.* 1.12, for example, mentions demonstrative questioning. Further, at the beginning of *EN* 2 Aristotle says that the virtues of thought (*dianoia*)—which include not only *epistēmē* but also *technē*, *phronēsis*, *sophia*, and *sunesis*: *EN* 6.3—are acquired mainly through teaching. I take it that the relevant sort of teaching is not demonstrative. Indeed, if (as has been plausibly argued) the *EN* is itself a dialectical work, and if reading and studying it contribute to one's acquiring *phronēsis*, then dialectic teaches in the sense *EN* 2 has in mind.

Though I think Aristotle counts dialectic as a kind of teaching here, it's less clear whether he thinks rhetoric teaches. On the one hand, it would not be unprecedented were he to say this: see *SE* 183b39ff. (And if rhetoric teaches, that gives us another reason to think that so too does dialectic. Whether or not rhetoric teaches, it seems to require prior *gnōsis*; I return to this point below.) On the other hand, in saying that rhetoric aims to persuade or convince (*sumpeithousin*), Aristotle may intend to distinguish it from the preceding cases, all of which involve genuine teaching. Cf. M. F. Burnyeat, 'Enthymeme: Aristotle on the Logic of Persuasion', in D. Furley and A. Nehamas (eds.), *Aristotle's Rhetoric* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3–55. Philoponus, 7.1–5, seems to think Aristotle doesn't here count rhetoric as a kind of teaching.

<sup>16</sup> See R. Bolton, 'Aristotle's Account of the Socratic Elenchus' *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 11 (1993), 121–52.

<sup>17</sup> 'Aristotle on Understanding Knowledge', 118.

and as we'll see more fully below, later in 1.1 Aristotle considers a learner who need not be so advanced (a22). This is the same passage I mentioned above, the one that sets the stage for Aristotle's discussion of the *aporêma* in the *Meno*. Moreover, in 2.19 he discusses the process by which, beginning at birth, we eventually learn (99b29) first principles as such.<sup>18</sup> Though not every stage along this journey counts as intellectual learning, I think the slave's learning so counts. At least, it's reasonable to think this on the account of intellectual learning that I go on to suggest. This is not to say that the level of learning engaged in by Meno and his slave is a dominant concern in the *APo*. It is only to say that it is included in Aristotle's opening remarks and occasionally adverted to.

If, however, Aristotle is concerned only with a more advanced level of learning than Meno and his slave engage in, then Aristotle's concerns are included within Plato's concerns (rather than, as I have been arguing, the other way round). For even if Meno and his slave engage in a more elementary level of learning than Aristotle is concerned with, Plato's notion of zetetic learning extends beyond the learning that Meno and his slave engage in. For Socrates assumes that if the slave were to move from his true beliefs to knowledge, he would do so by engaging in yet more zetetic learning. Aristotle's notion of intellectual learning would be a case of doing just that.<sup>19</sup>

## 5. What is intellectual learning?

There are disputes about the force of the adjective 'intellectual' (*dianoêtikê*). Zabarella, among others, thinks Aristotle is distinguishing discursive (*dianoia*) from non-discursive thought (*noêsis*), to indicate that he is interested only in learning the conclusions of demonstrations, and not in learning definitions, which Aristotle, according to Zabarella, thinks one grasps non-discursively.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Or so I think. But Scott, *RE*, 107–17, thinks 2.19 considers only higher-level learning. At the other extreme, D. Bronstein 'The Origin and Aim of *Posterior Analytics* II.19', *Phronesis* 57 (2012), 29–62, argues that the first three-quarters of the chapter discusses just how we get to preliminary accounts (not first principles). I discuss 2.19 briefly in section 17.

<sup>19</sup> According to McKirahan, nothing Aristotle says here or elsewhere makes it clear how broad or narrow the scope of intellectual teaching and learning are meant to be: *Principles and Proofs: Aristotle's Theory of Demonstrative Science* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 22. Whether it's broad or narrow, it's reasonable to link it to inquiry as it is conceived of in the *Meno*, though there is room for dispute about precisely how to do so.

<sup>20</sup> J. Zabarella, in *Duos Aristotelis libros Posteriorum Analyticorum Commentaria in Opera Logica* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1966 = reprint of Cologne edition of 1597), 620ff. Though Barnes doesn't endorse everything Zabarella says, he thinks the opening principle of the *APo*. concerns learning only 'derived propositions': see B1, 251 and B2, 262. Cf. S. LaBarge, 'Aristotle on "Simultaneous Learning" in *Posterior Analytics* 1.1 and *Prior Analytics* 2.21', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2004), 177–215, at 190, 200–1 ('Simultaneous Learning' hereinafter).



One might think that, if this were right, it would differentiate Plato's concerns from Aristotle's, since Plato is interested in learning what virtue is: he wants to know the definition of virtue (though, in my view, he does not think that learning this is non-discursive). If Zabarella is right, intellectual learning is more restricted than I have suggested.

However, as we've seen, Plato is interested in inquiring into, and learning, more than definitions. He wants to know not only what virtue is but also whether it is teachable. Nor does the discussion with the slave involve searching for a definition. And Zabarella's interpretation of Aristotle is anyway too narrow. For Aristotle doesn't restrict intellectual learning to learning the conclusions of demonstrations. Rather, it covers all the cases of learning that the *APo.* considers; and the *APo.* considers learning not only the conclusions of demonstrations but also definitions, and yet further things as well. For example, as we shall see, at 71a17ff. Aristotle considers a case of learning (a22) something that is neither a definition nor the conclusion of a demonstration; this is in the context of replying to Meno's Paradox. Further, *APo.* 2 discusses four sorts of inquiries (*zêtêseis*), one of which is inquiring what something is. In 2.3, Aristotle says that 'a definition seems to be of what a thing is'. Inquiring into what something is is a way of trying to learn what it is; if one inquires successfully, one has engaged in zetetic learning. And in 2.19, 99b28–9, Aristotle asks how we learn 'primitive, immediate principles' (99b21); these are, or at least include, definitions. I don't think he means that we learn them noetically rather than dianoetically. For at 100b5–6, he says that both *epistêmê* and *nous* are truth-entailing intellectual (*dianoia*) states: *dianoia* is a broad condition, and *nous* falls within its scope. Moreover, 2.19 says that one comes to know first principles (and so definitions) through induction. (This is not to say that induction is sufficient for acquiring knowledge of first principles; but it is necessary for doing so.) Since 1.1 says that induction teaches—which implies that one can learn through induction—it follows that we come to know definitions, at least in part, by learning them. Though much of the *APo.* focuses on demonstration, not all of it does so. In particular, we shall see that the passages of primary concern to us here don't do so.

It therefore seems reasonable to think that *dianoêtikê* means something like reasoning in a broad sense, perhaps as opposed to perceiving.<sup>21</sup> On this account,

<sup>21</sup> For this interpretation, see Philoponus, 5; Aquinas, in Lecture 1 on Book 1 of his commentary on the *Analytics*; and Ross, *Analytics*, 504. Cf. Mignucci, *L'Argomentazione dimostrativa*, 1–3; and B2, note *ad loc.* According to Vlastos, Plato is concerned with learning that involves 'rational thought in contrast to sense-perception' ('*Anamnesis*', 154); if he is right, Plato is concerned with the sort of learning Aristotle mentions. It's true that the triangle case I discuss below seems to involve perception (one identifies the figure in the semi-circle by seeing it as a triangle, or by seeing that it is

Meno's slave engages in a sort of zetetic learning that falls within the scope of *dianoêtikê mathêsis*.

If Plato's and Aristotle's concerns overlap in the ways I've suggested, it's reasonable to think that the opening sentence of 1.1 mentions a necessary condition for inquiry as Plato conceives of it. And, as we've seen, Taylor and Barnes both think it states a stepping-stone version of a foreknowledge principle. Let's now ask about that.

## 6. Prior *gnôsis*

When I translated the opening sentence of 1.1. above, I left a crucial term, *gnôsis*, untranslated. B2 translates it as 'knowledge':<sup>22</sup>

All teaching and all learning of an intellectual kind proceed from pre-existing knowledge (*gnôsis*). (71a1–2)

This makes it sound as though Aristotle says flat-out that all learning<sup>23</sup> requires prior knowledge. One might then conclude, as Barnes and Taylor do, that Aristotle accepts a foreknowledge principle. If he does so, he might seem to disagree with Plato, as I've interpreted Plato.<sup>24</sup>

However, matters are not so simple. When commentators say that Plato requires knowledge for inquiry, I take it they mean that he requires knowledge *as he conceives of it*: what I've called P-knowledge. This, at any rate, is what they *should* mean. For given the importance the *Meno* places on the distinction between knowledge and true belief, it would be very misleading to say that Plato requires knowledge for inquiry unless 'knowledge' were being used for P-knowledge. It would, in particular, be very misleading to say that Plato requires

a triangle); however, it doesn't involve *only* perception. Nor does Aristotle explicitly mention perception here, though he may do so in the parallel passage in the *APr*. (Whether he does so depends on whether we read *idômen* or *eidômen* at 67a25: see sect. 16.) Similarly, the slave in the *Meno* presumably uses perception to identify the diagrams Socrates seems to draw for him, though he doesn't acquire the right answer simply on the basis of perception. Be that as it may, in both cases the crucial factor is the way in which the learner or inquirer reasons. *Dianoêtikê* learning doesn't have to be entirely nonperceptual; but it must centrally include the appropriate sort of reasoning.

<sup>22</sup> So too does B1, though in other respects the translation of the sentence as a whole differs from that in B2.

<sup>23</sup> That is, all intellectual learning. But I shall from now on generally speak simply of learning, by which I mean the sort of intellectual learning that Aristotle has in mind. I leave to one side the question of whether he countenances further sorts of learning; if he does, they aren't relevant here. As we saw in Ch. 4, a similar question arises about Plato.

<sup>24</sup> Again, we've seen that Plato thinks we must have had knowledge about some range of things in a prior life. But he doesn't think we need to have prior knowledge in this life, in order to learn; and that is my concern here.

knowledge for inquiry, if 'knowledge' is being used so as to include true beliefs that fall short of knowledge as he conceives of it. And, when I argued that Plato doesn't require knowledge for inquiry, I meant that he doesn't require P-knowledge for inquiry.

We can now ask the following question: when Aristotle says that learning requires prior *gnôsis*, is he rejecting Plato's view that having and relying on relevant true beliefs is sufficient for inquiry? Is he saying that, in order to learn (and so in order to inquire successfully), one needs to be in a cognitive condition that is superior to, more demanding than, what Plato considers to be mere true belief? For want of a better label, let's ask whether Aristotle differs from Plato in requiring 'superior cognition'. By 'superior cognition' I mean any cognitive condition that is cognitively superior to what Plato takes to be mere true belief.<sup>25</sup>

Even if Aristotle doesn't require superior cognition for inquiry, he might require knowledge as he conceives of it; for he might take knowledge to be more extensive than P-knowledge. That is, perhaps Plato and Aristotle draw the line between knowledge and mere true belief differently. Perhaps Aristotle thinks that some of the cases that Plato would say are mere true belief count as knowledge as he, Aristotle, conceives of it; perhaps he expands the scope of knowledge beyond its Platonic bounds. In fact, I think this is the case. For example, Aristotle but not Plato allows one to know that something is so without knowing why it is so. However, he seems to think that one knows that *p* is so only if one has a good argument for the claim that *p* is true (where, however, the argument can fall short of showing why *p* is true).<sup>26</sup> The issue of whether Plato and Aristotle distinguish knowledge from mere true belief in the same way is a different issue from whether Aristotle requires superior cognition for inquiry. My focus here is on whether, in requiring prior *gnôsis* for intellectual learning, Aristotle requires superior cognition. However, I shall also occasionally ask whether the prior *gnôsis* at issue here counts as knowledge as Aristotle conceives of it, even if he doesn't count it as superior cognition. Let's call knowledge as Aristotle conceives of it 'A-knowledge'. A-knowledge includes, but is not restricted to, superior cognition.

<sup>25</sup> Why not just ask whether Aristotle requires P-knowledge for zetetic learning, that is, for successful inquiry? The answer is that P-knowledge doesn't correspond exactly to any Aristotelian notion of knowledge, and so there is a sense in which he doesn't require it for anything. The crucial question for my purposes is whether Aristotle requires one to be in a more demanding cognitive condition, to inquire, than Plato does. Speaking of superior cognition allows me to focus on this question.

<sup>26</sup> See my 'Aristotle on Knowledge', *Elenchos* 14 (2010), 121–56, where I provide a more detailed defense of my account of how Aristotle conceives of knowledge.

It's difficult to know how Aristotle uses *gnôsis*, and related words such as *gignôskein* and *gnôrizēin*, in 1.1. For one thing, as Barnes remarks, though Aristotle explicitly defines *epistasthai* in 1.2, his definition 'carries with it the implication that *gignôskein* has a different sense...[Yet] there is never any attempt to define *gignôskein*'.<sup>27</sup> For another, as Aristotle uses *gignôskein* and the cognate noun, they have, as Burnyeat puts it, an 'implicitly graded sense'.<sup>28</sup> Sometimes the verb is used interchangeably with *epistasthai*; but it ranges considerably more widely. Indeed, Aristotle uses it in cases that he does not count as knowledge. For example, he says that *aisthêsis*, even of the sort had by animals, is a type of *gnôsis*. But he emphasizes that this *gnôsis* doesn't amount to *epistêmê*.<sup>29</sup> Nor does all perception even amount to knowledge in the broader sense of being a truth-entailing cognitive condition that implies but goes beyond mere true belief.<sup>30</sup> For, in Aristotle's view, animals lack belief (*doxa*) and supposition (*hupolêpsis*).<sup>31</sup> One might argue that he thinks animals have knowledge even though they lack belief and supposition. But the reason he thinks animals lack belief and supposition is that they are not cognitively well enough equipped to have it. Whether or not knowledge is a species of or implies belief, it is cognitively more difficult to attain. If a creature can't have belief, neither can it have knowledge.

Since Aristotle uses *gnôsis* to range beyond knowledge, I shall from now on translate *gnôsis* as 'cognition'.<sup>32</sup> Though the scope of cognition as Aristotle understands it is unclear, I shall assume that it is factive: if one cognizes x,

<sup>27</sup> B2, 82. Barnes nonetheless takes it to be genuine knowledge, though he doesn't say exactly what he takes that to be.

<sup>28</sup> 'Aristotle on Understanding Knowledge', 106; cf. 106–8, 114, 127–33. However, Burnyeat thinks it is always some sort of knowledge (whether low- or high-level), whereas I think it is used more extensively.

<sup>29</sup> See e.g. GA 731a30; *De Mem.* 449b12–14; *Met.* 981b11–13. Burnyeat, 'Aristotle on Understanding Knowledge', 114, cites further passages as well.

<sup>30</sup> This conception of knowledge is weaker than A-knowledge, according to which one can know that p is true only if one has a good argument for p's being true. *Epistêmê* as defined in 1.2 is a species of A-knowledge. See my 'Aristotle on Knowledge'. My focus here is on propositional knowledge; I leave to one side the question of whether Aristotle thinks there are other kinds of knowledge.

<sup>31</sup> See e.g. DA 3.3.

<sup>32</sup> The usual Latin translation of *gnôsis* is *cognitio*, and at least Aquinas recognizes false *cognitio*: 'hac tamen differentia servata, quae supra circa veritatem dicta est, quod falsitas in intellectu esse potest, non solum quia *cognitio intellectus falsa est*, sed quia intellectus eam cognoscit, sicut et veritatem, in sensu autem falsitas non est ut cognita, ut dictum est' (*Summa Theologiae* 1a.17.3; emphasis added). Thanks to Terry Irwin and Scott MacDonald for calling this passage to my attention. However, though medieval Latin uses *cognitio* such that it need not be truth-entailing, it is not clear that classical Latin does so; at least, Cicero doesn't do so. (Thanks here to Charles Brittain and Walter Cavini.) In 'Aristotle on Knowledge', I argue that Aristotle uses *gnôsis* so that it need not be truth-entailing; but I won't press that claim here. S. LaBarge, 'Aristotle on *Empeiria*', *Ancient Philosophy* 26 (2006), 23–44, at 38, also translates *gnôsis* as 'cognition'.

x exists; if one cognizes that p, p is true. However, one can cognize x, or that p, without having A-knowledge; one might have mere true belief instead—or indeed even less than that, since animals have *gnôsis* but lack belief.

Because Aristotle uses *gignôskein* and the cognate noun so broadly, it's difficult to know whether, in saying that learning requires prior cognition, he means that it requires superior cognition, or A-knowledge, or just cognition in an even broader sense. However, though the mere use of the words doesn't allow us to answer that question, Aristotle proceeds to describe the sort of prior cognition that is required for learning. So let's look at that. All we know so far is that we shouldn't infer from the mere fact that he requires *gnôsis* that he's requiring superior cognition, or even A-knowledge.

## 7. Prior cognition

In a passage quoted above, Aristotle says that deductive arguments involve prior cognition in that they assume their premises 'as from those who grasp (*sunientôn*) them',<sup>33</sup> and that inductive arguments involve prior cognition in that the particulars from which the universal is reached are clear. The sort of grasp one has of particulars prior to grasping universals certainly isn't *epistêmê* as Aristotle defines it in 1.2; for that is restricted to what is universal and necessary.<sup>34</sup> Nor is it superior cognition or, I'm inclined to think, even A-knowledge. Nor does getting the premises of deductive arguments 'as from those who grasp them' necessarily involve superior cognition or even A-knowledge. For, at this point, Aristotle seems to have in mind all deductive arguments, including dialectical ones; but not all of these even have all true premises. A fortiori, he wouldn't be requiring us even to A-know that the premises are true. Even if he has in mind just sound deductive arguments, it's not clear that, in each case, a learner must antecedently know, rather than merely believe or assume for the sake of argument, that the premises are true.<sup>35</sup> Further, Aristotle goes on to speak of 'grasping what the

<sup>33</sup> Philoponus, 6.19–23, thinks Aristotle has in mind the dialectical method of getting one's premises from one's interlocutors. Ross, *Analytics*, 504, also favors this interpretation. Ross also says that Aristotle is here requiring prior knowledge. But interlocutors engaged in dialectic don't need to have knowledge, whether that is superior cognition or just A-knowledge. (Contrast R. Bolton, 'Aristotle: Epistemology and Metaphysics' in C. Shields (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 151–62.) As we've seen, Barnes acknowledges that Aristotle here uses the language of dialectic; but he doesn't think Aristotle is discussing dialectic (B1, 91). My own view is that Aristotle has in mind deduction in general; as such, some dialectic falls within its scope (I say 'some' because dialectic isn't purely deductive).

<sup>34</sup> However, later in 1.1 Aristotle speaks of having unqualified *epistêmê* of a particular. I discuss this below.

<sup>35</sup> Similarly, one can *lambanein* that something is so without knowing that it is. Cf. Charles, *AME*, 75f., n. 26.

thing said is'; and he explains this in terms of signification. But, as we shall see, to grasp what something signifies can fall short of superior cognition and even of A-knowledge. Aristotle's claim that rhetoric requires prior cognition also supports the view that the cognition at issue here needn't be A-knowledge, let alone superior cognition. For the typical audience listening to an orator doesn't have that, at least, not on all the matters rhetoricians speak about.

I suggest, then, that the prior-cognition principle mentioned at the beginning of 1.1 doesn't require superior cognition or even A-knowledge. So far, then, Aristotle hasn't endorsed any version of a *foreknowledge* principle. Rather, he's endorsed a *prior-cognition* principle, where the cognition need not be knowledge. Further, his prior-cognition principle is a stepping-stone version, since what one is attempting to learn is different from what one needs prior cognition of. In deduction, one needs to cognize, or grasp, the premises; in induction, one needs to cognize, or grasp, certain particulars; and these are different from what one is trying to learn.

## 8. Two types of prior cognition

In 71a11–17, Aristotle proceeds to say that:<sup>36</sup>

There are two ways in which we must already have cognition (*proginōskein*). In some cases, we must presuppose (*prohupolambanein*) that something is; in other cases, we must grasp (*sunienai*) what the thing spoken of is; and in other cases we must do both. E.g. of the fact that everything is either asserted or denied truly, we must presuppose that it is the case; of the triangle, that it signifies (*sêmeinein*) this; and of the unit both (both what it signifies and that it is). For something different is needed to make each of these things clear to us.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> I have used B2's translation, except that where I have 'already have cognition', it has 'already have knowledge'. Barnes's translation has the disadvantage of making belief a species of knowledge. Yet knowledge but not belief is truth-entailing. Hence we need to repair his translation. There are two (compatible) ways of doing so: either *proginōskein* should not be translated as 'we must already have knowledge', or else *prohupolambanein* should not be translated as 'we must already believe'. I favor the first option since, as I've argued, as Aristotle uses *gnōsis* (*gignōskein*) it doesn't always amount even to A-knowledge. (B1 may agree. At least, it translates *proginōskein* as 'to be already aware'; and, at least as I use the term, awareness can fall short of knowledge. But I'm not sure this was Barnes's intention; he may just have wanted to use different English words to render different Greek words. See B1, 90 with B2, 82.) I also favor the second solution, since I prefer to use 'belief' for *doxa*, and 'supposition' for *hupolēpsis*.

<sup>37</sup> διχῶς δ' ἀναγκαῖον προγινώσκειν· τὰ μὲν γάρ, ὅτι ἔστι, προὑπολαμβάνειν ἀναγκαῖον, τὰ δέ, τί τὸ λεγόμενον ἔστι, συνιέναι δεῖ, τὰ δ' ἄμφω, οἷον ὅτι μὲν ἅπαν ἢ φῆσαι ἢ ἀποφῆσαι ἀληθές, ὅτι ἔστι, τὸ δὲ τρίγωνον, ὅτι τοδὶ σημαίνει, τὴν δὲ μονάδα ἄμφω, καὶ τί σημαίνει καὶ ὅτι ἔστιν· οὐ γὰρ ὁμοίως τούτων ἕκαστον δῆλον ἡμῖν.

We've seen that in the immediately preceding lines Aristotle says that deductive and inductive reasoning requires prior cognition. He also says what sort of prior cognition is required: in deductive reasoning, for example, one gets one's premises 'as from those who grasp them'. How are the types of prior cognition that he now mentions related to his immediately preceding remarks?<sup>38</sup>

Philoponus (7.8ff.) and Aquinas (Lecture 2 on Book 1) think Aristotle is narrowing his focus: rather than considering all deduction and induction, he is now considering just demonstration, which is a species of deduction. Though I agree that Aristotle is narrowing his focus, I'm not sure he is now discussing just demonstration. Rather, he seems to intend a restriction to deduction as such, leaving induction to one side.<sup>39</sup> He is explaining in more detail what sort of prior cognition is needed in deduction. That this is so is suggested by the fact that his initial description of deductive reasoning uses forms of both *lambanein* and *sunienai*; and forms of both words recur in his more detailed discussion. Aristotle describes two sorts of prior cognition that are involved in deductive reasoning: the supposition (*hupolêpsis*) that something is so, and grasping (*sunienai*) what the thing said is or signifies. Let's look at these two sorts of prior cognition more closely.

Aristotle typically uses 'supposition' as a generic term that includes *epistêmê* and *doxa* as species.<sup>40</sup> As such, not all suppositions are true, though the examples of suppositions that Aristotle gives here are true. Nonetheless, one can suppose that they are so without having superior cognition or even A-knowledge that they are. For example, Aristotle says that, in attempting to learn about units, one must suppose that they are. This seems to mean that, to learn about units, one must assume, or perhaps believe, that units exist; and, in his view, they do exist, so the

<sup>38</sup> Though Aristotle says that there are two types of prior cognition, it has been argued that he in fact countenances three of them. See e.g. Ross, *Analytics*, 504–5. By contrast, B1, 91, and Aquinas (Lecture 2 on Book 1) speak of two types of prior cognition. Those who say that Aristotle mentions three types think that grasping that something is covers two types of prior cognition: cognition that certain things exist and cognition that certain propositions are true. Thanks to David Bronstein for helpful discussion of this point.

<sup>39</sup> However, see *epagomenos* at 71a21; *epachthênai*, 71a24. But there is dispute about whether those passages discuss induction in Aristotle's technical sense (whatever that is); see n. 57. David Bronstein has suggested to me that perhaps Aristotle means to include not only deduction but also what, in *Met.* 1.9, 992b30–2, he calls learning by definition, which need not be strictly or entirely deductive. Whatever the precise scope of his concern here is, I take it to extend beyond demonstration, though I doubt that it includes induction.

<sup>40</sup> See *APo.* 89a3–4, 89a39; *DA* 427b25. In *EN* 1139b15–18, Aristotle distinguishes *hupolêpsis* from various other cognitive conditions by saying that the former but not the latter can be false. Cf. *APo.* 79b28.

supposition that they exist is a true supposition. But one can assume or believe that something exists without A-knowing that it does.<sup>41</sup>

Nor does Aristotle's second type of prior cognition require even A-knowledge. For in this second type, what's needed is a grasp (*sunesis*) of what the items spoken about are or, as he also puts it, of what they, or the corresponding terms, signify (*sêmeinei*).<sup>42</sup> It seems that, for Aristotle, what the term 'F' signifies is a feature true of all (but not necessarily of only) Fs. 'Eclipse', for example, signifies some kind of deprivation of light, and 'man' signifies some kind of animal (2.8, 93a22–4), where the exact kind is not initially specified.<sup>43</sup> One can grasp that 'man' signifies some kind of animal, without having superior cognition (or, I think, even A-knowledge) about what man, or anything else, is.

That Aristotle doesn't require superior cognition for intellectual learning is well defended by David Charles, in *Aristotle on Meaning and Essence*.<sup>44</sup> As we saw in Chapter 3, section 11, Charles argues that Aristotle has a three-stage view of scientific inquiry. At Stage 1, one knows, or grasps, what 'F' signifies. At Stage 2, one knows, or grasps, that there are Fs. It's only at Stage 3 that one knows the

<sup>41</sup> One can also assume or believe that something exists, even if it doesn't; people used to believe that phlogiston exists. But Aristotle doesn't seem to have such cases in mind here. Another of his examples of something one must (sometimes or always) have a *hupolêpsis* of is, roughly, the Law of the Excluded Middle. Insofar as most learners can't explain why the Law of the Excluded Middle is true, they lack P-knowledge, or superior cognition, of it. Barnes writes in another context that 'although it is false that learners must have explicit knowledge of some logical laws, it may be that in some weak sense of "know" all learners must "know" some logical laws (e.g. they must order their beliefs in accordance with them)' (B1, 103/B2, 100). He isn't here explicating *hupolêpsis*. But one might argue that this weak sense of 'know' (if Barnes is right to say that is what it is) is what Aristotle has in mind by *hupolêpsis*, at least in the case of the Law of the Excluded Middle. I doubt, however, whether Aristotle thinks that is sufficient for knowledge. But even if he does, still, it doesn't amount to superior cognition. Even if it counts as A-knowledge (though I don't think it does), this would show at most that *some* cases of supposition involve A-knowledge; it wouldn't show that all do.

<sup>42</sup> Aristotle seems to speak interchangeably of grasping what the thing spoken of is (71a13) and of grasping what it, or of what the corresponding term, signifies (71a15–6).

<sup>43</sup> For this account of Aristotle on signification, see Charles, *AME* and 'Paradox'. As he notes, however, though Aristotle 'makes a number of claims about names, their signification, and accounts of what names signify, he does not develop a full or unified account of these issues' (*AME*, 79). Fortunately, for our purposes the details don't matter; for us, the crucial point is that one can grasp what 'F' signifies without grasping the essence of F. Aristotle's account of signification is weaker than the one Charles thinks Plato holds, which requires grasping a feature true of all and only Fs.

<sup>44</sup> However, I'm not sure whether he thinks it requires A-knowledge. On the one hand, he sometimes seems to suggest that being at Stages 1 and 2 requires one to have knowledge; see e.g. 'Paradox', 137. But sometimes he speaks instead of grasping ('Paradox', 137) or recognizing ('Paradox', 143). If he thinks that being at Stages 1 and 2 requires A-knowledge, then we disagree on that point. Here, though, I should note that 1.1 presents the three-stage view in an abstract or generic way, which Book 2 then applies to the case of scientific inquiry. I take no stand here on whether the three-stage view requires A-knowledge in Book 2. My claim is just that it doesn't do so in 1.1.



real essence of F—and so, in my terminology, has superior cognition about Fs.<sup>45</sup> One can be in an earlier stage without being in a later stage, though being in an earlier stage puts one in a good position to advance to the next stage. As we've seen, Charles thinks this three-stage view allows Aristotle to avoid Meno's Paradox. It does so by insisting that, and explaining how, one can be in Stage 1 without being in Stage 2, and in Stage 2 without being in Stage 3. Being in Stages 1 and 2 are robust enough to allow one to inquire; but they aren't so robust that there's nothing left to inquire into.

Although I disagree with Charles on some details,<sup>46</sup> we agree on one crucial point: neither grasping what a term signifies nor grasping that something is requires superior cognition.<sup>47</sup> Yet Aristotle says that sometimes grasping what a term signifies is sufficient for satisfying the prior-cognition principle. Hence, that principle doesn't require superior cognition. Nor, I've suggested, does it require A-knowledge. Hence, Aristotle hasn't yet disagreed with what Plato means in saying that one doesn't need knowledge for inquiry. For even if (contrary to my view) he requires A-knowledge, he doesn't require superior cognition.

I suspect that at least many of those who say that, in the opening sentences of *APo*. 1.1, Aristotle requires knowledge for learning would agree that at least superior cognition isn't at issue. It's just that they use 'knowledge' more broadly than that. But doing so creates the misleading impression that Aristotle but not Plato requires knowledge for learning.<sup>48</sup> In fact, Aristotle hasn't yet disagreed with Plato about what cognitive level one needs to be in for inquiry. For when he requires prior cognition, he isn't requiring superior cognition; and so he isn't disagreeing with Plato's claim that having and relying on relevant (mere) true beliefs is sufficient for inquiry. So far, then, Aristotle hasn't accepted a *foreknowledge* principle for intellectual learning. Rather, he has endorsed just a stepping-stone version of a prior-cognition principle, where cognition need not be superior cognition or even, I've suggested, A-knowledge.

<sup>45</sup> This is because, as we've seen, Plato requires knowledge of real essence in order to have knowledge, as he conceives of knowledge (at least in the case of virtue and of things relevantly like it).

<sup>46</sup> For example, if he thinks that, even in 1.1, being in Stages 1 and 2 requires A-knowledge, we disagree on that point. See n. 44.

<sup>47</sup> This is so whether or not these two types of prior cognition map neatly onto the three-stage view as it is developed in Book 2.

<sup>48</sup> Of course, as we've seen, many think Plato requires P-knowledge. Were he to do so, it would still be misleading to say that Plato and Aristotle both require knowledge, since even if Aristotle requires A-knowledge, he doesn't require P-knowledge or superior cognition.

## 9. Plato and Aristotle on prior cognition

We have now looked at what cognitive level Aristotle requires us to be in, in order to engage in intellectual learning, as well as at what sorts of contents he requires us to grasp. Let's briefly compare his views with Plato's. Plato, I argued, doesn't require foreknowledge, in this life, for inquiry or discovery. In his view, having and relying on relevant true beliefs is sufficient. He doesn't commit himself to the view that having and relying on relevant true beliefs is necessary. However, he says that dialectical inquiry requires satisfying the Dialectical Requirement; and it requires us to have an appropriate degree of familiarity with the things through which the discussion proceeds, though this needn't amount to knowledge. But it's not clear whether the appropriate degree of familiarity requires true beliefs or whether something less than that (such as roughly-accurate beliefs) will do. Be that as it may, Aristotle agrees with Plato insofar as he doesn't require superior cognition for inquiry or learning. However, he requires prior cognition, which seems to involve what Plato would view as mere true belief. In requiring true beliefs, Aristotle goes beyond what Plato is clearly committed to.

Plato and Aristotle agree, however, that one can inquire, or learn, on the basis of (what Plato views as) mere true belief; knowledge (in the sense of P-knowledge or superior cognition) isn't needed.<sup>49</sup> If this is right, Aristotle's implicit reply to Meno's Paradox, like Plato's reply in the geometrical discussion, rejects S3: contrary to it, one can inquire even if one doesn't know that which one is inquiring into; for having and relying on relevant true beliefs will do.<sup>50</sup>

What about content, as opposed to cognitive condition? Aristotle, we've seen, requires one to grasp what 'F' signifies and/or that Fs exist, where the former involves grasping a feature true of all, but not necessarily true of only, Fs. Do Meno and his slave do so? If not, Aristotle would think they aren't in a position to learn, as he conceives of learning here. If that's so, then either he imposes more stringent conditions on zetetic learning than Plato does or else, contrary to what I've suggested, Aristotle is concerned just with learning of a more advanced sort than Plato is, if not in terms of cognitive condition, then in terms of content.

<sup>49</sup> Nor, I've suggested, is A-knowledge needed. But for the purpose of comparing Plato with Aristotle, the crucial question concerns superior cognition.

<sup>50</sup> One might argue that so far Aristotle has said only that having and relying on true beliefs is necessary. That leaves open the possibility that he doesn't think it's sufficient. However, even if this is a theoretical possibility, his development of the three-stage view in the rest of the *APo.* suggests it's not actual. He continues to believe that it's sufficient for inquiring that one be in Stage 1 (or, more accurately, that puts one in the best possible position for advancing to Stage 2). For a good defense of this view, see Charles, *AME*.

In fact, however, the slave seems to grasp both that squares and diagonals are, and also what 'square' and 'diagonal' signify, as Aristotle conceives of signification.<sup>51</sup> He is able to point to and recognize examples of squares and diagonals: that suggests he thinks they exist. Further, he grasps that squares have four equal sides; that is a feature true of all squares. Hence he grasps what 'square' signifies in Aristotle's sense of 'signify'; he grasps a feature true of all squares, though it is not a feature true only of squares, since rhombi also have four equal sides.

Meno also seems to satisfy Aristotle's conditions on learning, with respect to virtue. He thinks that virtue exists,<sup>52</sup> and he mentions what he takes to be examples of it (or of types of it). For example, he says that, for a man, virtue is managing the city. He also readily agrees that virtue is good (73b6); so he mentions a feature true of all cases of virtue, and in that sense grasps what 'virtue' signifies, as Aristotle conceives of signification.

We've now looked at Aristotle's implicit reply to Meno's Paradox: implicit, because he hasn't yet mentioned the *aporêma*; but a reply nonetheless since what he says is in fact a solution to it, and indeed one that recalls the *Meno*'s, which Aristotle explicitly mentions later in 1.1. Aristotle says that, in order to engage in intellectual learning (which includes zetetic learning, even of the sort engaged in by Meno and his slave), one must have prior cognition. In particular, one must grasp what the terms at issue signify and/or that the phenomenon at issue exists.<sup>53</sup> Though this isn't clear from 1.1, it emerges later that these necessary conditions are also sufficient. This solves Meno's Paradox by showing that there are cognitive conditions that are robust enough to permit inquiry, but that are also weak enough to allow there to be something one doesn't yet know that one can inquire into. For one can use one's grasp of what a term signifies, or that something is, as a 'springboard' for inquiring what something's

<sup>51</sup> We've seen that Meno and his slave don't specify what 'F' signifies, as Charles thinks Plato conceives of signification, which requires specifying a feature true of all and only Fs. The question here is whether they specify what 'F' signifies, as Aristotle conceives of signification, which requires specifying a feature true of all Fs, though not one true only of Fs.

<sup>52</sup> Initially he doesn't take it to be a real kind or a form; but he thinks there is such a thing as virtue, even if he doesn't have a clear conception of what sort of thing it is. Whatever Meno's initial views about virtue are, we've seen that Socrates explains the Oneness Assumption to him; according to it, virtue is some one form or essence, the same in all cases. So during the course of the conversation with Socrates, Meno becomes clearer about what sort of thing virtue is, and he looks for an account of it in the light of that deeper understanding. Of course, neither Meno nor his slave is on a par with practicing scientists. Nonetheless, they are able to inquire in a way that satisfies Aristotle's prior-cognition principle as it is described in 1.1, even if they don't satisfy it in the more determinate way in which it is developed for 'scientific' inquiry in Book 2. Thanks to David Charles for helpful discussion of this issue.

<sup>53</sup> At least, this is so for learning by deduction (or for that as well as learning by definition: see n. 39).

real essence is.<sup>54</sup> The strategy is the same as Plato's. Like Plato, Aristotle describes a cognitive condition that permits inquiry but falls short of superior cognition. And like Plato, he suggests that the content of that cognitive condition need not be identical with what one is seeking to learn: a stepping-stone version of a prior-cognition principle will do.

Aristotle's implicit reply, like Plato's reply in the geometrical discussion, rejects S3: one can inquire into something even if one doesn't know what it is (that is, even if one doesn't have P-knowledge, or superior cognition, of its real essence). If one is inquiring about F, it will do if one grasps what 'F' signifies and/or that Fs exist, where this grasp need not amount to P-knowledge or superior cognition. Not only has Aristotle not required P-knowledge or superior cognition of that which one is inquiring into; but neither has he required us to have any P-knowledge or superior cognition (or indeed any A-knowledge) of anything at all. So he hasn't yet endorsed even a stepping-stone version of a *foreknowledge* principle; he's endorsed only a stepping-stone version of a *prior-cognition* principle.

## 10. A particular case

Aristotle began by speaking in general terms about the sort of prior cognition that is needed for intellectual learning as such. He then narrowed his scope to deduction in particular. Now he narrows his scope even further, by focusing on a particular case (*enia*: 71a21).<sup>55</sup>

I. It is possible to *gnôrisein* <that q> by previously *gnôrisein* <that p> and acquiring *gnôsis* <that q> at the same time (*hama*)<sup>56</sup> <as one acquires cognition of r>—for example, in the cases that fall under the universal of which one has cognition.

<sup>54</sup> I take the term 'springboard' from Charles, *AME*, 35; 'Paradox', 147.

<sup>55</sup> I have inserted 'I', 'II', and 'III' for ease of reference.

<sup>56</sup> There's dispute about whether *hama* indicates a partial exception to the prior-cognition principle. On one view, Aristotle's point is that, contrary to it, one doesn't always need prior cognition of the 'minor' premise (in quotation marks, since the argument at issue isn't a demonstration in the strict sense); one can acquire cognition of it at the same time as one acquires cognition of the conclusion. For this interpretation, see R. McKirahan, *Principles and Proofs*, 183. B2, 85, by contrast, thinks Aristotle's point is that the learner must know the universal premise before coming to class, but can learn the minor premise in class, in the course of being taught the conclusion, but before one actually learns it. Hence, in Barnes's view, there is no exception to the prior-cognition principle, since one cognizes the minor premise as one is being led to the conclusion, but before one reaches it.

Presumably one doesn't learn the conclusion literally instantaneously; there's at least an unconscious inference, which takes some time. In this sense, Barnes is right. However, the time involved is very short; there's not a long learning process. In this sense, McKirahan is right. It's worth noting that in the parallel passage in *APr*. 2.21, Aristotle uses not just *hama* but also *euthus* (67a24–5). On *euthus* in this connection, see LaBarge, 'Simultaneous Learning', 196–7. For further discussion, see D. Bronstein, 'Meno's Paradox'.

II. For one previously knew (*proêdei*) that every triangle has angles equal to two right angles. But one *gnôrizet* that this figure in the semicircle is a triangle at the same time as performing the induction.<sup>57</sup> For in some cases one learns in this way, rather than *gnôrizet* the last term through the middle. This is true when one reaches the particulars, i.e. things not said of any subject.

III. Before the induction, or (*ê*) before getting a deduction, one should perhaps be said to know (*epistasthai*) <the conclusion> in one way (*tropon tina*) but not in another. For if one did not know (*eidenai*) without qualification (*haplôs*) whether <a given triangle> is, how could one know (*eidenai*) without qualification that it has two right angles? But it's clear that one knows (*epistasthai*) it insofar as one knows (*epistasthai*) it universally; but one does not know (*epistasthai*) it without qualification. Otherwise the puzzle (*aporêma*) in the *Meno* will result: for one will learn either nothing or that which (*ha*) one <already> knows. (71a17–30)<sup>58</sup>

In I, Aristotle says that there are some arguments whose conclusions one can cognize (that is, one can cognize that their conclusions are true) even if one doesn't have prior cognition of all the premises (that is, even if one doesn't grasp that all of them are true). This occurs 'in the cases that fall under the universal of

One might argue that the prior cognition rule isn't violated, even if the minor premise isn't antecedently cognized, on the ground that the prior-cognition principle doesn't always require that both premises be antecedently cognized in the sense of grasping that they are true (which is what is at issue here). Perhaps, in the case Aristotle describes, the prior-cognition principle is satisfied even if only the major premise is antecedently cognized. For earlier Aristotle said that sometimes all one needs prior cognition of is of what the relevant terms signify; and he gives triangle as an example. Since the learner in his example grasps what 'triangle' signifies, he satisfies the prior-cognition principle. Philoponus, 8.6–11, gives a different argument for the same conclusion. He also suggests that perhaps the minor premise is contained potentially in the major premise, and so in that sense it is antecedently cognized (8.11–19).

<sup>57</sup> *epagomenos*; cf. 71a24, *epachthênai*. There is dispute about whether Aristotle is using these words nontechnically, to mean 'being led on', sc. to knowledge, sc. through deduction; or whether he is using them for induction in his technical sense (the nature of which is also disputed). The first view is favored by Ross, *Analytics*, 506; and Barnes. (Barnes favors this interpretation in his commentary in both B1 and B2, but B1 translates as 'induction', whereas B2 translates as 'led to the conclusion'.) For versions of the second view, see Hamlyn, 'Aristotelian Epagoge'; R. McKirahan, 'Aristotelian Epagoge in *Prior Analytics*, 2.21 and *Posterior Analytics* 1.1', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 21 (1983), 1–13; M. Gifford, 'Aristotle on Platonic Recollection and the Paradox of Knowing Universals: *Prior Analytics* B.21 67a8–30', *Phronesis* 44 (1999), 1–29; and LaBarge, 'Simultaneous Learning'. Since this issue doesn't affect my main concerns, I shall not discuss it here. Whatever *epagomenos* means here, Aristotle is considering, if only *inter alia*, a deductive argument; and I shall focus on it.

<sup>58</sup> Ἔστι δὲ γνωρίζειν τὰ μὲν πρότερον γνωρίσαντα, τῶν δὲ καὶ ἅμα λαμβάνοντα τὴν γνώσιν, οἷον ὅσα τυγχάνει ὄντα ὑπὸ τὸ καθόλου οὐ ἔχει τὴν γνώσιν. ὅτι μὲν γὰρ πᾶν τρίγωνον ἔχει δυσὶν ὀρθαῖς ἴσας, προήδει· ὅτι δὲ τότε τὸ ἐν τῷ ἡμικυκλίῳ τρίγωνόν ἐστιν, ἅμα ἐπαγόμενος ἐγνώρισεν. (ἐνίων γὰρ τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον ἡ μάθησις ἐστι, καὶ οὐ διὰ τοῦ μέσου τὸ ἔσχατον γνωρίζεται, ὅσα ἤδη τῶν καθ' ἑκαστα τυγχάνει ὄντα καὶ μὴ καθ' ὑποκειμένου τινός.) πρὶν δ' ἐπαχθῆναι ἡ λαβεῖν συλλογισμὸν τρόπον μὲν τινα ἴσως φατέον ἐπίστασθαι, τρόπον δ' ἄλλον οὐ. ὁ γὰρ μὴ ἤδει εἰ ἔστιν ἀπλῶς, τοῦτο πῶς ἤδει ὅτι δύο ὀρθὰς ἔχει ἀπλῶς; ἀλλὰ δῆλον ὡς ὧδὲ μὲν ἐπίσταται, ὅτι καθόλου ἐπίσταται, ἀπλῶς δ' οὐκ ἐπίσταται. εἰ δὲ μή, τὸ ἐν τῷ Μένωνι ἀπόρημα συμβήσεται· ἡ γὰρ οὐδὲν μαθήσεται ἢ ἂ οἶδεν.

which one has *gnôsis*'. In II, he gives an example. In III, he summarizes his main point and relates it to the *Meno*.

In I, the only cognitive terms Aristotle uses are forms of *gnôrizēin* and *gnôsis* (*gignôskein*). In II, he also uses forms of *eidenai* and *epistasthai*. *Eidenai* and *epistasthai* are generally thought to indicate knowledge.<sup>59</sup> One might then infer that, earlier in the chapter, *gnôsis* is knowledge and so superior cognition.

However, this line of reasoning should be resisted. First, when Aristotle makes his general point in I, he uses forms just of *gnôsis* and *gnôrizēin*. It's only in II and III, when he turns to a particular case, that he uses forms of *eidenai* and *epistasthai*. Even if genuine knowledge that the premises are true is required in this special case, it doesn't follow that it is needed for learning in general. Secondly, the point Aristotle makes in I applies not only to a learner who already has knowledge of the 'major' premise but also to a learner who has just true belief about it. For, as we shall see in more detail shortly, he considers a case in which one knows that a universal premise is true; and he claims that this implies that one in a way knows that a given conclusion is true. But it is equally true that if one merely has a true belief that the universal premise is true, one thereby in a way has a true belief that the conclusion is true. Though he illustrates his point in II and III with a knower, his point is not special to knowledge as opposed to true belief. Thirdly, even if, in II and III, Aristotle has A-knowledge in mind, it does not follow that he has superior cognition in mind. And I suggest below that, when Aristotle mentions knowledge in II and III, we need not take him to have superior cognition in mind.

Let's now look at the case Aristotle discusses. He considers the following argument:<sup>60</sup>

- (A) Every triangle has interior angles whose sum is equal to the sum of two right angles (= 2R).
- (B) This figure in the semicircle is a triangle.
- (C) Therefore this figure has 2R.

He then considers someone who knows that (A) is true, but who doesn't know that this particular triangle exists and who therefore hasn't explicitly entertained (C).

<sup>59</sup> However, Ackrill, 'Aristotle's Theory of Definition', 366, interestingly suggests that in the *APo.*, Aristotle sometimes uses *eidenai* for true belief (or, Ackrill also suggests, for what he calls 'weak knowledge').

<sup>60</sup> The discussion that follows is indebted to the lucid account in B2, 87–8. For a different account of what argument Aristotle has in mind, see Ross, *Analytics*, 505–6.

Before looking at how Aristotle explains this case, let's return to the issue of what level of cognition is at issue. One might think Aristotle has in mind an expert geometrician; if so, it would be reasonable to think he has superior cognition in mind or, at least, a higher level of cognition than the one the slave has in the geometrical inquiry in the *Meno*. One might then argue that Aristotle's concern in this passage is quite different from the sort of case Plato focuses on in the geometry discussion: Aristotle is concerned just with an advanced learner; Plato is concerned with someone at a lower cognitive level.<sup>61</sup>

But I don't think Aristotle has in mind an especially sophisticated learner. He doesn't, for example, say or imply that the learner he is interested in must have proven that (A) is true in order to 'know' it in the way at issue here. For all he says, perhaps I 'know' that (A) is true, not because I've proven that it is, but because I've taken Aristotle's word for it and have good reason to believe that he's reliable on this point. That certainly wouldn't amount to superior cognition.<sup>62</sup> Even if he has A-knowledge in mind, his point doesn't seem to turn on that. For, as I suggested above and as we shall see in more detail below, his point works just as well (or badly) if the learner has mere true belief. Anyone who grasps that every triangle has 2R will do for his purposes. But whatever level of cognition is at issue, Aristotle is considering just a special case, not intellectual learning as such.

## 11. Analysis of the case

Aristotle suggests that, in the case he describes, the following seems to be true:

- (1) A knows that every triangle has 2R.
- (2) A doesn't know that this triangle exists.
- (3) Unless one knows that x exists, one can't know anything about x (71a26–7).

Therefore

- (4) A doesn't know that this triangle has 2R.

But Aristotle also seems tempted by the following argument:

- (1) A knows that every triangle has 2R.

<sup>61</sup> For this view, see Bronstein, 'Meno's Paradox', 121–3; 126–7. Here again, though, we should recall that even though the slave starts off without any knowledge, Socrates indicates that he could in the end acquire knowledge 'as accurate as anyone's', by following the same method.

<sup>62</sup> Nor would it clearly even amount to A-knowledge. If it doesn't, then Aristotle uses epistemic terms loosely here, as he seems to do in any case in speaking of *epistēmē* of the conclusion. See n. 64.

(5) This is a triangle.

Therefore

(6) A knows that this triangle has 2R.

Steps (4) and (6) seem to contradict one another. Various solutions are in principle possible. For example, one might argue that (1) and (5) do not imply (6)—which, given the intensional context, seems the most obvious strategy.

Aristotle, however, favors a different solution. He suggests that the seeming contradiction is not genuine, since different types of knowledge are at issue. We don't both know and not know, with the same kind of knowledge, that this triangle has 2R; hence (4) and (6) are compatible. I take it that he favors this strategy, not because he is unaware of, or is confused about, the nature of intensional contexts, but because he is sympathetic to the view that, in learning by deduction, when one knows the universal premise one in some way also thereby knows the conclusion, even if one isn't in a position to entertain it explicitly; and he is trying to explain what way that is. To do so, he reads (4) as:

(4') A doesn't know without qualification (*haplôs*) that this triangle has 2R.

And he reads (6) as:

(6') A knows universally (*katholou*) that this triangle has 2R.

He then argues that (4') and (6') are compatible: one can simultaneously know and not know that this triangle has 2R, if one knows this universally but not without qualification.<sup>63</sup>

To know without qualification that this triangle has 2R is to have *de dicto* knowledge that (C) is true.<sup>64</sup> This is the sort of knowledge one initially *doesn't*

<sup>63</sup> Aristotle is contrasting two ways of knowing (or grasping) that (C) is true: one can know it without qualification or universally. Contrast M. Ferejohn, 'Meno's Paradox and De Re Knowledge in Aristotle's Theory of Demonstration', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 5 (1988), 97–117 at e.g. 106; cf. his *The Origins of Aristotelian Science* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991). He thinks that to know something universally is to know a universal, and that to know something without qualification is to know a particular, so that Aristotle is contrasting knowing different things, not two ways of knowing the same proposition.

<sup>64</sup> As various commentators have noted, it's odd that Aristotle speaks as though one can *epistasthai haplôs* that this triangle has 2R. For on his technical account of that notion in 1.2, one cannot do so. However, Aristotle hasn't yet introduced that account; so perhaps he feels free not to speak in accordance with it. B2, 87 plausibly suggests that Aristotle uses the phrase here just to express 'an ordinary knowledge claim', in contrast to knowing (C) with some sort of qualification; in the present context, the relevant qualification is knowing the conclusion merely universally. This fits well with my suggestion above that Aristotle doesn't have superior cognition in mind here, even though he uses forms of *eidenai* and *epistasthai*. For an extreme reaction to the occurrence of *haplôs*



have of (C), in the case Aristotle is considering. What, however, is it to know something universally?<sup>65</sup> Aristotle answers this question in 1.24:<sup>66</sup>

It is especially clear that the universal demonstration is more important from the fact that in having (*echontes*) the prior of the propositions, we in a way know (*ismen pōs*) the posterior one too: we have it potentially. For example, if someone knows that every triangle has two right angles, he in a way also knows (*oide pōs*) that the isosceles has two right angles—he knows it potentially—even if he does not know that the isosceles is a triangle. But one who has <only> the latter proposition does not know the universal in any way, neither potentially nor actually. (86a22–9)<sup>67</sup>

What sort of potentiality is at issue here? A natural first thought is that Aristotle has in mind either first or second potentiality.<sup>68</sup> As we've seen,<sup>69</sup> a first potentiality is the sort of potentiality a child has to (e.g.) know language, in that she can do so in due course. A second potentiality is the sort of potentiality had by someone who (e.g.) knows French, though she isn't exercising her knowledge at the time; this is also called first actuality, in distinction from second actuality, which I have when I exercise my knowledge of French by, for example, speaking or reading it on an occasion. Though it would be natural to think that Aristotle has in mind his distinction between first and second potentiality, I'm not sure he

*epistatai* in 1.1., see M. Gifford, 'Lexical Anomalies in the Introduction to the *Posterior Analytics*, Part I', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 19 (2000), 163–223.

<sup>65</sup> Since knowing something unqualifiedly (as it is explained here) is knowing it *de dicto*, it is tempting to think that knowing something universally is knowing it *de re*; and B2, 88, may succumb to this temptation. Cf. Ferejohn, 'Meno's Paradox and De Re Knowledge in Aristotle's Theory of Demonstration', 116 n. 12; and his *Origins of Aristotelian Science*, 42–3 (both passages are cited in B2). For a challenge to this view, see B. Morison, 'An Aristotelian Distinction between Two Types of Knowledge', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2012), 29–57, at 40–2. The issue is complicated by the fact that the *de re/de dicto* distinction is drawn in different ways. Whatever one in the end decides about this, it is important to bear in mind that what one knows only universally is not, or is not only, a thing (*a res*), such as this triangle, but the proposition that this triangle has 2R.

<sup>66</sup> Neither the examples nor the terminology are exactly the same in 1.1 and 1.24. For example, in 1.1 Aristotle focuses on a particular triangle; in 1.24 he focuses on types of triangles. Further, 1.24 discusses types of demonstration; but strict demonstration isn't at issue in the triangle example in 1.1. Nonetheless, the two discussions are close enough for it to be reasonable to use 1.24 to interpret 1.1, as B1, 95, also does. Philoponus, 8.12, and Aquinas, Lecture 3 on Book 1, also explain what Aristotle says here in terms of potential knowledge. I take it that *pōs*, in 1.24, corresponds to *tropon tina* in the parallel passage in 1.1. Cf. *APr.* 2.21, which I discuss below.

<sup>67</sup> *μάλιστα δὲ δῆλον ὅτι ἡ καθόλου κυριωτέρα, ὅτι τῶν προτάσεων τὴν μὲν προτέραν ἔχοντες ἴσμεν πως καὶ τὴν ὑστέραν καὶ ἔχομεν δυνάμει, οἷον εἴ τις οἶδεν ὅτι πᾶν τρίγωνον δυσὶν ὀρθαῖς, οἶδὲ πως καὶ τὸ ἰσοσκελὲς ὅτι δύο ὀρθαῖς, δυνάμει, καὶ εἰ μὴ οἶδε τὸ ἰσοσκελὲς ὅτι τρίγωνον· ὁ δὲ ταύτην ἔχων τὴν πρότασιν τὸ καθόλου οὐδαμῶς οἶδεν, οὔτε δυνάμει οὔτ' ἐνεργείᾳ.*

<sup>68</sup> However, first and second potentiality do not exhaust the types of potentiality that Aristotle recognizes: see e.g. *Met.* 5.12 and Book 10.

<sup>69</sup> Ch. 5, sect. 2.

does so. For what the learner potentially knows is a singular proposition, that this triangle has 2R; but we don't have a first or second potentiality to know singular propositions. First and second potentialities are more generic: we have a first potentiality to know language, but not to know a specific language, let alone a particular proposition. Similarly, a geometrician, for example, has a second-potentiality knowledge, or grasp, of geometry, since he knows or grasps geometry. But no one has a second-potentiality grasp of a specific geometrical proposition. Even if that's wrong,<sup>70</sup> still, the learner in Aristotle's example doesn't seem to have second-potentiality knowledge that this triangle has 2R; for she has never even entertained that proposition. Perhaps Aristotle means that the learner in his example potentially knows that this triangle has 2R in virtue of her second-potentiality knowledge, or grasp, of geometry. But however we explain the relevant sort of potentiality, Aristotle is right to say that (4') and (6') do not conflict.<sup>71</sup>

## 12. The *aporêma* of the *Meno*

Aristotle next says that if we don't accept the distinction he's just drawn (between knowing the conclusion universally and knowing it without qualification):

the puzzle (*aporêma*) in the *Meno* will result: for one will learn either nothing or that which one <already> knows. (71a29–30)<sup>72</sup>

Aristotle's distinction between knowing something universally and knowing it without qualification is therefore his explicit solution to the *aporêma*. Before asking exactly how that distinction is meant to solve the *aporêma*, let's look at Aristotle's formulation of the *aporêma*. For it has been argued that it has only 'a vague resemblance' to the *Meno*'s.<sup>73</sup> There are certainly differences between Plato's and Aristotle's formulations. What we need to know is how significant they are.

First it's worth noting that, whereas Socrates claims that Meno has introduced an *eristikos logos*, Aristotle mentions an *aporêma*, a puzzle. As we've seen, it might—but shouldn't—be thought that Plato uses *eristikos* in order to suggest

<sup>70</sup> David Bronstein has suggested to me that the use of the plural *hexeis* in 2.19, 99b25, suggests that Aristotle thinks we can have second-potentiality knowledge of particular propositions.

<sup>71</sup> However, whether we should say that he has specified a way in which the learner already genuinely knows that (C) is true is another matter. Barnes, for example, thinks that the sense in which the learner is said to know (C) already is 'utterly unnatural' (B1, 95); contrast Morison, 'An Aristotelian Distinction between Two Types of Knowledge', 37–8.

<sup>72</sup> τὸ ἐν τῷ Μένωνι ἀπόρημα συμβήσεται· ἡ γὰρ οὐδὲν μαθήσεται ἢ ἃ οἶδεν.

<sup>73</sup> LaBarge, 'Simultaneous Learning', 201; cf. 200.

that Meno's Paradox is merely sophistical and so not to be taken seriously. Perhaps Aristotle uses *aporêma* to make it clear that he, at any rate, takes the argument he has in mind seriously.

Another difference is that Aristotle mentions learning, whereas Plato mentions inquiry. However, we've seen that Plato is interested in zetetic learning—in learning that takes the form of inquiry—and it falls within the scope of Aristotle's concerns here.

It's been suggested that another difference is that, whereas Plato is interested just in discovering definitions, and tries to do so by reasoning from particulars to universals, Aristotle, in the present context, moves from universals to particulars: from knowing that a universal premise is true to knowing that a particular instance is.<sup>74</sup> However, we've seen that Plato's interest is not confined to discovering definitions. The geometrical discussion doesn't aim to discover a definition. Indeed, one might argue that, in a way, it involves reasoning from universals to particulars or, at least, from the more to the less universal. For Socrates gives a general account of what a square is and of what a diagonal is; the slave uses his grasp of what these are to find the solution to a particular geometrical problem. But even if Plato and Aristotle defend the possibility of different cases of learning or inquiry, it doesn't follow that they aren't considering the same paradox. Meno's Paradox isn't restricted to a particular case of inquiry; it challenges the possibility of inquiry as such.

Another alleged difference, suggested by LaBarge, is that, whereas Socrates describes a dilemma, Aristotle doesn't do so; rather, he mentions only the alleged impossibility of learning that which one already knows, which is just one horn of Socrates' dilemma (though phrased, as we've seen, in terms of learning rather than inquiry).<sup>75</sup> If LaBarge were right, there would be the following interesting result: Meno asks only how one can inquire (and realize one has found what one was looking for, should one do so) if one doesn't at all know that which one is inquiring into; Aristotle asks only how one can learn if one knows that which one is learning; Socrates asks how one can inquire whether one does or doesn't know that which one is inquiring into.

In support of his claim that Aristotle mentions just one horn of Socrates' dilemma, LaBarge says that, in the immediate context, Aristotle considers a learner who has some knowledge, which is relevant to just one horn of the dilemma. But it's equally true that Socrates considers just inquirers who lack knowledge. Nonetheless, he plainly mentions a dilemma that also challenges the

<sup>74</sup> Gifford, LaBarge, and Bronstein all mention this alleged difference.

<sup>75</sup> LaBarge, 'Simultaneous Learning', 191–2.

possibility of inquiring if one has knowledge. Similarly, even if Aristotle focuses on a learner who has knowledge, it doesn't follow that he doesn't formulate the *aporêma* as a dilemma that also mentions the alleged impossibility of learning if one lacks knowledge.

And I think Aristotle does formulate the *aporêma* as a dilemma. This is partly for textual reasons.<sup>76</sup> But it is also because we can see how the dilemma is meant to go. The first horn ('you will learn nothing') corresponds to S3 in Socrates' formulation ('If one does not know x, one cannot inquire into x'). The implied reason, in Aristotle's formulation, is that if you don't already know that which you are learning, you aren't in a position to learn it, and so you can't learn it; and so you will learn nothing. The second horn in Aristotle's formulation is 'you will learn that which (*ha*; plural relative pronoun) you <already> know'. This corresponds to S2 in Socrates' formulation ('If one knows x, one cannot inquire into x'). The implied reason is that if you already know that which you are learning, you can't genuinely learn it; for genuine learning involves acquiring new knowledge or true beliefs. Though Aristotle's formulation is terser than Plato's, he presents a dilemma, which we may formulate as follows:<sup>77</sup>

- (A1) One either knows, or does not know, that which one is learning.
- (A2) If one knows that which one is learning, one can't learn it ('one will learn only that which one knows').
- (A3) If one doesn't know that which one is learning, one can't learn it ('one will learn nothing').
- (A4) Therefore, whether one knows, or does not know, that which one is learning, one can't learn it.

This dilemma is recognizably the same as Socrates'. However, as we've seen, Socrates' dilemma can be understood in different ways. For example, Meno

<sup>76</sup> LaBarge, 'Simultaneous Learning' takes 'or' ( $\epsilon$ ) to be epexegetic rather than genuinely disjunctive: see 191, 201. However, even if a single occurrence of  $\epsilon$  could be so understood, it's not clear that the double occurrence ( $\epsilon \dots \epsilon$ ) can be so understood. Thanks here to Verity Harte and M. M. McCabe; see also Bronstein, 'Meno's Paradox', 130, n. 44.

<sup>77</sup> Aristotle mentions what I have labelled A3 before he mentions what I have labelled A2. I transpose them for the sake of parallelism with Socrates' dilemma. In thinking about how to formulate the argument I take Aristotle to have in mind (both here and below), I am indebted to comments from David Bronstein and Paolo Crivelli. Note that Aristotle, like Plato in formulating both Meno's questions and Socrates' dilemma, uses the relative pronoun. We saw that Plato also uses *hoti*, which can be used both as a relative pronoun and as an interrogative; but he does so in supporting S3, not in the dilemma proper. As we've seen, it's been thought that, in using *hoti*, he in some way equivocates, though I argued that he doesn't do so. Be that as it may, it's clear that Aristotle doesn't do so. Not only does he not equivocate in his own right; but neither does he suggest that Meno's Paradox rests on an equivocation over what-clauses.

thinks that not knowing involves being in a cognitive blank; Socrates explains that it can instead be lacking P-knowledge, which is compatible with having true beliefs and so not being in a cognitive blank. This leads them to render different verdicts on S3: Meno thinks it is true; Socrates thinks it is false. Both of them are right—given how each understands what’s involved in not knowing. Further, in Chapter 3, section 7, I considered three different formulations of the underlying logical structure of the dilemma.

Of the three formulations described in Chapter 3, Aristotle favors Formulation 1.<sup>78</sup> On this reading, he takes the *aporêma* of the *Meno* to be a dilemma whose first premise is an instance of the Law of the Excluded Middle. A2 and A3 then say that, whichever of its exclusive and exhaustive options obtains, learning is impossible. So read, the argument is valid and the first premise is true. Hence the conclusion can be avoided only by rejecting the second or third premise. But we can know which of these two premises to reject only once we know what knowing and not knowing amount to. I ask about that in the next section.

Notice that, though Aristotle says he is discussing the *aporêma* of the *Meno*, he focuses on Socrates’ dilemma. Unlike Meno, he doesn’t ask just how one can inquire into something if one doesn’t at all know what it is; rather, like Socrates, he considers difficulties with learning, or inquiring, whether one knows or doesn’t know. Further, like Socrates, he doesn’t explicitly mention M3.

### 13. Aristotle’s reply

Having looked at how Aristotle understands Meno’s Paradox, we can now ask how he replies to it. Like Plato, he replies by specifying precise ways of knowing and not knowing, which he then uses to disarm the dilemma. But whereas Plato replies by explaining that knowledge is P-knowledge and that not knowing is just lacking P-knowledge (which need not amount to being in a cognitive blank), Aristotle replies by distinguishing knowing something universally from knowing it without qualification: whereas Plato distinguishes ways of not knowing, Aristotle distinguishes ways of knowing. He then argues that one can learn, or come to know, something, even if one already knows it. For even if one has universal knowledge that something is so, one can come to know without qualification that it is so.

Aristotle writes tersely, as though the distinction allows one to avoid both horns of the dilemma, and as though failure to draw the distinction is sufficient for generating the dilemma. But I think he means only that the distinction allows one to avoid the conclusion by rejecting A2 (which corresponds to S2). His point

<sup>78</sup> Contrast Bronstein, ‘Meno’s Paradox’, 132.

is that even if, as in the case he describes, one already knows that which one is learning, or inquiring into, one can nonetheless learn, or inquire into, it—so long as one knows it only universally. For that leaves room for one to come to know it without qualification.<sup>79</sup> Presumably he offers this reply because he wants to explain how, even though, in the case he considers, one already knows the conclusion in a way, one can learn it, by coming to know it in a different way.<sup>80</sup> This suggests that Aristotle is focusing on the following, more determinate, version, or instance, of Meno's Paradox:

- (A1a) Either the learner knows the conclusion (that this triangle has 2R) or he does not.
- (A2a) If he knows the conclusion, he can't learn it.
- (A3a) If he doesn't know the conclusion, he can't learn it.
- (A4) Therefore, he can't learn the conclusion.

Aristotle then notes that we can understand each of A2a and A3a in two different ways:

- (A2a1) If the learner knows the conclusion without qualification, he can't learn it.
- (A2a2) If the learner knows the conclusion universally, he can't learn it.
- (A3a1) If the learner doesn't know the conclusion without qualification, he can't learn it.
- (A3a2) If the learner doesn't know the conclusion universally, he can't learn it.

Aristotle accepts A2a1; but he rejects A2a2. He also rejects A3a1: one might fail to know the conclusion without qualification, but still be able to learn it. For one might know it universally; and that would put one in a good position to learn the conclusion without qualification. There's also a sense in which he rejects A3a2. For he thinks one *can* learn the conclusion even if one doesn't initially know it even universally: someone who is untutored in geometry *can* learn the conclusion both universally and unqualifiedly, in the sense that she is capable of doing so. It's

<sup>79</sup> LaBarge, 'Simultaneous Learning', 191, thinks Aristotle intends his distinction between two kinds of knowledge to avoid 'both' horns; since LaBarge sees that it doesn't provide a way of avoiding the second horn, he concludes that Aristotle really mentions just one horn of Socrates' dilemma. My alternative is to say that Aristotle means that his distinction allows us to avoid the *aporèma* by showing that it is unsound, because A2 is false. Here I am indebted to discussion with Lesley Brown.

<sup>80</sup> To say that Aristotle's reply involves rejecting A2 is not to say that he accepts A3. Below I note a way in which he rejects A3. Similarly, though Plato's reply focuses on rejecting S3, there's a reading of S2 on which he rejects it. He focuses on rejecting S3, because that's the salient case, since he and Meno don't know but inquire. Aristotle focuses on rejecting A2, because his main concern is to explain how one can learn something even if one knows it (in a way).

just that she can't do so immediately; she needs to learn enough geometry first. However, Aristotle is considering just the case of someone who already knows (or believes) the conclusion universally.

Whereas Plato distinguishes two ways of *not knowing* that which one is inquiring into (being in a cognitive blank and lacking P-knowledge) and argues that one but not the other precludes inquiring into it, Aristotle distinguishes two ways of *knowing* (knowing unqualifiedly and knowing universally) that which one is learning and argues that one but not the other precludes learning it. Hence, though Aristotle has the *aporêma* in the *Meno* in mind, he focuses on a different case than Plato focuses on; and he suggests a different reply. Plato focuses on someone who lacks P-knowledge; and he then rejects S3. Aristotle focuses on someone who knows the universal premise without qualification but who doesn't know the conclusion without qualification; and he then rejects A2, which corresponds to S2. Though Plato and Aristotle consider different cases and offer different replies, they consider the same paradox and their replies to it are compatible. Plato explains how one can inquire into something even if one doesn't have any P-knowledge, either about that which one is inquiring into or about anything else (since relying on relevant true beliefs will do). Aristotle explains how one can learn something even if one already knows it; for one can learn it unqualifiedly even if one already knows it merely universally.<sup>81</sup>

Here, however, we must be careful. When Plato says that we can inquire into something even if we lack all knowledge, he means that we can do so even if we lack all P-knowledge. When Aristotle says that we can learn something even if we already know it, he doesn't mean that we can learn something even if we already have P-knowledge or superior cognition of it. He means that we can learn that a given proposition is true even if we already know that proposition universally. But knowing a conclusion merely universally falls short of having superior cognition of it.<sup>82</sup> Neither Plato nor Aristotle requires having P-knowledge or superior cognition (or, I think, even A-knowledge) to inquire or learn.

#### 14. Must one know that which one is learning?

We noted earlier that, according to Barnes, Aristotle endorses a matching version of a foreknowledge principle at the end of *APo.* 1.1. So far I've suggested that

<sup>81</sup> I've said that Plato rejects S2 (though not in replying to the paradox) by arguing that even if one has P-knowledge of what, e.g. virtue is, one can still inquire about virtue. Aristotle's rejection of A2 is quite different.

<sup>82</sup> So also McKirahan, *Principles and Proofs*, 183.

Aristotle replies by saying that one *can* learn something even if one already knows it in a way. That falls short of accepting a matching version of a foreknowledge principle. To do that, one must say that, to learn, or inquire into, something, one *must* already know it. To say that one can learn, or inquire into, something *even if* one knows it (in a way) is not to say, as the matching version requires, that one can learn, or inquire into, something *only if* one knows it. Has Aristotle committed himself to this latter claim?

He certainly hasn't endorsed a general, or unrestricted, matching version of a foreknowledge principle; he hasn't argued that, in general, one can learn that *p* only if one already knows that *p*. But has he endorsed a restricted matching version, according to which there are some cases—those that are relevantly like the triangle case<sup>83</sup>—in which one can learn that *p* only if one already knows that *p*? Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that, in the triangle example as he describes it, one can learn the conclusion (without qualification) only if one already knows it (universally). For one knows the universal premise; and Aristotle thinks that implies knowing the conclusion (universally). So *someone who knows that the universal premise is true* can learn that the conclusion is true only if they already know universally that it is. For it follows from the fact that one knows that the universal premise is true, that one also in a way knows that the conclusion is true.

But no, in the following sense. First, Aristotle allows that someone untutored in geometry *can* learn that this triangle has 2R. It's just that such a person has to learn a lot of other things first, which the person in Aristotle's example already knows or in some way grasps. Secondly, the prior knowledge one has of the conclusion is just universal or potential knowledge; one doesn't antecedently know without qualification that the conclusion is true. Yet knowing a conclusion merely potentially or universally is, at best, a low-grade way of knowing it.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, one point of his argument is that one doesn't need superior cognition, or even A-knowledge, that something is true, to learn that it is; it will do if one knows it merely universally. That's a robust enough condition to allow one to learn the conclusion without qualification; but it's not so robust that having it precludes learning it without qualification. Aristotle hasn't endorsed *any* version of a foreknowledge principle, even in the special case at issue here, if knowledge is taken to be P-knowledge or superior cognition. Nor has Aristotle said that, to inquire about or discover a definition, one needs antecedent knowledge of that

<sup>83</sup> It's an interesting question how many cases of learning are relevantly like the triangle example. For an interesting discussion (though with reference to Plato rather than Aristotle), see L. Powers, 'Knowledge by Deduction', *Philosophical Review* 87 (1978), 337–71.

<sup>84</sup> Perhaps the potential knowledge mentioned in 1.24 is higher grade than the potential knowledge at issue in 1.1. But neither amounts to superior cognition.



very definition. In his example, what one has antecedent ‘knowledge’ of is the conclusion that this triangle has 2R. Yet when people say that Plato accepts a matching version of foreknowledge, they generally mean that he believes that one has to have P-knowledge of the very thing one is learning or inquiring into (at least in the case of definitions, but perhaps more generally). If Aristotle accepts a restricted matching version of some sort, it is at any rate very different from the one that Plato has (in my view wrongly) been thought to hold. Nor is it motivated by the sorts of considerations that have been (though again, in my view wrongly) thought to motivate Plato. For example, Aristotle isn’t here concerned with the ‘circle of beliefs’ objection.

Nor does Aristotle emphasize the point that if one knows the universal premise without qualification, one can’t learn the conclusion unless one already knows it universally. The point he emphasizes is that one *can* learn what one already knows (in a way): not that one *must* know something in order to learn it. That’s all he says in I above. It’s also the point he emphasizes at the end of the chapter:

But, I think, nothing prevents one from knowing (*epistasthai*) in one way that which one is learning, while not knowing (*agnoein*) it in another way. For what is absurd is not that one <already> knows (*oide*) in a way (*pôs*) that which one is learning, but that <one already knows it> in this way, that is, to the precise extent and in the precise way in which one is learning it. (71b5–8)<sup>85</sup>

Here Aristotle says only that there are ways in which one *can* learn something one already knows. He does not say that one can learn something *only if* one already knows it. Nor does he say that one can learn something only if one has some relevant knowledge or other. Interestingly, he also generalizes the point that he makes in discussing the triangle example. This suggests that he thinks that knowing something merely universally is not the only sort of prior knowledge of something that allows one to come to know it without qualification.<sup>86</sup>

All in all, then, it’s not clear that Aristotle accepts even a limited matching version of foreknowledge. But even if Aristotle in the end accepts a limited matching version of foreknowledge, we shouldn’t allow that to obscure the fact that Plato and Aristotle agree that, in this life, one doesn’t need to have P-knowledge, or superior cognition, of that which one is inquiring into—or of anything else—in order to inquire.

<sup>85</sup> ἀλλ’ οὐδέν (οἶμαι) κωλύει, ὃ μανθάνει, ἔστιν ὡς ἐπίστασθαι, ἔστι δ’ ὡς ἀγνοεῖν· ἄτοπον γὰρ οὐκ εἶ οἷός τε πῶς ὃ μανθάνει, ἀλλ’ εἰ ὥδέι, οἶον ἢ μανθάνει καὶ ὧς.

<sup>86</sup> Philoponus suggests another case: ‘it is possible for a person who knows something directly not to know it by *reductio ad impossibile*, and vice versa’ (16.20–5, in part; trans. McKirahan).

## 15. A rival solution

Having presented his own solution, Aristotle contrasts it with another one that he rejects (71a30–71b5). Consider again the argument we looked at above, (1)–(6) in section 11. According to some people, if one doesn't know that this triangle exists, one doesn't know that every triangle has 2R. One knows only that every triangle whose existence one is aware of has 2R. In that case, we are not entitled to (1); and so the problem of trying to explain how we both do and don't know that this triangle has 2R doesn't arise. Aristotle brusquely rejects this solution as not worth taking seriously, on the ground that it is incompatible with scientific practice, which, in his view, requires genuinely universal premises.<sup>87</sup>

This is meant to be a solution not just to the puzzle raised by (1)–(6) but also to the *aporêma* of the *Meno*.<sup>88</sup> The solution is that, even if one doesn't know something at all, one can learn it. Even if one doesn't at all know that this triangle has 2R, one can learn that it has 2R by learning that it exists and then seeing that it is relevantly like the triangles whose existence one is aware of and that one knows have 2R. Of course, if, at t1, one doesn't know that this triangle exists, then, at t1, one can't learn immediately that it has 2R. But one can begin a process that will eventually allow one to learn that it has 2R.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>87</sup> So B1, 96.

<sup>88</sup> Contrast B1, 96.

<sup>89</sup> Aquinas (Lecture 3 on Book 1) has a nice discussion of how this passage is meant to provide a different solution to Meno's Paradox from the ones he thinks Plato and Aristotle offer. In his view, Plato thinks we already need to know the conclusion without qualification (so he seems to ascribe a matching version of foreknowledge to Plato). According to the solution that Aristotle here rejects, we can learn the conclusion even if we don't foreknow it in any way at all, not even universally. Aristotle steers a middle course, saying that if we know the universal premise, we potentially know the conclusion; yet we can still learn that it is true, since we can come to know it without qualification. I've rejected Aquinas' account of Plato's solution. But what should we say about his account of Aristotle? I agree with him that Aristotle is contrasting his own solution, which allows us to learn something we already know in a way, with an alternative according to which we can learn something even if we initially lack all knowledge of it. However, Aquinas seems to suggest that Aristotle thinks that in *every* case of learning, we already in some way know the conclusion in one way, though we come to know it in a different way. In my view, by contrast, though Aristotle thinks that, in the triangle case, we in one way foreknow the conclusion, he allows that there are *other* cases in which we can learn what we initially don't at all know. For on the account of our cognitive development that he provides in 2.19, there's quite a lot that we initially don't at all know (or even have beliefs about) that we eventually learn. I discuss 2.19 briefly in sect. 17. But perhaps Aquinas agrees. For, having said that Aristotle thinks we always foreknow the conclusion in a way, he goes on to say: 'But if we understand knowledge in its proper sense, as actual knowledge, then what we learn was not foreknown.' However, he then says: 'To learn, therefore, is to be brought from potential or virtual or universal knowledge to knowledge which is proper and actual.'

## 16. *Prior Analytics* 2.21

So far we've focused on *APo.* 1.1. But Aristotle also mentions the *Meno* in *APr.* 2.21, where he again considers the triangle example. Let's now consider it. Since we've discussed *APo.* 1.1 in some detail, we can be briefer in discussing *APr.* 2.21.

Aristotle's general concern in this chapter is to explain how someone can both know and not know the same thing at the same time. He begins the chapter by describing various ways in which it is not possible to know and not know the same thing at the same time. But he thinks there are also ways in which it is possible to do so. To explain this, he again discusses the example of someone who knows that every triangle has 2R (and so, in Aristotle's view, knows in a way that this triangle has 2R), but who doesn't know that this triangle exists (and so, in another way, doesn't know that it has 2R).

Aristotle's explanation of this case differs verbally from the one he gives in *APo.* 1.1, but his basic point is the same. In *APo.* 1.1, as we've seen, he distinguishes two ways of knowing the conclusion: one can know it universally and/or without qualification. We know it merely universally when we know that every triangle has 2R but don't know that this triangle exists; hence we lack *de dicto* knowledge that it has 2R. We know without qualification that it has 2R when we have that *de dicto* knowledge. In *APr.* 2.21, by contrast, Aristotle distinguishes two ways of knowing (not the conclusion, but) the universal premise: we can know it 'in virtue of having universal knowledge' or 'in virtue of having particular knowledge'. We have the first when we have *de dicto* knowledge that the universal or general premise, that every triangle has 2R, is true. We have the second when we have *de dicto* knowledge that this triangle has 2R, that this one does so, and so on for every triangle there (timelessly?) is.<sup>90</sup>

It's not clear one could have the latter sort of knowledge. But if one were to have it, one would also thereby know without qualification that this triangle has

<sup>90</sup> It's interesting to compare this sort of knowledge with the rival solution to the *aporêma* that we looked at in the last section. According to it, we foreknow that every triangle whose existence we are aware of has 2R; but we don't foreknow that every triangle has 2R, since there are some triangles whose existence we aren't aware of. This seems to assume that the only way to know that every triangle has 2R is to have particular knowledge that this is so—that is, to know that this triangle has 2R, and so on for every triangle there is. And, of course, if one already knew that, one couldn't come to know that this triangle has 2R, since one would already know it without qualification. Those proposing the rival solution see that we don't have particular knowledge; hence they conclude that we don't foreknow that every triangle has 2R. Aristotle provides a different account of what it is to know that every triangle has 2R, according to which we don't need to know without qualification that this triangle has 2R and so on for every triangle there is. On this account, we can know without qualification that every triangle has 2R, without knowing without qualification that this particular triangle has 2R.

2R. If, however, one has just the former sort of knowledge, one doesn't thereby know without qualification that this triangle (whose existence one is unaware of) has 2R. Hence Aristotle rightly says that one can't have particular knowledge that every triangle has 2R compatibly with not knowing that this triangle does so. But he thinks that one can know and not know that this triangle has 2R if one knows the universal premise with universal but not with particular knowledge.

So far, this is just a different way of making the same point that he makes in *APo.* 1.1: that there is a way in which one can know and not know that a given triangle, whose existence (as a triangle) one is unaware of, has 2R. In *APo.* 1.1, as we've seen, Aristotle explains how this distinction allows us to solve the *aporêma* of the *Meno*. Here too he relates his point to the *Meno*. But rather than mentioning the *aporêma*, he mentions recollection:

And likewise (*homoiôs*) the argument (*logos*) in the *Meno*, that learning is recollection. For (*gar*) it never happens that one has prior knowledge (*proepistasthai*) of the particular; rather, one gets knowledge (*epistêmê*) of the particulars at the same time as one makes the induction, like those who recognize something (*hôsper anagnôrizontas*). For there are some things we know immediately (*euthus*)—for example, that <the angles> are equal to two right angles, if we know (*eidômen*)<sup>91</sup> that it is a triangle; and similarly also in the other cases (67a21–26).<sup>92</sup>

There's dispute about how to interpret this passage. In particular, it's not clear whether Aristotle is criticizing Plato or is in some way agreeing with him. Let's call the first interpretation the *critical interpretation*, and the second the *positive interpretation*. The critical interpretation is assumed in Jenkinson's translation:<sup>93</sup> 'the argument in the *Meno* that learning is recollection may be criticized in a similar way'.

Even if Jenkinson is right to think that Aristotle is criticizing Plato, we should not infer that from Aristotle's use of *homoiôs* ('likewise'). The word doesn't make it clear whether Aristotle is saying that Plato's view is similar to the one he is criticizing or to the one he himself endorses. To decide whether Aristotle is

<sup>91</sup> Or 'see': *idômen*. Both readings have manuscript warrant. Ross prints *idômen*; but in his note *ad loc* (471) he has 'know'. B2, 86, seems to favor *idômen*. If seeing is at issue, it would, of course, have to be seeing-as or seeing-that. Whether this would be tantamount to knowing depends on how demanding one's conception of knowledge is.

<sup>92</sup> ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ὁ ἐν τῷ Μένωνι λόγος, ὅτι ἡ μάθησις ἀνάμνησις. οὐδαμοῦ γὰρ συμβαίνει προεπίστασθαι τὸ καθ' ἑκάστον, ἀλλ' ἅμα τῇ ἐπαγωγῇ λαμβάνειν τὴν τῶν κατὰ μέρος ἐπιστήμην ὥσπερ ἀναγνωρίζοντας. ἐνία γὰρ εὐθὺς ἴσμεν, οἷον ὅτι δύο ὀρθαῖς, ἕαν ἐίδωμεν ὅτι τρίγωνον. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων.

<sup>93</sup> This translation can be found in J. Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

criticizing or in some way agreeing with Plato, we need to look at the *gar*-clause that follows ('For it never happens... recognize something').

On the critical interpretation, Aristotle is saying that Plato wrongly thinks we always have prior knowledge of whatever we learn; hence, since this is a case of learning, Plato is committed to the view that we have prior knowledge of particulars. Aristotle then objects that, in the case he describes, we don't have prior knowledge of particulars. Rather, we come to know them for the first time when we realize that (for example) this figure before us is a triangle.

This interpretation can't be quite right as it stands. For, as we've seen, Aristotle thinks that if we know that every triangle has 2R, there's a way in which we *do* have prior knowledge of the relevant particulars: we know them universally. So presumably the critical interpretation takes Aristotle to be saying that Plato wrongly takes us to have prior knowledge without qualification that this triangle (whose existence we are unaware of) has 2R. To say only so much leaves it unclear whether, on the critical interpretation, the prior knowledge is prenatal and/or innate, and whether it is conscious or latent. The critical interpretation could in principle, then, be developed in different ways.

Ross suggests one version of a critical interpretation:<sup>94</sup>

This reminds A. (a21–30) of a famous argument on the subject of implicit knowledge, viz. the argument in the *Meno* (81b–86b) where a boy who does not know geometry is led to see the truth of a geometrical proposition as involved in certain simple facts which he does know, and Plato concludes that learning is merely remembering something known in a previous existence. A. does not draw Plato's conclusion; no previous actual knowledge, he says, but only implicit knowledge, is required; that being given, mere confrontation with a particular case enables us to draw a particular conclusion.

As we've seen, there's dispute about what Plato takes the range of our prenatal knowledge to be. If Ross is right, Aristotle thinks Plato takes it to be very extensive indeed: it extends even to the fact that this triangle has 2R. Presumably Aristotle's thought, on this interpretation, is that Plato accepts a matching version of foreknowledge, according to which one can learn that *p* is true only if one had prenatal knowledge that it is. In Chapter 4, I argued that we need not take Plato to posit such an extensive range of prenatal knowledge. Perhaps Aristotle thinks otherwise. Yet elsewhere he says that Plato denies that

<sup>94</sup> *Analytics*, 474. Interestingly, Ross doesn't explicitly advert to innate knowledge. LaBarge, however, first says that Ross adverts to prenatal knowledge, but he then goes on to say that Ross adverts to innate knowledge ('Simultaneous Learning', 182). Bronstein takes the critical interpretation to say that Aristotle 'is criticizing Plato's view that learning *x* consists in recollecting prior innate knowledge of *x*' ('Meno's Paradox', 138).

particulars can be known.<sup>95</sup> So it would be odd if he were to claim here that Plato takes us to have prenatal knowledge about particular triangles.<sup>96</sup>

Nor do we need to take Aristotle to be ascribing that view to Plato. On an alternative I prefer, the first part of what Aristotle says ('it never happens... induction') isn't a criticism of Plato. Rather, Aristotle is stating his own view, without saying whether Plato accepts or rejects it. The comparison comes next, when he says: 'like those who recognize something'. This indicates a point on which he thinks he and Plato agree: both are impressed with the immediacy with which we sometimes learn. In some cases, we learn so immediately that it's as though we are re-cognizing—that is, recollecting.<sup>97</sup> Aristotle and Plato disagree in that Plato thinks there is real recollection here, whereas Aristotle thinks it's just as though we are re-cognizing: there is quasi-recollection, but not the real thing.<sup>98</sup> Nonetheless, he credits Plato with noticing the phenomenon of quasi-recollection. He thinks Plato is wrong to believe that zetetic learning involves genuine recollection. But he doesn't explicitly say that here. Rather, he contents himself with acknowledging a point of similarity between himself and Plato.<sup>99</sup>

## 17. *Posterior Analytics* 2.19

In this much-discussed chapter, Aristotle provides an account of how we learn, one that supplements, and sometimes summarizes, what he says earlier in the

<sup>95</sup> See e.g. *Met.* 1.6.

<sup>96</sup> However, one might argue that Aristotle thinks Plato is inconsistent on this score. On the one hand, he denies that particulars can be known. On the other hand, he thinks we need prior knowledge of whatever we can learn; since he thinks we can learn about particulars, he is committed to the view that we had prenatal knowledge of them. It would be easy for Plato to avoid this argument. First, I've argued that he doesn't think one needs prior knowledge that *p* is true, in order to learn that *p* is true. We need to have had some prenatal knowledge, but not of every proposition we can learn. Secondly, I don't think Plato denies that we can know particulars. But if, contrary to my view, he does deny that, then he would also presumably deny that we can learn about them, if that implies coming to know them. In that case, he could favor a matching version of foreknowledge without being committed to positing prenatal knowledge of particulars.

<sup>97</sup> See, with variations, Gifford, 'Aristotle on Platonic Recollection', 22–4; LaBarge, 'Simultaneous Learning', 208–9; and Bronstein, 'Meno's Paradox', 138–9. Despite advocating a version of the critical interpretation, Ross also takes Aristotle to say that his own view 'is like the doctrine of the *Meno* that learning is recollecting. We do not know the particular fact beforehand; we acquire the knowledge at the same moment as we are led on, and this is like an act of recognition' (*Analytics*, 471).

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Vlastos, 'Anamnesis', who distinguishes a minimal from a full-strength version of the doctrine of recollection, only the latter of which involves literal recollection. Cf. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, 315 n. 12. For Descartes on quasi-recollection, see the passage quoted in Ch. 5, n. 19.

<sup>99</sup> One might be tempted to think that Plato is also impressed by the phenomenon of quasi-recollection, and wrongly takes it to imply genuine recollection. However, I suggested in Ch. 5, sect. 9, that Plato has a different motivation for the theory of recollection. Even if he is impressed by the phenomenon of quasi-recollection, he doesn't simply infer from it to genuine recollection.

*APo.*<sup>100</sup> For example, Aristotle has already explained how we can advance from Stage 1 to Stage 2, and how we can make progress to Stage 3. But he hasn't yet said how we get to Stage 1; nor has he fully explained how we can attain the highest level of cognition. *APo.* 2.19 addresses these issues, among others.

Early in the chapter, Aristotle says that one might be puzzled both about:<sup>101</sup>

whether there is or is not knowledge (*epistēmē*) of each <of the immediates> (or rather knowledge of the one and some other kind of thing of the other) and also about whether the states are not present in us <innately> but come about in us, or whether they are present in us <innately> without our noticing them. It would be absurd if we had them <innately>. For then we would have cognitions (*gnōseis*) that are more exact than demonstration, but without noticing it. If, on the other hand, we acquire them without having them earlier, how could we come to cognize them and learn them from no prior cognition? For that is impossible, as we also said in the case of demonstration. Evidently, then, we can neither possess them <innately> nor acquire them if we are ignorant and possess no such state at all (*mêdemian*). Hence we must have some potentiality (*dunamis*), but not one that is superior to these in respect of exactness. (99b23–34)<sup>102</sup>

Aristotle describes a dilemma whose first horn is that we have innate knowledge of immediates (i.e. of first principles); he then proceeds to reject this horn, arguing that it would be absurd to suppose that we had such knowledge without our noticing it. Like Plato, Aristotle imposes an accessibility condition on knowledge; and he argues that since it isn't satisfied, we don't have innate knowledge—at least not of immediates.<sup>103</sup> Though Aristotle is often thought to be criticizing

<sup>100</sup> There is an enormous literature on this chapter. For a variety of views, see B1 and 2; Scott, *RE*, Ch. 5 and 152–6; Charles, *AME*, 149–51, 265–72; Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles*, sections 74 and 169; Burnyeat, 'Aristotle on Understanding Knowledge'; M. Frede, 'Aristotle on Thinking', *Rhizai* V.2 (2008), 287–301; and his 'Aristotle's Rationalism', in Frede and Striker (eds.), *Rationality in Greek Thought*, 157–74; Bronstein, 'Origin and Aim of *Posterior Analytics* II.19'. Here I provide just a brief discussion of a central issue of concern to us here.

<sup>101</sup> With this passage, cf. *Met.* 1.9, 992b18–993a10.

<sup>102</sup> *πότερον ἐπιστήμη ἐκατέρου ἢ οὐ, ἢ τοῦ μὲν ἐπιστήμη τοῦ δ' ἑτερόν τι γένος, καὶ πότερον οὐκ ἐνοῦσαι αἱ ἔξεις ἐγγίνονται ἢ ἐνοῦσαι λελήθασιν. εἰ μὲν δὴ ἔχομεν αὐτάς, ἄτοπον· συμβαίνει γὰρ ἀκριβεστέρας ἔχοντας γνώσεως ἀποδείξεως λανθάνειν. εἰ δὲ λαμβάνομεν μὴ ἔχοντες πρότερον, πῶς ἂν γνωρίζοιμεν καὶ μαθηάνοιμεν ἐκ μὴ προϋπαρχούσης γνώσεως; ἀδύνατον γάρ, ὥσπερ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς ἀποδείξεως ἐλέγομεν. φανερόν τοίνυν ὅτι οὐτ' ἔχειν οἶόν τε, οὐτ' ἀγνοοῦσι καὶ μηδεμίαν ἔχουσιν ἔξιν ἐγγίγνεσθαι. ἀνάγκη ἄρα ἔχειν μὲν τινα δύναμιν, μὴ τοιαύτην δ' ἔχειν ἢ ἔσται τούτων τιμιωτέρα κατ' ἀκρίβειαν.*

<sup>103</sup> Barnes thinks Aristotle means that "it could not escape *others*' notice that we have such knowledge". Aristotle is making the correct and pertinent point that infants evidently do not have the strong abstract knowledge which the innateness hypothesis ascribes to them' (B1, 250). That is, we (adults) don't notice infants having such knowledge; hence they don't have it. As Barnes acknowledges, however, '[t]he commentators all take Aristotle to mean that we could not be *unconscious* of having such knowledge; and it is true that Aristotle supposes knowledge, like perception, to be a self-conscious state' (B1, 250). It's not clear whether Aristotle means that infants aren't aware of having innate knowledge; or that adults would be aware of having innate knowledge,

Plato here,<sup>104</sup> on my view he is agreeing with him.<sup>105</sup> Nor, when he explicitly mentions the *Meno* in *APo.* 1.1 and *APr.* 2.21, does he say or imply that Plato posits innate knowledge.

In the passage just quoted, Aristotle rejects innate knowledge just of immediates. But it's reasonable to think he rejects innate knowledge across the board, at least in the content and cognitive-condition sense. For he proceeds to give an account of our cognitive development that doesn't mention or imply it; yet if he thought we had it, it would surely be relevant to mention it or to say something that implies it. To be sure, he doesn't endorse the second horn of his dilemma, according to which we acquire knowledge of immediates from nothing. Rather, he thinks we are born with 'a connate discriminatory capacity (*dunamin sum-phuton kritikên*), which is called perception' (99b35).<sup>106</sup>

One might argue that the fact that Aristotle posits a 'connate discriminatory capacity' of perception makes him a dispositional innatist about perception. To be sure, we've seen that it's been argued that it's not sufficient for being a dispositional innatist that one posit an innate disposition; in addition, one must accord it a sufficiently robust explanatory role. But since Aristotle posits the connate discriminatory capacity of perception precisely in order to explain how we can learn, one might argue that he does accord it a sufficiently robust explanatory role. But even if Aristotle is a dispositional innatist about *perception*, it would take further argument to show that he is a dispositional innatist about *knowledge*. I ask shortly whether 2.19 supports the view that he is.

Aristotle proceeds to explain how, beginning from perception, we can eventually acquire knowledge of first principles as such:

if they had it. Both options lead to various (perhaps surmountable) difficulties; but I won't pursue that issue here. For our purposes, the point is just that, for whatever reason, Aristotle doesn't countenance innate knowledge. Or so I think; but as we shall see in sect.18, the claim is not entirely uncontroversial.

<sup>104</sup> See e.g. Bronstein, 'Meno's Paradox', 137.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. P. Adamson, 'Posterior Analytics 2.19: a Dialogue with Plato?' in V. Harte, M. M. McCabe, R. W. Sharples, and A. D. R. Sheppard (eds.), *Aristotle and the Stoics Reading Plato*, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, suppl. 107 (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 1–19, though he focuses on the *Phaedo* rather than on the *Meno*.

<sup>106</sup> This is evidently meant to satisfy 1.1's prior-cognition principle, though it's not entirely clear that it does so: see B1, 251. Perhaps Aristotle means that exercises of the capacity of perception are sufficient for initiating a process that, if all goes well, gives rise to a sort of *gnôsis* that enables us to engage in intellectual learning. Whether or not he thinks perception satisfies 1.1's prior-cognition principle, he thinks we first acquire *gnôsis* of a sort that enables us to engage in intellectual learning by means other than intellectual learning; hence he avoids an infinite regress of states of prior learning. As we saw in Ch. 4, sect. 2, Plato wouldn't mind this regress; but Aristotle would.



From perception, then, as we say, memory arises. And from memory, when it occurs often of the same thing, experience arises; for memories that are many in number make up one experience. From experience, or (*ἐ*) from the whole universal that has settled in the soul (the one apart from the many, whatever is present as one and the same in all of them) there arises a principle of skill (if it is about what comes to be) or of knowledge (*epistēmē*) (if it is about what is). (100a3–9)<sup>107</sup>

From perception, then, we advance to memory, then to experience—or, Aristotle says, to the whole universal that has settled in the soul. There is dispute about whether this is a further stage beyond experience or whether it explains what experience (or some experience) involves. In the first case, ‘or’ is corrective; in the second case, it is epexegetic.<sup>108</sup>

It seems that, in Aristotle’s view, our initial perceptions are nonconceptual.<sup>109</sup> But when we have experience, we have concepts of some sort (cf. *ennoēmata* in the parallel passage in *Met.* 1.1, 981a6).<sup>110</sup> What sort of concepts we can have at this level depends partly on whether ‘or’ is epexegetic or corrective. If it is epexegetic, then, at the level of experience the whole universal is settled in the soul and we have genuinely universal concepts at this stage. If it is corrective, then, at the level of experience, the whole universal isn’t settled in the soul.

<sup>107</sup> Ἐκ μὲν οὖν αἰσθήσεως γίνεται μνήμη, ὥσπερ λέγομεν, ἐκ δὲ μνήμης πολλάκις τοῦ αὐτοῦ γινομένης ἐμπειρία· αἱ γὰρ πολλαὶ μνήμαι τῷ ἀριθμῷ ἐμπειρία μία ἐστίν. ἐκ δ’ ἐμπειρίας ἢ ἐκ παντὸς ἡρεμήσαντος τοῦ καθόλου ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, τοῦ ἐνὸς παρὰ τὰ πολλὰ, ὃ ἂν ἐν ἅπασιν ἐν ἐνῇ ἐκείνοις τὸ αὐτό, τέχνης ἀρχὴ καὶ ἐπιστήμης, ἐὰν μὲν περὶ γένεσιν, τέχνης, ἐὰν δὲ περὶ τὸ ὄν, ἐπιστήμης.

<sup>108</sup> For the view that ‘or’ is epexegetic, see B1, 253; Ross, *Analytics*, 674; and LaBarge, ‘Aristotle on *Empeiria*’, 38. For the view that it is corrective, see Charles, *AME*, 149–51; Irwin and Fine, note *ad loc.*; and Bronstein, ‘Origin and Aim of *Posterior Analytics* II.19’, 44. According to Philoponus(?), “or” should be taken as having the sense of “and”. (Though the commentary on Book 1 is agreed to be by Philoponus, there is dispute about whether the commentary on Book 2 is also by him. Wallies, who edited the CAG volume, argues that it is not. O. Goldin, *Philoponus*(?), *On Aristotle Posterior Analytics* 2 (London: Duckworth, 2009), 4, thinks it may be a paraphrase of a lost commentary by Philoponus or of another commentary that derives from Ammonius. I have followed Goldin in putting a question mark in parentheses after the purported author’s name.) If ‘or’ is corrective, then, at the level of experience, the whole universal isn’t settled in the soul. It doesn’t follow that no universals are there at all. However, that no universals are in the soul at the level of experience would seem to follow if we think that 100a16 says ‘for the first time there is a universal in the soul’. And B2, 266 suggests that this translation might be preferable to the one he actually gives (‘there is a primitive universal in the soul’). For reasons that will emerge, I favor the sort of translation B2 actually gives.

<sup>109</sup> However, they have content that can be conceptualized. If the sort of perception we have at birth is nonconceptual, it doesn’t count as knowledge, even if it is a sort of *gnōsis*; see sect. 6. In *Theaetetus* 184–6, Plato arguably defends the view that all perception, not just the perception we have at birth, is nonconceptual. On this view of perception, we never, strictly speaking, perceive that the cat is on the mat, for we can do that only if we have the concepts of cat and mat; rather, in such cases, we acquire a belief on the basis of perception.

<sup>110</sup> I leave discussion of memory to one side. Experience covers a broad spectrum of cases, from some animals to some doctors: see *Met.* 1.1. In considering experience, I focus on the higher end of the spectrum.

It doesn't follow that the universal isn't in the soul at all. And there is a sense in which universals are there from birth. For Aristotle says that 'though one perceives the particular, perception is of the universal, e.g. of man but not of Callias the man' (100a16–b1; cf. 87b28–30; *DA* 420a2–5, 424a21–4). However, even though we perceive universals from birth, we don't, at birth, have concepts of them or of anything else.

But can one grasp a universal, as a universal, at the level of experience? I'm tempted to think that there is a way in which one can do so, if one is at the higher end of the spectrum of cases that count as experience. An empirical doctor, for example, grasps that this medicine cured several patients. That involves a universal judgment in the sense defined in *De Int.* 7, according to which a universal is by nature predicated of many things. I can't, at the level of experience, say what makes a cow a cow; indeed, I don't even apply 'cow' to all cows, as opposed to just those I have encountered and identified as such. But I can identify examples of cows as cows; and I can make some true general statements at least about the cows I've encountered. That gives me enough of a grasp of what cows are to enable me to investigate further until eventually, if all goes well, I learn what it is to be a cow, and apply the term to all cows, not just to those I've encountered. The experiential judgment isn't fully universal, insofar as it is tied to particulars and indeed to just some particulars. Nonetheless, at the level of experience, one can group together a variety of things as all being cows; and one can say that they are all animals that go 'moo' and that some of them yield milk.<sup>111</sup>

I'm inclined to think that Meno and his slave are at the level of experience, though at a lower level of it than empirical doctors are (but at a higher level of it than are those animals that are capable of having some experience). For Meno specifies types of virtue (virtue for a man, for a woman, and so on); these are low-level universals. Socrates then tells him that he doesn't want a swarm of virtues, but an account of what virtue as a whole is: *kata holou* (77a6; here Plato anticipates Aristotle's word for 'universal', *katholou*), and Meno

<sup>111</sup> For a defense of the view that we don't grasp universals at the level of experience, see Charles, *AME*, 149–61. Cf. R. J. Hankinson, 'Avant nous le déluge: Aristotle's Notion of Intellectual Grasp', in B. Morison and K. Ierodiakonou (eds.), *Episteme, Etc.: Essays in Honour of Jonathan Barnes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 30–59. He argues that, at the level of experience, we don't grasp universals 'in the strict sense... since it merely involves a retrospective tally of a finite number of past instances' (47). However, he allows that 'the content of the experience may still be expressed by a suitably restricted universally quantified proposition, although it is far from clear whether it *need be*' (47, n. 44). Aquinas (Lecture 20 on Book 2) seems to suggest that, at the level of experience, one can have universal concepts of a sort, though the whole universal isn't yet settled in the soul. He thinks Aristotle speaks of a universal being settled in the soul to indicate that it is considered apart from particulars, and is more firmly entrenched. The view I suggest in the text is close to his.

eventually attains some understanding of the sort of universal account Socrates wants. Similarly, the slave grasps that squares have four-equal sides; he isn't thinking just of this or that square, but of squares in general. Further, Meno grasps what 'virtue' signifies, and the slave grasps what 'square' signifies (as Aristotle understands signification). So there's a sense in which Meno and his slave grasp universals, though it's a sense that falls short of conferring knowledge.

From experience, we eventually (if all goes well) advance to knowledge (*epistêmê*). The vexed question of exactly how we do so need not concern us here. But we should ask whether anything in Aristotle's account suggests that he's a dispositional innatist about knowledge.<sup>112</sup> One might argue that 100a13–14 suggests that he is. For here he says that 'the soul is such as to be capable of undergoing (*paschein*) this'.<sup>113</sup> 'This' includes coming to have knowledge: Aristotle thinks that the mind is naturally structured so as to be able to acquire knowledge. He is spelling out his account of how we do in fact acquire knowledge; 100a13–14 emphasizes that we are, in fact, capable of undergoing the process he's been describing.<sup>114</sup> If Aristotle thinks we are innately structured so as to be able to acquire knowledge, then, one might think, he is an innate dispositionalist about knowledge.

That seems right, if it's sufficient for being a dispositional innatist about knowledge that one posit an innate disposition to acquire knowledge. However, as we've seen, dispositional innatism has been understood in different ways; and, on some understandings of the view, Aristotle is not committed to it. If, for example, it's necessary for being a dispositional innatist about knowledge that one posit an innate disposition to know *certain specific truths*, then Aristotle doesn't count. Further, one might argue that he doesn't accord the innate disposition to know a sufficiently robust explanatory role for him to count as a dispositional innatist about knowledge.<sup>115</sup>

The same seems true of two other passages. In *Met.* 980a21 Aristotle famously says that everyone by nature desires to know; and in *Rhet.* 1355a15–17 he says that 'men have a sufficient natural instinct for what is true, and usually do arrive at the truth'. These passages seem to posit an innate disposition to know. But they

<sup>112</sup> We've seen that he isn't a cognitive-condition or content innatist about knowledge—or about belief or concepts. But that leaves open the possibility that he is a dispositional innatist about knowledge (or beliefs or concepts).

<sup>113</sup> ἡ δὲ ψυχὴ ὑπάρχει τοιαύτη οὕσα οἷα δύνασθαι πάσχειν τοῦτο.

<sup>114</sup> For this interpretation, see also Philoponus(?), 437.5–6. In contrast to this 'minimalist' interpretation of the passage, Aquinas (Lecture 20 on Book 2) thinks Aristotle is adverting to the potential intellect. I discuss the potential intellect briefly in the next section. See also Ch. 9, sect. 3.

<sup>115</sup> This last point is pressed by Scott, *RE*, 91–106, esp. 100–1. He also discusses the next two passages I go on to discuss.

don't posit an innate disposition to know certain specific truths. Further, when Aristotle explains in more detail how we acquire knowledge (as he does in *APo.* 2.19 and *Met.* 1.1), the weight of the explanatory work falls on how we move from perception, to memory, to experience, and eventually, if all goes well, to knowledge. If it's sufficient for being a dispositional innatist about knowledge that one posit an innate disposition to know, then Aristotle counts. But if one must accord that disposition a central explanatory role, ignoring or downplaying factors like perception, memory, and experience, then he doesn't.

Just as Aristotle doesn't posit innate knowledge (but, at best, an innate disposition to acquire knowledge), so he doesn't posit prenatal knowledge. Indeed his theory of the soul doesn't seem to allow for prenatal existence; a fortiori, it doesn't allow for prenatal knowledge. To be sure, though it's generally agreed that Aristotle doesn't think the soul as a whole pre-exists, it has been argued that he thinks a part of the soul (intellect, or active intellect) is immortal. However, that doesn't imply that it pre-exists. Nor does he ever appeal to prenatal knowledge to explain how we can inquire and learn in this life.

Plato might well agree with Aristotle that, in this life, we advance from perception, to memory, to experience, and then to full knowledge. However, whereas, at least in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*, Plato thinks we need to explain our ability to progress in this way by appealing to prenatal knowledge, Aristotle doesn't think we need to do so; indeed, he thinks we shouldn't do so. But in a way, Aristotle agrees with Plato that his account, as I've described it so far, is not sufficient to explain how we can make the epistemic progress we do make. For example, Aristotle also assumes that the world is teleologically structured in a way that allows us, given how we are, to tend to the truth. He also has a reply to those philosophers who argue that we couldn't progress as we do unless we start off with knowledge of universals. For, as we've seen, though he denies that we have knowledge of universals from birth, he thinks we have *gnôsis* of them from birth. For we perceive them from birth, and perception counts as *gnôsis*. This *gnôsis* doesn't constitute or confer knowledge or even belief; for initially, the relevant content is nonconceptual. But Aristotle thinks that the account he provides shows how that content can be conceptualized in such a way that, if all goes well, it eventually constitutes or confers knowledge. I return to this point in Chapter 9, section 3.

## 18. Sleeping geometers and writing tablets

I've argued that Aristotle rejects both innate knowledge (at least in the content and cognitive-condition senses) and prenatal knowledge. While this interpretation is

hardly novel, it is not entirely uncontroversial. So let's look briefly at an alternative. First we need to look briefly at *De Anima* 3.4, where Aristotle, among other things, mentions the potential intellect—which, as we shall see in Chapter 9, Plutarch thinks Aristotle appeals to in solving Meno's Paradox. Aristotle says:

the intellect is in a way potentially the objects of intellect, but before it understands them, it is none of them actually. Its potentiality is that of a writing tablet (*grammateion*) with nothing actually written on it—which is also true of the intellect. (429b30–430a2)<sup>116</sup>

This passage might seem to *support* the view that Aristotle rejects innate knowledge. In the Preface to the *New Essays*, for example, Leibniz says that: 'There is the question whether the soul is completely blank like a writing tablet on which nothing has as yet been written—a *tabula rasa*—as Aristotle and [Locke] maintain' (48).<sup>117</sup> However, Aristotle doesn't use the writing-tablet metaphor to describe us as we, or our souls, are at birth. Rather, he uses it to describe the intellect, which we don't have at birth. His point is that even once we have acquired intellect, it is in a way potential. From birth, we have the potential for intellect: that is, we can acquire it. But we don't, at birth, have potential intellect.<sup>118</sup>

Philoponus anticipates Leibniz's interpretation of the writing-tablet metaphor. As he puts it:<sup>119</sup>

He [Aristotle] likens it [i.e. intellect] to a writing tablet with nothing written on it. Just as on an uninscribed sheet all those things which can be written on it are present in potentiality, on account of its suitability, but none of the things to be written is present in actuality before it is written, so too the intellect, he says, is no intelligible thing in actuality but all in potentiality... in likening the rational soul to an uninscribed thing you write on, Aristotle places the forms of intelligible things in the soul according to the first sort of potentiality—I mean by virtue of a suitability [to receive them]—not, as Plato does,

<sup>116</sup> ὅτι δυνάμει πῶς ἐστὶ τὰ νοητὰ ὁ νοῦς, ἀλλ' ἐντελεχεία οὐδέν, πρὶν ἂν νοῇ· δυνάμει δ' οὕτως ὥσπερ ἐν γραμματεῖω ᾧ μὴθὲν ἐνυπάρχει ἐντελεχεία γεγραμμένον· ὅπερ συμβαίνει ἐπὶ τοῦ νοῦ.

<sup>117</sup> Leibniz doesn't say that he has this passage in mind. However, he clearly takes the writing-tablet metaphor to be incompatible with innatism, and he says that it describes Aristotle's view. Indeed, he seems to think that the metaphor is incompatible even with dispositional innatism. For having rejected the *tabula rasa* view of the mind, he proceeds to defend his own view, which is, arguably, dispositional innatism. See Ch. 5, sect. 2; and Ch. 8, n. 61.

<sup>118</sup> For this view, see, for example, Frede, 'Aristotle's Rationalism' and 'Aristotle on Thinking'.

<sup>119</sup> in *De Intellectu* 36.70–37.80, trans. Charlton (in his Philoponus, *On Aristotle on the Intellect* (*de Anima* 3.4–8)), with minor revisions. Part of this passage may be found in R. Sorabji (ed.), *The Philosophy of the Commentators, 200–600 AD*, 3 vols. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), vol. 1, 3(i)1. For the Latin (the work does not survive in Greek), see G. Verbeke (ed.), *Philoponus: Commentaire Sur Le De Anima d'Aristote*, Édition critique (Louvain: Publications universitaires de Louvain, 1966). For a fascinating discussion, see F. de Haas, 'Recollection and Potentiality in Philoponus', in M. Karaus and J. Spruyt (eds.), *The Winged Chariot: Collected Essays on Plato and Platonism in Honour of L.M. De Rijk* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 165–84.

by way of disposition. That being so he does not, like Plato, think the soul pre-exists [birth], for if it is pre-existent it should possess accounts dispositionally.

As Philoponus describes this sort of view, Aristotle is talking just about the intellect, not about the soul as such. Nonetheless, he sees that the metaphor can be taken to imply that Aristotle rejects innate knowledge in the content or cognitive-condition senses. On this interpretation, intellect is potentially its objects, not in the sense of second potentiality (which would involve the intellect having actual knowledge), but only in the sense of first potentiality: it can know them; but it doesn't actually know them. Though Philoponus describes this interpretation, he doesn't in the end endorse it. For he goes on to say that:<sup>120</sup>

we ought to interpret what Aristotle says here carefully and thoughtfully with regard to his whole thought and to what he says everywhere about the intellect. If we have shown a thousand times over, quoting Aristotelian texts, that he wants the rational soul to be separate and immortal, it is plain that even if he here likens it to an uninscribed thing we write on, he does not mean that it has forms in potentiality in the first sense (the sense in which semen is a man in potentiality). But a certain latitude (*platos*) must be recognized in both meanings of 'potentiality'. For we say that prime matter is in potentiality a man, and also the elements and semen and all the things which are in potentiality in the first sense, that is, by virtue of suitability; but they are not in potentiality in the same way but some are closer to the thing and some are more remote. A similar latitude (*latitudo*), then, must be recognized in connection with potentiality in the second sense, i.e. by way of disposition. Both the sleeping geometer and the one who is aware are said to be [one who knows] in potentiality, but the waking geometer is closer to the actuality; and the geometer who is asleep or drunk because he is held down by sleep or intoxication, resembles the man who does not have the disposition at all. So in the same way even if he says the soul resembles an uninscribed thing you write on, he calls it this because of the holding down of cognition by the passions, which makes it seem as if it did not have forms at all.

Philoponus' considered view, then, is that Aristotle thinks that we do, after all, have innate dispositional knowledge (that is, what Aristotle calls a second potentiality or a first actuality), though of the sort that a sleeping, as opposed to a waking, geometer has. So in the end, Philoponus thinks that both Plato and Aristotle take us, from birth, to be like sleeping geometers. As we've seen, Philoponus also says that, if the soul pre-exists, it should have accounts dispositionally. He endorses the view that Aristotle thinks we do have accounts dispositionally. That removes an

<sup>120</sup> in *De Intellectu* 39, trans. Charlton. Part of this passage may be found in Sorabji, *The Philosophy of the Commentators*, vol. 1, 3(j)6. Cf. in *De Intellectu* 33.82–9, 39.27–40.43, 62.6–63.18. De Haas, 'Recollection and Potentiality in Philoponus', 175, thinks Philoponus is introducing a third kind of potentiality. However, he seems instead to be emphasizing degrees of potentiality within first and second potentiality.

impediment to thinking that Aristotle doesn't countenance the pre-existence or immortality of the soul—an interpretation that, he notes, some accept. But he proceeds to argue, against that interpretation, that Aristotle takes the rational soul not only to have innate knowledge but also to pre-exist and to be immortal.<sup>121</sup>

Philoponus is not alone in his interpretation of Aristotle. According to 'Philoponus', for example:<sup>122</sup>

[Plutarch] applies to Aristotle what belongs to Plato. Plato is the person who thinks the intellect of children is dispositional and has rational accounts of things, not Aristotle. But Plutarch thinks that Aristotle too says this. How can he not be speaking falsely when Aristotle refutes him? He says that the intellect of children is like a writing tablet on which nothing is written, because it is suitable for receiving the rational accounts of things but has not already actually received them.

The question 'Philoponus' poses in the foregoing passage was apparently answered by Iamblichus:<sup>123</sup>

Iamblichus says: 'And see that he says "writing tablet" (*grammateion*) and not "sheet of papyrus" (*chartês*). For it is not called a "writing tablet" if it does not have written letters on it. He says this meaning that the souls of children, which are potential intellect, have the accounts of things. So if he likens it to a writing tablet, clearly it has accounts (*logoi*) of things, just as the writing tablet has written letters. If he calls it "on which nothing is written", it stands for "ill written", because it has faint, non-evident written letters, as also we say of a tragic actor with a bad voice "He has no voice". So Aristotle too (says he), like Plato, is of the opinion that objects of intellect are in the soul and accounts of all things, and that there is recollection, not learning.' He says this to show that Aristotle too is of the same opinion as he is.

So whereas Leibniz takes the writing-tablet metaphor to show that the soul lacks innate knowledge, Iamblichus takes it to imply that the intellect has innate knowledge. Whereas I've argued that Plato and Aristotle agree in rejecting innate knowledge in the content and cognitive-condition senses, Iamblichus thinks they

<sup>121</sup> in *De Intellectu* 16. Though he presents a dilemma without here choosing between its horns, it's clear that, in the end, he favors the pre-existence immortality option. For discussion, see de Haas, 'Recollection and Potentiality in Philoponus', 172–7.

<sup>122</sup> 'Philoponus', in *DA* 520.1–12, *CAG* 15, ed. M. Hayduck; trans. Charlton. (I follow Charlton in referring to the author as 'Philoponus'. There is dispute about who the author is.) The passage may also be found in Sorabji (ed.), *The Philosophy of the Commentators*, vol. 1, 5(c)1. The Plutarch whom 'Philoponus' mentions is Plutarch of Athens, not 'our' Plutarch, who is Plutarch of Chaeronea. Later he says that 'Aristotle likens the soul to a writing tablet on which nothing is written, and calls "learning" what is genuine learning; whereas Plato likens it to a writing table which is already inscribed and calls learning "recollection"' (524.13–16; trans. Charlton). He goes on to say that, according to Aristotle, 'before learning, the intellect is in potentiality by virtue of suitability; after learning, it is in potentiality by virtue of having the disposition'.

<sup>123</sup> 'Philoponus', in *DA* 3, 533.25–35, trans. Charlton. The passage may also be found in Sorabji (ed.), *The Philosophy of the Commentators*, vol. 1, 3(i)3.

agree in positing it. Though we are both harmonizers on this point, we sing different tunes.

Philoponus' and Iamblichus' views are interesting and ingenious; but I think they are mistaken. First, though Philoponus says that we need to interpret *DA* 3.4's writing-tablet metaphor in the light of Aristotle's views as a whole, he doesn't say how to square his interpretation with *APo.* 2.19. Secondly, as I've mentioned, Aristotle uses the writing-tablet metaphor to describe, not our condition at birth, but our condition once we have acquired intellect. His point is that even when it is acquired, it is potential in the way that a writing tablet has the potential to be written on. If Aristotle doesn't think we have intellect at birth, he doesn't think we have innate dispositional knowledge (in Philoponus' sense: we don't have second potentiality knowledge). All we have at birth is a first potentiality for knowledge; but that falls short of having potential intellect at birth.



# Epicurean Inquiry

## 1. Introduction

As we've seen, Plutarch says that the Epicureans reply to Meno's Paradox by invoking prolepses. Though the Epicureans (unlike Plutarch and Aristotle) don't explicitly mention the *Meno*, they engage with the issues that motivate Meno's Paradox and so they know, or know of, Meno's Paradox in that sense.<sup>1</sup> So, for example, we'll see in Chapter 11 that Sextus ascribes an argument to them—which I shall call the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry—that is a variant of Meno's Paradox. Further, in the *Letter to Herodotus* (= *Hdt.*) Epicurus says:

First, then, Herodotus, we must grasp the things which underlie words, so that we may have them as a reference point against which to judge matters of belief, inquiry and puzzlement, and not have everything indiscriminated for ourselves as we attempt infinite chains of proof, or have words which are empty. For the primary concept (*ennoëma*) corresponding to each word must be seen and need no additional proof, if we are going to have a reference point for matters of inquiry, puzzlement, and belief. (*Hdt.* 37–8 = LS 17C)<sup>2</sup>

In saying that we need a 'reference point for matters of inquiry', Epicurus adverts to the Targeting Objection. He agrees with Meno that we must in some way 'grasp' the things we are inquiring into. To explain how we can do so, he appeals

<sup>1</sup> See the end of the Appendix to Ch. 1, where I distinguish using 'Meno's Paradox' for the conjunction of Meno's questions and Socrates' dilemma from using it more broadly for a philosophical puzzle that challenges the possibility of inquiry based on considerations about knowing and not knowing. Plutarch has no qualms about suggesting that the Epicureans reply to Meno's Paradox when the term is used in the first way; but even if we want to be extra cautious about agreeing with him about that (though I'm not sure we need to be), it's reasonable to agree with him if we use the term in the second way.

<sup>2</sup> Πρώτον μὲν οὖν τὰ ὑποτεταγμένα τοῖς φθόγγοις, ὧς Ἡρόδοτε, δεῖ εἰληφέναι, ὅπως αὖν τὰ δοξαζόμενα ἢ ζητούμενα ἢ ἀπορούμενα ἔχωμεν εἰς ταῦτα ἀναγαγόντες ἐπικρίνειν, καὶ μὴ ἄκριτα πάντα ἡμῖν ἢ εἰς ἄπειρον ἀποδεικνύουσιν ἢ κενοὺς φθόγγους ἔχωμεν. ἀνάγκη γὰρ τὸ πρῶτον ἐννόημα καθ' ἕκαστον φθόγγον βλέπεσθαι καὶ μὴθὲν ἀποδείξεως προσδεῖσθαι, εἴπερ ἔξομεν τὸ ζητούμενον ἢ ἀπορούμενον καὶ δοξαζόμενον ἐφ' ὃ ἀνάξομεν.

to primary concepts. As we shall see, these are prolepses. Similarly, in a key text that we'll explore in more detail below, Diogenes says:

(1) Prolepsis, they [the Epicureans] say, is, as it were (*hoionei*), apprehension (*katalêpsis*), or correct belief, or concept (*ennoia*), or universal stored thought (*noêsis*) (i.e. memory),<sup>3</sup> of what has frequently become evident externally, e.g. 'such and such a kind of thing is a man'. (2) For as soon as the word 'man' is uttered, immediately its outline (*tupos*) also comes to mind by means of prolepsis, since the senses give the lead. (3) Thus what primarily underlies each name is something evident (*enarges*). (4) And what we inquired about we would not have inquired about if we had not had prior cognition (*egnôkeimen*) of it. For example: 'Is what's standing over there a horse or a cow?' For one must at some time have cognized (*egnôkenai*) the shape (*morphê*) of a horse and that of a cow by means of prolepsis. (5) Nor would we have named something if we had not previously learnt its outline by means of prolepsis. (6) Thus prolepses are evident. (7) And what is believed (*to doxaston*) depends on something prior and evident, which is our point of reference when we say, e.g., 'How do we know (*ismen*) if this is a man?' (10.33 = LS 17E, somewhat modified)<sup>4</sup>

In (4), Diogenes says that, according to the Epicureans, we must have cognized something in order to inquire into it: this too answers the Targeting Objection. In asking 'Is what's standing over there a horse or a cow?', Epicurus asks a 'What is F?' question, and he tells us how to go about answering it: we rely on prolepses.

Further, Cicero says that, according to Epicurus, without prolepses 'understanding (*intelligi*), inquiry (*quaeri*), and discussion (*disputari*) are impossible' (*On the Nature of the Gods* (= *De Natura Deorum* = ND) 1.43–9 = LS 23E2; I discuss the fuller context below). And at *M* 11.21, Sextus says that 'according to the wise Epicurus, it is not possible either to inquire (*zêtein*) or to be puzzled (*aporein*) without a prolepsis'.<sup>5</sup>

Plutarch therefore seems right to say that the Epicureans appeal to prolepses to reply to Meno's Paradox. Hence, to assess their reply, we need to understand

<sup>3</sup> I follow the punctuation in LS 2.92–3.

<sup>4</sup> Τὴν δὲ πρόληψιν λέγουσιν οἰοῦναι κατάληψιν ἢ δόξαν ὀρθὴν ἢ ἔννοιαν ἢ καθολικὴν νόησιν ἐναποκειμένην, τουτέστι μνήμην τοῦ πολλάκις ἔξωθεν φανέντος, οἷον τὸ τοιοῦτόν ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος· ἅμα γὰρ τῷ ῥηθῆναι ἄνθρωπος εὐθὺς κατὰ πρόληψιν καὶ ὁ τύπος αὐτοῦ νοεῖται προηγουμένων τῶν αἰσθήσεων. παντὶ οὖν ὀνόματι τὸ πρῶτως ὑποτεταγμένον ἐναργές ἐστι· καὶ οὐκ ἂν ἐξηγήσαμεν τὸ ζητούμενον εἰ μὴ πρότερον ἐγνώκειμεν αὐτό· οἷον τὸ πόρρω ἐστὼς ἵππος ἐστὶν ἢ βοῦς· δεῖ γὰρ κατὰ πρόληψιν ἐγνωσκέναι ποτὲ ἵππου καὶ βοὸς μορφήν· οὐδ' ἂν ὠνομάσαμεν τι μὴ πρότερον αὐτοῦ κατὰ πρόληψιν τὸν τύπον μαθόντες. ἐναργεῖς οὖν εἰσιν αἱ προλήψεις· καὶ τὸ δοξαστὸν ἀπὸ προτέρου τινὸς ἐναργοῦς ἡρτῆται, ἐφ' ὃ ἀναφέροντες λέγομεν, οἷον "Πόθεν ἴσμεν εἰ τοῦτό ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος;".

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 2.4, p. 155, 44 Syll (= U 255): 'Indeed, Epicurus, who more than anyone prefers pleasure to truth, supposes that a prolepsis is the intellect's conviction (*pistis*). He defines a prolepsis as an application [of the intellect] to something clear and to the clear conception of the thing, and [holds] that no one can either inquire or puzzle over, or even hold a belief or refute [someone] without a prolepsis.'

what prolepses are. In doing so, we face some by-now-familiar questions. First, in saying that we need prolepses to inquire, what cognitive condition does Epicurus require us to be in? Is he suggesting that we can inquire into something only if we have knowledge? Or does he think that we can inquire even if we lack knowledge, either of the things we are inquiring into or more generally? Secondly, what sort of content does he think inquiry requires: a grasp of a real essence, or something less than that? Thirdly, when and how does he think we acquire prolepses? Are they innate or acquired by experience?

## 2. Prolepses: introduction

Before we can answer these questions, we need to know what prolepses are. Unfortunately, however, it's difficult to say what they are: the evidence is sparse; and it often underdetermines any particular account. I shall focus just on the issues relevant to our main concerns, leaving other issues largely to one side.

According to Cicero, Epicurus was the first to use the term *prolēpsis* as he did (ND 1.43–5 = LS 23E3).<sup>6</sup> The usual English translation is 'preconception', but sometimes 'anticipation' is used instead.<sup>7</sup> I shall use 'prolepsis'; for it is an English word, and the OED cites relevant uses of it.<sup>8</sup> The term literally means 'grasping before', so a prolepsis is something one must, for some purpose or other, grasp before one grasps something else. According to DL 10.33, as we've seen, Epicurus thinks we must grasp prolepses in order to inquire. That said, it's not clear exactly what prolepses are, what sort of grasp one must have of them, or why we must grasp them in order to inquire.

Nor is Epicurus himself as much help here as one would like. For one thing, he doesn't use the term very often.<sup>9</sup> Our principal source is Diogenes Laertius 10.33

<sup>6</sup> The passage is quoted and discussed below.

<sup>7</sup> In ND 1.43–5, Cicero uses *anticipatio*, as well as *notio*, *informatio*, and *praenotio*. He also seems to use *opinio* and *cognitio* for prolepses, though perhaps he thinks we acquire *opinio* and *cognitio* as a result of having *prolēpses*. LS use 'preconception'. So too does G. Striker, in 'Kritērion tēs alētheias', in her *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 22–76, and 'The Problem of the Criterion', also in her *Essays*, 150–65. (The former article was originally published in *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen*, Phil-hist. Klasse 2 (1974), 48–110. The latter was originally published in S. Everson (ed.), *Epistemology*, vol. 1 of *Companions to Ancient Thought*, 181–202. Throughout, in citing Striker I use the pagination from her *Essays*.) In *Epicurus' Scientific Method* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), E. Asmis tends to use 'presumption'; but in her 'Epicurean Epistemology', *CHHP*, 260–94, she uses 'preconception'. In 'Stoic Epistemology', *CHHP*, 295–322, M. Frede uses 'anticipation' in talking about the Stoics on prolepsis.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Scott, *RE*, 165 n. 15.

<sup>9</sup> According to G. Arrighetti's index (in *Epicuro: Opere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1960; 2nd ed., 1973)), he uses it just once in *Hdt.*, at 72; just once in the *Letter to Menoeceus* (*Men.*), at 124; and just twice in

(quoted in the last section); so I begin with it. Unfortunately, the passage is obscure in a number of ways.<sup>10</sup> For example, Diogenes doesn't make it clear whether prolepses are *all* the things he mentions in (1)—apprehension *and* correct belief *and* a concept *and* a universal stored thought (i.e. a memory)—or whether some of the options he mentions are mutually exclusive, and the task is to choose among them. Yet another possibility is that Diogenes doesn't think prolepses are exactly any of the things he mentions; rather, they are similar to, or sort of like, some or all of them. Perhaps 'as it were' is meant to distance his account from any particular technical interpretation of the items he mentions. This possibility is attractive if, as is possible, Diogenes uses at least some of the terms as the Stoics do. For his point might then be that, though prolepses are (for example) something like Stoic apprehension, they don't exactly conform to the Stoic definition of apprehension.<sup>11</sup>

Whatever Diogenes' (or Epicurus') view on the matter is, it's not clear that prolepses could in fact be all the things he mentions, though that depends on exactly how we understand the various items on his list. So, for example, the Stoics use 'belief' (*doxa*) for mere belief, and 'apprehension' (*katalêpsis*) for a cognitive condition superior to mere belief.<sup>12</sup> If that's how 'belief' and 'apprehension' are used here, then prolepses couldn't be both correct belief and apprehension. Or again, concepts are sometimes taken to be abstract entities.<sup>13</sup> If prolepses are concepts so conceived, they aren't the same as apprehension or memory, if the latter are taken to be mental states.

However, there are also ways of understanding the various items on Diogenes' list that bring them closer together. Let's take concept (*ennoia*) first. If concepts are viewed as abstract entities, prolepses aren't concepts.<sup>14</sup> For prolepses are mental particulars. So, for example, Diogenes tells us that prolepses are acquired as a result

the *Kuriai Doxai* (KD) (## 37 and 38). There are also a handful of occurrences in the surviving fragments of Book 28 of *On Nature*, for which see D. Sedley, 'Epicurus: *On Nature* book XXVIII', *Cronache Ercolanesi* 3 (1973), 5–83. *On Nature* 34.26–30 (= LS 20C8) seems to mention a prolepsis of responsibility or agency.

<sup>10</sup> This leads Striker to say that 'D.L. X offers too many different versions to be of help here' ('The Problem of the Criterion', 154 n. 9.)

<sup>11</sup> However, Sextus' account, at *M* 7.205, of what the Epicureans mean by true appearances is very close to his account of the Stoic notion of apprehensive appearances, for which see e.g. *M* 7.248. I discuss the Stoics on apprehensive appearances, as well as some further aspects of Stoic epistemology, in the next chapter.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, the passages collected in LS 41.

<sup>13</sup> For discussion of different accounts of concepts, see e.g. E. Margolis and S. Laurence (eds.), *Concepts: Core Readings* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the Epicureans may reject the existence of abstract objects. This may be why Plutarch says they deny that there are sayables (*lekta*) (*Adv. Col.* 1119f = LS 19K).

of repeated experience: after I have repeated experiences of horses, I acquire a mental representation of a horse, which enables me to think of horses.<sup>15</sup> That prolepses are mental particulars is also suggested by Cicero's claim that nature imprints them on our minds (*ND* 1.43–4, in part = *LS* 23E; see 23E2 for the present point):

(1) Anyone who reflects how ungrounded and rash these [non-Epicurean theological] doctrines are ought to revere Epicurus and place him among the very beings whom this investigation concerns. (2) For he alone saw, first, that the gods existed, because nature herself had imprinted the concept (*notionem*) of them in all men's minds. For what human nation or race does not have, without instruction, some preconception (*anticipationem*) of the gods? Epicurus' word for this is *prolēpsis*, that is, what we may call a delineation (*informationem*) of a thing, preconceived by the mind, without which understanding (*intelligi*), inquiry (*quaeri*), and discussion (*disputari*) are impossible. The power and value of this reasoning we have learnt from Epicurus' heaven-sent book on the yardstick and criterion. Thus you see the foundation of this inquiry admirably laid. For since the belief (*opinio*) has not been established by any convention, custom, or law, and retains unanimous consent, it must necessarily be understood that there are gods, given that we have ingrained, or rather innate, cognitions of them (*quoniam insitas eorum vel potius innatas cognitiones habemus*). But that on which all men's nature agrees must necessarily be true. Therefore it must be conceded that there are gods. (3) Since this is agreed among virtually all—the uneducated as well as philosophers—let us also allow the following to be agreed: that what I called our preconception (*anticipationem*), or prenotation (*praenotionem*), of the gods (for new things require new names, just as Epicurus himself gave *prolēpsis* its name, a name which no one had previously applied to it) is such that we think the gods blessed and imperishable. For as well as giving us a delineation of the gods themselves, nature has also engraved (*insculpsit*) on our minds the view of them as imperishable and blessed. (*ND* 1.43–5 = *LS* 23E1–3, trans. somewhat modified)<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> To say that prolepses are mental representations is not to say that they are mental images. A. A. Long, however, takes prolepses to be 'fine aggregates of moving atoms which present themselves to consciousness as images' ('Aisthesis, Prolepsis, and Linguistic Theory in Epicurus', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 18 (1971), 114–33, at 120). Striker says that '[i]t is presumably incorrect to postulate a clear distinction between "true" images and true propositions... Insofar as *prolēpseis* are "seen", it is natural to conceive of them as images; but insofar as they can be described as demonstrated or indemonstrable, we have to understand them as propositions' ('*Kritērion tēs alētheias*', 41). But 'seen' doesn't imply that prolepses are images. When Plato, for example, speaks of looking to forms (*Eu.* 6e; cf. *Meno* 72c6–d1), all he means is considering them; and one does that by thinking about what's true of them. One considers what the nature of piety is (which is expressed propositionally, as an answer to the question 'What is piety?'), and relies on that in determining whether something is or is not pious.

<sup>16</sup> *Ea qui consideret quam inconsulte ac temere dicantur, venerari Epicurum et in eorum ipsorum numero de quibus haec quaestio est habere debeat. Solus enim vidit primum esse deos, quod in omnium animis eorum notionem inpressisset ipsa natura. quae est enim gens aut quod genus hominum quod non habeat sine doctrina anticipationem quandam deorum, quam appellat πρόληψιν* Epicurus id est anteceptam animo rei quandam informationem, sine qua nec intellegi quicquam nec quaeri nec disputari potest. quoniam rationis vim atque utilitatem ex illo caelesti Epicuri

However, though prolepses aren't concepts when concepts are taken to be abstract entities, there are other ways of understanding concepts. On one view, for example, concepts are mental representations that enable us to think of things. Prolepses are concepts in this sense.

Insofar as prolepses are mental representations that enable us to think of things, they seem to be the contents of certain mental states. Sometimes, however, they seem to be mental states. Even if prolepses are mental states, they at any rate have content; and that will be my focus here.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. Prolepses and belief

Let's now turn to further items in Diogenes' list. Prolepses are reasonably identified with stored thoughts which, in turn, are memories.<sup>18</sup> For once prolepses are acquired, we retain them; they are stored in our minds as memories, as mental representations we can recall. Next we can note that Diogenes also says that prolepses are 'evident' (*enarges*; 10.33; cf. *Hdt.* 82) and a criterion of truth.<sup>19</sup> It is tempting to infer that prolepses are themselves true. Each can, at least, be represented as a true proposition.<sup>20</sup> So, for example, the Epicureans think there is

de regula et iudicio volumine accepimus. quod igitur fundamentum huius quaestionis est, id praeclare iactum videtis. cum enim non instituto aliquo aut more aut lege sit opinio constituta maneatque ad unum omnium firma consensio, intellegi necesse est esse deos, quoniam insitas eorum vel potius innatas cognitiones habemus; de quo autem omnium natura consentit, id verum esse necesse est; esse igitur deos confitendum est. Quod quoniam fere constat inter omnis non philosophos solum sed etiam indoctos, fatemur constare illud etiam, hanc nos habere sive anticipationem, ut ante dixi, sive praenotionem deorum (sunt enim rebus novis nova ponenda nomina, ut Epicurus ipse *πρόληψιν* appellavit, quam antea nemo eo verbo nominarat)—hanc igitur habemus, ut deos beatos et immortales putemus. quae enim nobis natura informationem ipsorum deorum dedit, eadem insculpsit in mentibus ut eos aeternos et beatos haberemus.

<sup>17</sup> P. Morel, 'Method and Evidence: On Epicurean Preconception', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 23 (2007), 25–48, argues that prolepses are both mental acts and contents. In 'Response to Morel' (*ibid.* 49–54, at 53–4), D. Konstan argues that they are just contents. D. Glidden, 'Epicurean *Prolêpsis*', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 3 (1985), 175–215, seems to think prolepses are just acts. According to Asmis, 'since the attitude and the effect [i.e. content] are coextensive, this distinction is unimportant, and indeed often seems to be ignored by the Epicureans' (*Epicurus' Scientific Method*, 63).

<sup>18</sup> Plutarch, in *Common Conceptions* 1085a–b, may distinguish stored thoughts from memories, though he might be offering different descriptions of some one thing rather than different descriptions of different things. Be that as it may, he is discussing the Stoics; even if they distinguish stored thoughts from memories, it wouldn't follow that the Epicureans do so. DL 10.33 makes it clear that the stored thoughts at issue there are memories.

<sup>19</sup> 'Epicurus, in the *Kanôn*, says that perceptions, prolepses, and affections (*pathê*) are the criteria of truth. The Epicureans add the "focusing of thought into an appearance"' (DL 10.31).

<sup>20</sup> See Striker, 'The Problem of the Criterion', 151; M. Schofield, 'Preconception, Argument, and God', in M. Schofield, M. Burnyeat, and J. Barnes (eds.), *Doubt and Dogmatism: Studies in Hellenistic Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 283–308, at 291; and J. Barnes, 'Epicurus: Meaning

a prolepsis of god, which says, or which can be expressed as saying, that gods are blessed and imperishable (Cicero, *ND* 1.45 = LS 23E3; quoted above); hence there are gods that are blessed and imperishable. Here it is important to note that the Epicureans mean, not just that the conditional—if there are gods, they are blessed and imperishable—is true, but also that, since there is a prolepsis of god that says that gods are blessed and imperishable, blessed and imperishable gods exist. If there is a prolepsis of *x*, *x* exists and is as the prolepsis says it is.<sup>21</sup>

If prolepses can be expressed as true propositions, it is reasonable to think that they are true beliefs in the content sense and confer true belief in the cognitive-condition sense. To be sure, I can entertain a proposition without taking it to be true, and so without believing it.<sup>22</sup> So the mere fact that prolepses are true, or are accurate representations of things, doesn't by itself imply that they are true *beliefs*. However, the Epicureans seem to think that we all accept our prolepses as true, even though we are not always aware of doing so. To take *p* to be true is to believe *p*. So if I take a prolepsis to be true, I thereby have a true belief, whether or not I'm aware that I do.

That prolepses are true beliefs is also suggested by the fact that the Epicureans think one can confuse a prolepsis with a false belief or supposition.<sup>23</sup> Prolepses must, then, be similar enough to beliefs to be able to be confused with false beliefs. Prolepses certainly aren't false beliefs; hence it's reasonable to infer that

and Thinking', in G. Giannantoni and M. Gigante (eds.), *Epicureismo greco e romano* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1996), vol. 1, 197–220, at 209. To say that prolepses can be expressed as true propositions is not to say that they are sayables as conceived of by the Stoics: see n. 14. It is, however, to say that they have what we would describe as propositional structure.

<sup>21</sup> Here I agree with e.g. Asmis, *Epicurus' Scientific Method*, 29–30. But the view might be rejected by Long and Sedley. For they think that, though the Epicureans posit a prolepsis of god, they don't think that gods objectively exist: see LS 1.145–9. For criticism of their view, see Scott, *RE*, 191–201, and D. Konstan, 'Epicurus on the Gods', in J. Fish and K. Sanders (eds.), *Epicurus and the Epicurean Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 53–71. For a reply to Scott, see D. Sedley, 'Epicurus' Theological Innatism', in Fish and Sanders (eds.), *Epicurus and the Epicurean Tradition*, 29–52.

<sup>22</sup> I assume the (or a) familiar account of belief, according to which to believe that *p* is to take *p* to be true. Perhaps we should add: with the aim of its being true. For when I entertain a hypothesis, or daydream, there's a sense in which I take a given proposition to be true; but, in these cases, I don't necessarily have the aim of those propositions being true. See D. Velleman, 'On the Aim of Belief', in his *The Possibility of Practical Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 244–81. Nonetheless, for convenience I shall generally speak just of taking *p* to be true, where that is meant to capture belief in particular.

<sup>23</sup> DL 10.34 (= LS 18B); cf. *Men.* 123–4 (= LS 23B). It's true that Epicurus sometimes seems to oppose, or contrast, prolepses and beliefs. He says, for example, that we test beliefs against prolepses (*Hdt.* 37–8 = LS 18C). And according to DL 10.33, belief (or what is believed) depends on something prior (namely, prolepses); this might be taken to suggest that prolepses are not themselves beliefs. Cf. *Hdt.* 37–8 = LS 18C. But perhaps Epicurus means that *mere* beliefs need to be tested against prolepses.

they are true beliefs.<sup>24</sup> It's just that we can't immediately tell which of our beliefs are prolepses. Prolepses are objectively, not subjectively, evident.<sup>25</sup> Though it's not immediately evident to us which of our beliefs is a prolepsis, prolepses are nonetheless evident in virtue of their nature. Similarly, we've seen that Plato thinks that we all have some true and some false beliefs, though our beliefs don't wear their truth and falsity on their faces.

#### 4. Prolepses and apprehension

What, finally, of apprehension? Diogenes doesn't say how he uses the term; and it is used in different ways.<sup>26</sup> But to say that someone apprehends that *p* would normally imply that the person takes *p* to be true, and that *p* is nonaccidentally true and is guaranteed to be true. If we so understand apprehension, then prolepses are or confer apprehension. We've already seen that they are true and are taken to be true. They are also nonaccidentally true and are guaranteed to be true. That this is so is implied by the fact that nature imprints them on us and that we get them as a result of experience. It's also implied by the fact that prolepses are evident and a criterion of truth.

Should we then say that prolepses are or confer knowledge? That depends on what we take knowledge to be. Apprehension, as just explained, falls short of knowledge as Plato understands it: it falls short of P-knowledge and so of superior cognition. Further, as we shall see below, their contents aren't sufficiently rich to confer P-knowledge. It also falls short of A-knowledge. For, I suggested in the last chapter, Aristotle thinks that one knows that *p* is true only if one has a good argument for the claim that *p* is true; but one can apprehend something

<sup>24</sup> In *On Nature* 28 (fr. 13 col. VII, lines 4–5 in Sedley, 'Epicurus: *On Nature* Book XXVIII', at 50), Epicurus speaks of false belief as subordinate to words (*pseudēs hupotetachthai tais lexesin ekeinais doxa*); in *Hdt.* 37 he implies that prolepses are subordinate to words (or sounds: *phthongoi*). It's reasonable to infer that beliefs as such are subordinate to words. So, again, since prolepses are not false beliefs, they are presumably (a subclass of) true beliefs. See S. Everson, 'Epicurus on Mind and Language' in S. Everson (ed.), *Language*, vol. 3 of *Companions to Ancient Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 74–108, at 83, 103; Barnes, 'Epicurus: Meaning and Thinking', 213 with n. 14. That prolepses are beliefs is also suggested by the passage from Clement quoted in n. 5. See also Theodoret, *Graecorum Affectionum Curatio* I 90, ed. P. Canivet (Paris: Cerf, 1958): 'Epicurus calls this conviction (*pistis*) of the intellect "prolepsis"'.  
<sup>25</sup> See D. Scott, 'Epicurean Illusions', 368; *RE*, 173.

<sup>26</sup> For the Stoics on apprehension, see the passages collected in LS 40. But the Cyrenaics and Philo of Larisa don't use 'apprehension' as the Stoics do. For the Cyrenaics, see Sextus, *PH* 1.215. For Philo, see Sextus, *PH* 1.235. For detailed discussion of Philo's epistemology, see C. Brittain, *Philo of Larissa: The Last of the Academic Sceptics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), chs. 2–3. See also Striker, 'Academics Fighting Academics', in B. Inwood and J. Mansfeld (eds.), *Assent and Argument* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 257–76, esp. 258–60.



without being able to produce a good argument for its being the case. If, however, knowledge is taken to be nonaccidentally true belief, then apprehension, as just explained, is sufficient for knowledge.

One might argue that even if there are some views of knowledge on which prolepses are or confer knowledge, Epicurus himself doesn't think prolepses are or confer knowledge. This seems to be Asmis' view. For she thinks that Epicurus doesn't acknowledge any condition superior to mere true belief.<sup>27</sup> However, in the *Letter to Menoeceus* (= *Men.*) (DL 10.123) he speaks of clear *gnôsis*. As we saw in the last chapter, *gnôsis* can be used more extensively than for knowledge. But clear *gnôsis* seems to be knowledge. The foundational role that Epicurus ascribes to prolepses and the fact that they function as a criterion of truth by which we decide the truth or falsity of (other) beliefs also suggest that he takes them to be or confer knowledge rather than mere true belief. I'm inclined to think, then, that Epicurus thinks that having prolepses amounts to having knowledge, as he conceives of knowledge, though the sort of 'knowledge' at issue falls short of what Plato and Aristotle count as knowledge. Let's call knowledge as Epicurus conceives of it 'E-knowledge'. Just as Aristotle expands the scope of knowledge beyond its Platonic boundaries, so Epicurus extends it even beyond its Aristotelian boundaries. The lower the criteria for having knowledge are, the easier it is to have knowledge.<sup>28</sup>

A further point about E-knowledge is worth making. As I've mentioned, Epicurus seems to think we can have a prolepsis without being aware that we have it; prolepses are objectively, not subjectively, evident. If this is right, then, in contrast to Plato, he seems to reject an accessibility condition on knowledge: we can have E-knowledge without being aware that we have it.<sup>29</sup> However, Epicurus

<sup>27</sup> *Epicurus' Scientific Method*, 38. Her reason is that 'the Epicureans did not recognize any truths that are not verified either directly or indirectly by empirical observation' (38). However, though this might preclude knowledge on some accounts of knowledge, it doesn't preclude it on all accounts of knowledge.

<sup>28</sup> Though Epicurus seems to think that everyone has some apprehension (and so some E-knowledge) in virtue of having prolepses, he also seems to acknowledge knowledge of a higher-level sort. So, for example, according to Plutarch Epicurus thinks that 'no one except the wise man is unshakably persuaded of anything' (*adv. Col.* 1117f = U 222). This suggests that only some are wise; since we all have prolepses, being wise involves more than that. A further reason to think that Epicurus countenances knowledge that goes beyond mere true belief is that he seems to think one can acquire knowledge by memorizing the *Kuriai Doxai* (often translated as *Principal Doctrines* or *Key Doctrines*); not everyone does so, hence doing so confers a sort of knowledge that goes beyond merely having prolepses.

<sup>29</sup> However, according to Striker, 'Epicurus, like many philosophers before and after him, thought that knowing that p implies knowing that one is justified in claiming that p, and hence that we could not know that anything was the case on the basis of a sense-impression unless we knew that the impression was true' ('The Problem of the Criterion', 153 n. 7).

may think it is relatively easy to uncover which of our beliefs are prolepses; if so, to that extent he doesn't reject an accessibility condition.

We've now looked at all the items on Diogenes' list. Although it may initially seem that we need to choose among them, I've suggested that we do not need to do so; prolepses can reasonably be identified with all of them. They are true thoughts or concepts, in the sense that they are true or accurate mental representations that enable us to think about things. Since they are stored over time, they are also memories. They are also true beliefs; for not only are they in fact true but, also, at some level we take them to be true, though we may not be aware of doing so. They are also, or also confer, apprehension, since they are not only true beliefs but are also nonaccidentally true and are guaranteed to be true. As such, they are or confer not only true belief but also knowledge, on one account of knowledge and as Epicurus conceives of knowledge.<sup>30</sup> However, prolepses don't confer either P-knowledge (superior cognition) or A-knowledge.

## 5. The range of prolepses

Let's now consider the range of prolepses. Some evidence might seem to suggest that there is a prolepsis corresponding to every word. Diogenes, for example, describes prolepses as 'what primarily underlies each name (*onoma*)' (DL 10.33). And Epicurus speaks of 'the primary concept (*ennoêma*) corresponding to every word (*tois phthongois*)' (*Hdt.* 37 = LS 17C1).<sup>31</sup> But other evidence suggests that the range of prolepses is more limited. We've seen, for example, that Diogenes says that prolepses are of what has 'frequently become evident externally' (10.33). It seems to follow that there are prolepses only of what objectively exists. There is a prolepsis of horse, but not of centaur.<sup>32</sup> Further, Cicero tells us that prolepses are natural (*ND* 1.43–4; cited above). As he explains, they are natural in the sense

<sup>30</sup> On the account I've suggested, Epicurus takes knowledge to be a species of belief. This agrees with Plato in the *Meno*, but contrasts with the Stoics (whom I discuss in the next chapter). The fact that Epicurus wrote a work called *Kuriai Doxai* supports this view of Epicurus. For when we memorize the *Kuriai Doxai*, we have E-knowledge; but what we are memorizing are *doxai*.

<sup>31</sup> Although the term 'prolepsis' doesn't occur in this passage, I agree with the generally-held view that prolepses are the primary concepts underlying words. See e.g. LS 1.89. Epicurus does use *eilêphenai*, 'to have grasped', which is etymologically connected to prolepsis. (For this point, see Asmis, *Epicurus' Scientific Method*, 22 n. 9.) Epicurus uses *ennoêma*, whereas DL 10.33 uses *ennoia*. The Stoics sometimes distinguish *ennoêmata* from *ennoiai*; for some sample passages, see LS 31. However, the Epicureans don't seem to do so.

<sup>32</sup> However, as I've noted (n. 21), LS (1.145) think that, though there is a prolepsis of god, gods don't objectively exist. Despite saying this, they also say that Epicurus may accept 'a lingering Platonist assumption, so common in Greek thought, that if I succeed in thinking of x then x must objectively exist for me to think of' (LS 1.78; cf. 1.147). I myself don't think Plato assumes this; see *On Ideas*, esp. ch. 9.

that nature imprints them in us; further, we don't acquire them through teaching, custom, convention, or law. It's not clear what range of things this is meant to include. It seems clear that if *x* is imprinted by nature, *x* objectively exists. But it's not clear whether nature is meant to contrast with what's artificial; if it does, there are no prolepses of artifacts, such as tables or shoes. In favor of thinking there are no prolepses of artifacts is that fact that Epicurus doesn't mention any such prolepses; nor do Diogenes or Cicero do so in describing Epicurean views.<sup>33</sup>

Be that as it may, not everything that objectively exists has its own prolepsis. First, we've seen that, according to Diogenes, Epicurean prolepses are universal stored thoughts. This suggests that there are prolepses only of universals; there are no prolepses of particulars. There is a prolepsis of horse, but not of my friend Flicka.<sup>34</sup> Secondly, in *Hdt.* 72 (= LS 7B6) Epicurus implies that there is no prolepsis of time. Yet he seems to think that time objectively exists and is not conventional. The reason there is nonetheless no prolepsis of time seems to be that time is not suitably basic: it is an accident of an accident (Sextus, *M* 10.219–27 = LS 7C). Nor does there seem to be a prolepsis of atoms; for, though they too objectively exist and are suitably basic, they aren't the sorts of things we can have experience of.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> E. Asmis, 'Epicurean Empiricism', in J. Warren (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 84–104, at 87 n. 5, thinks that Philodemus posits a prolepsis of good household manager (*On Household Management* = *De Oec.* 20.8–32 Jensen) and of good poem (*De poem.* 5. 33.32–6 Mangoni). For a brief discussion, see V. Tsouna, *The Ethics of Philodemus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 68–73. (See also her *Philodemus, On Property Management* (Greek text, translation, introduction and notes) (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012).) She notes that it's not entirely clear whether, in *De Oec.*, the relevant prolepsis is just of (a) good (*aretê*); or also or instead of (b) money-maker (or household manager) or of (c) good money-maker (or household manager). She thinks the similarity to *De poem.* 5. 33.34–6 Mangoni favors (c). So far as I can tell, *De poem.* is as unclear on this point as *De Oec.* is. Mangoni, 313, seems to think that Philodemus posits a prolepsis of good poem (not just of good) because he thinks that what constitutes a good poem is natural, not conventional. If this is right, then, so far as this passage goes, Philodemus restricts prolepses to what is natural (excluding what is conventional), but takes the range of what's natural to be rather extensive, though it's not clear exactly how extensive he takes it to be.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. DL 7.54: 'prolepsis is a natural concept of universals' (*hê prolêpsis ennoia phusikê tôn katholou*). Admittedly, the grammar is different here, and the passage is about the Stoics, not the Epicureans. For a different interpretation of *katholikê* in the present context, one that allows for prolepses of particulars, see Asmis, *Epicurus' Scientific Method*, 63. See also her 'Epicurean Epistemology', 277–8. In 'Epicurean Empiricism', 87 n. 5, she suggests that Sextus, *M* 7.208–15, mentions a prolepsis of Plato. But Sextus seems to have appearances more broadly construed in mind.

<sup>35</sup> That there is no prolepsis of atoms is also suggested by Sedley, 'Epicurus' Theological Innatism', 42.

There therefore seem to be prolepses only for some general features of reality.<sup>36</sup> As such, they are a subclass of concepts (and of memories, true beliefs, and apprehension) rather than being coextensive with them. There are, however, concepts of things that don't have a proprietary prolepsis. According to Diogenes, the Epicureans think 'all concepts (*epinoiai*) arise from the senses by means of confrontation, analogy, and similarity and combination, with some contribution from reasoning as well' (DL 10.32). The suggestion is that we combine our prolepses, and extrapolate from them, in various ways; we thereby acquire concepts of things that don't have their own prolepses and even of things that don't exist.<sup>37</sup>

## 6. The contents of prolepses

Let's now look more closely at the contents of prolepses. One issue is whether prolepses are definitions. The evidence here is unclear. According to Cicero:<sup>38</sup>

In the other branch of philosophy, logic, which concerns inquiry and argument, your master [Epicurus] seems to me unarmed and naked. He abolishes definitions. (*On Ends* (= *De Finibus* = *Fin.*) 1.22 = U 243 = LS 19H).

If Cicero is right, then of course prolepses aren't definitions. For Epicurus plainly thinks there are prolepses; yet, according to Cicero, he abolishes definitions. Other commentators, however, more plausibly ascribe a weaker view to Epicurus. For example, according to the anonymous commentator on Plato's *Theaetetus* (22.39–47 = LS 19F):<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> For the view that the range of prolepses is more extensive than I take it to be, see (in addition to Asmis, discussed above), V. Goldschmidt, 'Remarques sur l'origine épicurienne de la "prénotion"', in J. Brunschwig (ed.), *Les Stoïciens et leur logique* (Paris: Vrin, 2nd ed., 2006), 41–60; he thinks that Epicurean prolepses are concepts as such, rather than, as I have argued, a subclass of concepts. The issue of the range of prolepses is interestingly related to questions about the range of Platonic forms. On one view, forms are the meanings of general terms and there is, correspondingly, a form for every meaningful general term. On another view, forms are (a subclass of) properties, where properties carve reality at the joints; as such, there are not forms corresponding to every general term, since not every general term picks out a genuine property. I discuss this issue in connection with Plato in *On Ideas*, esp. chs. 4 and 8. See also Ch. 2, sect. 4. In section 7 below, I consider prolepses in connection with the meanings of terms.

<sup>37</sup> For how this works in the case of time, see *Hdt.* 72 (LS 7B6). Cf. DL 7.52–3; Sextus, *M* 8.58–60.

<sup>38</sup> If Cicero were right, the Epicureans would not think that inquiry ever aims to find definitions. Yet for Plato and Aristotle, that is a goal—though not the only goal—of inquiry. However, we shall see that Cicero goes too far in saying that the Epicureans abolish definitions entirely. I ask about inquiry and definition in sections 9 and 10.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Sextus, *PH* 2.211–12.

Epicurus says that names are clearer than definitions, and that indeed it would be absurd if instead of saying “Hello Socrates” one were to say “Hello rational mortal animal”.

To say that it’s clearer to address Socrates by name than to address him with the definition of man is not to say that there are no definitions. Indeed, it isn’t even to say that names are always clearer than definitions. For even if it’s clearer to address Socrates by name than with the definition of man, it might, for all that, be clearer to use a definition in other contexts for other purposes. And, at least according to the Vatican Scholiast on Dionysius Thrax, the Epicureans do value definitions:<sup>40</sup>

And though Epicurus always made use of outlines (*hupographais*), he showed that definitions (*horoi*) are more valuable, by using definitions instead of outlines in the treatise on physics. For he used definitions when he divided the totality into the atomic and the void, saying that ‘the atomic is a solid body which has no share of void included in it; <and> void is an intangible nature’ (= U 92 = A. Hilgard (ed.), *Scholia in Dionysii Thracis Artem Grammaticam in Grammatici Graeci* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1901), vol. 3, 116.).

So the Epicureans seem to countenance definitions. But what is the connection between prolepses and definitions? First we should note that prolepses are outline accounts. That this is so is suggested by the fact that, as we’ve seen, Epicurus says that the prolepsis of god says that god is imperishable and blessed; and in *Men.* 123 he explicitly says that this is an outline (*hupegraphê*) account of god. DL 10.33 also suggests that prolepses are outlines (*tupos*). If prolepses are outline accounts, then presumably they are not definitions. Further, some passages contrast outlines with definitions. However, other evidence suggests that prolepses are definitions.<sup>41</sup> According to Philodemus, for example, ‘[t]here is also the meaning that this is the particular definition of that, and that this is the prolepsis, as when we say that body as body has bulk and resistance and man as man is a rational animal’.<sup>42</sup>

The issue may be terminological: perhaps prolepses are definitions on one account of definition, but not on another. Certainly ‘definition’ has been

<sup>40</sup> The scholiast seems to say that the Epicureans take definitions to be more valuable than outline accounts (i.e. prolepses) are. Even if Epicurus recognizes definitions, he doesn’t take them to be intrinsically more valuable than prolepses. For one thing, though he says that prolepses are a criterion of truth, he doesn’t say that definitions are a criterion of truth. However, he might think that definitions are more useful for certain purposes than prolepses are; and perhaps that’s all the scholiast means.

<sup>41</sup> For the view that prolepses are definitions, see Konstan, ‘Response to Morel’, 52. He also thinks they state the essences of things: 51, 53. I discuss this shortly. Cf. Striker, ‘The Problem of the Criterion’, 151.

<sup>42</sup> *On Signs* 34.7–11, P. and E. DeLacy (ed. with trans. and notes), *Philodemus: On Methods of Inference*, 2nd ed. rev. (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1978).

understood in different ways.<sup>43</sup> Sextus, for example, describes two sorts of definitions: ‘accounts which, by a brief reminder, lead us to a conception of the objects denoted by the phrases’, and ‘accounts which show what it is to be a certain thing’ (*PH* 2.212). The second sort of definition corresponds to the Platonic–Aristotelian notion of definition, according to which the definition of *F* states *F*’s real essence. The first sort seems to be what, in other contexts, is called an outline account.<sup>44</sup> Prolepses seem to be definitions of the first, but not of the second, sort. In support of this suggestion we can note again that Epicurus says that the prolepsis of god says that god is imperishable and blessed; and in *Men.* 123 he says that this is an outline (*hupographê*) account of god. Further, Sextus’ language recalls Epicurus’ way of describing prolepses.<sup>45</sup>

If prolepses are outline accounts rather than Platonic–Aristotelian definitions, they don’t state full real essences. Each could, however, state part of the real essence of what it is of; or prolepses could state the essence in outline form. And at least some of them seem to do so. For example, again, the prolepsis of god says that god is blessed and imperishable (*DL* 10.123); being blessed and imperishable are presumably essential features of god. The prolepsis of justice says that justice is ‘what is useful in mutual associations’ (*KD* 37–8); this is said to be the nature (*phusis*) of justice. But saying only so much about god, or justice, falls short of providing a definition of them, in the sense of stating their full real essence. At least, they aren’t sufficiently full to answer Plato’s ‘What is *F*?’ question. (Of course, Plato would also say that the Epicurean account of justice is false; but that’s another matter.) If Plato thought such a brief account would do, he would have thought that the account he provides of justice in *Republic* 4 was adequate. Instead, he says that a ‘longer way’ (435d; cf. 504d) is necessary for explaining what justice is and why it’s better to be just than unjust. This suggests that, at least in his view, the account of justice in *Republic* 4 is an outline account, not a full definition.

One might argue that even if Plato wouldn’t count this as a full definition or specification of essence, Epicurus would do so. After all, we’ve seen that E-knowledge is more extensive than P-knowledge. Perhaps, similarly, he thinks a full specification of the essence of something can be expressed briefly. However,

<sup>43</sup> See LS 32 for Stoic accounts of definition. I discuss the Stoics on definition in the next chapter.

<sup>44</sup> With the first way of understanding definitions, cf. *DL* 7.60 (LS 32C3): ‘an outline account is a statement introducing us to things by means of a sketch, or which conveys the force of the definition more simply than the definition does’. I discuss this passage in the next chapter. According to Galen, ‘a definition is that which by a brief reminder brings us to a conception of the things underlying words’ (*Medical Definitions* 19.348.16–17 = LS 32D).

<sup>45</sup> Compare e.g. *PH* 2.212 with *Hdt.* 37.

since Epicurus himself characterizes the prolepsis of god as an outline, it's reasonable to think that he doesn't take prolepses to state full definitions.

That this is so receives further support from what Epicurus says about the definition and prolepsis of man. In DL 10.32, Diogenes says that when 'man' is uttered, we think of the outline (*tupos*) of man, as given by the prolepsis. He goes on to speak of the shape (*morphê*) of cow, which is likewise given by prolepsis. Democritus is alleged to have defined 'man' just in terms of shape. Aristotle objected that such a definition wouldn't enable us to distinguish men from either corpses or statues of men; for they have the same shape as man does (*PA* 1.1, 640b30–5). What Democritus views as the definition of man therefore seems to capture instead what 'man' signifies, in Aristotle's sense of signification: it specifies a feature true of all, but not true only of, men. Like Aristotle, Epicurus may have been dissatisfied with Democritus' definition of man. For Sextus says that Epicurus defined man as this sort of shape, ensouled (*PH* 2.25; cf. *M* 7. 267–8).<sup>46</sup> Perhaps, then, what Democritus takes to be the definition of man, Epicurus takes to be just the prolepsis of man. The prolepsis just mentions the shape of man; the definition of man says, more fully, that man is this sort of shape ensouled. The prolepsis mentions a feature true of all men; and so it captures what 'man' signifies, in Aristotle's sense. The definition also mentions an essential feature of man (being ensouled) that isn't mentioned in its prolepsis. Once again, then, prolepses are outline accounts that fall short of stating full real essences—although, in this case as in the others we've looked at, the prolepsis seems to state part of the essence.<sup>47</sup>

If, as I've suggested, prolepses are outline accounts rather than full definitions, that reinforces a suggestion I made above: that prolepses don't confer P-knowledge or superior cognition. For, in Plato's view, we can have P-knowledge, or superior cognition, of something only if we grasp its full real essence.

As we've seen, it's sometimes thought that, according to Plato in the *Meno*, we need to know a definition of F in order to inquire about F. If that were Plato's view, then Epicurus' view that we need prolepses—but not definitions—in order to inquire, would stand in sharp contrast to it. I've argued, however, that Plato doesn't think we need to know a definition of F in order to inquire about F. Having and relying on relevant true beliefs is sufficient, and so knowledge of a definition isn't needed. Nor does Plato think that one needs to have a true belief

<sup>46</sup> Here one might say that the ostensive element prevents the proposed definition from being a genuine definition, since genuine definitions must be general. Sextus likewise objects to the ostensive element: *PH* 2.25; *M* 7.267.

<sup>47</sup> Diogenes mentions *morphê*, which in this context means 'shape'. However, it's worth noting that the word is sometimes used for form in the sense of essence; see e.g. Aristotle, *Phys.* 193a30; *GC*, 335b6, 35; *PA* 640b30.

about the definition in order to inquire. When Plato is so understood, Epicurus' claim that we need—not definitions, but—prolepses for inquiry is closer to Plato's view than it would be if Plato required knowledge of (or a true belief about) a definition for inquiry. To be sure, Epicurus thinks that having prolepses is necessary, whereas Plato doesn't commit himself to the view that having true beliefs is necessary. He commits himself only to the view that having true beliefs is sufficient, and that having an appropriate degree of familiarity (where precisely what that involves is left unspecified) is necessary. Still, Plato and Epicurus agree that we can inquire about F on the basis of less than knowledge of (or a true belief about) the definition of F. They disagree in that for Plato, but not for Epicurus, acquiring knowledge of a definition is an important goal. One reason they differ in this way is that Plato thinks that knowledge of a definition of F provides maximum clarity about F, whereas Epicurus doesn't seem to think this. That's part of the point of an interesting argument recorded by Erotianus:<sup>48</sup>

For if we are going to explain the words known (*gignôskomenas*) to everybody, we would have to expound either all or some. But it's impossible to expound all, and pointless to expound <just> some. For we will explain them either through familiar or unfamiliar locutions. But unfamiliar words seem unsuited to the task, the accepted principle being to explain less known things by means of better known things; and familiar words, by being on a par with them, will be uninformative for illuminating language, as Epicurus says. For the informativeness of language is characteristically ruined when it is bewitched by an account (*logos*), as if by a homeopathic drug. (34.10–20 = U 258 = LS 19G; somewhat revised)

## 7. Prolepses and meaning

Let's now turn to another, related, issue about prolepses: what if any connection do they have to the meanings of words? The view that prolepses are the meanings of words is often held.<sup>49</sup> But whether prolepses are the meanings of words

<sup>48</sup> With the Erotianus passage, cf. Sextus, *PH* 2.207–8. According to Scott, '[t]he argument reported by Erotianus is, of course, reminiscent of Meno's paradox' (*RE*, 171, n. 2). According to Cicero, Epicurus agrees with Plato's view in the *Phaedrus*, according to which (as Cicero puts it) 'every discourse which is to proceed methodically and systematically must begin with a preface, like those we find in legal formulae: "the matter at hand is as follows". This enables the parties to the debate to agree on what the subject for debate actually is.' But, Cicero goes on to say, Epicurus thought one could satisfy this demand without providing a definition (*Fin.* 2.3–4; trans. Woolf). We might put this by saying that Epicurus accepts the Dialectical Requirement, but doesn't think it requires a definition. Nor does Plato in the *Meno* think it requires this. I leave discussion of the *Phaedrus* to one side. Cicero is presumably thinking of 237b–d; cf. 265d–e, 277b–c.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Striker, '*Kritêrion tês alêtheias*', 39; Schofield, 'Preconception, Argument, and God', 291. According to D. Fowler, 'in giving the meanings of words we use prolepses to occupy the



depends, among other things, on how meaning is conceived. If the meaning of a word is taken to be an abstract entity like a Fregean sense, then prolepses are not meanings. For, as we've seen, prolepses are not abstract entities; they are mental particulars that we acquire as a result of experience. For all that, prolepses could be meanings on some other account of meaning. Long, for example, agrees that prolepses are not abstract entities. Nonetheless, he says that they are 'fine aggregates of moving atoms which present themselves to consciousness as images. They provide Epicurus with a theory that the meaning of the word is primarily the prolepsis or concept which it calls to mind, and only secondarily the thing designated'.<sup>50</sup>

But the view that prolepses are meanings has been disputed. Everson, for example, says bluntly and without argument that prolepses 'are not well suited to play the role of the senses either of words or of sentences'.<sup>51</sup> He argues, however, that, though prolepses aren't themselves the meanings of words, they play a role in determining the meanings of words.<sup>52</sup>

This view is, however, contested by Barnes, who argues that prolepses are meant to explain, not word meaning, but just speaker's meaning: I don't mean anything by what I say when I utter the word 'horse' unless I have a prolepsis of horse; but, for all that, 'horse' has a determinate meaning and indeed has it independently of prolepses.<sup>53</sup> It's one thing to say that the meaning of 'F' is, or is determined by, the prolepsis of F. It's another thing to say that I can't intend to say anything about Fs unless I have a prolepsis of F. The latter view leaves open

place of *lekta* in Stoic semantics, though they are emphatically visual rather than propositional' (*Lucretius on Atomic Motion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 188–9).

<sup>50</sup> A. A. Long, 'Aisthesis, Prolepsis, and Linguistic Theory in Epicurus', 120.

<sup>51</sup> 'Epicurus on Mind and Language', 80.

<sup>52</sup> 'Epicurus on Mind and Language', 80; cf. Scott, 'Epicurean Illusions', 367. It's useful to distinguish two issues about meaning: their ontological status, and their content. I've already suggested that prolepses aren't meanings, if meanings are taken to be abstract entities: that concerns ontological status. In what follows, I leave ontological status to one side and ask whether prolepses are the meanings of words if the meaning of a word is taken to be its conventional meaning: that's a question about content. Meaning, so understood, is what a competent speaker of the language grasps in grasping the meaning of a word. I once would have said that this is what a dictionary (as opposed e.g. to an encyclopedia) aims to capture. But according to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'Dictionary definitions are written with a lot of things in mind, but rigorously circumscribing the exact meanings and connotations of terms is not usually one of them' (quoted in *The New York Times*, in an article appearing in *The Observer* on July 17, 2011, entitled 'Giving Weight to Words').

<sup>53</sup> This is the main argument of his 'Epicurus: Meaning and Thinking'. For the classic distinction between speaker and word meaning, and for the view that the latter can be explained in terms of the former, see H. P. Grice, 'Meaning', *Philosophical Review* 66 (1957), 377–88. Cf. his 'Utterer's Meaning, Sentence-Meaning, and Word-Meaning', *Foundations of Language* 4 (1968), 225–42.

the possibility that the meaning of the word is determined independently of prolepses; and, according to Barnes, that's Epicurus' view.

Can we adjudicate among these options? It seems clear that prolepses are relevant to speaker's meaning.<sup>54</sup> For I can't mean anything by 'w' unless I have a concept of w; and I can't have any concepts unless I have some prolepses. But are prolepses also the meanings of terms? If not, do they at least partly determine the meanings of terms? It's difficult to be sure, one way or the other. Consider, for example, one of Barnes's arguments for denying that Epicurus takes prolepses to be the meanings of words or even relevant to determining the meanings of words. He says that a parrot can be trained to say 'That's a cow'; what the parrot says is meaningful, even though the parrot doesn't mean anything by it.<sup>55</sup> That's surely right; and presumably Epicurus would not want to deny that it is. But he might, for all that, want to say that 'That's a cow' wouldn't be a meaningful sentence unless there were a prolepsis of cow.<sup>56</sup> The fact that meaningful sentences can be uttered by creatures who lack language doesn't imply that there could be meaningful sentences if there were no prolepses. The sentence has an established meaning; perhaps it wouldn't have that or any meaning if it weren't appropriately correlated with prolepses. The parrot argument therefore doesn't show that prolepses are irrelevant to determining the meanings of words.

But is there any positive evidence for the view that prolepses are meant to explain the meanings of words? Much of the evidence is indeterminate. We've seen, for example, that Diogenes says that we would not have named something if we hadn't learnt its outline by means of prolepsis (DL 10.33). He might mean that the word would be meaningless unless it were suitably related to a prolepsis. But he might instead mean that the word won't mean anything to me unless I have the relevant prolepsis.

<sup>54</sup> However, Barnes seems to assume that the Epicureans think I can't mean anything in uttering 'w' unless I have a prolepsis of w; I don't mean anything in uttering 'cow' unless I have a prolepsis of cow ('Epicurus: Meaning and Thinking', see e.g. 210–11). Given the limited range of prolepses, this is too strong. Epicurus' view is rather that I can't mean anything in uttering 'w' unless I have a concept of w; and I can't have a concept of w unless I have some prolepses, though there need not be a prolepsis of w in particular. Further, Barnes vacillates among different explanations of how prolepses explain speaker's meaning. For example, he says both that 'I must have some idea of what a cow is' and that I must 'know what a cow is' (210). Yet it's one thing to have some idea of what a thing is, another to know what it is. Barnes also says that 'if I am to hold this latter belief [that cows are ruminants], surely I must know what it is to be an animal of *that* sort' (211). But one can *believe* that cows are ruminants without *knowing* what cows are. I return to these points in discussing Epicurus' reply to Meno's Paradox.

<sup>55</sup> 'Epicurus: Meaning and Thinking', 217.

<sup>56</sup> The Epicureans seem to acknowledge a prolepsis of cow: see DL 10.33. In other cases, their view (if they think prolepses help determine the meanings of words) would be that 'x' wouldn't be meaningful unless it were suitably related to prolepses.

Or again, Epicurus says that without prolepses words would be empty (*Hdt.* 37 = LS 17C). He might mean that words would be meaningless unless there were prolepses. But he might instead mean that we wouldn't mean anything by our words unless we had some prolepses; words would in that case be empty to us.<sup>57</sup>

Everson, who favors the view that prolepses are relevant to determining the meanings of words, concedes that there is no knock-down argument in favor of that view. But he thinks that Epicurus 'is committed to the priority of thought over language' in a way that makes it reasonable to think that prolepses play a role in determining the meanings of words.<sup>58</sup> This seems right to me. To be sure, we don't acquire all our prolepses prior to having any language.<sup>59</sup> For one needs to have the relevant experiences before having any given prolepsis; yet one might not have any experience of, say, elephants or certain colors until after one acquires language. Indeed, there are some prolepses one might never acquire, precisely because one never has the relevant experiences. One might never have experience of elephants or of certain colors.<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, Epicurus seems to think that we have to have some prolepses in order to have any language at all; hence prolepses are independent of language in the sense that they can be acquired independently of, and prior to, having any language. This is suggested by, among other things, the Epicureans' views about the origins of language.<sup>61</sup> If this is right, it seems reasonable to think that the Epicureans take prolepses to play a role in determining the meanings of terms.

If Epicurus thinks prolepses are relevant to determining the meanings of words, he favors a psychologistic account of meaning, in the sense that he thinks the meanings of words are determined, at least in part, by the contents of certain

<sup>57</sup> Yet another possibility is that he means that empty names are false though meaningful. In *That Epicurus Actually Makes a Pleasant Life Impossible* (= *Non Posse*), Plutarch says that, according to the Epicureans, 'unsurpassable joy is produced by comparison with a great bad thing one has escaped; and this is the nature of the good, if one applies [one's intellect] properly and then takes a firm stand, but does not walk around (*peripatê*) babbling emptily (*kenos*) about the good' (1091b). 'Walk around' is presumably a reference to the Peripatetics. He might mean that Peripatetic views about the good are meaningless. But an alternative is that he uses 'empty' to make a point about reference: nothing answers to Peripatetic views about the good; that is, their views about the good are false.

<sup>58</sup> 'Epicurus on Mind and Language', 106.

<sup>59</sup> This perhaps contrasts with Scott, *RE*, 167.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. C. Brittain in connection with Stoic prolepses, in 'Common Sense', 178. Cf. Sedley, 'Epicurus' Theological Innatism', 34. For the example of colors, see Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 2.741–5. It's an interesting question what counts as having the relevant experiences. For example, must one see an elephant, or a particular color, to have a prolepsis of it? Or will it do if one reads or hears about them?

<sup>61</sup> See *Hdt.* 75–6 (LS 19A); Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 5.1028–90 (LS 19B); Diogenes of Oenoanda 10.2.11–5.15 (LS 19C). For a brief discussion, see LS 1.100–1.

psychological states. This view has been thought problematic on the ground that there are many different ideas of what e.g. horses are; and so, if these ideas determine the meaning of 'horse', the term will have multiple meanings. It would then be difficult to be sure we were communicating with one another rather than talking past one another. However, Epicurus probably thinks he can avoid this objection (though whether his reply is successful is another matter). For he seems to think that, though each of us has our own individual token prolepsis of e.g. horse, they are all qualitatively similar enough to allow communication. That's implied by the fact that nature implants them in us; that's meant to ensure that they correctly capture things as they are.<sup>62</sup>

There is dispute among contemporary philosophers of language about whether we can have concepts prior to having language. Dummett, for example, argues that having a natural language is necessary for having concepts. By contrast, Fodor argues that concepts are prior to and independent of natural language. In his view, natural language is a means for expressing thought; but one doesn't need to have natural language in order to have thoughts.<sup>63</sup> The Epicureans seem to side with Fodor on this point. Indeed, they seem to think we can have not only concepts but also beliefs and apprehension prior to having language. For they think we must have some prolepses prior to having language; and, as we've seen, prolepses are or confer true belief and apprehension.

## 8. Prolepses and innatism

We've seen that, according to Diogenes, Epicurean prolepses are 'of what has frequently become evident externally'. This suggests that they are acquired through experience,<sup>64</sup> in which case they are not innate—at least, not in the content, and so not in the cognitive-condition, sense.<sup>65</sup> Rather (to use one of Diogenes' examples),

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Everson: '[a]lthough it is a consequence of the psychologism that the meaning of words in an idiolect is prior to that of words in a common language, it is a consequence of the relation of prolepses both to experience and to language that speakers are able to make their idiolects type-identical' ('Epicurus on Mind and Language', 108).

<sup>63</sup> See M. Dummett, 'What is a theory of meaning (1)?' and 'What is a theory of meaning (2)?' in his *The Seas of Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and his 'The Relative Priority of Thought over Language' in his *Frege and Other Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 315–24; and J. Fodor, *Concepts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). For another statement of the view that thought is prior to language, see Devitt, *Ignorance of Language*.

<sup>64</sup> However, as LS note (1.89), some prolepses seem to be acquired at least partly through introspection, in which case not all of them are acquired solely through experience of what's external. But introspection is reasonably thought of as inner experience.

<sup>65</sup> For the view that no prolepses are innate, see Asmis, *Epicurus' Scientific Method*, 66–73. She seems to have cognitive-condition or content innatism in mind, not dispositional innatism. Scott,

we see particular men on various occasions, and thereby acquire the prolepsis of man, as a result of our experience.

To be sure, it has been argued that the very meaning of the word implies that prolepses are had prior to experience, in a way that makes them all innate.<sup>66</sup> However, though the meaning of the word 'prolepsis' implies that we grasp prolepses prior to grasping something, it doesn't imply anything about what we have them prior to. In particular, the meaning of the word doesn't imply that we have prolepses prior to experience. We can tell what we must have them prior to only by looking at what roles they are intended to play and at how they are described in more detail. *Hdt.* 37–8 says we need prolepses—not before having any experiences whatever, but—before inquiring.<sup>67</sup>

Though the meaning of the word doesn't imply that prolepses are innate, Long and Sedley think that Epicurus takes one prolepsis—the prolepsis of god—to be innate. At first, this seems difficult to square with Diogenes' remark that prolepses are acquired through experience. However, it's sometimes thought that dispositional innatism is compatible with some versions of the view that concepts are acquired through experience.<sup>68</sup> And Long and Sedley explain that, in their view, Epicurus thinks that '[t]he idea of such beings is "innate", in the sense that it is part of our very nature to conceive it' (LS 1.145); 'what is innate is a predisposition' (LS 2.148). So on their view, Epicurus is a dispositional innatist in the case of the prolepsis of god. We don't literally have the prolepsis of god from birth; but we are innately predisposed to acquire it.<sup>69</sup> In a later article, Sedley develops this view further; and he argues that Epicurus' dispositional innatism about god is compatible with Diogenes' claim that prolepses are acquired through experience.<sup>70</sup>

*RE*, 191–200, argues that Epicurus is not even a dispositional innatist. However, he thinks some Epicureans, though not Epicurus himself, countenanced at least one innate prolepsis.

<sup>66</sup> See N. DeWitt, *Epicurus and his Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), 145. Against DeWitt, see Scott, *RE*, 190 n. 7.

<sup>67</sup> And also for other purposes, none of which, however, implies that prolepses are had prior to all experience.

<sup>68</sup> See Scott, 'Innatism'. He argues that the Stoics believe both that moral prolepses are dispositionally innate and that we acquire all our prolepses from experience; he also thinks that the way in which the Stoics combine these views is consistent. I discuss the Stoics on innatism in the next chapter.

<sup>69</sup> In 'Epicurus' Theological Innatism', Sedley says that 'all human beings are born with an innate predisposition to form, as they mature, that conception of god' (38; cf. 36, 45, 48, 40). However, he also speaks of 'a universal innate belief' (35), and says that the prolepsis of god is 'literally' innate (37; cf. 31). He also speaks of 'our innate and self-evident cognition of' the gods (49). If all that's innate is a predisposition to acquire the prolepsis, then the prolepsis isn't literally innate; nor do we literally have an innate belief or cognition.

<sup>70</sup> 'Epicurus' Theological Innatism', 40–9. Contrast Scott, *RE*, 190–200.

One reason Long and Sedley favor their view is that they think the Epicureans believe that the gods don't objectively exist. Rather, they argue, for the Epicureans the gods are 'thought-constructs' (LS 1.145), just as giants are. But there are nonetheless important differences between gods, on the one hand, and purely fictional entities like giants, on the other hand. To explain the difference, they suggest that we acquire the idea of giants by conscious inference from other ideas we have, whereas, in the case of god, 'we do not have to make any conscious effort to form' (LS 1.145) the prolepsis. That's because we are innately predisposed to acquire it. It's not clear how this inference goes. Even if we were innately predisposed to acquire a given prolepsis, it wouldn't follow that we acquire it unconsciously: perhaps we are innately disposed to make certain conscious inferences. Nor, if we acquire some concepts without conscious effort, would it follow that those concepts are dispositionally innate.<sup>71</sup>

Further, if, like me, one accepts the more orthodox view that the Epicureans think gods objectively exist, we lose one of Long and Sedley's main reasons for thinking the Epicureans take the prolepsis of god to be innate. However, even if the Epicureans think gods objectively exist, they could think we are innately predisposed to acquire a prolepsis of god. Descartes and Leibniz, for example, combine dispositional innatism with the view that God objectively exists; perhaps Epicurus does so as well.

Long and Sedley think a passage in Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods* provides textual evidence for the view that Epicurus is a dispositional innatist about the prolepsis of god, evidence that, so far as I can tell, doesn't depend on their view that Epicurus doesn't think gods objectively exist (*ND* 1.43–5, quoted above). We've seen that, according to this passage, nature imprints the prolepsis of god in our minds. That, however, doesn't imply that the prolepsis is literally innate: perhaps nature imprints the prolepsis on us only after we have certain experiences. Nor does the fact that nature imprints the prolepsis on us imply that we are innately predisposed to acquire it. Cicero might mean that nature does its imprinting once we have suitable experiences, solely as a result of our having had those experiences.<sup>72</sup>

It's true that Cicero says that, according to Epicurus, the cognitions we have of gods are 'insitas...vel potius innatas', which Long and Sedley translate as

<sup>71</sup> For discussion of how we acquire the prolepsis of god, see esp. Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 5.1169–82. For Scott's interpretation, see *RE* 191–4, 197. For Sedley's alternative, see 'Epicurus' Theological Innatism', 44–9. For Sedley's criticisms of Scott's interpretation, see his notes 50 and 51.

<sup>72</sup> This is especially so if, as I suggested above, all prolepses are natural (a claim Sedley accepts: 'Epicurus' Theological Innatism', 34); for not all are dispositionally innate, nor does Sedley think they are. Cf. Sedley, 'Epicurus' Theological Innatism', 36–7.

‘ingrained, or rather innate’. Though ‘innatus’ can mean innate, in the sense of had from birth, it can also mean natural; and given the context, that seems the best way to understand it here. For the point Cicero emphasizes is that the prolepsis is natural in the sense that ‘nature had imprinted’ it on our minds, where that, in turn, seems to mean that it isn’t acquired by ‘convention, custom, or law’. That doesn’t imply either that any prolepses are innate or even that we are innately disposed to acquire prolepses. Nor does Cicero give any argument for either of those claims; he explains only why the prolepsis of god is natural. The main passage adduced by Long and Sedley therefore doesn’t imply either that the prolepsis of god is literally innate or that we are innately predisposed to acquire it.<sup>73</sup>

It’s also worth noting that Long and Sedley’s reason for thinking that Epicurus is an innatist in the case of the prolepsis of god doesn’t generalize; the prolepsis of god is a special case. This is relevant to the Epicurean response to Meno’s Paradox. As we’ve seen, Plato is often thought to respond (in part) by positing innate knowledge. I argued that he doesn’t do so. Nor, we’ve seen, does Aristotle do so. We’ve now in effect seen that neither does Epicurus do so. That’s so even if he thinks the prolepsis of god is dispositionally innate. For, again, that is supposed to be a special case. But prolepses in general—not just the prolepsis of god—are supposed to solve Meno’s Paradox. If Epicurus favors innatism just in the case of god (or in a few special cases), his reasons are independent of Meno’s Paradox. Hence, Epicurus doesn’t reply to Meno’s Paradox by positing innate knowledge or by appealing to any other version of innatism. To this extent, he agrees with Plato and Aristotle.

However, the Epicureans disagree with Plato on a related point. For unlike Plato, they don’t posit prenatal knowledge. Rather, like Aristotle, they deny that we even existed prenatally. Lucretius, for example, writes:<sup>74</sup>

<sup>73</sup> LS also cite a passage that follows the one quoted in the text above. But here again, Cicero just says that ‘we have the advice of nature’ as to the shape of the gods; and that ‘nature supplies us all’ with the view that they are human in form. He doesn’t say when nature gives us this advice or supplies us with that view. For a defense of the view that *innatus* here means ‘natural’ rather than ‘innate’, see Asmis, *Epicurus’ Scientific Method*, 68–9, 71–2. Cf. Scott, *RE*, 198; 191–200; and Konstan, ‘Epicurus on the gods’, esp. 66–8. Even if *innatus* means ‘innate’ here, one might argue that it is shorthand for the view that the prolepsis is dispositionally innate; we need not take the passage to intend a more robust form of innatism (as Long and Sedley agree).

<sup>74</sup> This isn’t his only reason for rejecting the pre-existence of the soul: in *De Rerum Natura* 3.417–829, he offers twenty-eight arguments for the mortality of the soul. According to Aetius 4.7.4 = *Dox. Gr.* P. 393 (U 336), ‘Democritus and Epicurus [said that the soul] is mortal and perishes with the body’. According to Fragment 14 in the *Vatican Sayings*, ‘We are born once and cannot be born twice, but for all time must be no more’. The so-called symmetry argument likewise tells against pre-existence (*De Rerum Natura* 3.972–7): the fact that we don’t pre-exist doesn’t bother us; so the fact that we won’t exist once we die shouldn’t bother us either.

Moreover, if the nature of the soul is immortal, and it enters into the body at birth, why can we not remember also the life lived before? Why do we not preserve traces of things done before? For if the power of the mind is so much changed that all remembrance of things past is lost to it, that state is not, I think, a step far from death. So you must admit that the soul that was before has passed away and that the soul that is now has been created. (3.670–8; Bailey rev.)

Lucretius suggests that if we had existed prenatally, we would preserve traces of what we'd done prenatally. Since we don't have these traces, we didn't exist prenatally.

## 9. Three types of inquiry

Let's now turn, finally, to the role prolepses play in inquiry. We saw in section 1 that a number of sources make it clear that, according to Epicurus, we can't inquire unless we have prolepses. But exactly how does this work?

We've already seen one way in which it doesn't work: in appealing to prolepses, Epicurus isn't appealing to either innate or prenatal knowledge (or beliefs or concepts). For he doesn't think prolepses are innate; nor does he think we existed prenatally. But what can we say, more positively, about the role prolepses play in explaining the possibility of inquiry?

There may not be a single answer to this question. For the Epicureans countenance three different sorts of inquiries; perhaps they involve prolepses in different ways.<sup>75</sup> First, we've seen that Epicurus thinks one can confuse a prolepsis with a false belief. Correspondingly, one sort of inquiry involves trying to adjudicate among our conflicting beliefs so as to decide which if any are prolepses, which are false beliefs (or true beliefs that are not prolepses). The goal of this sort of inquiry is to identify one's prolepses as such.

DL 10.33 gives an example of a second sort of inquiry: we inquire whether that's a horse or a cow over there.<sup>76</sup> Here we aren't attempting to identify which of our beliefs are prolepses; rather, we apply a prolepsis to a particular case.

<sup>75</sup> According to DL 10.34, the Epicureans recognize two sorts of inquiries: into things (*pragmata*) and into mere utterances (*tas de peri psilên tên phônên*). He doesn't elaborate further, and it's not clear what he has in mind. One possibility is that the second sort of inquiry is into definitions. This is perhaps suggested by Erotianus 34.10–20 (quoted at the end of sect. 6). However, not all of the passages on definitions in Epicureanism suggest that definitions are just of words rather than of things; see, for example, the passage quoted in sect. 6 from the Scholiast on Dionysius Thrax. If definitions are viewed as being just of words, they are very different from Platonic–Aristotelian definitions, which aim to specify the real essences of things.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. *Phil.* 38c11–d1: Socrates says that one might ask 'What could that be that appears to stand near that rock under a tree?' One might then go on to say, correctly, that it is a man; or, incorrectly, that it is a statue.



In a third sort of inquiry, we use our prolepsis of something in order to discover further truths about that thing. For example, we have a prolepsis of god as imperishable and blessed, and we use the prolepsis in order to discover further properties gods have or lack. We discover, for example, that they aren't concerned about humans and didn't design the universe. In this third sort of inquiry, we can also seek to move from a prolepsis, an outline account, to a definition. This is what Plutarch calls the process of articulation.<sup>77</sup>

## 10. Prolepses and inquiry

Let's now consider these three types of inquiry in more detail, asking what role prolepses play in them.

In the first sort of inquiry, we try to identify which of our beliefs are prolepses. It might seem that in this sort of inquiry we in a sense learn only what we already know; for we already have prolepses, even if they aren't always ready to hand. If so, this type of inquiry should remind us of one reading of Plato—though one I rejected—according to which we have latent (innate) knowledge, and inquiry involves making it explicit. Hence, as we saw in Chapter 1, Dominic Scott says that the Epicureans think that '[a]t the end of it all the learner realizes that the knowledge was always right under his own nose. He did not have to go out in search of obscure or recondite truths; he had to become aware of what, in a sense, he already knew—the *res apertae* that were constantly to hand.' This, Scott says, has 'certain Platonic resonances'.<sup>78</sup>

In the *Meno* (82ff.) Socrates demonstrates the newly born theory of recollection by questioning a slave boy ignorant of mathematics and showing how, by the end of the session, he has come to know something he did not at the beginning. Socrates is adamant that he is not teaching the boy, i.e. he is not instilling opinions into him. All the answers that the slave has given depend upon what he already knew. He answers by drawing on his own resources. He does not learn by listening to another's wisdom, but by drawing upon his own reserves—his memories of a prenatal existence. Such metaphysical extravagance would no doubt have seemed unnecessary, if not unnatural, to Epicurus, but he would have agreed on the essential point that learning to be truly happy is a question of making

<sup>77</sup> For more on articulation, see Ch. 8, sect. 5; and Ch. 9, sect. 5. For the view that Epicureans use prolepses to arrive at definitions, see J. Barnes, 'Epicurean Signs', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, suppl. vol. (1988), 91–134 (though his focus is on Philodemus rather than on Epicurus).

<sup>78</sup> 'Epicurean Illusions', 374. I'm not sure whether, in speaking of 'indefinable prolepses', Scott means (a) prolepses can't be defined; (b) prolepses aren't themselves definitions; or (c) prolepses can't be expanded into, or be used to discover, definitions. I defended (b) earlier in this chapter. But I don't accept (a) or, as we shall see, (c).

the most of your own resources. Whereas Plato identified these with knowledge of definitions, Epicurus made do with perceptions, feelings and the indefinable prolepses.

We should hesitate to agree that, in becoming aware which of our beliefs are, and which are not, prolepses, we become aware only of what we already know. First, we acquire new 'knowledge' at least in the sense that, if all goes well, we learn that *this* is a prolepsis, whereas that isn't; that's something we didn't antecedently know, at least not explicitly. Secondly, Scott seems to think that Plato and Epicurus agree that knowledge is needed for inquiry. But it is potentially misleading to suggest this, in a by-now familiar way. For doing so might suggest that they both require knowledge conceived in the same way, and that they require it to be had at the same time; but they don't agree in these ways. Plato requires us to have had prenatal P-knowledge in order to inquire; Epicurus eschews prenatal existence. And, though he requires us to have some prolepses in this life in order to inquire, this doesn't confer P-knowledge, but only E-knowledge. From Plato's point of view, to require prolepses for inquiry is to require no more than true belief.

Understanding how Plato and Epicurus disagree about the nature of knowledge allows us to see that there's a different issue about which they agree: neither of them requires us to have any P-knowledge, or superior cognition, in this life, in order to inquire. Neither requires more than what Plato would call true beliefs. They both reject S3 of Socrates' dilemma, if it is read in terms of superior cognition.<sup>79</sup>

But even if we agree with Scott about the first sort of inquiry, it doesn't follow that the Epicureans view all inquiry in the same way. So let's now look at the second sort of Epicurean inquiry. In Diogenes' example, we ask whether the thing in the distance is a horse or a cow. This can be construed as a 'What is F?' question, for it asks 'What is that thing in the distance?'. But it is quite different from the sort of 'What is F?' questions that Plato focuses on. In the *Meno*, for example, he asks 'What is virtue?'; and he thinks the correct answer specifies the nature of virtue, the single form or property because of which anything that is virtuous so counts. However, we've seen that, though that's Plato's focus, he doesn't restrict inquiries to such cases. The slave, for example, inquires about the answer to a particular geometrical problem; he isn't looking for a definition.

What role do prolepses play in the second sort of Epicurean inquiry? According to Asmis, 'Diogenes' example of identifying an object at a distance illustrates

<sup>79</sup> This fits with a point made in sect. 6, that neither Plato nor Epicurus requires us to grasp definitions to inquire.

one way in which the investigator may already, in a sense, know the answer to the problem under investigation. In this case, one has previously come to know the type of object that the particular object under investigation is subsequently observed to exemplify'.<sup>80</sup> So just as Scott thinks that in the first sort of Epicurean inquiry we learn only what we already know, so Asmis thinks that in the second sort of inquiry we learn only what we already know.

I agree that, in Diogenes' example, the inquirer E-knows (but doesn't P-know) the type of object being inquired into: her grasp of the prolepsis of horse gives her E-knowledge of the shape of horse. But Asmis says that the inquirer already in a sense knows the answer to the question: she ascribes a matching version of foreknowledge to Epicurus. However, I've argued that he restricts the range of prolepses to concepts that express basic truths about fundamental features of reality. If so, he isn't committed to a general matching version of foreknowledge.<sup>81</sup>

Nor does DL 10.33 commit Epicurus to a matching version of foreknowledge. The inquirer is asking whether that's a horse or a cow in the distance; that's precisely what she doesn't know but seeks to discover. Her grasp of the prolepses of horse and of cow allows her to understand the question, and it puts her in a good position to be able to answer it. But it doesn't, all by itself, give her 'knowledge' of the answer. At the very least, she needs to use perception as well. She applies her general 'knowledge' to a particular case.<sup>82</sup> Since the inquirer doesn't have prior knowledge of the answer to the question, the passage doesn't commit Epicurus to a matching version of foreknowledge.

In Diogenes' example, we ask what that object over there is, and we have prolepses of the relevant alternatives (e.g. horse and cow). However, we've seen that Epicurus doesn't posit a prolepsis for every meaningful word. Nor does he think that one can inquire about x only if one has a prolepsis of x; he thinks we can inquire into time, though he denies that there is a prolepsis of time. His view

<sup>80</sup> *Epicurus' Scientific Method*, 49. In 'Epicurean Epistemology', she takes a weaker and more plausible line: '[t]he function of preconceptions is to answer a problem put by Plato in the *Meno*: how can we inquire into anything without previously knowing it? Epicurus' solution is that we have notions derived from sense perception. Having learned by observation what a horse and a cow are, we can ask the question: is the indistinct shape seen in the distance a horse or a cow?' (277 n. 25). Here she says that having a prolepsis enables us to ask a given question; by contrast, in *Epicurus' Scientific Method* she says that having a prolepsis implies that we already know the answer (at least 'in a sense').

<sup>81</sup> As we've seen, however, Asmis thinks Epicurus posits prolepses of individuals (n. 34). But in describing Diogenes' example she rightly doesn't suggest that we use a prolepsis of that very horse (or cow); we appeal just to the prolepsis of horse and cow as such. That perhaps counts against the view that Epicurus countenances prolepses of individuals: for if he countenanced them, he would have invoked them here.

<sup>82</sup> For discussion of applying general knowledge to particular cases, see Epictetus (a Stoic), *Diss.* 2.17 (cf. 1.22). I discuss Epictetus briefly in the next chapter.

is, rather, that we can inquire only if we have a basically correct orientation onto the world; we need a stock of true beliefs about basic features of it, as contained in our prolepses. That doesn't commit him to the view that we can inquire into *x* only if we have some knowledge, or true beliefs, about *x*. Nor does the view that our other concepts are composed out of prolepses commit him to it. For the mere fact that we combine our prolepses of *x* and *y* so as to form a concept of *z* doesn't guarantee that our concept of *z* includes true beliefs about *z*. One might argue that one can't have a concept of *x* unless it is at least partly accurate.<sup>83</sup> However, whether that's so is disputed; for example, we shall see in Chapter 11 that Sextus may challenge the view. It's reasonable to ascribe the view to Epicurus; but it's not clear that he is strictly speaking committed to it.

Nor does the third sort of inquiry—in which we use a prolepsis of *x* in order to discover further truths about *x*, including its definition—commit Epicurus to a matching version of a foreknowledge principle. For we don't already know the propositions we eventually learn. Nor is the 'knowledge' we antecedently have P-knowledge or superior cognition. In this sort of inquiry, we have a prolepsis of *x*—and so E-knowledge (but not P-knowledge or superior cognition) of *x*; and, if all goes well, we learn new truths about *x*, including its definition.

Though none of these three types of inquiry commits Epicurus to a matching version of a foreknowledge principle, they might seem to commit him to a stepping-stone version of a foreknowledge principle. For doesn't he think that, to inquire or discover whether that's a horse in the distance, one must know the shape of horse by means of a prolepsis? But we've already seen that saying this is potentially misleading. Having prolepses doesn't confer P-knowledge. Yet, as we've seen, when a foreknowledge principle is ascribed to Plato, commentators generally have, or at any rate should have, P-knowledge in mind. Epicurus doesn't require P-knowledge, or superior cognition, for inquiry. He requires us to have some prolepses; but they confer only E-knowledge. Rather than saying that he accepts a foreknowledge principle, we should say that he accepts *a stepping-stone version of a prior-prolepsis principle*: one can inquire only if one has some prolepses.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>83</sup> I ascribe this view to Plato in the *Cratylus* in 'Plato on Naming'.

<sup>84</sup> Long and Sedley might seem to disagree with my view. For they say that: [s]tarting from Meno's celebrated paradox that you could not inquire about something unless you *already* knew what it was, Plato evolved the view that when we inquire into something we do in a way already know what it is, thanks to our soul's half-forgotten pre-natal experience—more specifically (in the *Phaedo*) thanks to its pre-natal acquaintance with the transcendent Form of the thing concerned. E4 (= DL 10.33) strongly suggests that Epicurus saw his 'preconception' as an alternative response to Meno's paradox, providing some sort of prior acquaintance (hence 'pre-') required as a basis of inquiry, but without such unacceptable by-products as separated universals

According to Barnes, the Epicureans think that:<sup>85</sup>

[I]f you are to investigate or puzzle over anything—more generally, if you are to believe or talk about anything—then you must have a *concept* of the thing in question. The point is simple and true: if I am to wonder whether, say, the thing over there is a cow, then I must *know* what a cow is; for if I have *no idea* of what a cow is, no conception of a cow, then I cannot think (and I cannot say) anything at all about cows.

In a note he adds: ‘This point is closely connected with “Meno’s paradox”’. Indeed it is: but how, exactly? Barnes moves from saying that one needs a *concept* (or idea) of what one is inquiring into, to saying that one needs to *know* the thing one is inquiring into. Yet it’s one thing to have a concept of, or ideas, about, what a cow is, and another to know what a cow is. Of course, one might use ‘know’ loosely or weakly, to mean no more than having an idea about something. And, as we’ve seen, Meno raises his questions because he doesn’t understand Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge; he wrongly thinks that in disclaiming all knowledge about virtue, Socrates means that he has no ideas about virtue. Part of Socrates’ reply to Meno involves saying that one doesn’t need to *know* that which one is inquiring into, in order to inquire into it, since having and relying on relevant true beliefs is sufficient. In saying this, he uses ‘knowledge’ as he understands it, for P-knowledge. Barnes ignores Socrates’ crucial distinction between knowledge and true belief. Nor does Epicurus think that one needs P-knowledge, or superior cognition, of anything in order to inquire, though, as we’ve seen, he thinks prolepses confer not only true belief but also apprehension, which confers E-knowledge.

and pre-natal existence...In consequence, its importance as a criterion lies especially in its guarantee that we know what the things we are discussing actually are. Our conjectures about them can be directed tested against that knowledge (LS 1.89).

In contrast to the view I’ve defended, this might be taken to ascribe a matching version of a foreknowledge principle to Epicurus. But whether that’s their view depends on exactly what they mean in saying that prolepses ‘guarantee that we know what the things we are discussing actually are’. Here there are two issues. First, what sort of *knowledge* is at issue? Secondly, what’s involved in knowing ‘what the things we are discussing are’?

<sup>85</sup> ‘Language’ in *CHHP*, 193–213, at 196 and n. 135; emphasis added. The same conflation that I discuss in the text infects his paper, ‘Epicurus: Meaning and Thinking’ (which I discussed above in sect. 7). He says there both that ‘I must have some idea of what a cow is’ and that I must ‘know what a cow is’ (210). But, again, it’s one thing to have an idea of something, another to know what it is. Or again, he says that ‘if I am to hold this latter belief [that cows are ruminants], surely I must know what it is to be an animal of *that sort*’ (211). But why must one *know* what a cow is to have the *belief* that cows are ruminants?

## 11. Conclusion

Let's conclude our discussion of Epicurus by comparing his reply to Meno's Paradox with Plato's and Aristotle's. Epicurus, like Aristotle but unlike Plato, rejects the view that we existed prenatally; hence he also rejects the view that we had prenatal knowledge. Epicurus, like Plato and Aristotle, doesn't posit innate knowledge (or beliefs or concepts). He also agrees with Plato and Aristotle that inquiry doesn't require us to have P-knowledge or superior cognition.<sup>86</sup> Rather, like Aristotle, he thinks that we need to have and rely on (what Plato would classify as) relevant true beliefs in order to inquire, where these beliefs are not innate. Plato, we've seen, thinks this is sufficient; but he doesn't commit himself to the view that it is necessary. What's necessary is the appropriate degree of familiarity, which Plato leaves unspecified except insofar as he makes it clear that true beliefs are sufficient. Hence Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus all reject S3 of Socrates' dilemma if knowledge is taken to be P-knowledge or superior cognition.

Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus also all agree that one can inquire on the basis of beliefs that do not specify the real essence of a thing. Just as the cognitive condition needed for inquiry is less than superior cognition, so the content needed for inquiry is less than a real definition.

Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus also all agree in not being committed to either a matching or a stepping-stone version of a foreknowledge principle, if knowledge is P-knowledge and restricted to this life.<sup>87</sup> However, they all accept one or another version of a stepping-stone version of a prior-cognition principle. In accepting the Dialectical Requirement, Plato requires prior familiarity. He doesn't spell out precisely what the minimum level of familiarity is, though he makes it clear that having and relying on relevant true beliefs is sufficient. Aristotle, we've seen, requires prior *gnôsis*, where that needn't involve more than what Plato views as true belief; and he requires just a stepping-stone version of it. And we've now seen that Epicurus accepts a stepping-stone version of a prior-prolepsis principle: we have to have some prolepses in order to inquire.

Even though Epicurus (like Aristotle) rejects Platonic forms, immortal souls, and prenatal knowledge, and even though he doesn't attach the same importance

<sup>86</sup> Again, Plato requires some prenatal P-knowledge; but he doesn't think we need any P-knowledge in this life.

<sup>87</sup> However, we've seen that Plato's prenatal foreknowledge principle might involve a restricted version of a foreknowledge principle, though only for prenatal knowledge, not for us as we are in this life. Similarly, we've seen that in describing the triangle case in *APo.* 1.1, Aristotle might seem to endorse a restricted version of a matching principle, as for us as we are in this life; however, the 'knowledge' at issue is far from being P-knowledge.

to discovering definitions as Plato and Aristotle do, still, if we focus just on their replies to Meno's Paradox, the similarities should impress us more than the differences do. Their replies are closer to one another than they have sometimes been taken to be, and in ways that haven't always been noticed. In particular, it's been suggested that all these philosophers accept a foreknowledge principle, indeed, a matching version of one. However, I've argued that none of them accepts either a matching or a stepping-stone version of a foreknowledge principle, if we understand knowledge as Plato does, and if we restrict our attention to this life. Rather, they all rightly think that inquiry can begin from a weaker cognitive condition than knowledge (as Plato conceives of it). They also all agree that we can inquire into something even if we don't antecedently grasp its real essence. Just as the cognitive condition that is sufficient for launching an inquiry can be, and typically is, less than P-knowledge or superior cognition, so its content can be, and typically is, less than a specification of essence. In arguing that knowledge (as Plato conceives of it) isn't needed for inquiry, they all reject S3 (according to which, if one does not know *x*, one cannot inquire into *x*). They all agree that we need to have a target to aim at. But they all think we can specify a target even if we lack superior cognition and even if we don't grasp the real essence of that which we're inquiring into. It will do if we have a stock of suitably relevant true beliefs.

# 8

## Stoic inquiry

### 1. Introduction

Having looked at the Epicureans, let's now turn to the Stoics. According to Plutarch, they reply to Meno's Paradox by invoking natural concepts:

The Stoics explain <the possibility of inquiry> with natural concepts (*phusikas ennoias*). (Fr. 215f)

Similarly, Cicero says that:<sup>1</sup>

Such are the things we claim are apprehended by the senses.<sup>2</sup> The next set are just like them, though we don't claim that these are apprehended by the senses themselves, but by the senses in a certain respect—e.g. 'That is white', 'This is sweet', 'That is melodious', 'This is fine-scented', 'This is rough'. Our apprehension of this set now comes from the mind rather than from the senses. Next comes: 'That is a horse', 'That is a dog'. Then we get the rest of the series, which connects more significant things and encapsulates what we might call a filled-out apprehension of things—e.g. 'If something is human it is a mortal animal partaking in reason'. It's from this set <of appearances> that our concepts of things are imprinted on us, without which there can be no understanding, inquiry, or discussion of anything. (*Acad.* 2.21)<sup>3</sup>

According to Diogenes, for Chrysippus a prolepsis is 'a natural concept of universals' (*ennoia phusikê tôn katholou*; DL 7.54 = LS 40A3). So the natural concepts Plutarch mentions are prolepses; and the concepts Cicero mentions at

<sup>1</sup> Note the similarity between what Cicero says at the end of this passage about the Stoics and what he says about the role of prolepses in Epicurean inquiry (*ND* 1.43 = LS 23E2; cf. DL 10.33). Cicero mentions *notitiae*, which are either co-extensive with, or at least include, prolepses. See *Acad.* 2.30.

<sup>2</sup> Cicero discusses these in the preceding passage.

<sup>3</sup> Atqui qualia sunt haec, quae sensibus percipi dicimus, talia secuntur ea, quae non sensibus ipsis percipi dicuntur, sed quodam modo sensibus, ut haec: 'illud est album, hoc dulce, canorum illud, hoc bene olens, hoc asperum.' Animo iam haec tenemus comprehensa, non sensibus. 'Ille' deinceps 'equus est, ille canis.' Cetera series deinde sequitur, maiora nectens, ut haec, quae quasi expletam rerum comprehensionem amplectuntur: 'si homo est, animal est mortale, rationis particeps.' Quo e genere nobis notitiae rerum imprimuntur, sine quibus nec intellegi quicquam nec quaeri disputative potest.



least include them. Hence the Stoics, like the Epicureans, posit prolepses and use them to explain the possibility of inquiry. So the Stoics, like the other philosophers we've looked at, reject the conclusion of Meno's Paradox: contrary to it, inquiry is possible. But exactly how do the Stoics conceive of prolepses and their role in inquiry? What premise or premises, or inference or inferences, of Meno's Paradox do they reject? As in discussing the Epicureans, so here, I begin with a general account of their views about prolepses, and then turn to the role they accord prolepses in inquiry. Also as in discussing the Epicureans, so here, I leave some issues to one side and focus just on the issues of special concern to us here.

## 2. Aetius' account

According to Aetius:<sup>4</sup>

The Stoics say that when a human being is born, the governing part of his soul is like a piece of papyrus (*chartês*) ready to be written on. He inscribes each one of his concepts on it. The first method of inscription is through perception. For by perceiving something—white, for example—they have a memory of it once it has gone. When there have been many memories of the same kind, we then say they have experience. For the plurality of similar appearances is experience. Some concepts arise naturally in the ways mentioned, without skill; others through our own teaching and attention. The latter are called 'concepts' (*ennoiai*) only; the former are also called 'prolepses'. Reason, in virtue of which we are called rational, is said to be completed from our prolepses during our first seven years. (*Placita* 4.11.1–4 = LS 39E)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Though Aetius says that the Stoics take reason to be completed (*sumplêrousthai*) during our first seven years, DL 7.55 says they take it to be perfected (*teleioutai*) at the age of fourteen; these are compatible only if being given completed falls short of being perfected. Cf. Aristotle, *Pol.* 1333b34, 1336b40. According to Galen, 'reason is a collection of concepts and prolepses' (*On Hippocrates' and Plato's Doctrines* 5.3.1 = LS 53V). Though this doesn't say at what age we have this collection, it repeats the point that reason consists in having a set of concepts and prolepses. With the Aetius passage, compare Cicero, *Acad.* 2.21, quoted above. The fact that the Stoics think we don't acquire concepts until at least the age of seven suggests that they take having concepts to be a higher-level cognitive achievement than it is usually taken to be nowadays. Perhaps, in their view, children and animals have, if not concepts, then quasi- or proto-concepts: see C. Brittain, 'Non-rational Perception in the Stoics and Augustine', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 22 (2002), 253–307, esp. 256–74.

<sup>5</sup> Οἱ Στωικοὶ φασιν· ὅταν γεννηθῇ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἔχει τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν μέρος τῆς ψυχῆς ὥσπερ χαρτίον εὐεργὸν εἰς ἀπογραφὴν. Εἰς τοῦτο μίαν ἐκάστην τῶν ἐννοιῶν ἐναπογράφεται. Πρῶτος δὲ [ὁ] τῆς ἀναγραφῆς τρόπος ὁ διὰ τῶν αἰσθήσεων· αἰσθανόμενοι γάρ τινας οἶον λευκοῦ, ἀπελθόντος αὐτοῦ μνήμην ἔχουσιν· ὅταν δ' ὁμοειδῆς πολλὰ μνημαὶ γένωνται, τότε φαιμέν ἔχειν ἐμπειρίαν· ἐμπειρία γάρ ἐστι τὸ τῶν ὁμοειδῶν φαντασιῶν πλήθος. Τῶν δ' ἐννοιῶν αἱ μὲν φυσικῶς γίνονται κατὰ τοὺς εἰρημένους τρόπους καὶ ἀνεπιτεχνήτως, αἱ δ' ἤδη δι' ἡμετέρας διδασκαλίας καὶ ἐπιμελείας· αἱ μὲν οὖν ἐννοιαὶ καλοῦνται μόνον, ἐκεῖναι δὲ καὶ προλήψεις. Ὁ δὲ λόγος, καθ' ὃν προσαγορευόμεθα λογικοί, ἐκ τῶν προλήψεων συμπληροῦσθαι λέγεται κατὰ τὴν πρώτην ἐβδόμαδα.

Aetius' claim that the Stoics compare the governing part of the soul when a human being is born to a piece of papyrus ready to be written on recalls Aristotle's claim in *De Anima* 3.4 that the potentiality of the intellect is like that of a writing tablet (*grammateion*) that doesn't have anything written on it (430a).<sup>6</sup> As Aetius uses the metaphor, it suggests that the Stoics reject the existence of innate concepts, and so of innate belief and knowledge, at least in the content, and so in the cognitive-condition, sense. But, as we shall see, the issue of when and how the Stoics think we acquire concepts is disputed. I discuss this issue in sections 7–9.

Aetius proceeds to tell a story that is reminiscent of Aristotle's account of our cognitive development in *Posterior Analytics* 2.19 and *Metaphysics* 1.1.<sup>7</sup> In the former passage, as we've seen, Aristotle says:

From perception, then, as we say, memory arises. And from memory, when it occurs often of the same thing, experience arises; for memories that are many in number make up one experience. From experience, or (*ê*) from the whole universal that has settled in the soul (the one apart from the many, whatever is present as one and the same in all of them) there arises a principle of skill (if it is about what comes to be) or of knowledge (*epistêmê*) (if it is about what is). (100a3–9)

Similarly, Aetius says that, according to the Stoics, we begin with perception, and then acquire memory, and then experience. According to the Stoics, we can have perception without memory, memory without experience, and experience without concepts. Hence as the Stoics conceive of experience, it is nonconceptual.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that Aetius says that the Stoics think we acquire all our concepts only after we have experience reinforces the view that they don't take any concepts to be innate in the content, or, therefore, in the cognitive-condition, sense. Aetius also makes it clear that prolepses are just a subclass of concepts:<sup>9</sup> they are concepts we acquire 'naturally', 'without skill', and without teaching or attention.

<sup>6</sup> However, as we've seen, Aristotle doesn't use the writing-tablet metaphor to describe us as we are at birth. Further, Aetius uses *chartês*, whereas Aristotle uses *grammateion*. As we've seen (Ch. 6, sect. 18), Iamblichus takes the difference in terminology to be significant.

<sup>7</sup> Though both Aristotle and the Stoics (as Aetius describes them) trace a route from perception to memory to experience to *epistêmê*, it's not clear that they characterize each of these stages in the same way; but I won't pursue that interesting issue here. For some relevant passages on Stoic epistemology, see LS 39–42. For general discussions, see Annas, 'Stoic Epistemology' in Everson, S. (ed.), *Epistemology*, vol. 1 of *Companions to Ancient Thought*, 184–203; M. Frede, 'Stoics and Skeptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions', in his *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 151–76; and his 'Stoic Epistemology'; R. J. Hankinson, 'Stoic Epistemology', in B. Inwood (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 59–84.

<sup>8</sup> By contrast, we've seen that Aristotle allows us to have some concepts at the level of experience, though, as we've also seen, there is dispute about what sorts of concepts are available at that stage. So either Aristotle takes experience to be a higher-level cognitive condition than the Stoics do, or else he has more minimal conditions for having concepts than they do.

<sup>9</sup> I discuss the range of prolepses in sect. 4.

As we've seen, Diogenes also implies that prolepses are just a subclass of concepts; for he says that they are natural concepts of universals (7.54). But not all concepts are natural; for example, the concept of Cyclops (which Diogenes mentions in 7.53) isn't. Nor are all concepts of universals. DL 7.53, for example, explains how one might acquire a concept of Socrates.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Prolepses

We've seen that concepts are understood in various ways. Hence, to say that prolepses are natural concepts of universals isn't to say in exactly what sense of the term they are concepts. So let's ask about that.

Though the Stoics, unlike the Epicureans, countenance abstract entities, prolepses are not among them. Rather, prolepses are appearances (*phantasiai*); and appearances are mental particulars. That prolepses are appearances is made clear by, for example, Plutarch, who says that 'concept is a kind of appearance, and an appearance is an imprinting (*tupôsis*) on the soul' (*Common Conceptions* 1084f = LS 39F). He goes on to say that the Stoics 'define concepts as a kind of stored thoughts' (1085a).<sup>11</sup> So prolepses are a subclass of concepts which, in turn, are a kind of appearance—the kind that are stored thoughts. They are therefore rational since, for the Stoics, all thoughts are rational. Indeed, as we've seen, they take being rational to consist in having a set of concepts and prolepses. Animals and children have appearances; but their appearances are not rational. Their appearances are therefore nonconceptual. They have mental representations; but these representations are not conceptualized.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, all the appearances of those who are rational are rational appearances, and so they all involve concepts.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> For 7.53, see below, sect. 8.

<sup>11</sup> The passage continues as follows: ', and memories as permanent and static printings (*tuposeis*)'. It's not clear whether these are different descriptions of the same thing, or of different things; the latter is perhaps more plausible. As we've seen, DL 10.33 suggests that for the Epicureans stored thoughts just are memories.

<sup>12</sup> It's sometimes said that the Stoics think that animals, and children who haven't reached the age of reason, lack minds. On this view, animals, and children who haven't reached the age of reason, don't have *mental* representations. But they have some sort of imprint that has content, even if that content is not conceptualized. For the view that children who haven't reached the age of reason lack minds, see Frede, 'Stoic Epistemology', 303–4. However, in 'The Stoic Conception of Reason', he says that human beings are born with irrational souls, and that each has a *hêgemonikon* (50); to this extent, or in this way, it is natural to say that children have mental representations.

<sup>13</sup> To say that rational appearances have conceptual content is not to say that they are all fully conceptualized: even if part of their content is conceptualized, part might be nonconceptual or unconceptualized. But all rational appearances are at least partly conceptualized, whereas all nonrational appearances are wholly nonconceptual.

Something can appear not only to perception but also to reason. Being appeared to as though confronted by an oar bent in water is a perceptual appearance; it is a mental state of being appeared to in a given way on the basis of perception. By contrast, when a given argument appears sound to me, that appears to me to be so on the basis of reason. Even the perceptual appearances of those who are rational are rational. Rational appearances and what appears to reason are not coextensive; the latter is a subclass of the former.

Saying that prolepses are a subset of rational appearances leaves many issues underdetermined. The difficulties are exacerbated by the fact that, as Sextus remarks, 'it is hard to give an account of appearance, as it figures in Stoicism' (*M* 7.241).<sup>14</sup> As he explains, Cleanthes took an appearance to be 'an imprinting in the soul' (*M* 7.228). It's not clear whether, on this view, an appearance is an event (the process of imprinting) or a mental representation (the imprint). Chrysippus took appearances to be alterations in the soul (*M* 7.230); this suggests that they are mental events. At *M* 7.237, Sextus says that appearance is a way of being affected (*peisis*) or a condition (*diathesis*); at least the latter perhaps suggests that appearances are more like states than events. Some of the ways in which appearances are categorized—as persuasive or unpersuasive, true or false—suggests that they are mental contents. So saying that prolepses are appearances leaves it unclear whether they are mental contents, cognitive conditions, or both.<sup>15</sup> I shall, accordingly, move back and forth among these options as seems to fit the context best, though my focus will generally be on content.

As we saw in the last chapter, Diogenes describes Epicurean prolepses as being (as it were and among other things) stored thoughts, i.e. memories (10.33); we've now seen that Stoic prolepses are stored thoughts.<sup>16</sup> Diogenes also suggests that Epicurean prolepses are (as it were) correct belief and apprehension. We've seen how the Epicureans might think this: if one has a prolepsis, one in some sense accepts it, and so one in some sense believes that it is true; and it is true. In accepting a prolepsis, one acquires not mere true belief, but apprehension, in the

<sup>14</sup> My translations of *M* 7 and 8 are generally based on those by R. Bett, *Sextus Empiricus: Against the Logicians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), though I have sometimes modified them without comment.

<sup>15</sup> As we've seen, the same issue arises in connection with the Epicureans. For the view that Stoic prolepses are mental states, see P. Crivelli, 'The Stoics on Definition', in D. Charles (ed.), *Definition in Ancient Philosophy*, 359–423, at 379. For the view that they are mental events, see J. Barnes, 'Meaning, Saying and Thinking', K. Döring and T. Ebert (eds.), *Dialektiker und Stoiker—Zur Logik der Stoa und ihrer Vorläufer* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1993), 47–61, at 55. (He is talking about *noêseis* as such, not prolepses in particular; but prolepses are a kind of *noêsis*.) Even if prolepses are cognitive conditions of some sort, they at any rate have content.

<sup>16</sup> On memory, see above, n. 11.

sense that one acquires not just any old true belief, but one that is nonaccidentally true and one that is guaranteed to be true. Further, for the Epicureans, prolepses, or acceptances of them, can be both belief and apprehension, since, in their view, belief is a genus of which apprehension is a species.

By contrast, given how the Stoics understand belief (*doxa*) and apprehension, they presumably don't think that prolepses are, or confer, both correct belief and apprehension. For, in their view, apprehension is not a species of belief (*doxa*): they reserve *doxa* for mere belief; apprehension is a cognitive condition that is superior to mere belief.<sup>17</sup> Hence prolepses can't be or confer both apprehension and correct belief.<sup>18</sup>

But are prolepses either correct belief or apprehension? To say that they can't be both isn't to say that they are either. And in one way they aren't. For, as we've seen, prolepses are appearances. But belief and apprehension are not appearances; rather, they are, or arise as a result of, assents to appearances.<sup>19</sup> So, for example, at *M* 7.237 Sextus says that 'impulse and assent and apprehension are alterations of the leading part [of the soul], but are different from appearance'. And Cicero says that:

Zeno used to clinch the wise man's sole possession of knowledge (*scientia*) with gestures. He would spread out the fingers of one hand and display its open palm, saying 'An appearance is like this'. Next he clenched his fingers a little and said 'Assent is like this'. Then, pressing his fingers quite together, he made a fist, and said that this was apprehension. (This illustration also suggested the name he gave to it—*katalêpsis*—which it had not had before.) Then he brought his left hand against his right fist and gripped it tightly and forcefully, and said that knowledge was like this and possessed by none except the wise man. (*Acad.* 2.145 = LS 41A; trans. somewhat revised)

<sup>17</sup> See the passages collected in LS 41. Though apprehension is not a species of *doxa* for the Stoics, it is a species of belief in 'our' sense of the term, of taking to be true. I discuss this conception of belief in 'Sceptical *Dogmata*: *PH* I 13', *Methexis* 13 (2001), 81–105. The Stoic term that comes closest to our wider notion of belief is 'assent' (*sunkatathesis*), though it might be more accurate to say that we acquire beliefs when we assent. For discussion of the relation between belief and assent, see J. Barnes, 'Belief Is Up to Us', in his *Method and Metaphysics*, ed. M. Bonelli (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), 394–411 (originally published in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 106 (2006), 21–38).

<sup>18</sup> This account is controversial. On an alternative, some *doxai*—nonaccidentally true ones—are cases of apprehension and so involve assenting to an apprehensive appearance. On this view, prolepses could be both *doxai* and apprehension, not because *doxa* is a genus of which apprehension is a species, but because apprehension is a genus of which some true *doxai* are a species. For this view, see T. Brennan, *The Stoic Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 51–81; and C. Meinwald, 'Ignorance and Opinion in Stoic Epistemology', *Phronesis* 50 (2005), 215–31.

<sup>19</sup> For the view that apprehension is assent to an apprehensive appearance, see *M* 7.151–2; *M* 8.397; *M* 11.182; *PH* 3.241. In *M* 7.154, Sextus says it would be better to say that apprehension is assent to an assertible (*axiôma*), that is, to the associated propositional content.

Though this passage doesn't mention belief, it makes it clear that assent is different from appearance. The passage also makes it clear that apprehension and knowledge (*epistêmê* = *scientia*) are, or result from, different kinds of assent.

Sextus makes it clear that belief and apprehension are, or result from, assents to different kinds of appearances. For example, in *M* 7.151–7 (LS41C) he distinguishes among apprehension, *epistêmê*, and belief, saying that *epistêmê* is apprehension 'that is secure and firm and unchangeable by reason', whereas belief is 'weak [and false] assent';<sup>20</sup> apprehension (the genus, of which *epistêmê* is one species) is 'assent belonging to an apprehensive appearance; and an apprehensive appearance, so they claim, is one which is true and of such a kind that it could not turn out false',<sup>21</sup> where it's clear that this is supposed to be a distinct sort of assent from belief. In the Stoics' view, apprehension—that is, assent to an apprehensive appearance—is a higher-level cognitive condition than belief.

We've seen so far that appearances, and so prolepses, aren't themselves either belief or apprehension. However, we've also seen that we acquire belief and apprehension by assenting to appearances. Hence, though prolepses aren't themselves beliefs or apprehension, they could confer belief or apprehension in the sense that we could acquire belief or apprehension by assenting to a prolepsis.

Can we tell which, if either, is the case? Diogenes says that, for Chrysippus, prolepses are a criterion of truth (7.54). If something is a criterion of truth, it is guaranteed to be true; it is true in virtue of its nature or causal origin.<sup>22</sup> Mere true beliefs, however, are not guaranteed to be true. So, if we assent to a prolepsis, we

<sup>20</sup> 'and false' may be a copyist's error: see H. Maconi, 'Nova Non Philosophandi Philosophia', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 6 (1988), 231–53, at 240 n. 26. The issue doesn't affect anything I say here.

<sup>21</sup> Apprehensive appearances are defined in different ways. According to the earlier two-clause version, an apprehensive appearance (a) comes from what is; and (b) is formed in exact accordance with what is. There is also a later three-clause version, which adds (c) is such as would not come about from what is not. For the two-clause version, see DL 7.46; Sextus, *M* 11.183; Cicero, *Acad.* 2.77–8. For the three-clause version see *Acad.* 2.77; DL 7.50; Sextus, *M* 7.248, 402, 426; *PH* 2.4. There is dispute about whether the addition of (c) involves a modification of their original view, or whether it spells out an implication of (a) and (b) or is, at any rate, something the Stoics believed all along. For discussion of apprehensive appearances, see Frede, 'Stoics and Skeptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions' and 'Stoic Epistemology'; Hankinson, 'Stoic Epistemology'.

<sup>22</sup> If prolepses are true, it would seem that their contents are assertibles (*axiômata*). For a defense of this view, see C. Brittain, 'Common Sense', 173–4. For the view that the contents of at least some prolepses are predicates (that is, incomplete sayables), see Frede, 'Stoics and Skeptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions', 153–6. (However, in 'Stoic Epistemology', 319, he speaks of anticipations, as he calls them in this article, as being definitions and as being true. If so, they seem to have assertibles as their contents. But perhaps he is here describing what he thinks of as a subclass of prolepses.) The issue doesn't affect my main claim, which is that having a prolepsis isn't sufficient for having P-knowledge or superior cognition. Thanks to Jacob Klein for helpful discussion of this issue. For the distinction between assertibles and predicates, see n. 51.

acquire apprehension, not mere true belief.<sup>23</sup> However, they confer belief in ‘our’ sense of the term, since we all in some sense accept our prolepses as true, though we aren’t always aware of doing so. For the Stoics, as for the Epicureans, prolepses are objectively, not subjectively, evident.

Should we then say that having prolepses confers knowledge? According to Frede, we should say this. In his view, ‘for the Stoics the acquisition of the natural notions amounts to the acquisition of the fundamental or basic knowledge about the world embodied in these notions’.<sup>24</sup> As always, however, it matters how we conceive of knowledge. The Stoics define *epistêmê*—which is sometimes translated as ‘knowledge’<sup>25</sup>—in various ways. According to Stobaeus, for example, the Stoics say that:

*Epistêmê* is apprehension that is secure and unchangeable by reason. It is secondly a system of such *epistêmai*, like the rational apprehension of particulars that exists in the virtuous man. It is thirdly a system of expert *epistêmai*, which has intrinsic stability, just as the virtues do. Fourthly, it is a tenor for the reception of appearances which is unchangeable by reason, and consisting, as they say, in tension and power. (2.73.16–74.3 = LS 41H)

According to the Stoics, only the sage has *epistêmê*,<sup>26</sup> and it’s not clear there have ever been any sages. By contrast, everyone (normal) who has reached the age of reason has prolepses. Hence, merely having prolepses isn’t sufficient for having knowledge, if knowledge is taken to be *epistêmê* as understood by the Stoics. Nor is it sufficient for having *epistêmê* as Aristotle defines it in *Posterior Analytics* 1.2, or as Plato understands it in the *Meno*. Indeed, not only is it not sufficient for having P-knowledge or superior cognition, but neither is it sufficient for having A-knowledge, which includes but goes beyond *epistêmê* as defined in *APo.* 1.2.

However, if we take it to be sufficient for someone to have knowledge that they have a nonaccidentally true belief, a belief that is guaranteed to be true, then

<sup>23</sup> However, it’s sometimes said that apprehension, or apprehensive appearances, give rise to prolepses; see e.g. Striker, ‘The Problem of the Criterion’, 157–9. Similarly, Frede says that ‘cognitions... give rise to the so-called natural notions or anticipations’; prolepses are ‘based on cognitive impressions or cognitions’ (‘Stoic Epistemology’, 315; cf. 319). According to LS, ‘[i]n their generality and complexity, preconceptions and common conceptions cover truths which cognitive impressions, or at least sensory ones, do not transmit directly; but Chrysippus can be assumed to have regarded these criteria as complementary to sense-perception, and grounded in the cognitive impressions of which it consists’ (1.252–3).

<sup>24</sup> ‘The Stoic Conception of Reason’, 54. Similarly, Brittain says that ‘Chrysippus thought that reason was constituted by certain conceptions and preconceptions, some of which... are the common conceptions [which are, or are a subclass of, prolepses]. A vital implication of this claim is that we start off our rational lives with a stock of preliminary, but secure, knowledge about the world’ (‘Common Sense’, 179).

<sup>25</sup> This is how Frede translates it in ‘Stoic Epistemology’.

<sup>26</sup> See e.g. Sextus, *M* 7.151–7 = LS 41C.

having prolepses confers knowledge.<sup>27</sup> And, on the view I favor, that's how the Stoics conceive of knowledge: for that's what apprehension is and, in my view, they take apprehension to be knowledge. *Epistêmê* is one species of it; the other species is mere apprehension: apprehension that qualifies as knowledge, but that falls short of *epistêmê*, which is just one species of knowledge. Let's call the broad category of apprehension (which comprises *epistêmê* and mere apprehension) S-knowledge, for knowledge as the Stoics conceive of it. Whereas Plato takes all knowledge to be P-knowledge, and thinks the category of belief is quite extensive,<sup>28</sup> the Stoics, like Aristotle, have a broad category of knowledge, with *epistêmê* being just one species of it. Mere apprehension, apprehension that falls short of *epistêmê*, is knowledge, but of a lower-level sort. S-knowledge is more extensive than either P-knowledge or A-knowledge. Nor is it always available to us as such. We have it, if we have prolepses. But we might not be aware of having them; they might be unconscious or latent.<sup>29</sup> As we've seen, the same is true of Epicurean prolepses.

#### 4. The range of prolepses

Let's now ask about the range of prolepses. Is there a prolepsis for every word or, at least, for every general term? Or is their range more limited? In the last chapter, I suggested that Epicurus restricts prolepses to some basic general features of reality: there is a prolepsis of justice, but not of Cyclops or of time. The Stoics also limit the range of prolepses. For, as we've seen, Diogenes says prolepses are *natural* notions of *universals* (7.54). Presumably, then, there are no prolepses of particulars. There is a prolepsis of horse, but not of my friend Flicka.<sup>30</sup> Diogenes doesn't say what he means by 'natural'. But it's reasonable to think that, like

<sup>27</sup> Here I use 'belief' as we understand belief, not as the Stoics conceive of *doxa*. On Meinwald and Brennan's view (see n. 18), having a nonaccidentally true belief (in our sense of the term, of taking something to be true) isn't sufficient for having knowledge; for, on their view, *epistêmê* is the only sort of knowledge the Stoics recognize. On their view, the Stoics are, in that respect, close to Plato, insofar as they take all knowledge to be quite difficult to attain. If, however, I am right to think that the Stoics recognize a category of mere apprehension that goes beyond *doxa*, then it is reasonable to think that it constitutes a lower level of knowledge—just as Aristotle allows genuine knowledge that falls short of *epistêmê* as he conceives of it.

<sup>28</sup> He has a broad category of belief insofar as knowledge is a species of it. He also has a broad category of *mere* belief, since all beliefs that fall short of P-knowledge belong in it; and most of our beliefs, in his view, are mere beliefs that fall short of knowledge.

<sup>29</sup> To say this is not to say that prolepses are innate. I discuss innateness in sects. 7–9. Insofar as we can have prolepses without being aware that we do so, the Stoics reject an accessibility condition on 'mere' apprehension, that is, apprehension that falls short of *epistêmê*.

<sup>30</sup> We've seen that DL 7.53 allows that there are concepts of particulars. But these concepts aren't prolepses. Brittain, however, thinks there may be prolepses of particulars, though he adds that if



Aetius, he means that we acquire prolepses on the basis of experience, without skill, teaching, or attention; prolepses are in this sense unlearned.<sup>31</sup> If this is right, presumably there are no prolepses of fictional entities: though there is a prolepsis of horse, there isn't one of centaur. There is a concept of centaur; but not all concepts are prolepses.<sup>32</sup> Rather, as Frede puts it, the Stoics think that '[i]f one grows up in an environment with trees and camels, one will naturally end up with a [prolepsis] of a tree and a [prolepsis] of a camel, without having set out to form them'.<sup>33</sup> No one grows up in an environment with centaurs. Nor do we acquire the concept of them without attention; it is not an unlearned concept.

How many concepts are natural in the sense Frede describes? Colors and natural kinds seem to be. But what about artifacts? If one grows up in an environment with tables, will one naturally acquire a prolepsis of table? If so, it would seem that there are prolepses of artifacts. However, perhaps the Stoics think that acquiring a concept of table takes skill or teaching, whereas acquiring prolepses of natural kinds doesn't; if so, there are no prolepses of artifacts. As against this, one might note that, in *Diss.* 4.8.6, Epictetus posits the prolepsis of a philosopher; in 4.8.10, of a builder and a musician. He seems to do so because he thinks there are objectively correct accounts of what these things are. He says, for example, that the prolepsis of a philosopher isn't wearing a cloak and having long hair, but being free from error.<sup>34</sup> This line of reasoning doesn't sanction prolepses of every general term, or even of every general term for things that exist. But it isn't clear exactly what range of prolepses it encompasses. That Epictetus posits a limited range of prolepses might be suggested by *Diss.* 2.11.2–4 (a passage I discuss below). For here he denies that we come into being with a natural concept of a half-tone musical interval, because we have to be taught such things. It's not clear, however, whether he means that there are no natural concepts (that is, prolepses) in such cases, or whether it's just that we don't come into being with them but acquire them over time. Whatever Epictetus thinks, so far as we know Stoics before Epictetus don't explicitly mention prolepses of things like philosophers or builders. If this isn't just an accident of history, then either they countenance them but don't put special weight on them; or else Epictetus

there are, 'they are unlikely to be constitutive of reason or criterial for progress in philosophy' ('Common Sense', 173).

<sup>31</sup> See the passage from Aetius quoted at the beginning of sect. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. DL 7.53, where Diogenes describes different ways of forming concepts. I quote this passage below.

<sup>33</sup> 'Stoic Epistemology', 320. However, see next note.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Ch. 7, n. 33, where we noted that Philodemus might posit a prolepsis of good poem and one of good household management, on the ground that there are objective standards here.

expands the range of prolepses beyond that countenanced by earlier Stoics; or else he agrees with earlier Stoics about the range of prolepses, as they use the term, but uses it in a broader sense than they do.<sup>35</sup>

Another possibility is that when Diogenes says that, for the Stoics, prolepses are natural, he means more than that they are acquired without skill, teaching, or attention; in addition, they arise from features of our nature. This would presumably imply that there are no prolepses of artifacts. However, it's not clear that the Stoics think that all prolepses arise from features of our nature. Rather, just a subclass of prolepses do so, what are sometimes called common conceptions or common prolepses.<sup>36</sup> If this is right, then not all prolepses arise from our nature, though they are all natural in the broader sense that we acquire them on the basis of experience, without teaching, skill, or attention, where, however, it's not clear exactly what is natural in this sense.

## 5. Prolepses, outline accounts, and definitions

In looking at Epicurus, we saw that the content of a prolepsis is, or is expressed by, an outline account; it is not a definition in the sense of being a full statement of the full real essence of what it is of. Nonetheless, the contents of at least many Epicurean prolepses specify either part of the essence of what the prolepsis is of, or the essence of what it is of in an outline fashion. What about Stoic prolepses? Is their content expressed by definitions or by outline accounts? Do they disclose full real essences, partial real essences, necessary properties that aren't essential, or just accidental, nonessential properties?

For the Stoics, as for the Epicureans, the contents of prolepses are, or are expressed by, outline accounts, not definitions. As Augustine says, we use prolepses as a springboard for discovering definitions: we begin with an outline account and try to fill it in, thereby converting it into a definition.<sup>37</sup> According to Ammonius (*in Isag.* 55.2–7), outlines reveal their objects in a nonarticulated way (*ou diarthrôsis*); and he contrasts outlines with definitions, which reveal their

<sup>35</sup> The term came to be used more broadly. Sextus, for example, sometimes uses it for all concepts or, at least, for all generally shared beliefs. See e.g. *M* 7.443. I discuss Sextus' use of 'prolepsis' in Ch. 11.

<sup>36</sup> On common conceptions and common prolepses, see Alexander, *De Mixtione* 217.2–4 = SVF 2.473; Sextus, *M* 11.22, *M* 9.124. I return to this issue below.

<sup>37</sup> '[The Stoics say that from the senses] the mind forms concepts—*ennoiai*, as they call them—of those things, that is, which they articulate by definition. The entire method of learning and teaching, they say, stems and spreads from there' (*City of God* 8.7 = SVF 2.106 = LS 32F). This passage, as well as the passages that I go on to cite from Ammonius and Plutarch, may all be found in Crivelli, 'The Stoics on Definition', 384–5.

objects clearly (*saphôs*). And Plutarch says that (at least according to some of the Stoics) Chrysippus ‘entirely removed the confusion regarding prolepses and concepts by articulating each of them and assigning it to its proper place’ (*Common Conceptions* 1059b–c = LS 40G). The process of articulation is the process of moving from a prolepsis to a definition, and so from an outline account to a definition.<sup>38</sup>

To say that the contents of prolepses are, or are expressed by, outline accounts rather than definitions is not to say what sorts of features of a thing a prolepsis or a definition reveals; and the issue is disputed. According to Diogenes (DL 7.60 = LS 32C1–3):

A definition is, as Antipater says in *On Definitions* Book 1, ‘a statement of analysis matchingly expressed’; or, as Chrysippus says in his *On Definitions*, a representation of a peculiar characteristic (*idion*). An outline account is a statement introducing us to things by means of a sketch, or which conveys the force of the definition more simply than a definition.

And according to a scholion on Dionysius Thrax (107.5–7 = LS 32B):

Chrysippus says that a definition is a representation of a peculiar characteristic, i.e. that which expounds the peculiar characteristic. Antipater the Stoic says: “A definition is a statement expressed with necessary force”, i.e. with reciprocal force. For the definition is meant to be reciprocal.

Let’s begin by looking at Chrysippus’ account of definition.<sup>39</sup> We can then ask how if at all Antipater’s account differs; and we can then turn to the nature of outline accounts.

<sup>38</sup> Saying that articulation involves moving from prolepses to definitions can be understood in at least two ways. First, it might be that there is a mental representation in our soul that we don’t initially fully grasp. At that stage, the representation is a prolepsis; when we have a full or clear grasp of it, it is a definition. On this interpretation, one and the same content is both a prolepsis and a definition; it’s just grasped in different ways. Second, perhaps prolepses and definitions aren’t the same contents differently conceived, but are instead two different contents; the first is a more minimal content than the second. We start with the first and move to the second, which is not antecedently there without being clearly grasped. I favor the second view; but the first view should be borne in mind. The first view might seem to involve a matching view; the second doesn’t do so. According to the Anonymous Commentator on the *Theaetetus*, what Socrates does is to help us articulate our natural conceptions; this, he says, follows from the fact that learning is recollection. See 46–7. He says that he discusses this further in his commentary on the *Phaedo*; unfortunately, that commentary is not extant. In *Platonic Questions* 100e, Plutarch also links articulation to recollection. In both cases, the argument seems to be that the Stoics (and others) are wrong to think that we can fully explain how we can articulate our *ennoiai* by appealing just to our reasoning abilities as they develop naturally in this life; rather, we also need to invoke recollection. We discussed this sort of argument (though not in terms of articulation) in Ch. 5; cf. Ch. 9, sect. 2.

<sup>39</sup> It’s reasonable to start with Chrysippus, since he antedates Antipater.

A Chrysippean definition reveals the peculiar, or distinctive, characteristic (*idion*) of its definiendum. According to Long and Sedley, ‘there seems no doubt . . . that “peculiar characteristic” (*idion*) is an expression intended by the Stoics to apply only to features which are not just unique but also essential’ (LS 1.194). However, Crivelli does doubt this.<sup>40</sup> In his view, Chrysippean definitions state either just necessary unique properties that are not essential or else necessary unique properties in a broad sense, where it is not ruled out that these are essential, though neither is that required. Hence, in his view, Chrysippean definitions can, but need not and don’t always, state essences. He calls this the dialectical interpretation, because he thinks these two ways of understanding *idion*—for necessary unique properties in either a narrow sense that excludes essence or in a broad sense that includes but isn’t limited to them—correspond to Aristotle’s usage of the term in dialectical contexts, especially in the *Topics*.

Here it may be useful to look briefly at Aristotle’s usage. In *Topics* 1.4, he says that ‘the peculiar characteristic in some cases signifies what it is to be something and in other cases does not’. He then proposes to use ‘definition’ for the first case (for the ‘what it is to be something’, that is, for the essence), and *idion* for the latter, noting that *idion* is, however, sometimes applied to both—that is, to both essential and nonessential properties—indiscriminately. As he explains more fully in 1.5, when an *idion* is a nonessential property, it isn’t just any old nonessential property. Rather, if *x* is an *idion* of *y*, it is unique to *y* and is a property *y* has necessarily. In one of his examples, it is distinctive of, or peculiar to, man that he is receptive of grammar.

Aristotle therefore mentions three ways of understanding *idion*: it can be used just for essence, just for unique nonessential necessary properties, or for both taken together. Though he mentions all three usages, he proposes to use *idion* just in the second way. Sometimes, however, he uses it nontechnically for essence. For example, in the famous function argument in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7, he asks what the *idion ergon* of human being is; he then proceeds to ask what the essence of human being is. *Idion* is an adjective, which means ‘peculiar’ or ‘distinctive’; we can tell whether the distinctive essence, or a distinctive property in a broader or different sense, is meant only by seeing what the accompanying noun is. In *EN* 1.7, the use of *ergon* suggests that here, at any rate, distinctive essence is meant.<sup>41</sup>

Let’s now return to the issue of whether Chrysippean definitions state just essences, or just *idia* in Aristotle’s technical sense, or both. A natural first thought

<sup>40</sup> ‘The Stoics on Definition’, 396–404.

<sup>41</sup> For other nontechnical uses of *idion* for essence, see *APo*. 73a7, 75b18, 76a17, *DA* 402a9, *Met.* 1004b11. For detailed discussion of *idion* in the technical sense, see *Topics* 5.

is that Chrysippus thinks definitions state peculiar qualities (*idiôs poia*) as the Stoics understand them; and, if this is so, it would seem to follow that Chrysippean definitions state essences, since that's what peculiar qualities seem to be.<sup>42</sup> However, this natural first thought is probably wrong. For Chrysippean definitions aren't restricted to peculiar qualities in the Stoic sense. Common qualities and incorporeals, for example, can be defined; but they aren't, and don't have, peculiar qualities in the technical Stoic sense. However, it doesn't follow that Chrysippean definitions don't state the essences of their definienda. If a definition states the *idiôs poion* of x, it states x's essence; but, though that's sufficient for a definition to state an essence, it isn't necessary. And, as we've seen, *idion* can be used for essence, though it can also be used more broadly.

A consideration in favor of the view that a Chrysippean definition states the essence of its definiendum is that there appears to be a tight connection for the Stoics between definition, on the one hand, and the division of a genus into its species, on the other hand; and the latter captures essence.<sup>43</sup> And at least many Chrysippean definitions seem to state the essence. However, some of them seem to state just necessary unique features of what they are of. So, for example, in support of their view, according to which Chrysippean definitions state just essences, Long and Sedley cite their 31D (Alexander, *On Aristotle's Topics* 1.8–14 = SVF 2.124); 58A (DL 7.103); and 63D (Seneca, *Ep. Mor.* 76.9–10) and 63M (Cicero, *Tusc.* 5.81–2). In 31D, Alexander says that the Stoics define dialectic as the knowledge of speaking well, taking speaking well to consist in saying what is true and what is fitting, and regarding this as a (or perhaps the) peculiar characteristic of the philosopher. In 58A, Diogenes says that, for the Stoics, heating is the peculiar characteristic of what is hot. In 63D, Seneca says that perfect reason is man's peculiar good. In 63M, Cicero says that it is a peculiar characteristic of the wise man that he does nothing which he could regret, nothing against his will, and so on. 63D, and perhaps 58A,<sup>44</sup> arguably use *idion* for essence. 31D may state part of the essence. But 63M seems to state, not the essence of the wise man, but necessary unique properties that flow from the essence. If we go by the passages Long and Sedley cite, it seems we should conclude that Chrysippean definitions sometimes state the essence, sometimes necessary unique properties, and sometimes both.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> For the Stoics notion of a peculiar quality, see LS 28.

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., DL 7.60–2. However, as Long and Sedley remark (1.193), not all Stoic definitions clearly conform to the pattern of genus and differentia.

<sup>44</sup> It's not clear that heating is the essence of what's hot (presumably insofar as it is hot: heating isn't my essence, even when I happen to be hot); it might instead be something the hot does in virtue of its essence (which might, for some philosophers or scientists, be e.g. a certain atomic structure).

<sup>45</sup> At least, this is so if we understand essence as Aristotle does for, roughly, the real essence of a thing, where that is a basic explanatory property in virtue of which something is what it is. It is

Let's now turn to Antipater. There's dispute about whether his account of definition aims to capture the Chrysippean account in different terms, or whether it is meant to be a revision or correction of it. Long and Sedley favor the first view. They argue that, for both Chrysippus and Antipater, definitions aim to state the essences of their definienda. Crivelli favors the second view. He thinks that, for Antipater, definitions need to state only a feature true of all and only the things that fall under it; in contrast to Chrysippus, Antipater doesn't take definitions to include even a modal clause.<sup>46</sup>

I'm inclined to think that Antipater retains a modal clause. For 'necessary' seems to be included within the quotation in the scholion on Dionysius Thrax (107.5–7; LS 32B; cited above). It is the gloss that emphasizes that this involves being true of all and only the things that fall under the scope of the definition. Further, perhaps 'analysis' is intended to indicate that definitions express both essential features and also unique necessary features. If this is right, then Antipater's account of definition is the same as Chrysippus', though it is expressed in different terms.<sup>47</sup>

Let's now turn to the Stoic notion of an outline account, which I cited above (DL 7.60 = LS 32C). Diogenes gives two different explanations of what an outline account is.<sup>48</sup> According to the second, an outline account must capture the

possible that the Stoics have a more expansive view of what something's essence is, such that it includes what Aristotle would view as *idia* in his technical sense. If that is the Stoic view, then Chrysippean definitions seem to state essences as the Stoics conceive of essence. However, it's difficult to be sure about this since, in the surviving works, the Stoics don't discuss essence technically in the way in which Aristotle does.

<sup>46</sup> Crivelli, 'The Stoics on Definition', 406.

<sup>47</sup> This is a variant of Long and Sedley's suggestion, at 1.194, that 'analysis' captures essence. If I was right to think that Chrysippean definitions can include more than the essence, it seems reasonable to think that 'analysis' is similarly broad. Further, I disagree with Long and Sedley's suggestion that only analytic truths are at issue here.

<sup>48</sup> Contrast Brittain, 'Common Sense', 188. Following a suggestion by Jonathan Barnes, he suggests that the first explanation is mentioned just to point out a possible ambiguity; it is then set aside. It's just the second explanation that specifies a relevant notion of an outline account. However, DL 7.60 doesn't read as though it means to dismiss the first account; the passage reads more naturally if Diogenes is giving two descriptions, each acceptable, of what an outline account is. This is perhaps also suggested by the fact that different authors understand outline accounts in different ways; perhaps Diogenes aims to be inclusive. See Barnes, *Porphyry: Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 57–62. He notes that Alexander takes outline accounts to reveal *per se* attributes (*in Met.* 176.25–6; cf. *in Top.* 421.23–32), i.e. properties that necessarily hold of the thing being defined but that are not mentioned in its definition (and so are not part of the thing's essence, as Aristotle conceives of essence); these are *idia* in Aristotle's technical sense. Porphyry suggests that an outline 'signifies a property attached to the substance' (*ad Gadal* 51 = Simplicius *in Cat.* 30.13–15), which Barnes takes to mean that it mentions a property that holds of all and only Fs. Ammonius says that outline accounts reveal accidents (*in Isag.* 54.23–55.2). If Diogenes' first

essence, or at least part of the essence, though more simply than a definition does. Diogenes' first account, however, is considerably broader: outline accounts introduce us to things by means of a sketch. That is, each provides a way of allowing us to think about what it is of; but it needn't do so by capturing the thing's essence, even in outline fashion. However, it's not clear from Diogenes' brief report exactly what sorts of features outline accounts must mention. The specification presumably can't be so broad that it doesn't allow us to think about *x* in particular. But that leaves room for doubt about what sorts of features of *x* must be mentioned.<sup>49</sup>

## 6. Prolepses and meaning

Let's now turn to another issue that we discussed in considering the Epicureans: what if any connection do prolepses have with meaning? Are they identical to the meanings of terms? If not, do they nonetheless play a role in determining the meanings of terms? If not, are they at least relevant to determining or explaining speaker's meaning? I suggested that the Epicureans think prolepses are relevant to explaining speaker's meaning and that, though prolepses are not identical to the meanings of words, they are relevant to determining the meanings of words. What, however, about the Stoics?

According to Galen, Diogenes of Babylon says that:

The source of articulate utterance is the same as the source of utterance, and therefore meaningful articulate utterance has that source too. But this last is language. Therefore language and utterance have the same source. But the source of utterance is not the region of the head, but evidently somewhere lower down. For it is obvious that utterance passes out through the windpipe. Therefore language too does not have its source in the head, but lower down. But that too is certainly true, viz. that language has its source in thought. For some people actually define language as significant utterance sent out from thought. It is also credible that language is sent out imprinted, and stamped as it were, by the concepts (*ennoiai*) present in thought, and that it is temporally coextensive with both the act of thinking and the activity of speaking. Therefore thought too is not in the head but in the lower regions, principally no doubt around the heart. (*On Hippocrates' and Plato's doctrines* 2.5.9–13 = LS 53U)

account of what an outline account is includes all of these, then the contents of outline accounts can be quite various.

<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Long and Sedley say that an outline account 'is a formula used for the preliminary marking off of a definiendum, prior to the construction of a true definition. It clarifies what it is that is under discussion, but may not yet reveal that thing's nature' (1.194). They don't say how many sorts of features can do this.

And Diogenes Laertius says:

Appearance arises first; and then thought, which has the power of utterance, expresses in language what it experiences by the agency of the appearance. (7.49 = LS 33D)

The, or an, idea here is that my thoughts determine what I mean by what I say. What I say expresses my thoughts; my thoughts somehow ‘imprint, as it were’, the words I utter. This suggests that prolepses are relevant to speaker’s meaning.<sup>50</sup> Here, however, we must be careful. Though the Stoics seem to think that we need to have some prolepses to mean anything by what we say, they also think that we can think of things that don’t have their own proprietary prolepsis. Their view isn’t that I can think of *x* only if I have a prolepsis of *x*. However, they seem to think that I can think of *x* only if I have a concept of it; and I can have concepts of things only if I have some prolepses.

Are prolepses relevant, not just to speaker’s meaning, but also to semantic meaning, to word or sentence meaning? In asking about this, it’s again important to be clear how meaning is being understood. If the meaning of a term is taken to be an abstract entity, then prolepses aren’t identical to the meanings of terms. For, as we’ve seen, prolepses are particular mental representations, states, or events. What comes closest to being the meanings of terms and sentences in the Stoics are incomplete and complete sayables (*lekta*), which are abstract entities.<sup>51</sup>

Nor are prolepses identical to the meanings of terms, when the latter are taken to be what an ordinary competent speaker of a language grasps.<sup>52</sup> For one thing, the conventional meaning of a term can change over time; but the contents of

<sup>50</sup> Cf. LS 33A–I, with LS 1.199–203. For discussion, see Barnes, ‘Meaning, Saying and Thinking’.

<sup>51</sup> Sextus, *M* 8.10–12; cf. *M* 8.74 (LS 34B); 8.85–6 (LS 34D); *DL* 7.65 (LS 34A). Complete sayables are assertibles, which are, or are very like, propositions, when propositions are taken to be abstract entities. Like propositions, they are the (primary) bearers of truth and falsity, though the Stoics also speak of true and false appearances; presumably the latter are true and false in a derivative way, in virtue of the assertibles with which they are associated. See e.g. *M* 7.244–6. Though assertibles are in some ways like propositions as they are often conceived of nowadays, they also differ from them in some ways. For example, assertibles can change their truth value; and some of them include indexicals. In addition to complete sayables, the Stoics also acknowledge incomplete sayables, at least some of which are predicates. These seem to be, or to be close to, the meanings of terms, when meanings are taken to be abstract entities that are the constituents of propositions, viewed as abstract entities. See LS 1.205–8, and S. Bobzien in J. Barnes, S. Bobzien, and M. Mignucci, ‘Logic’, in *CHHP*, 77–176, at 95–6.

<sup>52</sup> For a detailed defense of this claim, see Brittain, ‘Common Sense’. The Stoics seem to think that what an ordinary competent speaker grasps is a sayable. However, it’s worth separating the notion of what an ordinary competent speaker grasps from any particular account of its ontological status. See Ch. 7, n. 52.



prolepses don't change over time. To be sure, a given person might become (more) aware of the content of one of her prolepses over time, and she might be able to articulate it better over time. But the content itself doesn't change.

Even if prolepses aren't identical to meanings, either when meaning is taken to be an abstract entity or when it is taken to be what an ordinary competent speaker of a language grasps (however the ontology of that is construed), it doesn't follow that prolepses don't play a role in determining the meanings of words. But it's difficult to be sure whether they do so; and the issue is disputed. On the one hand, it is natural to suppose that the passages from Diogenes Laertius and Diogenes of Babylon (quoted above) are intended to explain, not just how I can mean something by what I say, but also how language as such can be meaningful. The passages suggest that, for the Stoics, the meanings of words are at least partly determined by our concepts and so, directly or indirectly, by our prolepses. If this view is right, the Stoics, like the Epicureans, are sympathetic to the view that speaker's meaning plays a role in determining semantic meaning.<sup>53</sup>

However, that the Stoics hold this view is by no means certain. So, for example, the Stoics define, or explain, sayables as what 'subsists (*huphistamenon*) in accordance with (*kata*) rational appearances' (*M* 8.70; cf. *DL* 7.43). This might mean that sayables exist in virtue of—by being somehow dependent on—rational appearances, in which case, if sayables are meanings, the Stoics favor the view that meaning is dependent on thought. But *kata* might instead mean 'in accordance with', where that means there is some sort of correspondence between thoughts and sayables, without its being implied that the latter depend on the former.<sup>54</sup> Further, at least some sayables seem to be states of affairs.<sup>55</sup> It's not clear how one and the same thing could be both a state of affairs and the meaning of a term (or of a sentence or proposition). Be that as it may, if (some) sayables are states of affairs, that fits well with the view that the existence (or subsistence) of (some) sayables is not dependent on the existence of thoughts, since states of affairs aren't (generally) so dependent (though of course states of affairs involving thoughts are). Or again, the other incorporeals that the Stoics recognize—place,

<sup>53</sup> For the view that sayables are meanings which, in turn, depend on thought, see e.g. LS 1.199–203; and Long, 'Language and Thought in Stoicism', in A. A. Long (ed.), *Problems in Stoicism* (London: Athlone Press, 1996), 75–113, at e.g. 82; and his 'Stoic Psychology and the Elucidation of Language', in his *From Epicurus to Epictetus: Studies in Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 236–55, at 241–4.

<sup>54</sup> For a defense of this second interpretation, see Barnes, 'Meaning, Saying and Thinking', 55–6; cf. 'Language', *CHHP*, 211–13. As we saw in Ch. 7, sect. 7, he also argues that Epicurean prolepses explain speaker's meaning but not word meaning.

<sup>55</sup> See e.g. *M* 9.211 (LS 55B). Bobzien, 'Logic', 95, thinks *M* 8.10 suggests that, though true assertibles are, or correspond to, states of affairs, this is not the case with false ones.

void, and time—are mind-independent; and one might be tempted to think that all incorporeals should be on a par in this respect, in which case sayables would also be mind-independent. However, it doesn't follow from the fact that some incorporeals are mind-independent that all are; so this consideration is indecisive. Another consideration that has been adduced in favor of the mind-independence of sayables is the fact that they seem to be effects of causes. However, though effects aren't in general mind-dependent, some of them are; for example, there are cases of mental causation, and their effects are mind-dependent.<sup>56</sup>

It's not clear, then, whether the Stoics think that the meanings of terms are at least partly determined by prolepses. But, however we resolve this issue, prolepses give us substantial information about the world; they encode basic truths about the world. That remains true even if another of their roles is to determine, at least in part, not only speaker's meaning but also word meaning.

## 7. Innatism

Let's now return to the question of when we acquire prolepses, which I mentioned briefly above in discussing Aetius. In particular, do the Stoics take any prolepses to be innate and, if so, what sort of innatism do they favor?

Before attempting to answer that question, it might be helpful to review the three sorts of innatism that I've distinguished, and that will be of concern to us in discussing the Stoics on innatism: cognitive-condition, content, and dispositional innatism. According to cognitive-condition innatism about knowledge, we are, from birth, in the cognitive condition of knowing. According to content innatism about knowledge, from birth we have specific mental contents in us that are suitable to serve as the content of knowledge, whether or not we are in the cognitive condition of knowing. According to dispositional innatism about knowledge, we are, from birth, predisposed to acquire knowledge, or to know certain specific things, whatever our experience. As we've seen, this divides into weak and strong dispositional innatism about knowledge. According to the first, though we are predisposed to know, or to know certain specific things, whatever our experience, we might not actually acquire knowledge. According to the second, we will inevitably acquire knowledge, or come to know certain specific things, whatever our experience. As we've seen, one can be an innatist of these broad types not only about knowledge but also about belief and concepts.

<sup>56</sup> For some of the considerations just canvassed, see Sedley, 'Stoic Physics and Metaphysics', in *CHHP*, 382–411, at 401.

We've seen that Plato is often taken to favor cognitive-condition innatism about knowledge (and so about belief and concepts). However, I argued in Chapter 5 that, though he posits prenatal knowledge, he doesn't posit innate knowledge (or beliefs or concepts) of any of the three varieties I've distinguished. What he says is compatible with weak dispositional innatism; but he is not committed to it. By contrast, if he accepts the sort of accessibility condition on knowledge that I ascribed to him, he would seem to reject cognitive-condition and content innatism for knowledge. Since he doesn't think we all acquire knowledge, let alone knowledge of specific truths, he also seems to reject strong dispositional innatism for knowledge. Aristotle, we saw, posits innate dispositions. But the innate dispositions he posits are general rather than highly specific. For example, he seems to think that, though we have an innate disposition to know language, we don't have an innate disposition to know Greek. Nor does he clearly accord the innate disposition of knowledge the sort of explanatory role he would need to accord it in order for him to be classified as an innate dispositionalist about knowledge. Epicurus isn't committed to any of the sorts of innatism we've described; indeed, he may reject all of them.

What, however, about the Stoics? We've seen that Aetius says that all prolepses are acquired by experience over time. This seems to suggest that no prolepses are innate. However, other evidence seems to suggest that at least some prolepses are innate. Epictetus, for example, says that:<sup>57</sup>

We do not come into being with a natural concept (*phusei ennoian*) of a right-angled triangle, or a half-tone musical interval, but are taught each of these by some technical or systematic instruction, and so those who do not know them do not even think that they know them. Who, on the other hand, has not come into being with an inborn concept (*emphuton ennoian*) of good and bad, fine and base, appropriate and inappropriate, of happiness, of what is proper and what is one's fate, and of what one ought and ought not to do? (*Diss.* 2.11.2-4)<sup>58</sup>

Here, moral concepts are said to be *emphutotai*. As we've seen, *emphutos* can mean 'innate'; but it can also mean 'natural' in a sense that doesn't imply innateness.

<sup>57</sup> Epictetus seems to be thinking of the *Meno*. Perhaps he thinks that Plato takes the slave to have an innate idea of triangle, and he (Epictetus) rejects that view; in his view, we learn about triangles for the very first time in this life. However, he agrees with Plato (as he interprets Plato) in positing innate moral notions. Cf. Scott, *RE*, 161. Though the passage quoted in the text mentions just *ennoiai*, Epictetus goes on to make it clear that these are prolepses.

<sup>58</sup> ὀρθογωνίου μὲν γὰρ τριγώνου ἡ διέσεως ἡμιτονίου οὐδεμίαν φύσει ἔννοιαν ἤκομεν ἔχοντες, ἀλλ' ἐκ τινος τεχνικῆς παραλήψεως διδασκόμεθα ἕκαστον αὐτῶν καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οἱ μὴ εἰδότες αὐτὰ οὐδ' οἶονται εἰδέναι. ἀγαθοῦ δὲ καὶ κακοῦ καὶ καλοῦ καὶ αἰσχροῦ καὶ πρέποντος καὶ ἀπρεποῦς καὶ εὐδαιμονίας καὶ προσήκοντος καὶ ἐπιβάλλοντος καὶ ὃ τι δεῖ ποιῆσαι καὶ ὃ τι οὐ δεῖ ποιῆσαι τίς οὐκ ἔχων ἐμφυτον ἔννοιαν ἐλήλυθεν;

I'm inclined to think it means 'natural' here. For it is used interchangeably with 'natural' (*phusei*) a few lines earlier, where being natural contrasts with being technical or acquired by instruction. Nonetheless, innateness is at issue. For Epictetus says that, though we don't 'come into being' with either technical concepts or concepts whose acquisition requires instruction, we do come into being with moral concepts. If we come into being with them, they seem to be innate; and that seems to be inconsistent with Aetius' report.

There are various ways of dealing with this seemingly conflicting evidence. First, one might say that the evidence does indeed conflict. If it does, we might or might not have grounds for rejecting some of it as inaccurate. Secondly, we might attribute the difference to developments within Stoicism: Aetius correctly describes the early Stoic view, which eschews innatism; but later Stoics such as Epictetus embrace it, at least for moral notions.<sup>59</sup> Thirdly, we might distinguish among varieties of innatism and argue that, although the early Stoics reject some varieties of innatism, they, as well as later Stoics such as Epictetus, accept a sort of innatism that is compatible with Aetius' report.

## 8. Innatism and the early Stoics

Let's look first at the third view, which is defended by Dominic Scott.<sup>60</sup> He argues that none of the Stoics is a cognitive-condition or content innatist. But he thinks that both early and later Stoics are dispositional innatists, though only for moral notions.<sup>61</sup> And, in his view, that's compatible with the Aetius passage

<sup>59</sup> This second view is endorsed by A. A. Long, in his *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002). I discuss his view in sect. 9. Seneca is another late Stoic who has been thought to endorse some form of innatism; see e.g. *Ep. Mor.* 120.

<sup>60</sup> See *RE*, Ch. 8; and 'Innatism'. For a similar view, see M. Jackson-McCabe, 'The Stoic Theory of Implanted Preconceptions', *Phronesis* 49 (2004), 323–47; and H. Dyson, *Prolêpsis and Ennoia in the Early Stoa* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009). For an earlier, classic discussion of these issues, see F. H. Sandbach, 'Ennoia and Prolêpsis', in A. A. Long (ed.), *Problems in Stoicism*, 22–37; an earlier version appeared in *Classical Quarterly* 24 (1930), 44–51.

<sup>61</sup> Scott uses the label 'dispositional innatism' (e.g. 'Innatism', 131); he doesn't use either 'content innatism' or 'cognitive-condition innatism'. I'm not sure whether he thinks the Stoics are weak or strong dispositional innatists. Sometimes he seems to favor strong dispositional innatism, as in the following passage: 'you will find people forming these notions *whatever their experience*' ('Innatism', 139; emphasis added). However, he also says that 'if we have *aphormai* towards virtue given by nature, then, *so long as there is no interference from our particular environment or associates*, we shall behave in accordance with virtue' (143; emphasis added). This is weak dispositional innatism. Other passages are neutral, e.g.: 'we are disposed both to certain patterns of behaviour, and hence the formation of certain ethical ideas and beliefs' (145). Although, in discussing the Stoics, Scott tends to speak of innate ideas and beliefs, he seems to think they favor the view that we are innately disposed to acquire—not just certain ideas or beliefs—but knowledge (in some sense of the term) of specific truths. Whether or not that's his view, it will be worth our while to ask whether it is the Stoics' view.

cited above. He also cites three passages that he thinks suggest that the early Stoics are dispositional innatists, though only for moral notions. I discuss these passages shortly.

I'm not sure whether the Aetius passage is consistent with dispositional innatism. Whether it is depends on exactly how we interpret the writing-tablet (or papyrus) metaphor. Leibniz, for one, takes it to be incompatible even with dispositional innatism.<sup>62</sup> However, one might argue that writing tablets (or pieces of papyri) have properties that allow them to be written on; and one might take that to be compatible with weak dispositional innatism. But presumably a blank writing tablet (or piece of papyrus) isn't structured so as to receive certain specific messages rather than others; so the metaphor at least doesn't express strong dispositional innatism. If, as is possible but not certain, Aetius' account is incompatible even with dispositional innatism, whereas other evidence implies that early Stoics are dispositional innatists of some sort, then the evidence is inconsistent: that is the first solution mentioned in the last section. We would then need to decide what evidence is more reliable.

But let's now leave Aetius to one side, and turn to the passages Scott cites as evidence that the early Stoics are dispositional innatists, though only for moral notions. He appeals to two passages in Plutarch (*Common Conceptions* 1070b–c; and *Stoic Self-Contradictions* 1041e–1042a) and to one passage in Diogenes (DL 7.53).

Here is the first Plutarch passage:<sup>63</sup>

Has there ever been another argument that does greater outrage to common experience... and this too in matters concerning good and bad things, and objects of choice and avoidance, and things congenial and repugnant, the clarity of which ought to be clearer than that of things hot and cold, or white and black, since the appearances of these are

Leibniz is also sympathetic to the view that the Stoics are dispositional innatists, though he doesn't say that they restrict the view to moral notions. In the Preface to the *New Essays*, 48–9, he contrasts the view that, at birth, 'the soul in itself is completely empty like tablets which nothing has been written on' with the view that 'the soul inherently contains the sources (*principes*) of various notions and doctrines, which external objects merely rouse up on suitable occasions, as I believe and as do Plato and even the Schoolmen... The Stoics call these sources *prolepses*, that is, fundamental assumptions, or what is taken as agreed in advance' (trans. Remnant and Bennett, slightly modified). Unlike Aetius, Leibniz doesn't associate the first view with the Stoics, though he thinks Aristotle favors it (see Ch. 6, n. 117). Leibniz takes Plato to favor the same view as the Stoics. Scott, by contrast, argues that Plato favors cognitive-condition innatism and for more than moral notions, whereas, in his view, the Stoics favor just dispositional innatism and only for moral notions. The Leibniz passage is also cited by Scott, *RE*, 223.

<sup>62</sup> See previous note.

<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately, the text is corrupt at the crucial point; see Cherniss's note *ad loc.*

incidental to the perceptions entering from without, whereas the former come to be connaturally from principles within us. (trans. Scott)<sup>64</sup>

Here, moral proleptses are distinguished from appearances of hot and cold, and white and black. The latter come from ‘without’; that is, we have to perceive hot and cold, and white and black, things in order to acquire appearances, and so concepts and proleptses, of them. Not only do they come from without, but also, it seems, they are incidental to what exists externally—which perhaps suggests that not everything that comes from without is like hot and cold, or white and black. Be that as it may, moral proleptses are said to come to be connaturally from principles within us. It’s not clear what these principles are. But it’s reasonable to connect them with the process of conciliation (*oikeiôsis*) and the starting points (*aphormai*) of virtue. This, however, replaces one problem with another; for there is considerable dispute about both conciliation and starting points.<sup>65</sup>

If moral proleptses come to be, they are not literally innate. But the passage may imply some form of dispositional innatism. For the idea seems to be that we are naturally constituted so as to acquire moral proleptses, no matter what our perceptual experiences may be.<sup>66</sup> However, even if the passage implies dispositional innatism, I don’t think we can infer that it restricts the view to moral notions. For even if it implies that moral notions are dispositionally innate, whereas notions of hot and cold, and white and black, are not, it doesn’t say which side of the divide various other notions belong on. For all it says, some non-moral notions might also come to be connaturally from principles within us; or they might be dispositionally innate for other reasons. Perhaps, for example, proleptses of inference or of causation also arise connaturally from principles

<sup>64</sup> γέγονε δ’ ἕτερος λόγος ὅφ’ οὐ μᾶλλον ἢ συνήθεια παρανεόμῃται...καὶ ταῦτ’ ἐν τοῖς περὶ ἀγαθῶν καὶ κακῶν αἰρετῶν τε καὶ φευκτῶν οἰκείων τε καὶ ἀλλοτριῶν, ἃ μᾶλλον ἔδει θερμῶν [τε] καὶ ψυχρῶν λευκῶν τε καὶ μελάνων σαφεστέραν ἔχειν τὴν ἐνάργειαν· ἐκείνων μὲν γὰρ ἔξωθέν εἰσιν αἱ φαντασίαι ταῖς αἰσθήσεσιν ἐπεισώδιοι, ταῦτα δ’ ἐκ τῶν ἀρχῶν τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν σύμφυτον ἔχει τὴν γένεσιν.

<sup>65</sup> For a classic discussion, see B. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>66</sup> However, it’s worth noting that the passage doesn’t explicitly say that the principles are innate. If they aren’t, it’s less clear that we have an innate disposition to acquire moral proleptses. Even if they are innate, one might argue that they fall short of being dispositions, or at any rate fall short of being dispositions to acquire moral proleptses. According to J. Sellars, the Stoics’ claim ‘that if we are left to our own devices then we shall naturally tend towards virtue may be understood as a claim presupposing the existence of either (a) innate moral concepts or (b) an innate moral tendency. Alternatively it might presuppose (c) the claim that, although born without any innate moral concepts or tendency, the natural course of events after birth will inevitably lead to the formation of an inclination towards virtue’ (*Stoicism* (Chesham, Bucks: Acumen, 2006), 77). He goes on to reject (a), but finds it difficult to choose between (b) and (c). (b) corresponds to dispositional innatism; but (c) falls short of it. Cf. C. Brittain, ‘Antiochus’ Epistemology’, in D. Sedley (ed.), *The Philosophy of Antiochus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 104–30, at 123–30.

within us.<sup>67</sup> The passage doesn't imply that this is so; but neither does it imply that it isn't. If, however, as it seems reasonable to think, the passage implies that we are innately predisposed to acquire certain specific proleptses (whether just moral ones or further ones as well), it posits a more specific innate disposition than the generalized disposition to tend to the truth that Aristotle posits.

Here it is relevant to recall that, as noted above, the Stoics sometimes speak of common conceptions and proleptses. These (or at least the common proleptses, if those are distinct from common conceptions) seem to be a subclass of proleptses. It may be that everyone, or everyone normal, who reaches the age of reason acquires them: that's why they are common, because everyone, or everyone normal, acquires them. Perhaps we are guaranteed to acquire them because they arise from our nature. By contrast, what further proleptses we acquire depends on the particular circumstances we grow up in. Someone who grows up in an environment with horses will naturally acquire a prolepsis of horse; but someone who doesn't grow up in such an environment will not do so. Common conceptions that are proleptses seem to include moral notions; but, as we've seen, it's not clear that they are restricted to them. Perhaps common conceptions that are proleptses are dispositionally innate, whereas other proleptses are not, though they are still natural in a broader sense of the term.<sup>68</sup>

In the second passage that Scott appeals to, Plutarch says that Chrysippus says that:

the doctrine of good and bad things proposed and approved by himself is most consistent with life and most closely coincides with the inborn proleptses (*emphutôn prolêpseôn*).<sup>69</sup>

If, with Scott, we take *emphutos* to mean 'innate' here, it would seem that Chrysippus posits innate proleptses, not just innate dispositions to acquire proleptses; or perhaps he takes proleptses to be innate because he identifies them with

<sup>67</sup> Epictetus, *Diss.* 1.6.12–15, contrasts humans with animals by saying that the former, but not the latter, understand, or follow (*parakalouthēin*), i.e. follow arguments in the sense of understanding when one thing follows from another. If this is part of what our rationality consists in, perhaps there's a prolepsis of following, one we acquire not from perception but because of internal principles. Cf. Sextus, *M* 8.275–6.

<sup>68</sup> On common conceptions, see sect. 4. By contrast, it's not clear that the Epicureans posit common conceptions, that is, conceptions everyone, or everyone normal, is guaranteed to acquire in virtue of being rational. If the Stoics single out a special class of proleptses that we are guaranteed to have in virtue of our nature and that partly constitute our rationality, that seems to go beyond the Epicureans. In at least this respect, they don't take over the Epicurean doctrine of proleptses 'virtually lock, stock, and barrel' (Schofield, 'Preconception, Argument, and God', 293). Rather, they modify it in various ways (though 'virtually' leaves room for that).

<sup>69</sup> τὸν περὶ ἀγαθῶν καὶ κακῶν λόγον, ὃν αὐτὸς εἰσάγει καὶ δοκιμάζει, συμφωνότατον εἶναί φησι τῷ βίῳ καὶ μάλιστα τῶν ἐμφύτων ἁπτεσθαι προλήψεων.

dispositions, and takes dispositions to be innate.<sup>70</sup> Alternatively, perhaps Plutarch speaks of *emphutoi prolêpseis* as shorthand for the view that we have an innate disposition to acquire proleptses.

But it's not clear that Plutarch takes Chrysippus to think either that we are innately disposed to acquire moral proleptses or that proleptses are innate in virtue of being identical to innate dispositions. Another possibility is that *emphutos* means 'natural', rather than 'innate', here.<sup>71</sup> In favor of this view is the fact that nothing in the context requires it to mean 'innate', whereas all proleptses are natural (in whatever sense Diogenes has in mind in 7.54). If Chrysippus were singling out just moral proleptses, we would expect the word to be used more narrowly than that here. Further, though he mentions just moral proleptses, it's not clear that he means to imply that only they are *emphutoi*. His point seems to be that Stoic views about good and bad fit with the proleptses of good and bad. But since the Stoics take their views about good and bad to be true, that's hardly surprising. By the same token, they think their views about the soul, or fate, most closely coincide with proleptses. So, while the passage can be read as espousing dispositional innatism, it can also be read as saying just that proleptses are natural in a way that falls short of making them dispositionally innate. Nor does the point Plutarch ascribes to Chrysippus seem to be restricted to moral proleptses.

The third passage Scott discusses is DL 7.53:

It is by confrontation that we form notions of sense-objects. By similarity of things based on thoughts of something related, like Socrates on the basis of a picture. By analogy sometimes by magnification, as in the case of Tityus and the Cyclops, sometimes by diminution, as in the case of the Pygmy; also the idea of the centre of the earth arose by analogy on the basis of smaller spheres. By transposition, things like eyes on the chest. By combination, Hippocentaur. By opposition, death. Some things are conceived by transition, such as sayables and place. The idea of something just and good is acquired naturally. That of being without hands, for instance, by privation. (trans. Scott)<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup> This last view is favored by T. H. Irwin, in 'Stoic and Aristotelian Conceptions of Happiness', in M. Schofield and G. Striker (eds.), *The Norms of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 205–44, at 208–9; he cites *Stoic Self-Contradictions* 1041e–f and *Common Conceptions* 1060a.

<sup>71</sup> Sandbach, 'Ennoia and Prolêpsis', 28, cites passages in which the word means 'part of one's nature', where, as he thinks, innateness is not implied. However, he adds that 'it is difficult to feel confident that Chrysippus did not mean "inborn" when he wrote the word. But if he did, it was only a temporary aberration'. Cherniss, note *ad loc.*, thinks *emphutos* here means 'inbred', and not 'innate'; he doesn't express any misgivings, but just cites Sandbach, among others. Nor does he say exactly what being inbred means, if it falls short even of dispositional innatism.

<sup>72</sup> Κατὰ περίπτωσιν μὲν οὖν ἐνοήθη τὰ αἰσθητά· καθ' ὁμοιότητα δὲ τὰ ἀπό τινος παρακειμένου, ὡς Σωκράτης ἀπὸ τῆς εἰκόνης· κατ' ἀναλογίαν δὲ αὐξητικῶς μὲν, <ὡς> ὁ Τιτυὸς καὶ Κύκλωφ· μειωτικῶς δέ, ὡς ὁ Πυγμαῖος· καὶ τὸ κέντρον δὲ τῆς γῆς κατ' ἀναλογίαν ἐνοήθη ἀπὸ τῶν μικροτέρων σφαιρῶν· κατὰ μετάθεσιν δέ, οἷον ὀφθαλμοὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ στήθους· κατὰ σύνθεσιν δὲ ἐνοήθη Ἱπποκένταυρος· καὶ κατ' ἐναντίωσιν θάνατος· νοεῖται δὲ καὶ κατὰ μετάβασιν τινα, ὡς τὰ λεκτὰ καὶ ὁ τόπος· φυσικῶς δὲ νοεῖται δίκαιόν τι καὶ ἀγαθόν· καὶ κατὰ στέρησιν, οἷον ἄχειρ.



Diogenes says that, according to the Stoics, we acquire concepts of sensible things from confrontation, whereas we acquire concepts of justice and good naturally. Clearly not all the concepts he mentions are prolepses; for example, he explains how we acquire the concept of Cyclops by magnification. But there are prolepses of just and good, and of such sensible things as colors (Aetius, we saw, mentions whiteness). Yet DL 7.53 mentions naturalness only in connection with the concepts of just and good. Given that DL 7.54 takes all prolepses to be natural, one might think that 7.53 has in mind a narrower notion of being natural, one that applies just to moral prolepses. Perhaps this narrower notion involves our nature; the point is that moral prolepses, but not other ones, are intrinsic to our nature and hence are dispositionally innate. This is Scott's interpretation.

The passage is compatible with this interpretation but I'm not sure that it requires it. First, even if it implies that moral prolepses are dispositionally innate, it doesn't clearly imply that *only* they are dispositionally innate. Perhaps, as I suggested in connection with the first passage, various other prolepses also arise from something intrinsic to our nature. Secondly, it's not entirely clear that Diogenes is singling out a special class of prolepses that are acquired naturally, in a narrow sense of the term. An alternative is that the sensibles he mentions are particulars that don't have their own prolepses, though there are concepts of them. If this is right, we need not invoke a narrower notion of 'natural' in 7.53 than the one at issue in 7.54. If so, then either all prolepses are dispositionally innate, in virtue of being natural in the same way, or none of them is or, at least, that they are can't be inferred from 7.53–4.

The passages Scott cites can, then, be read as positing dispositional innatism. But I'm not sure the passages require that reading, though the first one (perhaps in contrast to the second and third passages) strongly suggests it. Whatever reading we favor in the end, it's not clear that moral prolepses are being singled out; the passages leave open the possibility that, if they are dispositionally innate, so too are further prolepses, though it's not clear that all of them are.

If the early Stoics favor dispositional innatism just for moral prolepses (though I have challenged that view), they don't do so in order to solve Meno's Paradox (nor does Scott suggest otherwise). For they solve the paradox by appealing to prolepses as such. If they take just moral prolepses to be dispositionally innate, their reasons stem, not from Meno's Paradox, but from special features of their ethical theory. Even if the Stoics take a broader range of, or all, prolepses to be dispositionally innate, it's not clear that it's that fact about them that makes them a suitable response to Meno's Paradox. Rather, it's the fact that we all have prolepses that are guaranteed to be nonaccidentally true that does so. One might think that the whole point of taking them to be dispositionally innate is to secure

their reliability. But the fact that something is innate doesn't by itself guarantee truth or reliability. To be sure, the Stoics think that nature is beneficent; we are so designed that what is natural in the appropriate way is guaranteed to be true and reliable. But then it's their view about the beneficence of nature that does the work, not innatism as such. Even if we acquire proleptses, and don't have an innate disposition to acquire them, still, so long as nature guarantees—by whatever means—that everyone normal will acquire a certain range of them, they can be relied on.

## 9. Epictetus and innatism

Having looked at the early Stoics, let's now turn to Epictetus. Though Scott argues that both the early Stoics and Epictetus accept dispositional innatism, though just for moral proleptses, and eschew cognitive-condition and content innatism across the board, A. A. Long thinks Epictetus favors a distinctive form of innatism—at least, one that is distinctive among the Stoics.<sup>73</sup> As he puts it, '[t]he criterial role and natural origin of preconceptions goes back to early Stoicism, but Epictetus was probably alone in making them equivalent to an *innate* moral sense'.<sup>74</sup> He therefore favors a chronological solution to the seemingly conflicting evidence: Epictetus favors innatism; earlier Stoics don't do so.<sup>75</sup>

What sort of innatism does Long think Epictetus favors? In the passage just cited, he says that Epictetus posits an innate moral sense; he also identifies proleptses with that moral sense. Moral proleptses are therefore literally innate, because they are identical to an innate moral sense.

Yet he also says that Epictetus' 'essential point is that everyone is *innately* equipped with a moral sense, or rather with a shared stock of general concepts that furnish the basic capacity for making objective discriminations between good and bad, and so on'.<sup>76</sup> The first part of this passage says that, according to Epictetus, we have an innate moral sense. But then Long seems to revise this suggestion, saying 'or rather' we have a 'shared stock of general concepts'. This makes it sound as though concepts are innate; and that might suggest that he

<sup>73</sup> Sandbach, 'Ennoia and Prolépsis', 29, also suggests that Epictetus posits innate proleptses; since he doesn't think earlier Stoics do so, he, like Long, thinks Epictetus has a novel view, at least among the Stoics. However, he doesn't spell out exactly what he thinks is involved in positing innate proleptses.

<sup>74</sup> *Epictetus*, 83. As we shall see, Long means that Epictetus is unique among the Stoics, not that he is unique *tout court*.

<sup>75</sup> However, he doesn't discuss the early Stoics. As we shall see, Long and Scott agree that Epictetus is a dispositional innatist just for moral notions. Their disagreement is about whether that's also true of the early Stoics; Scott but not Long thinks they are.

<sup>76</sup> *Epictetus*, 80.

takes Epictetus to favor at least content innatism. If that's his view, then he interprets Epictetus differently from Scott, and in a way that makes Epictetus' view incompatible with Aetius' account. This result might not be unwelcome to Long. After all, he thinks Epictetus has a unique view among the Stoics; and Epictetus would have a unique view among them if he favored content innatism.

However, Long goes on to say that 'in claiming that these preconceptions are "innate", his [Epictetus'] point is not that newborn infants are fully equipped with them but that our basic evaluative and moral propensities are hardwired and genetically programmed, as we would say today: they are not, in their general content, a cultural accretion'.<sup>77</sup> This might be taken to suggest, not that prolepses are themselves innate, but that propensities are innate. And that, in turn, might be taken to express dispositional innatism: the prolepses aren't themselves innate; what's innate is a propensity to acquire them, and to do so naturally, not because of the culture we happen to live in. If that's his interpretation of Epictetus, then he agrees with Scott that Epictetus favors just dispositional innatism, and only for moral notions. But they would disagree in that Long thinks that only Epictetus, among the Stoics, holds this view, whereas Scott thinks the early Stoics also hold it.

But, having said this, Long goes on to speak of the "innate" content' of prolepses;<sup>78</sup> this again suggests that concepts are innate in the content sense, not just dispositionally. But perhaps he uses this as a shorthand way of saying that the dispositions are innate. That this is his view is perhaps suggested by the fact that he puts 'innate' in scare quotes. However, the fact that he speaks of 'content' might suggest that he attributes content innatism to Epictetus.

Long also suggests that Epictetus' views on prolepses are similar to those that Vlastos thinks Socrates holds in the *Gorgias* on the role of true beliefs in inquiry.<sup>79</sup> According to Long, Vlastos thinks Socrates posits innate true beliefs, where that seems to involve at least content innatism.<sup>80</sup> This suggests that Long takes Epictetus to posit innate moral true beliefs, at least in the content sense.<sup>81</sup> However, he then says that both Epictetus and Socrates 'are optimistic rationalists in the following sense: they assume, first, that human beings are naturally lovers of truth and consistency, and secondly, that they possess the mental and moral resources that, when brought to light and properly articulated, can cause

<sup>77</sup> *Epictetus*, 81–2. <sup>78</sup> *Epictetus*, 82.

<sup>79</sup> See G. Vlastos, 'The Socratic Elenchus'. I won't ask here either whether Vlastos interprets the *Gorgias* correctly or whether Long interprets Vlastos correctly. For an anticipation of something like Vlastos' interpretation, see Olympiodorus' commentary on the *Gorgias* at e.g. 3.2, 38.3, 39.6.

<sup>80</sup> *Epictetus*, 82–3.

<sup>81</sup> *Epictetus*, 82, speaks both of knowledge and of true belief.

them to abandon their false and inconsistent beliefs' (83).<sup>82</sup> This falls short of dispositional innatism, if we take that view to involve being predisposed to believe, or to know, certain specific truths. But perhaps it amounts to dispositional innatism if it's sufficient for being a dispositional innatist that one think we are predisposed to acquire knowledge (or beliefs). But earlier Stoics also seem to accept this view.<sup>83</sup>

Let us now take stock. First, the Stoics don't favor content or, therefore, cognitive-condition, innatism. Nor is it clear that they favor dispositional innatism either as such or just for moral prolepses (or for a broader category though not for all prolepses), though it's difficult to be sure about this, one way or the other. A case can be made for saying they are dispositional innatists in some sense of the term; but the case is not decisive. Secondly, if they favor dispositional innatism just for moral notions (or even for a wider category, though not for all prolepses), that's not part of their reply to Meno's paradox. For their reply appeals to prolepses as such, not just to some prolepses. Thirdly, even if they favor dispositional innatism for prolepses across the board (though I don't think they do so: some, even if not all, are acquired solely through experience), it's not innatism as such that does the work of ensuring that prolepses are true and reliable; rather, it's the fact that nature is beneficent, and so ensures that everyone normal who reaches a certain age will have a certain range of prolepses, which are guaranteed to be true. That view can be defended without invoking innatism. And indeed, it's the having of such prolepses, rather than their being dispositionally innate (if they are), that is relevant to answering Meno's Paradox.

Just as the Stoics reject innatism (at least in the content and cognitive-condition senses), so they—unlike Plato, but like Aristotle and the Epicureans—eschew prenatal knowledge. According to Eusebius:<sup>84</sup>

They [the Stoics] say that the soul is subject to generation and destruction.

And Plutarch says:

As proof of the fact that the soul is engendered, and engendered after the body, Chrysippus chiefly uses the fact that children resemble their parents in temperament and character. (Plutarch, *Stoic Self-Contradictions* 1053d = LS 53C).

<sup>82</sup> If this is supposed to be true in general, not just in the moral sphere, then it seems that Epictetus' innatism would extend beyond the moral sphere.

<sup>83</sup> Unless we wish to say that they think we come into being with something less than a *disposition* for these things. See n. 66.

<sup>84</sup> Eusebius, *Evangelical Preparation* 15.20.6 = LS 53W. However, he goes on to allow survival for at least some time.

If the soul is engendered after the body, it doesn't pre-exist. Hence the issue of prenatal knowledge doesn't arise.

However, this argument may be too quick. For the Stoics accept some version of the doctrine of the 'eternal return'; and, on some accounts of it, each of us has pre-existed.<sup>85</sup> Even if we did so, however, the evidence doesn't suggest that the Stoics appeal to this view to explain the possibility of inquiry.

If prolepses aren't innate in the content or cognitive-condition sense, and if we didn't exist prenatally, then the Stoics don't reply to Meno's Paradox either by positing content or cognitive-condition innatism or by appealing to our prenatal condition. In this respect, they agree with Aristotle and the Epicureans. They also partly agree with Plato, insofar as, though he posits prenatal knowledge, he doesn't posit either content or cognitive-condition innatism. However, the Stoics may well favor dispositional innatism, and indeed think that we are predisposed to acquire, not just some S-knowledge or other, but prolepses in particular. If so, they go beyond Plato and Aristotle. For they favor at most a more generic version of dispositional innatism. However, we've seen that it's not clear that they are committed even to such a version of innatism about knowledge; nor do the Epicureans seem to be. It's sometimes thought that the Stoics weaken Plato's version of innatism from cognitive-condition innatism to dispositional innatism. However, on the view defended here, they may be committed to a stronger version of innatism than Plato is in the *Meno*. For Plato isn't clearly committed to any version of innatism, whereas the Stoics may well accept some version.

## 10. Prolepses and inquiry

Now that we've looked at Stoic prolepses in general terms, let's consider their role in inquiry. The Stoics, like the other philosophers we've looked at, think that inquiry is possible; hence they too reject the conclusion of Meno's Paradox. So we need to know what inference or premise (or inferences or premises) they reject.

<sup>85</sup> See the passages collected in LS 52. There is dispute about how to interpret the doctrine. On one view, numerically the same 'I' pre-existed. On another view, only someone qualitatively identical to, or very like, me pre-existed. It's difficult to see how the latter view could give me memories that would enable me to inquire in this life. But even if the Stoics accept the first view, they don't appeal to it in explaining the possibility of inquiry. For discussion of the question of in what if any sense 'I' pre-existed, see LS, commentary on section 52; R. Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), esp. chs. 3 and 4; and J. Barnes, 'The Same Again: the Stoics and Eternal Recurrence', in his *Method and Metaphysics*, 412–28 (originally published in J. Brunschwig (ed.), *Les Stoïciens et leur logique* (Paris: Vrin, 1978), 3–20).

Before addressing that issue, we should recall that, as we noted in Chapter 1, they take the goal of inquiry to be discovery, or apprehension, of the truth. As Cicero says in the *Academica*, the Stoics think that:<sup>86</sup>

reason provides the starting point for inquiry; and reason achieves virtue when it has strengthened itself by inquiry. Inquiry is the impulse for cognition, and its aim is discovery. But no one discovers what is false, nor can something that remains unclear be a discovery. Rather, it is when something that had been veiled (so to speak) has been revealed that it is called a discovery (2.26).<sup>87</sup>

So according to Cicero, the Stoics think that the starting point of inquiry is reason and that the aim of inquiry is discovery of the truth or, more precisely, cognition—that is, apprehension—of the truth. As we saw in section 1, in *Acad.* 2.21 Cicero says that, for the Stoics, having prolepses is necessary for inquiry. What he says in 2.26 about the starting point of inquiry is another way of making the same point. For, as we've seen, the Stoics think that having reason consists in having a set of concepts and prolepses. We can inquire only once we reach the age of reason, and hence only after we acquire a certain range of concepts and prolepses. As we've seen, Plutarch also says that the Stoics think that we need prolepses in order to inquire and to discover.

But exactly how is this supposed to work? We can consider three sorts of Stoic inquiry, which correspond to the three sorts we considered in looking at Epicurus. In the first, we attempt to identify our prolepses as such. In the second, we apply our prolepses to particular cases. We might wonder, for example, whether Socrates, or a given action, is just. To help us decide about this, we appeal to prolepses. Epictetus discusses this sort of inquiry at length. He says, for example, that:<sup>88</sup>

Prolepses are common to all people, and one prolepsis does not conflict with another. For which of us does not take it that a good thing is advantageous and choiceworthy, and something to be sought and pursued in every circumstance? Which of us does not take it that justice is something honorable and fitting? When, then, does conflict occur? In the application of prolepses to particular instances, as when someone says: 'He acted in a fine way; he is courageous', but someone else retorts 'No, he's crazy'. (*Diss.* 1.22.1–3, trans. Long, modestly revised)

<sup>86</sup> With the reference to being veiled, cf. Plutarch's mention of the Demaratus analogy in 215d (see Chapter 9, sect. 2).

<sup>87</sup> nam quaerendi initium ratio attulit, quae perfecit virtutem, cum esset ipsa ratio confirmata quaerendo; quaestio autem est adpetitio cognitionis quaestionisque finis inventio; at nemo invenit falsa, nec ea quae incerta permanent inventa esse possunt, sed cum ea quae quasi involuta ante fuerunt aperta sunt, tum inventa dicuntur.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. *Diss.* 4.1.44–5.

In the third sort of inquiry, we use a prolepsis as the basis for discovering a definition; this is the process of articulation. In the first book of *On the Gods*, for example, Antipater says:<sup>89</sup>

Prior to our whole discourse (*logos*), we can briefly call to mind the clear evidence (*enargeian*) (alt: *ennoian*)<sup>90</sup> that we have about god. Well, we conceive (*nooumen*) of god as a blessed imperishable animal that is beneficent to men. (Plutarch, *Stoic Self-Contradictions* 1051e–f)

This is the prolepsis of god, which we use in order to discover the definition of god, which is perhaps.<sup>91</sup>

God is an immortal rational animal, perfect or noetic in happiness, un-receptive of any evil, and providential of both the cosmos and the things in it. (DL 7.147)

Let's look at this third sort of inquiry in more detail. In the case just described, I've correctly identified the content of my prolepsis of god, and I use it as a basis for trying to discover the definition of god. The content of the prolepsis differs from the content of the definition. Hence, in this third sort of inquiry, the Stoics aren't committed to a general matching version of a foreknowledge principle for propositional inquiry.<sup>92</sup> But one might think they accept a matching version of a foreknowledge principle for objectual inquiry. For one begins with a prolepsis of god and tries to find a definition of god. So it seems that one begins with some knowledge of god, and uses it to gain further knowledge of the same thing. There are, however, two reasons to hesitate about ascribing this view to the Stoics.

First, as we've seen, we should be careful about saying that they require *knowledge* for inquiry. They require prolepses; but having prolepses doesn't confer knowledge as Plato understands it. To be sure, having prolepses confers S-knowledge.<sup>93</sup> Hence it might seem to do no harm, and even seems right, to say that the Stoics require knowledge (as they conceive of it) for inquiry. However, insofar as we want to compare the Stoics' account with Plato's, it is misleading to say that they

<sup>89</sup> My account of Antipater follows Brittain, 'Common Sense', 180ff. Cf. Sandbach, 'Ennoia and Prolêpsis', 25; Schofield, 'Preconception, Argument, and God', 291–305.

<sup>90</sup> *ennoian* is a conjecture of Wyttienbach's, adopted by Pohlenz and von Arnim. However, the MSS have *enargeian*, which Cherniss favors in his Loeb edition. Whether we read *ennoian* or *enargeian*, it seems clear that a prolepsis is at issue.

<sup>91</sup> As Brittain explains ('Common Sense', 180–1 and n. 64), it's not clear that Antipater takes this to be the final definition. But that shouldn't obscure the crucial point, which is that in one sort of inquiry, one uses prolepses in order to discover definitions.

<sup>92</sup> But see n. 38.

<sup>93</sup> At least, that's so on my account, on which all apprehension counts as S-knowledge. However, if we say instead that S-knowledge is restricted to *epistêmê* as the Stoics conceive of it, then prolepses do not confer S-knowledge; for, again, everyone normal who has reached the age of reason has some prolepses, but only the Sage has *epistêmê*.

require knowledge for inquiry. For, as we've seen, when commentators say that Plato requires knowledge for inquiry, they mean, or should mean, that he requires P-knowledge. That's not what the Stoics require. Nor, I've argued, do Plato, Aristotle, or the Epicureans require it (for us as we are in this life).

A second reason it is misleading to say that the Stoics accept a general matching version of a foreknowledge principle, whether for propositional or objectual inquiry, is that they posit a limited range of prolepses. There is, for example, a prolepsis of horse but not (let us assume) of table. Yet we can seek to move from an outline account of what a table is (where that isn't a prolepsis, but just a concept that falls short of being a prolepsis) to a fuller understanding of what a table is. The general point at issue here isn't restricted to the third sort of inquiry, but is true of Stoic inquiry as such: we need a concept of what we're inquiring into, to inquire into it; and we need a stock of prolepses to inquire at all. But we don't need a prolepsis of the very thing we are inquiring into.

We might think to say that the Stoics accept a restricted matching version of a prior-prolepsis principle: there are some things that we can inquire into only if we antecedently have prolepses of them. But it's not clear we should say this either. For their view is that we need some prolepses or other to inquire, not that we need this or that prolepsis in particular. For all they say, it might be possible for me to inquire whether *x* is *F*, when there is a prolepsis of *F*, even if I haven't acquired that prolepsis, so long as I have some suitable prolepses and also have concepts of *x* and *F*, even if those concepts aren't prolepses. The motivation for positing prolepses isn't that there are some things inquiry into which raises a special problem that requires a prolepsis. The motivation for positing prolepses is rather that we need a generally correct orientation onto the world.

Rather than saying that the Stoics accept a matching, or even a stepping-stone, version of a foreknowledge principle, we should say that, like the Epicureans, they accept just a stepping-stone version of a prior-prolepsis principle. According to it, we need some prolepses in order to inquire, though we don't need prolepses of the very things we are inquiring into, though we do need concepts of those things. Nor, again, do these prolepses or concepts confer P-knowledge or superior cognition.

The second sort of inquiry described above conforms to the pattern just described. To decide whether Socrates is just, I don't need a prolepsis either of Socrates or of Socrates' being just. Rather, I apply a general prolepsis to a particular case. Here too, then, the Stoics accept just a stepping-stone version of a prior-prolepsis principle. Nor, despite the example just given, does one need a prolepsis of *x* or of *F*, to decide whether *x* is *F*. For, again, one can inquire whether *x* is *F* even if there is no prolepsis of *x* or of *F*; one can inquire whether this is a



table, no less than whether this action or person is just. To inquire whether *x* is *F*, one needs some prolepses or other; and one needs a concept of *x* and of *F*. But the concepts need not be prolepses.

We haven't yet discussed the first sort of inquiry. In it, we attempt to discover which of our beliefs are prolepses. It might seem that here the Stoics accept a matching version of a prior-prolepsis principle. For I already have the prolepsis; all that happens is that I learn that it is a prolepsis. However, even here there is new information, namely, that *this* is a prolepsis. At least in that sense, one doesn't learn what one already knows; for one doesn't already know that this is a prolepsis, at least, not explicitly. One has a prolepsis of *x*; and having it confers *S*-knowledge of what *x* is. But it's one thing to know, or apprehend, if only unconsciously, what, say, a horse is, and another to have explicit conscious knowledge, or apprehension, about which of one's beliefs captures, at least in outline fashion, what it is to be a horse.

On the account I've suggested, the Stoics think that one can inquire into that which one doesn't know. For they think that one can use one's prolepsis of, for example, justice to decide whether a given action is just, which is something one doesn't know; and one can attempt to move from a prolepsis of *x* to a definition of *x*, which again is something one doesn't yet know. Brittain, however, may disagree with part of my account. He considers both the case of moving from a prolepsis to a definition and also the case of applying one's prolepses to particular cases. In his view:<sup>94</sup>

in either case, there doesn't seem to be any problem with solving Meno's dilemma by denying the first arm. For inquirers discover new information either by structuring their antecedent knowledge ('articulation') or by applying it to the world. In the first case, however, it is notable that there *is* a sense in which the inquirer already knows the conclusion: as Plutarch suggested, it is there potentially in the inquirer's set of preconceptions.

On the one hand, Brittain says that 'inquirers discover new information': so he seems to agree that we can use what we 'know' to inquire into that which we don't know. However, he also says that in the case of moving from a prolepsis to a definition, one in a sense already knows the conclusion, since 'it is there potentially'.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, we've seen that, according to Barnes, in *APo.* 1.1 Aristotle

<sup>94</sup> 'Common Sense', 182–3. I quoted part of this passage in Ch. 1, sect. 6. Here I provide a more detailed and nuanced account.

<sup>95</sup> Brittain suggests that he is agreeing with Plutarch. I consider Plutarch's account in the next chapter. Dyson argues that Plato and Chrysippus both solve Meno's Paradox by positing tacit knowledge of definitions (*Prolēpsis and Ennoia*, 73) or by positing what 'might alternately be described as potential, inarticulate, latent, or tacit knowledge of *X*' (75). Cf. xvii; xxix. It's not clear that these are all equivalent notions. See also the passage from Frede quoted in Ch. 1, sect. 6.

thinks that ‘in a sense [the learner] also knows the conclusion’: when one knows that every triangle has 2R, one thereby in a sense—potentially, if we think of 1.24—knows that this triangle has 2R.<sup>96</sup>

What exactly does Brittain mean in saying that the fact that we have prolepses implies that we in a sense already know the conclusion, since it is there potentially in the prolepsis? One possibility is that he thinks that the prolepsis implies the definition and that, if one knows that *p*, and *p* implies *q*, one thereby in a sense knows that *q*. It’s disputed whether, if one knows that *p*, and *p* implies *q*, one in a sense knows that *q*. Be that as it may, it’s not clear that outline accounts imply definitions. Here, however, it matters exactly what we take outline accounts to be. If, as I argued above, they need not always state definitions in outline fashion but can delimit the object of inquiry in other ways, then not all prolepses imply definitions. Even if they state the force of the definition in a summary fashion, it’s not clear that they imply definitions. Perhaps one way to convey the force of a definition in summary fashion is to capture part of the thing’s essence; and perhaps the way in which it does so doesn’t imply the whole essence. That would be so if, for example, the outline stated just the genus. Even if all outline accounts are summaries of full definitions, it’s not clear that they imply definitions: not all summaries imply every relevant detail.

There is, however, a weaker sense in which one might think to say that even if prolepses don’t imply full definitions, we know the latter potentially in virtue of having the former: if we have prolepses, we potentially know, i.e. can come to know, definitions. For if we have a prolepsis of *x*, we can set a target to aim at, and we have a reasonable chance of hitting it. If that’s what Brittain means, I agree with him. However, as we saw in looking at Aristotle, it’s not clear that this involves knowing the conclusion, or definition, in a way. Rather, it puts us in a good position to come to know it. Further, it’s worth noting that, in the case Aristotle describes, all we need to do, to learn the conclusion, is to realize that the figure in the semi-circle is a triangle. By contrast, moving from a prolepsis to a definition is a much more complicated affair. We might be correspondingly more reluctant to say that our grasp of a prolepsis means that we know the conclusion in a way.

## 11. Possible criticisms

The Stoics’ account of how prolepses are necessary for inquiry has not always met with favor. Nor is the account I’ve suggested of how prolepses are relevant to

<sup>96</sup> B1, 94–5. I discuss Barnes’s interpretation of *APo*. 1.1 in Ch. 6.

inquiry entirely uncontroversial. So let's look at some other accounts.<sup>97</sup> I begin by looking at some difficulties considered by Brittain, in his excellent paper, 'Common Sense', which I've often relied on above. He considers the Antipater case discussed above, in which one has correctly identified the content of one's prolepsis and uses it to discover a definition. He suggests that, in doing so, we acquire a new concept, what the Stoics call a technical thought (*technikê noêsis*, DL 7.51), whose content is a definition. But, he says:<sup>98</sup>

The problem is that we are supposed to hold onto our preconception, in order to use it not merely as a foundation for detailed knowledge, but also as a criterion or canon for confirming our developed understanding. This difficulty is more serious in the case of foolish inquirers, who fail to use their common conception as a criterion for their further beliefs, and thus end up as e.g. anti-providentialists. Such inquirers have clearly modified—i.e. *subtracted* an element from—their original concept, and hence, it seems, no longer have the preconception.

I'm not sure there's much of a problem here. In the favorable case, the inquirer doesn't lose his prolepsis when he acquires a definition; so the prolepsis is still available for use as a criterion. It's true that in the unfavorable case—the case of a failed inquiry—someone might wrongly reject as false what is in fact a prolepsis. I'm not sure Brittain is right to say that, in such a case, the inquirer loses her prolepsis; perhaps it remains latent in her and in some unconscious way influences her beliefs. Still, the only problem here is that inquiries aren't guaranteed to succeed. But the Stoics don't think that having prolepses is a guarantee of success. Rather, they think that having them is necessary for inquiry and that having them gives us some hope of success. In the terminology used before, having prolepses is necessary for answering both the Targeting Objection and the Recognition Objection.

Brittain seems to agree, for he goes on to say that:<sup>99</sup>

Perhaps this is not much of a problem: good inquirers can remember the content of their preconception, and bad inquirers have perverted their reason, and are no longer of much interest.

However, he thinks the issue:<sup>100</sup>

points to a second problem concerning how we draw on the content of the preconception in the first place. For unless they start researching on this topic as soon as they become

<sup>97</sup> I defer discussion of Sextus' criticism of the Stoics until Ch. 10.

<sup>98</sup> 'Common Sense', 181.

<sup>99</sup> 'Common Sense', 181.

<sup>100</sup> 'Common Sense', 181. Rather than saying that the content of the prolepsis is confused, we should say that we are confused about its content. Prolepses are objectively clear, even if they aren't always subjectively clear.

rational, it seems likely that ordinary people will already have a range of true and false beliefs about the object of inquiry. Hence either they won't have the preconception any more, or, if they do, its content may be confused and no longer stand out as the obvious starting point for inquiry.

To solve this second problem, Brittain suggests that the Stoics can distinguish the ideal pattern of inquiry from many actual ones. But he thinks this is a 'superficial' response. For it's clear that the Stoics think that 'we are somehow able to recognise the "common conceptual" truths contained in e.g. their ethical "paradoxes" *despite* the perversion of our reason'; that is, there are supposed to be actual inquiries in which we do so.<sup>101</sup> Yet:<sup>102</sup>

it doesn't ever seem to be the case that we have an interesting pre-reflective concept that is properly expressible in a single formula. If so, we can't start to inquire just on the basis of the preliminary knowledge contained in the 'clear evidence' of our preconception, let alone from evidence that we can identify as 'clear'.

We considered this sort of problem earlier, in looking at the *Meno*. There, Plato considers inquirers—Meno, his slave—who have a range of true and false beliefs, though they aren't initially aware of which of their beliefs are true, which are false. He explains how they can nonetheless make progress. For inquirers have the capacity to engage in rational reflection, and they tend to favor true over false beliefs. To be sure, we may not always succeed in identifying our prolepses as such; and we might not always discard the false beliefs. But the fact that we have true beliefs and tend to rely on them makes it likely that we will make progress, or are at least capable of doing so. Of course, there is no iron-clad guarantee; but the Stoics don't suggest there is. Or so I think. But how does Brittain suggest the Stoics reply? He says:<sup>103</sup>

The general form that response must take is pretty clear, I think: the Stoics need to argue that there is evidence supporting the identification of some particular concept as a preconception. Given their theory on the nature of preconceptions, such evidence ought to show either that the concept has an appropriate causal history or that it is deeply embedded in human nature—i.e. that it arises naturally.

This seems to say that prolepses have features we can appeal to, to help us identify them as such: we can try to ascertain the causal origins of our prolepses, and we can try to figure out whether they are natural. If we ascertain that a given concept has a certain origin and is natural, we can be confident it is a prolepsis.

That, however, is not a solution whose attempted application guarantees success; for we can make mistakes here too. We can wrongly decide that a

<sup>101</sup> 'Common Sense', 182.

<sup>102</sup> 'Common Sense', 183.

<sup>103</sup> 'Common Sense', 183.

given concept has a certain origin or is natural; our mixture of true and false beliefs raises difficulties here just as much as it does elsewhere. The best we can do is to offer Plato's solution: in fact, inquiries do often go well, because people do in fact have and tend to rely on relevant true beliefs, whether or not they always identify them as such. But not all inquiries go well, because people don't invariably rely on relevant true beliefs.

Brittain also considers a third problem for the Stoics' reliance on prolepses in inquiry. Suppose I have a prolepsis of god and no false beliefs about god. Even so:<sup>104</sup>

it is still unclear how the content of the preconception can be perfectly isolated, within the set of beliefs that are involved in possessing a conception, as a single proposition (or *lekton*). If so, it looks as though there is some tension between the Stoic views about the immediate functions of concepts in perception, thought and speech, and their application as criteria for philosophical inquiry. For if we allow the ordinary concepts applied in thought and perception to be determinate and relatively simple, it is hard to see how they could constitute the preconceptions the Stoics need for philosophical research; and if we take them to be relatively indeterminate and complex, it is difficult to understand how our preconceptions can be isolated and used as criteria.

Here Brittain seems to assume that for a prolepsis to serve as a criterion of truth it must be correctly identified as such; merely having and relying on what is in fact a prolepsis won't do.<sup>105</sup> The problem Brittain raises is mitigated if a prolepsis can play its criterial role so long as one has and relies on it, even if one doesn't identify it as such. It would also do if what one identifies as a prolepsis is a prolepsis plus certain further assumptions,<sup>106</sup> so long as those assumptions are true. That is, inquiry will in that case be more likely to succeed than if one hasn't correctly identified a relevant prolepsis as such at all. If one inquires not only on the basis of a prolepsis but also on the basis of further, relevant true assumptions, then, if one reasons well, one will make progress—and by relying on prolepses (as well as on further assumptions).

Long and Sedley raise another criticism, endorsing:<sup>107</sup>

Sextus Empiricus' admirable comments on the criterial impotence of conceptions and preconceptions. He can agree with the Stoics that conceptions are a prerequisite of all investigation . . . Yet this totally fails to justify their claim that the use we make of them is well grounded, especially since one philosopher's preconceptions may conflict with

<sup>104</sup> 'Common Sense', 185.

<sup>105</sup> He also seems to assume this in considering the second problem.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Brittain, 'Common Sense', 185 with his n. 79; and Frede, 'Stoic Epistemology', 319–21.

<sup>107</sup> LS 1.253. They are discussing LS 40T (= Sextus, *M* 8.331a–332a). I discuss this passage in Ch. 11, sects. 7 and 8.

another's. Epictetus tries to retain the community of preconceptions by referring disagreement to their application to particulars. For this quite promising move to work, the scope and content of preconceptions would need to be far more restricted than the Stoics were willing to admit. On this aspect of the debate over the criteria of truth, the sceptics can be judged to have carried the day.

However, Epictetus and other Stoics take all prolepses to be true; hence, as Epictetus insists, prolepses can't conflict with one another. Contrary to Long and Sedley, it's not the case that 'one philosopher's preconceptions may conflict with another's'. Rather, one person may take something to be a prolepsis, and another may take something that conflicts with that purported prolepsis to be a prolepsis. For, as we've seen, prolepses don't wear their evidence on their face. But are Long and Sedley right to say that the fact that we can make mistakes about which of our concepts or beliefs are prolepses shows that the use we make of prolepses is not well grounded? That depends on what 'well grounded' means. If, for our use to be well grounded, we must always infallibly identify our prolepses as such, and correctly employ them as criteria, then our use is not guaranteed to be, and often isn't, well grounded. But the Stoics would agree, in the sense that they don't think we infallibly identify our prolepses as such. However, they think we can learn to do so and that, if we do so, that puts us in a good position to make progress. That provides one sense in which our use of them at least can be well grounded. Further, even if we don't correctly identify them as such, they may unconsciously guide us in inquiry in ways that enables us to make progress. That is, they make us sensitive to evidence in appropriate ways, allowing us to make discriminations that are generally correct, even if we can't say in virtue of what features we do so. In this sense too, our use of them can be well grounded, even if we sometimes go astray.

Nor am I sure why Long and Sedley think that Epictetus' explanation of disagreement (that it consists, not in our having different prolepses of, for example, god, but in our applying the same prolepsis differently) requires a restriction on the scope and contents of prolepses beyond what the Stoics would welcome. We've seen that the contents of prolepses are just outline accounts. Different inquirers might disagree about the implications of an outline account, and that might lead them to apply it differently. Or, two inquirers might agree, on the basis of their prolepsis, that justice involves fairness; but that isn't sufficient to determine whether this or that action or person is just. There's no mechanical way of applying one's prolepses to particular cases. That's undoubtedly a problem; but it's not a problem that requires the Stoics to limit the scope and content of prolepses.

## 12. Conclusion

We have found similarities and differences among Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Stoics. Only Plato appeals to prenatal knowledge; in this respect, he differs from all the other philosophers we've discussed. However, all the philosophers we've explored so far agree in not positing innate knowledge or belief in the content sense or, therefore, in the cognitive-condition sense. None of them thinks that, from birth, we are in the cognitive condition of knowing or believing. Nor do any of them think that we are born with mental representations that constitute concepts. Nor does Epicurus seem to be even a dispositional innatist. We've seen that what Plato says is compatible with weak dispositional innatism; but he isn't committed to it. Aristotle posits an innate disposition to know. But, as we've seen, it's not clear that he accords it a sufficiently robust explanatory role to count as a dispositional innatist about knowledge. The Stoics, however, seem to accept some version of dispositional innatism about knowledge. Indeed, they may accept strong dispositional innatism: we have an innate disposition to acquire certain specific items of S-knowledge, that is, specific prolepses (the common ones). So although these philosophers agree on some issues about innatism, they also, or may also, disagree on others.

None of these philosophers accepts a general, or unrestricted, matching version of a foreknowledge principle, if that principle is taken to say that, to inquire whether *p* is true, or about *x*, one needs to have, in this life, P-knowledge or superior cognition that *p* is true, or about *x*. Nor do any of them accept such a principle if it says that, in order to inquire what the answer to a question is, one antecedently needs to have, in this life, P-knowledge or superior cognition of what the answer is. Nor do any of them accept a stepping-stone version of a foreknowledge principle, if that principle is taken to say that, to inquire whether *p* is true, or about *x*, or what the answer to a question is, one needs to have, in this life, some relevant P-knowledge or superior cognition. One can—we all routinely do—inquire on the basis of less than P-knowledge or superior cognition; and such inquiries can be successful, issuing in knowledge of the answers to our questions. Plato, however, thinks that our ability to inquire and discover can only be explained by appealing to prenatal P-knowledge in some range of cases. Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Stoics all disagree; they think that we can fully explain our ability to inquire and discover in terms of our natural development in this life, without appealing to prenatal or, for that matter, innate knowledge.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Even if some of them favor dispositional innatism about knowledge, the knowledge isn't innate; just the disposition is.

If we focus on us as we are in this life, we can say that all of the philosophers considered so far accept some version of a stepping-stone prior-cognition principle, if that principle is taken to say that, to inquire whether *p* is so, or about *x*, or what the answer to a question is, one must have some relevant prior cognition, where the cognition need not be, and typically isn't, P-knowledge or superior condition. Though, in the discussion with the slave, Socrates argues just that having and relying on relevant true beliefs is sufficient for inquiry, in espousing the Dialectical Requirement he makes it clear that some relevant prior cognition is necessary for inquiry. However, he doesn't say precisely what sort is needed, except insofar as he makes it clear that P-knowledge isn't needed and that having and relying on true beliefs is sufficient. In *APo.* 1.1., Aristotle requires prior *gnôsis*. But, I argued, the relevant prior *gnôsis* isn't P-knowledge or superior cognition; nor need it even amount to A-knowledge. It amounts to no more than what Plato thinks of as true belief. Similarly, Epicurus and the Stoics say that having and relying on prolepses is necessary for inquiry; and their respective accounts of prolepses are quite similar, though there are some differences and the Stoics are clearer and more precise. But both Epicurus and the Stoics take prolepses to be, or to be expressible as, true propositions about basic features of reality; and they think we acquire prolepses naturally, without teaching or learning. Having prolepses confers knowledge as they conceive of it (E-knowledge and S-knowledge). But it doesn't confer P-knowledge or even A-knowledge; it confers no more than what Plato thinks of as true belief. All these philosophers therefore agree that we can inquire on the basis of what Plato would classify as true belief.

Further, just as Plato thinks that we all have and rely on true beliefs without always being able to identify them as such, so Epicurus and the Stoics think that we all have and rely on prolepses without always being able to identify them as such. Nonetheless, these true beliefs and prolepses influence our reasoning in such a way that we tend to the truth. Further, if we reason well, we stand a good chance of eventually being able to identify which of our beliefs are true and which of the true ones are prolepses. That is one form inquiry can take—the attempt to identify which of our beliefs are true, or are prolepses. Aristotle agrees that one can inquire without antecedently realizing which of one's beliefs are true, which are false. This is clear from *Met.* 3.1 (995a27–b4), discussed in Chapter 3, section 1. As we saw, in this passage he discusses examining *aporiai* in an effort to reach the truth; initially one doesn't know what is true and what is false in the *aporiai*. Nonetheless, one will be in a better position to judge once one has considered all the conflicting arguments. In what is surely an allusion to Meno's Paradox (especially M2 and M3), he says that if one hasn't first made the difficulties



clear, one's goal won't be clear to one (that is, one won't know what one is putting forward to inquire into; this is M2), and one won't know, or realize (*gignôskein*), whether one has found what one was looking for (M3).

Though Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and the Stoics develop their theories in different ways, and differ on some points, they all agree on some central issues. In particular, they all think that, to inquire, we need to have and rely on relevant cognitions, where these need not be more than what Plato thinks of as true beliefs. They all reject the conclusion of Meno's Paradox by rejecting S3, if it is read in terms of P-knowledge. In rejecting the conclusion of Meno's Paradox and identifying a false premise, they say *that* one can inquire even if one lacks P-knowledge. But they also go further than that, by explaining *how* inquiry in the absence of P-knowledge is possible. They do so by providing accounts of our cognitive development which explain how we can make progress towards acquiring knowledge we don't initially have. In doing this, they show not only *that* we can inquire (in which case, contrary to Meno's Paradox, inquiry is possible), but also *how* we can inquire fruitfully, how we can make progress in inquiry and discover what we don't already know. In this sense, they respond not only to Socrates' dilemma but also to at least part of Meno's third question; they say how, even if we lack knowledge at the outset, we can acquire it.

So far, we've provided our own account of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Epicureans. However, as I've noted several times, Plutarch also provides an account; we haven't yet discussed it in any detail. In the next chapter I do so. Then, in the final two chapters, I turn to Sextus. Like Plutarch, he too challenges the Epicureans' and Stoics' attempts to explain the possibility of inquiry; his criticisms also apply to Aristotle and (in contrast to Plutarch's criticisms) to Plato. The Epicureans and Stoics argue, in turn, that it's the Skeptics who can't inquire. So there is an ongoing dialectical debate among these philosophers about who best explains the possibility of inquiry. Considering this debate should deepen our insight into the various philosophers' views about how best to reply to Meno's Paradox.

## Plutarch's Account

### 1. Introduction

Now that we've provided our own account of Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Stoics, let's look at Plutarch's assessment. As we've seen, Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Stoics are closer to one another than they are sometimes taken to be, and in surprising ways. For example, none of them accepts a this-life foreknowledge principle—if knowledge is understood as Plato understands it, as P-knowledge. Rather, they all think that we can inquire and learn on the basis of what Plato would call true beliefs, where this prior cognition is just of the stepping-stone variety. Nor do any of them posit innate knowledge in the content or cognitive-condition sense. However, despite this agreement among all these philosophers, Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Stoics reject some aspects of Plato's view.<sup>1</sup> In particular, none of them thinks that we could inquire and learn in the ways that we do only if we had prenatal knowledge. Plutarch, by contrast, thinks that only Plato has a satisfactory solution to Meno's Paradox. In this chapter, I ask why he thinks this; I also consider his criticisms of the alternatives we've canvassed.

According to Plutarch:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Which is not to say that their alternatives are exactly the same.

<sup>2</sup> 215f is part of a group of fragments preserved in a commentary on Plato's *Phaedo* and ascribed to Plutarch. These fragments may conveniently be found in vol. 15 of Plutarch's *Moralia* in the Loeb Classical Library, ed. F. H. Sandbach (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969); 215f is on pp. 390–3. I follow Sandbach's numbering. It's disputed whether the author of the commentary on the *Phaedo* is Olympiodorus or Damascius. For the commentary, see L. G. Westerink (ed. and trans.), *Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo*, vol. 2 (Bodmin: The Prometheus Trust, 2009; originally published Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing Co., 1977). 215f is # 280 in Westerink's numbering; it may be found on pp. 166–9. (See II 28 for a partial repetition but also some variation; these are 217 in Sandbach's numbering.) Westerink argues that the commentary is by Damascius (15–17). He defends the same view in more detail in the introduction to his edition of *Damascius' Lectures on the Philebus* (Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing Co., 1959). Sandbach (388) attributes it to Olympiodorus. This issue doesn't matter to us here. There is also dispute about whether 215 is by Plutarch. Sandbach (389) and Westerink (166–7) think it is. J. Opsomer, *In Search of the Truth* (Brussels: Paleis der Academien, 1998), argues that it is not, though he thinks it belongs to a Middle

- 215c That only for Plato is there an easy explanation, when he refers knowing (*gnôsis*) and not knowing (*agnoia*) to forgetting and recollection.
- 215d That pieces of knowledge (*epistêmai*) are in us but hidden by other extraneous things, like the writing tablet (*deltos*) sent by Demaratus.
- 215e That both inquiry and discovery prove recollection. For no one could inquire into what he had no conception (*anennôêtos*) of, nor could he discover it—at least, not through inquiry, for we say that someone who comes upon something also discovers it.
- 215f That the problem in the *Meno*, namely, whether it is possible to inquire or to discover, is genuinely puzzling. For <we cannot inquire into or discover> either things (*ha*)<sup>3</sup> we know (*ismen*) (for that would be pointless) or things we do not know (for even if we come upon them, we do not know (*agnooumen*) them: they might be any old thing). The Peripatetics considered the potential intellect (*ton dunamei noun*) <to be the solution to the puzzle>. But our puzzle arose from actual knowing (*eidennai*) and not knowing. For let it be granted that there is such a thing as the potential intellect; the puzzle is still the same. For how does this <potential intellect> think (*noei*)? For <it thinks about> either things it knows or things it does not know. The Stoics explain <the possibility of inquiry> with natural concepts (*phusikas ennoias*). If, then, these are potential, we will ask the same question <about the Stoics as we asked about the Peripatetics>. But if they are actual, why do we inquire into things we know? But if we start from them <in order to inquire> into other things we do not know, how do we <inquire into> things we do not know? The Epicureans <explain the possibility of inquiry> with prolepses. If they say these are articulated, inquiry is unnecessary. But if <they say> they are unarticulated, how do we go beyond prolepses, to inquire into what we do not even have a prolepsis of?<sup>4</sup>

Platonic context (200–3). It's difficult to be sure, one way or the other: on the whole, neither the arguments for authenticity nor those against it are very persuasive. Sandbach, for example, notes the similarity between 215k and *Mor.* 537a. However, someone might have copied Plutarch. Opsomer notes that the style of the fragments is unlike Plutarch's style. But, as he also notes (following Westerink), the fragments might have undergone a double condensation, first by Damascius and then by a *reportator*. The fact that the MSS attribute the fragment to Plutarch provides at least a *prima facie* reason to assume that at least 215 and 216a–e (which are attributed to the same source as 215) are due to Plutarch. As Sandbach notes, however, though the MSS indicate where the Plutarch fragments begin (*viz.*, with 215), they don't indicate where they end; Sandbach includes 216f and g, but with an asterisk. That said, I'm more concerned with content than with authorship; and for my purposes nothing hangs on whether the fragment is by Plutarch. However, I do discuss some passages from (elsewhere in) Plutarch in attempting to explain 215.

In addition to quoting 215f, I have quoted further parts of 215, since they will be helpful to us.

<sup>3</sup> Plutarch, like Plato and Aristotle, formulates Meno's Paradox with what is unambiguously a relative pronoun.

<sup>4</sup> Ὅτι μόνῳ τῷ Πλάτῳι ῥᾶστον ἀποδοῦναι τὸν λόγον, εἰς λήθην καὶ ἀνάμνησιν ἀναφέροντι τὴν γνώσιν καὶ τὴν ἄνοιαν. Ὅτι ἔννευσιν μὲν αἱ ἐπιστήμαι, κρύπτονται δὲ ὑπὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἐπεισοδίων ὁμοίως τῇ ὑπὸ Δημαράτου πεμφθείσῃ δέλτῳ. Ὅτι καὶ τὸ ζητεῖν καὶ τὸ εὐρίσκειν δηλοῖ τὴν ἀνάμνησιν· οὔτε γὰρ ζητήσκειν ἂν τις οὐδ' ἐστὶν ἀνεννόητος οὔτε ἀνεύροι διὰ γε ζητήσεως· λέγεται γὰρ εὐρίσκειν καὶ ὁ κατὰ περίπτωσιν. Ὅτι ἀπορον ὄντως εἰ οἷόν τε ζητεῖν καὶ εὐρίσκειν, ὥς ἐν Μένωνι προβέβληται· οὔτε γὰρ ἂ ἴσμεν, μάταιον γάρ· οὔτε ἂ μὴ ἴσμεν, κἂν γὰρ περιπέσωμεν αὐτοῖς, ἀγνοοῦμεν, ὥς τοῖς

In 215c and e, Plutarch mentions the theory of recollection, which he takes to be both Plato's reply and also the only satisfactory reply to Meno's Paradox. In 215f, he describes Meno's Paradox; he also says how the Peripatetics, Stoics, and Epicureans reply, and he finds fault with their replies.

## 2. Plutarch's account of Plato

At the beginning of 215f, Plutarch explains how he understands Meno's Paradox. We can formulate his account of it as follows:

- (P1) For all  $x$ , one either knows or does not know  $x$ .
- (P2) If one knows  $x$ , one cannot inquire into or discover  $x$ .
- (P3) If one does not know  $x$ , one cannot inquire into or discover  $x$ .
- (P4) Therefore, whether one does or does not know  $x$ , one cannot inquire into or discover  $x$ .

This formulation contrasts interestingly with Meno's questions and Socrates' dilemma. Plutarch makes it clear that he takes what he calls 'the problem in the *Meno*' to challenge the possibility of both inquiry and discovery—that is, of discovery through inquiry. For, as he says in 215e, we can discover things without inquiry; we might just happen upon them. That sort of discovery isn't relevant here.<sup>5</sup> In mentioning discovery, Plutarch recalls Meno's third question, M3; by contrast, we've seen that Socrates' dilemma doesn't mention discovery.<sup>6</sup> However, Meno asks just how, if we found what we were looking for, we'd know, or realize, we had done so if, at the outset, we didn't know that very thing. Plutarch also asks how we can inquire or discover if we do know. In saying there's a problem about inquiry (and discovery) whether we do or don't know, he follows Socrates' dilemma rather than Meno's questions.

τυχοῦσιν. οἱ μὲν γὰρ Περιπατητικοὶ τὸν δυνάμει νοῦν ἐπενόησαν· ἡμεῖς δ' ἠπορούμεν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐνεργείᾳ εἶδέναι καὶ μὴ εἶδέναι. ἔστω γὰρ εἶναι τὸν δυνάμει νοῦν, ἀλλ' ἔτι ἀπορία ἡ αὐτή· πῶς γὰρ οὗτος νοεῖ; ἢ γὰρ ἂ οἶδεν ἢ ἂ οὐκ οἶδεν. οἱ δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς Στοᾶς τὰς φυσικὰς ἐννοίας αἰτιῶνται· εἰ μὲν δὴ δυνάμει, ταῦτό ἐρούμεν· εἰ δὲ ἐνεργείᾳ, διὰ τί ζητοῦμεν ἂ ἴσμεν; εἰ δὲ ἀπὸ τούτων ἄλλα ἀγνοούμενα, πῶς ἄπερ οὐκ ἴσμεν; οἱ δὲ Ἐπικούρειοι τὰς προλήψεις· ἄς εἰ μὲν διηρθρωμένας φασί, περιττὴ ἡ ζήτησις· εἰ δὲ ἀδιարθρώτους, πῶς ἄλλο τι παρὰ τὰς προλήψεις ἐπιζητοῦμεν, ὃ γὰρ οὐδὲ προειλήφαμεν;

<sup>5</sup> We saw that Meno doesn't make it clear whether he's concerned just with discovery through inquiry, or with any old discovery, even if it involves just happening upon something by chance. Whatever Meno's concern is, Socrates' reply makes it clear that his interest in discovery is just with discovery through inquiry, not happening upon something by chance.

<sup>6</sup> We've seen that Meno doesn't use the word for discovery (*heuriskein*); but he plainly has it in mind, whereas Socrates' dilemma doesn't in the same way advert to it, though he mentions it in discussing the theory of recollection.

In addition to laying out the basic argument, Plutarch also supports P2 and P3. (Similarly, Socrates supports S2 and S3; and Meno uses M2 to motivate both M1 and M3.) On behalf of P2, he says that it would be 'pointless' (*mataion*) to inquire into or discover *x* if one already knows *x*. Similarly, we saw that Socrates, in supporting S2, says that one couldn't, or wouldn't, inquire into that which one already knows, because there's no need to do so. We wondered whether he meant that one can inquire into that which one knows, though it would be pointless to do so. But I argued that he makes it clear that S2 means that one can't inquire into something one knows, not merely that it would be pointless, though possible, to do so. The same seems true here. For at the beginning of 215f, Plutarch makes it clear that he takes Meno's Paradox to challenge the very possibility of inquiry and discovery. That suggests that the conclusion is P4 (rather than 'inquiry and discovery are either impossible (if one doesn't know) or pointless (if one knows)'). In that case, P2 should say that inquiry and discovery are impossible if one knows. It's just that Plutarch's reason on behalf of P2, like Socrates' reason on behalf of S2, isn't very good.<sup>7</sup>

On behalf of P3, Plutarch says that 'even if we come upon them, we do not know them'—that is, we won't know, or realize, we have done so. This adverts to M3, which asks how, if we don't have knowledge at the outset, we will know, or realize, we've found what we were looking for, should we do so. Meno supports M3 with M2. Plutarch doesn't provide any support for his analogue to M3. Rather, he uses it to support P3.

Having described Meno's Paradox, Plutarch proceeds to say how, in his view, the Peripatetics, Stoics, and Epicureans reply: he doesn't go on to mention Plato. That's because he's already described Plato's view, before setting out Meno's Paradox. He does this in 215c, d, and e.

In 215e, Plutarch makes it clear that, in his view, Plato thinks that inquiry and discovery are possible. Hence he thinks that Plato rejects the conclusion of Meno's Paradox. I've agreed with that view, against those who, like Ryle, think that Plato takes Meno's Paradox to be sound. If Plutarch thinks that Plato rejects the conclusion of Meno's Paradox, then he presumably also thinks that Plato takes the Paradox to be either invalid or to have at least one false premise. Assuming that the key terms are used univocally, Plutarch's formulation of Meno's Paradox is valid. Assuming Plutarch sees this, he presumably thinks that Plato rejects at least one premise.

<sup>7</sup> As we shall see, the issue of whether Plutarch has in mind the possibility of inquiry, or its point, arises at other stages.

In 215e, he says that Plato 'refers' knowing and not knowing to forgetting and recollecting. His idea seems to be that we don't know that which we are inquiring into in the sense that we don't have conscious explicit knowledge of it. But we once had such knowledge. Though we've forgotten it, we can recall it; what we call inquiry is to be analyzed as recollection of what we once knew but no longer know, in the sense that we have forgotten it. So far, this involves positing prior but forgotten knowledge: presumably prenatal knowledge. Insofar as Plutarch takes Plato to think that we don't now know, he takes Plato to reject P3. It's just that he explains how we can inquire (and discover), even though we don't know now, by positing prenatal knowledge that we can recall.

It's true that 215e doesn't explicitly mention prenatal knowledge. However, in 216a Plutarch says that:<sup>8</sup>

new-born babies do not smile but have a fierce look for about three weeks, sleeping most of the time. But all the same, at times in their sleep they often laugh and relax. Now how else can this come about, unless the soul then withdraws from the vortex of animal life and its motions depend upon its own previous experiences?

Though he isn't explicit about this, it's reasonable to think that Plutarch takes our prenatal knowledge to have been conscious explicit P-knowledge. If so, he thinks that Plato accepts a prenatal foreknowledge principle: we must have had conscious explicit prenatal knowledge in order to inquire and discover in this life. I've agreed with this interpretation of Plato.

215d makes it clear that Plutarch thinks that, though we've forgotten our prenatal knowledge at the conscious level, we have latent knowledge; we didn't forget our prenatal knowledge in such a way that we don't at all know now. This interpretation of Plato contrasts with the one I defended. To explain his interpretation, Plutarch alludes to a story told by Herodotus (8.239), according to which, during the Persian wars, the Spartan Demaratus, who lived in Persia, spied for the Greeks and warned them of the impending invasion. He did so by sending a message concealed beneath a layer of wax. Similarly, Plutarch thinks, we have knowledge hidden within us.<sup>9</sup> We've seen that Plato is often taken to hold that we have knowledge hidden within us in the sense that we have latent innate P-knowledge at least of answers to 'What is F?' questions. The knowledge is already there; inquiry involves scraping away the surface message—our current conscious beliefs—in order to find the true, knowledge-constituting or

<sup>8</sup> Cf. 217c.

<sup>9</sup> Scott discusses the Demaratus analogy in *RE*, 18–19. He argues that, with a variation he describes, it correctly captures Plato's view. Scott and Plutarch interpret the analogy somewhat differently; I focus here on Plutarch's use of it.

knowledge-conferring message that is already there, but hidden. Is the hidden knowledge that Plutarch mentions innate? Does it constitute or confer P-knowledge?

215d doesn't explicitly address these questions. But in *Platonic Questions* 1, Plutarch says:<sup>10</sup>

As for the only thing Socrates took wisdom to be (which he called the passion for the divine and the intelligible), there is no creation or discovery of it for humans but recollection. Hence Socrates taught nothing, but rather stirred up (*anekinei*; cf. *M.* 85c9) and helped to draw out the inborn concepts (*emphutoi noêseis*) of the young by inducing in them the inception of *aporia* as if of labor pains. And he used to call this 'obstetric skill', since it does not, as others claimed to do, implant intelligence from without, but shows that they have it proper in themselves, but incomplete, confused, and in need of nurture and stabilization. (1000d–e)<sup>11</sup>

*Emphutos* can mean 'innate'; and that is probably how Plutarch uses the word here.<sup>12</sup> If so, he thinks that Plato posits not only conscious explicit prenatal knowledge but also innate concepts. These seem to be innate at least in the content sense, not merely in the dispositional sense. They are presumably what are hidden in Demaratus' tablet; hence they constitute knowledge (*epistêmê*).

However, the hidden knowledge doesn't seem to be or confer P-knowledge of answers to 'What is F?' questions. For Plutarch says that the hidden message is 'incomplete, confused, and in need of nurture and stabilization'. If it is in need of stabilization, it doesn't confer P-knowledge; for, as Plato makes clear in *Meno* 98a, P-knowledge is stable. Nor is P-knowledge incomplete or confused.<sup>13</sup> The inborn concepts seem to have thinner contents than answers to 'What is F?'

<sup>10</sup> Plutarch appears to say here that there is no such thing as discovery or teaching, but only recollection instead (see also 217h). By contrast, in 215e he assumes that discovery is possible (215e also assumes that inquiry is possible; teaching isn't mentioned). Cf. Ch. 4, sects. 2–3, where I suggested that Socrates argues, not that there is recollection but no inquiry, learning, or discovery, but that (successful) inquiry, learning, and discovery consist in, or essentially involve, recollection.

<sup>11</sup> ἦν δὲ μόνην ἡγεῖτο Σωκράτης σοφίαν <τὴν> περὶ τὸ θεῖον καὶ νοητὸν ἐρωτικὴν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ προσαγορευομένην, ταύτης οὐ γένεσις ἔστιν ἀνθρώποις οὐδ' εὗρεσις ἀλλ' ἀνάμνησις. ὅθεν οὐδὲν ἐδίδασκε Σωκράτης, ἀλλ' ἐνδιδούς ἀρχὰς ἀποριῶν ὥσπερ ὠδίνων τοῖς νέοις ἐπήγειρε καὶ ἀνεκίνει καὶ συνεξήγε τὰς ἐμφύτους νοήσεις· καὶ τοῦτο μαιωτικὴν τέχνην ὠνόμαζεν, οὐκ ἐντιθείσαν ἔξωθεν, ὥσπερ ἑτεροὶ προσεποιούντο, νοῦν τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσιν, ἀλλ' ἔχοντας οἰκείον ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἀτελὴ δὲ καὶ συγκεχυμένον καὶ δεόμενον τοῦ τρέφοντος καὶ βεβαιούντος ἐπιδεικνύουσιν.

<sup>12</sup> As we've seen, however, *emphutos* can also mean 'natural' in a sense that doesn't imply innateness. Cherniss, note *ad loc.*, translates *emphutos* as 'innate' and distinguishes the *emphutoi noêseis* that Plutarch mentions here from the *emphutoi prolêpseis* that Plutarch ascribes to the Stoics in *Stoic Self-Contradictions* 1041e; the latter, Cherniss thinks, are 'inbred' but not innate. So according to Cherniss, Plutarch uses *emphutos* in one way in connection with Plato, and in another way in connection with the Stoics.

<sup>13</sup> P-knowledge is incomplete in the sense that one can have P-knowledge of what something is (of its real nature or essence) without knowing everything that's true of it. But it is not incomplete with respect to what something is. If one grasps just part of what something is, one doesn't yet have any P-knowledge of what it is. Nor does Plato seem to think that one can have P-knowledge in a confused way.

questions do: that's part of why they don't confer P-knowledge. We can use them in order to discover definitions; but they are not themselves definitions. Hence, Plutarch doesn't seem to think that Plato posits innate P-knowledge. Rather, our conscious explicit prenatal P-knowledge remains hidden in us in the form of what Plato would think of as true belief. To be sure, in 215d Plutarch refers to it as knowledge (*epistêmê*). But when we see how he describes it, we can see that he doesn't use the term for P-knowledge. Similarly, we saw that in *Posterior Analytics* 1.1, Aristotle uses *epistêmê* for less than P-knowledge, and for less than *epistêmê* as he defines it in 1.2. Plato would say that, as Plutarch describes his (Plato's) view, he takes him to posit latent innate true beliefs, which are remnants of prenatal P-foreknowledge. This is an interesting twist on the familiar view according to which Plato posits both conscious explicit prenatal knowledge and latent innate knowledge, where the contents are the same and the knowledge in both cases is P-knowledge. However, as we've seen, it has also been held that Plato posits (not innate knowledge but) innate true beliefs.

If the content of the hidden message is less than that of a definition, and if having it confers less than P-knowledge, then Plutarch commits Socrates just to a stepping-stone version of a prior-cognition principle, even where definitions are concerned. One needs to have the hidden message in order to learn a definition through inquiry; but that involves moving from one proposition (as expressed by the content of the hidden message) to another (the definition).<sup>14</sup>

So far we've seen *how* Plutarch thinks Plato replies. But *why* does he think this is the only satisfactory solution? In 215e, he says that we can inquire into something, and discover it through inquiry, only if we have a conception of it. Though Plutarch isn't explicit about this, when we put 215e together with the passage cited above from *Platonic Questions*, the implication is that he thinks we couldn't acquire the conceptions that are necessary for inquiry and discovery through 'ordinary' experiences we have in this life. Rather, they must be inborn—that is, innate. Unfortunately, he doesn't explain why he thinks this.

However, Alcinous does so.<sup>15</sup> In his view:<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Similarly, we've seen that the Stoics and Epicureans think that we can move from prolepses—outline accounts—to full definitions. In this respect, the view that Plutarch ascribes to Plato resembles their view.

<sup>15</sup> Unlike Plutarch, Alcinous doesn't explicitly mention Meno's Paradox. But 158.1–4 perhaps suggests that he knows it: cf. *anakinein* with *Meno* 85c9. It would be odd if he knew this passage, but not Meno's Paradox. On the other hand, he doesn't mention the *Meno's* definition of knowledge, though one might expect him to. For this last point, see D. Sedley, 'Three Platonist Interpretations of the *Theaetetus*', in C. Gill and M. M. McCabe (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 79–103, at 93.

<sup>16</sup> Alcinous speaks of learning, whereas Plutarch speaks of inquiry. However, we've seen that the sort of inquiry Plato is interested in is zetetic learning: learning, i.e. improving one's cognitive



If, again, instances of learning are instances of recollecting, then the soul is immortal. That learning is recollection we may infer as follows. Learning cannot arise in any way other than by recollecting what was known before. If we had in fact to start from particulars in forming our conception of common qualities, how could we ever traverse the infinite series of particulars; or, alternatively, how could we form such a conception on the basis of a small number (for we could be deceived, as for instance if we came to know the conclusion that only that which breathed was an animal); or how could concepts have the dominant role that they have? So we derive our thoughts through recollection, on the basis of small sparks, under the stimulus of certain particular impressions remembering what we knew long ago, but suffered forgetfulness of at the time of our embodiment. (*Didaskalikos* (= *Handbook*) 177.45-178.10; Dillon, rev.)<sup>17</sup>

In looking at Plato's argument for the immortality of the soul in the *Meno*, I argued that he inferred from the pre-existence of the soul to its immortality. That inference quite obviously fails; so one might think to interpret the argument differently. However, the first sentence of the passage just quoted from Alcinous suggests that he makes the same fallacious inference. That provides some support for the view that Plato also does so.

Alcinous then argues that learning is indeed recollection (and so the soul is immortal). For the only alternative would be starting from particulars. But to move from particulars to common qualities (that is, universals), we'd either have to traverse an infinite series, which is impossible; or else infer from a small number of cases, which might issue in an inaccurate concept, since the sample might be unreliable. Further, saying that concepts are acquired in these ways gradually over time conflicts with the dominant role they play. Hence, we derive

condition, through inquiry. I assume that's the sort of inquiry Plutarch has in mind, and the sort of learning Alcinous has in mind.

Cf. Sextus, *PH* 2.195–7 and 2.204. Other Platonists offer other reasons for thinking that only the theory of recollection can explain the possibility of inquiry or learning, though they tend to ask instead how we acquire certain concepts or knowledge. For example, in his *Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*, Proclus argues that mathematical knowledge can't be explained in terms of perception. One reason he gives is that 'all sensible things are confused with one another and no quality in them is pure and free of its opposite, but all are divisible and extended and changing'. Yet 'how can we get the exactness of our precise and irrefutable concepts from things that are not precise? For whatever yields knowledge that is steadfast has that quality itself in greater degree'. Hence our grasp of such concepts must derive from the soul: we should say that 'the soul produces them by having their patterns in her own essence and that these offspring are the projections of forms previously existing in her'. See 1.12.9–13.27, trans. Morrow.

<sup>17</sup> Εἴ γε μὴν αἱ μαθήσεις ἀναμνήσεις εἰσίν, ἀθάνατος ἂν εἴη ψυχὴ· ὅτι δὲ αἱ μαθήσεις ἀναμνήσεις, τοῦτον ἂν ἐπαχθείμεν τὸν τρόπον· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἄλλως μάθησις ὑποσταίη, ἢ κατὰ ἀνάμνησιν τῶν πάλαι γνωσθέντων. Εἰ γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν κατὰ μέρος ἐνενοούμεν τὰς κοινότητας, πῶς ἂν τὰ κατὰ μέρος διωδεύσαμεν ἀπειρα ὑπάρχοντα, ἢ πῶς ἀπ' ὀλίγων; διεψεύσθημεν γὰρ ἂν, οἷον φέρε κρίναντες τὸ ἀναπνοῇ χρώμενον μόνον ζῶον εἶναι· ἢ πῶς ἂν τὸ ἀρχικὸν εἶεν αἱ ἐννοιαὶ; ἀναμνηστικῶς οὖν νοοῦμεν ἀπὸ μικρῶν αἰσθημάτων, ἀπὸ τινων κατὰ μέρος ὑποπεσόντων ἀναμνηστικόμενοι τῶν πάλαι ἐγνωμένων, ὧν λήθην ἐλάβομεν ἐνσωματωθέντες.

our thoughts—not entirely from particulars, but—by recollecting what we knew prenatally but forgot on being born. We do so with the help of ‘small sparks’. These are what Alcinous earlier calls natural concepts (*phusikê ennoia*, 155.27, 32), each of which is a ‘simple item of knowledge’, a ‘wing of the soul’ (*Phdrs.* 246e), and a ‘memory’ (155.33–4). So we retain memories of what we knew prenatally, though these are just ‘simple items of knowledge’, the having of which enables us to reacquire the fuller knowledge we had prenatally (155.34–6).

Like Plutarch, Alcinous seems to think that our prenatal knowledge was conscious explicit P-knowledge (155.20–156.23). We forgot that knowledge on being born; nor does it remain in us latently. Rather, we retain just natural concepts. These confer less than P-knowledge; they provide just ‘small sparks’ that enable us to reacquire the P-knowledge we had prenatally. So Alcinous, like Plutarch, favors just a stepping-stone version of a prior-cognition principle.<sup>18</sup>

Are these natural concepts innate? One might think that the claim that they are natural implies that they are innate. But that depends on whether they are natural in the sense that they are part of our nature (in which case they would be at least dispositionally innate), or whether being natural just contrasts with being artificial or conventional (which would not imply innateness). Though the word on its own doesn’t imply innateness, the context suggests that what’s at issue is our nature; Alcinous doesn’t seem to have in mind (only) the contrast between what’s natural and what’s artificial or conventional. Hence it seems reasonable to take the natural concepts at issue here to be at least dispositionally innate.

However, it’s not clear precisely what sort of innatism is at issue. Sedley seems to agree.<sup>19</sup> For he speaks both of ‘buried memories or innate conceptions’ that are ‘pieces of knowledge’ and also of ‘an innate capacity’ and an ‘innate disposition’. Positing innate conceptions that are pieces of knowledge suggests either content innatism or cognitive-condition innatism about knowledge. Positing innate dispositions suggests dispositional innatism. Positing innate capacities might fall short of positing innate dispositions, since capacities can fall short of dispositions.

Whatever Alcinous’ precise position is, it’s clear that he thinks that we couldn’t acquire concepts, or knowledge, of universals unless we had prenatal knowledge of them and also have natural concepts of them. For otherwise, he thinks, we could never move from a grasp of particulars to knowledge of universals. Since

<sup>18</sup> Like Plutarch, he uses *epistêmê* (155.33). But in these contexts, neither of them uses the term for P-knowledge. Contrast J. Dillon, *Alcinous: The Handbook of Platonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 68.

<sup>19</sup> Sedley, ‘Alcinous’ Epistemology’, in K. A. Algra *et al.* (eds.), *Polyhistor: Studies in the History and Historiography of Ancient Philosophy: Presented to Jaap Mansfeld on His Sixtieth Birthday* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 300–12. For the first two quotations, see 305; for the third, see 306.

knowledge of universals is possible, we must have had that knowledge prenatally and must retain natural concepts of them.<sup>20</sup> It's reasonable to think that something like this line of reasoning explains Plutarch's favorable verdict about Plato's theory of recollection.

Alcinous' and Plutarch's reasoning is similar to Chomsky's argument for innate knowledge, or cognition.<sup>21</sup> They all believe that a given phenomenon—our ability to grasp universals or to learn language—can be explained only by positing prior knowledge or cognition. Chomsky thinks we must posit latent innate knowledge, or cognition, of the rules of grammar. Alcinous and Plutarch think we must posit prenatal P-knowledge as well as inborn or natural concepts that are at least dispositionally innate and that enable us to recover the P-knowledge we once had.

### 3. Plutarch's account of Aristotle

Let's now ask why Plutarch finds Aristotle's account unsatisfactory. As we've seen, he says that:<sup>22</sup>

The Peripatetics considered the potential intellect <to be the solution to the puzzle>. But our puzzle arose from actual knowing (*eidenai*) and not knowing. For let it be granted that there is such a thing as the potential intellect; the puzzle is still the same. For how does this <potential intellect> think? For <it thinks about> either things it knows or things it does not know.

First Plutarch says that the Peripatetics appeal to the potential intellect to solve Meno's Paradox. He then asks whether the potential intellect thinks of what it does or doesn't know. He suggests there's a problem either way; unfortunately, he doesn't spell out exactly what these problems are.

In speaking about the potential intellect, Plutarch is presumably thinking of *De Anima* 3.4. However, Aristotle doesn't appeal to the potential intellect in either his implicit or explicit reply to Meno's Paradox in *APo.* 1.1.<sup>23</sup> Still, let's ask briefly

<sup>20</sup> It's not clear how extensive Alcinous takes the scope of recollection to be. Sedley thinks he favors a form of 'cognitive dualism', according to which we have some empirically-derived concepts: see Sedley, 'Three Platonist Interpretations of the *Theaetetus*'. The phrase 'cognitive dualism' is Sedley's: 91 n. 27. As he notes, on this interpretation Alcinous' view is close to Scott's interpretation of the *Meno*. For a different view, on which Alcinous thinks that recollection is involved in all learning, see Helmig, *Forms and Concepts*, 141–54.

<sup>21</sup> I discussed Chomsky briefly in Ch. 5, sect. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Since Plutarch doesn't mention Aristotle, it's possible that he has other Peripatetics in mind. It's nonetheless worth asking whether his interpretation of the Peripatetics accurately captures Aristotle's view and, if it does, whether he has good criticisms of Aristotle's solution.

<sup>23</sup> As we've seen (Ch. 6, sect. 11), in *APo.* 1.24 Aristotle explains knowing a conclusion universally in terms of knowing it potentially; but this doesn't advert to the potential intellect as it is discussed in *DA* 3.4. We've also seen that, in describing our cognitive development in 2.19, Aristotle says that 'the

why Plutarch thinks the potential intellect is an inadequate solution to Meno's Paradox. One reason seems to be that he doesn't think there is any such thing as the potential intellect to begin with: that's why he says that even if we grant its existence ('let it be granted that there is such a thing'), a problem remains. Perhaps he also means to imply that if the potential intellect is just potential, it can't initiate the process of abstraction, which requires activity. This, however, would show only that the potential intellect isn't by itself a sufficient solution; for all that, it could be one component of a solution. Aquinas, for example, thinks that Aristotle invokes it along with the agent or active intellect (Lecture 20 on Book 2).

But a full discussion of why Plutarch finds fault with the potential intellect is beyond my scope here. Let's instead consider Plutarch's second question—whether the intellect thinks of things it knows or of things it doesn't know—in connection with *APo.* 1.1, asking not about the potential intellect as it figures in *DA* 3.4, but about thinking, or inquiring and learning. Aristotle would say that we can think about—and inquire about and learn—both things we know and things we don't know. He would reject both horns of the dilemma that Plutarch levels against him. We can think about, and inquire about and learn, things we don't know, so long as we have and rely on relevant true beliefs about them. In the case of deduction, for example, we must grasp what the terms at issue signify and/or that the corresponding things exist. But this grasp needn't be even A-knowledge, let alone P-knowledge or superior cognition. Similarly, 2.19 explains how we can learn first principles, even though we start off without any knowledge of anything; it's just that, in this case, our initial starting point is further from our goal than it is in the triangle example discussed in 1.1. As Aristotle explains in 1.1, we can also inquire into and learn things we already know. For example, we can learn something if we know it universally but don't know it without qualification.

Plutarch might reply that, though Aristotle claims that we can, in the ways just described, inquire both about things we know and also about things we don't know, that misses the point. For we can engage in such inquiries only if we have the relevant concepts. Yet, Plutarch would object, Aristotle's account of our cognitive development makes it impossible to explain how we can acquire them. In his view, we can acquire them only if we had prenatal P-knowledge of

soul is such as to be capable of undergoing (*paschein*) this' (100a13–14). Aquinas thinks this refers to the potential intellect (Lecture 20 on Book 2); he thinks Aristotle mentions it here in order to make it clear that perception isn't sufficient for knowledge. However, I suggested in Ch. 6 that Aristotle means just that the soul can develop in the way he's describing: this is a natural fact about it.

definitions and retain inborn concepts. For, as Alcinous explains, if we didn't have such prenatal knowledge and don't have innate cognition, we could never acquire knowledge at all. For, to do so, we'd either need to traverse an infinite series of particulars (which is impossible) or rest content with a small sample (which might lead us to draw the wrong inferences).

In his lectures on the *Phaedo*, Olympiodorus also argues against the Peripatetic account of our cognitive development; and he seems to have *APo.* 2.19 and *Met.* 1.1 in mind. In defending Plato's theory of recollection, he argues that:

we should not believe the Peripatos when it declares that we discern these things by means of something called the capacity of discrimination (*dunamis kritikê*). The human soul does not act naturally (*phusikôs*), as a spider makes its web. Besides, if it makes additions and passes from one thing to another, it must have certain forms within itself. Otherwise there would be no question of passing on to other things, or of supplying deficiencies, without such forms. (Lecture 12, 17–21; trans. Westerink rev.)<sup>24</sup>

As we've seen, in *APo.* 2.19 Aristotle argues that we have a connate discriminatory capacity, perception. This enables us to begin a process that, if all goes well, terminates in our having the best sort of knowledge. Aristotle also describes this process in *Met.* 1.1, 981a30–b6, where he likens it to the way in which fire burns by nature (*phusei*; 981b3). Olympiodorus objects that we couldn't make the sort of cognitive progress we do make unless we already had forms (*eidê*; he also mentions *logoi*) in us. Hence 'the human soul does not act naturally'.

Plutarch and Olympiodorus are right to think that Aristotle rejects innate and prenatal knowledge. Aristotle is, however, aware of the view that we couldn't acquire knowledge of universals unless they were in us in some way from the beginning. He probably has that view in mind in *APo.* 2.19, where he also hints at his reply. Early in the chapter, as we've seen, he rejects the existence of innate knowledge but posits the existence of a connate discriminatory capacity, which is perception (99b35). As we've also seen, he also notes that, 'though one perceives the particular, perception is of the universal, e.g. of man but not of Callias the man' (100a16–b1; cf. 1.31, 87b28–30; *De Anima* 424a21–4; 418a20–5). In some sense, then, the universal *is* there at the start. And, though it isn't known at the start, the way it is in the soul enables us eventually to grasp things as being of certain kinds, as instances of certain universals. We aren't born with knowledge or even concepts. But the fact that we in a way perceive universals from

<sup>24</sup> Olympiodorus is a Neo-Platonist, not a Middle Platonist; his views aren't in complete accord with either Plutarch's or Alcinous' (nor should we assume that the latter two are in complete agreement with one another). However, they all seem to agree on the point at issue here.

birth means that we can in due course acquire knowledge of them without having to 'traverse the infinite series of particulars' (as Alcinous puts it). We can form concepts of them, and come to know what things are, 'on the basis of a small number' of instances, because each instance contains, or gives us access to, universals.

Aristotle agrees with Alcinous that 'it is impossible to go through an infinite series' (*APo.* 1.3, 72b10–11). But he thinks that isn't necessary in the case at hand; nor is he as pessimistic about moving from a small sample to a correct conception as Alcinous is. For Callias and Socrates manifest the same human form; this enables us to acquire knowledge of what it is to be human without surveying all the particulars. And, though we can go wrong here, we have reason to be hopeful of success.<sup>25</sup> As we've seen, Aristotle goes on to sketch the process by which we improve our cognitive condition: we move from perception, to memory, to experience, and eventually, if all goes well, we acquire Stage 3 knowledge: we understand first principles as such. Our cognitive development is a gradual process; it proceeds in stages. After doing enough perceiving, we acquire concepts. Over time, we articulate, clarify, and refine these concepts, and acquire yet further concepts, including non-perceptual ones. We also acquire new beliefs, and we extend such knowledge as we eventually acquire. If all goes well, we eventually acquire knowledge of even the highest-level sort. We do so through a natural reasoning process. We start off with perceptual content that is general (and also particular), even though we can't initially conceptualize or articulate it in general terms. We nonetheless have a good chance of success, not because we had prenatal, or have hidden latent innate, knowledge or even concepts, but because the teleological structure of the world, and the nature of our capacities, ensure that we tend to the truth.

<sup>25</sup> Hankinson suggests that the way in which Aristotle thinks we perceive universals constitutes tacit knowledge ('Avant nous le déluge', 57; see also 51). He goes on to say that '[t]his buried knowledge needs to be excavated and given articulate form, just as the truth regarding the geometrical problem has to be elicited from Meno's slave boy. But crucially, for Aristotle, this tacit knowledge has not been there all along' (58). This makes it sound as though he thinks Aristotle favors a matching version of foreknowledge across the board (not just in the special case described in 1.1), although the foreknowledge is acquired rather than innate. However, he also suggests a weaker claim: '[w]e can know something (or at any rate possess all the material necessary for coming to know it) without being aware of that fact' (57; emphasis added). I myself would say that, though we perceive universals early on, we don't initially *know* them, though we can come to do so. According to Philoponus(?), 'when this first percept is imprinted in it (*phantasia*), it also instilled in the soul a certain murky cognition of the universal (*gnôsin tina amudran tou katholou*)' (437.26–7; trans. Goldin rev.).

#### 4. Plutarch's account of the Stoics

Let's now turn to Plutarch's account of the Stoics. He thinks they are vulnerable to a dilemma:<sup>26</sup>

The Stoics explain <the possibility of inquiry> with natural concepts (*phusikas ennoias*). If, then, these are potential, we will ask the same question <about the Stoics as we asked about the Peripatetics>. But if they are actual, why do we inquire into things we know? But if we start from them <in order to inquire> into other things we do not know, how do we <inquire into> things we do not know?

Plutarch levels a version of Meno's Paradox against the Stoics. Let's call it 'the Paradox of Stoic Inquiry'. It can be formulated as follows.<sup>27</sup>

- (1) Using prolepses is necessary for inquiry.<sup>28</sup> (= a Stoic assumption)
- (2) Prolepses are either potential or actual.
- (3) We can't use potential prolepses to inquire.
- (4) If prolepses are actual, we would have to use them to inquire either (a) into things we know or (b) into things we don't know.
- (5) Neither (4a) nor (4b) is possible.
- (6) Therefore we can't use actual prolepses to inquire.
- (7) Therefore, whether prolepses are potential or actual, inquiry is impossible.

The argument is valid, but the Stoics don't want to accept its conclusion. However, they accept (1); and (2) and (4) look unassailable. Hence, to avoid the conclusion, the Stoics have to reject at least one of (3) or (5). But how exactly should we understand these two premises? Are the Stoics committed to either of them?

<sup>26</sup> Plutarch doesn't say which horn the Stoics would attempt to disarm. That perhaps supports my suggestion (in n. 32) that the same is true of his account of the Epicureans, though admittedly the grammar in the two passages is different.

<sup>27</sup> In describing (4a), Plutarch asks *why* (*dia ti*) we inquire. This perhaps suggests that we can do so, though it would be pointless to do so. In describing (4b), he asks *how* (*pôs*) we can inquire, which perhaps suggests that we can't do so. If this is what Plutarch has in mind, then the conclusion of the argument would be that inquiry is either impossible (if prolepses are potential) or pointless (if they are actual). I shall leave this interpretation to one side. However, if my defense of the Stoics is successful, it shows that, on their view, inquiry is neither impossible nor pointless. Further, if I was right to say that Plutarch takes the conclusion of Meno's Paradox to be that inquiry is impossible, it seems likely that he wants to argue that the Stoics make inquiry impossible, period. Though he mentions both inquiry and discovery in setting out Meno's Paradox and in describing Plato's solution to it, in discussing the Stoics he mentions just inquiry.

<sup>28</sup> Plutarch speaks of natural concepts. But, as we've seen, this is just another name for prolepses. I shall use the latter term. Though Plutarch speaks of natural concepts in discussing the Stoics, and of prolepses in discussing the Epicureans, he doesn't say how if at all he thinks they differ.

Let's begin with the first horn, according to which proleptses are potential. Plutarch doesn't explain what he means. Nor does he say why we couldn't use potential proleptses to inquire. All he says is that, if they are potential, the same problem arises for the Stoics as for the Peripatetics, if the latter attempt to explain the possibility of inquiry by appealing, as Plutarch thinks they do, to the potential intellect. Yet, as we've seen, he doesn't explain what that problem is.

Still, let's see if we can make any progress. There's a clear sense in which the Stoics think that proleptses are merely potential until we reach the age of reason. For, in their view, we don't have them prior to that, though we are able to acquire them in due course. If that is what Plutarch has in mind in asking whether proleptses are potential, then the Stoics would say that proleptses are indeed merely potential until we reach the age of reason. And they would be happy to agree that, when proleptses are merely potential in this sense, inquiry is impossible. For, as we've seen, they think we can inquire only if we have some proleptses. So they accept (3), read in the way just suggested: if proleptses are merely potential—if we don't yet have them because we haven't yet reached the age of reason—we can't inquire. But the Stoics would then reject (5); they would argue that actually having proleptses, so far from making inquiry impossible, enables it. I consider this reply shortly.

Before doing so, however, it's worth considering another way in which proleptses might be said to be potential. Even once we have them, they might be said to be merely potential in the sense that we might not identify them as such. This might be either because we are not conscious of having them or because, though we've entertained them, we haven't realized that they are proleptses (we might think that they are false; or we might suspend judgment about their reliability; or we might think that they are true, but without recognizing their foundational or criterial status). If this is what Plutarch has in mind, the Stoics would reject (3); they would say that even if proleptses are potential in this sense, they can enable inquiry. For we can rely on proleptses without being aware that we are doing so. Our chances of successful inquiry are much greater if we've correctly identified our proleptses as such. But they can play a helpful role in inquiry even if we haven't done so. Similarly, we have recognitional abilities whose workings we can't explain, and whose existence we might not be fully conscious of; nonetheless, we rely on them, and doing so plays a crucial role in allowing us to make relevant discriminations among things. In the same way, Plato argues that if we have and rely on relevant true beliefs we can make progress, even if we aren't aware of which of our beliefs are true and even if not all of our beliefs are explicit.

Let's now turn to the other horn of Plutarch's dilemma. Suppose our proleptses are actual. Why does Plutarch think that precludes inquiry, and how if at all



might the Stoics argue against that view? Plutarch mentions two ways in which the Stoics might think that we can use actual prolepses in inquiry: we can use them to inquire either into things we know or into things we don't know. But, he suggests, neither is possible. Plutarch doesn't explain why he thinks this. But let's consider what he might have in mind, and what the Stoics might say in reply, beginning with (4a).

One possibility is that Plutarch thinks that for a prolepsis of *x* to be actual is for one to know everything there is to know about *x*. If this is what he means, he would be right to say that, if one has a prolepsis of *x*, one can't inquire about *x*. For, as we've seen, one inquires in order to discover what one doesn't know. If we already know everything there is to know about *x*, there's nothing left to inquire into about *x*.<sup>29</sup> However, the Stoics can say that even if we can't in that case inquire into *x*, we can use our prolepsis of *x* to inquire into something else, *y*, that we don't know. For example, even if the prolepsis of horse tells us everything there is to know about the species horse, it doesn't tell us whether that object over there is a horse or a cow. So even if we can't use actual prolepses to inquire into things we know, we can use them to inquire into things we don't know. Hence (5) is false; and so we needn't accept (6).

Be that as it may, we've seen that the Stoics don't think that to have a prolepsis of *x* is to have complete knowledge of *x*. If we have a prolepsis of *x*, we have just an outline account of *x*. So inquiry can take the form of using the prolepsis of *x* in order to discover *x*'s definition, or other facts about *x* that aren't included in either its prolepsis or definition. One might say that this is a case of inquiring into something one already knows, for one knows *x* in virtue of having a prolepsis of *x*.<sup>30</sup> If so, the Stoics can still say that (5) is false. For, though we know something about *x*, we don't know everything about *x*; and we can use our prolepsis of *x* in an effort to discover further facts about *x*, including its definition.

But perhaps Plutarch would count using a prolepsis of *x* to discover further facts about *x* as a case of inquiring into something one doesn't know; for one doesn't yet know those further facts. Yet he objects that that's not possible either. We've already seen how to disarm that objection. I have enough of a grasp to enable me to inquire, but not so robust a grasp that further inquiry is impossible (or pointless).

<sup>29</sup> As before, one might object that it's thinking one knows, not knowing, that precludes inquiry. Also as before, I leave this complication to one side.

<sup>30</sup> At least, one apprehends *x*. As we've seen, there are questions about whether mere apprehension is a kind of knowledge. Even if it is, it falls short of *epistēmē*.

All in all, then, the Stoics need not be worried by Plutarch's dilemma—though there are different ways of avoiding it, depending on how we understand what it is for a prolepsis to be potential or actual.

## 5. Plutarch's account of Epicurus

Just as Plutarch finds fault with the Peripatetics' and Stoics' replies, so he finds fault with the Epicurean reply.<sup>31</sup> In his view:<sup>32</sup>

The Epicureans <explain the possibility of inquiry> with prolepses. If they say these are articulated, inquiry is unnecessary. But <if they say> they are unarticulated, how do we go beyond prolepses to inquire into what we don't even have a prolepsis of?

Plutarch levels a dilemma: the Epicureans think inquiry requires prolepses. These are either articulated or unarticulated; but problems arise in both cases. If prolepses are articulated, further inquiry is unnecessary. If, on the other hand, they are unarticulated, then, Plutarch wonders, 'how do we go beyond prolepses to inquire into what we don't even have a prolepsis of?' This seems to ask: if prolepses are unarticulated, how can we use them to inquire into other things that we don't have a prolepsis of? If I have an unarticulated prolepsis of horse, how can I use it to inquire about my friend Flicka, who doesn't have her own proprietary prolepsis? And how could having an unarticulated prolepsis help me inquire about atoms or time, which likewise lack their own prolepses? This is a good question; and I shall consider it in due course. But another question one might have expected Plutarch to ask is: 'How can I use an unarticulated prolepsis of x to inquire about x?' Though he doesn't seem to ask this question, I shall do so.

We can now formulate the following variant of Meno's Paradox, which we can call 'The Paradox of Epicurean Inquiry':

<sup>31</sup> Though Plutarch speaks of the Epicureans, I shall focus just on Epicurus.

<sup>32</sup> According to Barnes, '[t]he *men* clause gives the Epicureans' own view, as *phasi* shows. The *de* clause must give Plutarch's view, not that of the Epicureans. For, according to Plutarch, the Epicureans, like the other Schools, tried but failed to solve Meno's paradox' ('Epicurean Signs', 128 n. 119). That is, Barnes thinks Plutarch says that the Epicureans themselves say that if prolepses are articulated, inquiry is pointless. He thinks that Plutarch then infers that the Epicureans think that prolepses are unarticulated, and that Plutarch raises a problem for that view. However, Barnes inserts a comma before *phasi* ('they say') in the first clause, thereby making it parenthetical. But doing so seems to make the resulting Greek ungrammatical, for both 'articulated' and 'unarticulated' are in the accusative; both therefore seem to be governed by *phasi*. Plutarch is therefore neutral on the issue of whether the Epicureans think prolepses are articulated or unarticulated at the start of inquiry. Similarly, we've seen that he doesn't take a stand on which horn of the Paradox of Stoic Inquiry he thinks the Stoics would attempt to dislodge. Thanks to David Sedley for first alerting me to the difficulty with Barnes's translation.

- (1) For all  $x$ , if  $x$  has a prolepsis, the prolepsis is either articulated or unarticulated.
- (2) If the prolepsis of  $x$  is articulated, inquiry into  $x$  is unnecessary.
- (3) If the prolepsis of  $x$  is unarticulated, inquiry into  $x$  is impossible.
- (4) Therefore, inquiry into  $x$  is either unnecessary or impossible.
- (5) If the prolepsis of  $x$  is unarticulated, one can't use it to inquire about something else,  $y$ , that doesn't have its own prolepsis.

Assuming that the key terms are used univocally, the argument is valid and the first premise is an instance of the Law of the Excluded Middle.<sup>33</sup> (2) then claims that, given the first of the exclusive and exhaustive options mentioned in (1), inquiry into  $x$  is unnecessary; and (3) claims that, given the second option, inquiry into  $x$  is impossible. (4) validly concludes that inquiry into  $x$  is either unnecessary or impossible.<sup>34</sup> (5) adds that if the prolepsis of  $x$  is unarticulated, neither can we use it to inquire into something else,  $y$ , that doesn't have its own prolepsis.

Not only is the argument so read valid but, also, its first premise is guaranteed to be true. Hence whether the argument is sound, and which premise or premises to reject if it isn't sound, depends on what Plutarch means by 'articulation'. So let's ask about that.

One possibility (of a sort we've encountered before) is that the prolepsis of  $x$  is articulated if it expresses all the truths there are about  $x$ . If that's what 'articulation' means here, then Plutarch is right to say that, if the prolepsis of  $x$  is articulated, inquiry into  $x$  would be unnecessary; for there'd be nothing left to

<sup>33</sup> One could, I suppose, argue that 'articulated' means 'completely articulated' and that 'unarticulated' means 'completely unarticulated', and that these are not exclusive and exhaustive options; hence there is room for an intermediate state of being partly articulated. One could then reject premise (1) by invoking this intermediate state; and one could then argue that it permits inquiry. However, Plutarch's argument is stronger if (1) mentions exclusive and exhaustive options. Of course, that leaves room for dispute about what it is to be articulated or unarticulated. We've met with this sort of issue before, in asking whether Meno's Paradox, either as it is formulated by Plato in the *Meno* or as Aristotle understands it in *APo.* 1.1, takes knowing and not knowing to be exclusive and exhaustive options, or whether there is room for an intermediate condition. As before, so here, I favor the first interpretation.

<sup>34</sup> We've seen that when Plutarch initially lays out Meno's Paradox, he seems to take its conclusion to be that inquiry is impossible, not that it is either impossible or unnecessary. We've also seen that it's not entirely clear which of these two conclusions he levels against the Stoics. It seems clearer here than it does in the case of the Stoics that he intends the disjunctive conclusion; and so I have formulated the Paradox of Epicurean Inquiry with it. But sometimes I ask just whether Plutarch argues that Epicurean inquiry is impossible, period, either as such or into  $x$  on the basis of a prolepsis of  $x$ .

inquire into about *x*. Indeed, if one can inquire only about something one doesn't know, inquiry into *x* would in this case be impossible.<sup>35</sup>

However, even if it would be pointless, or impossible, to inquire about *x* if one knew everything there was to know about *x*, one could use one's articulated prolepsis of *x* to inquire about other things that don't have their own prolepses. If, for example, one has an articulated prolepsis of horse, which says everything there is to say about the species, one could use that prolepsis to help one decide whether the object over there is a horse or a cow; one could apply one's prolepsis of *x* to a particular case. Nor does Plutarch deny this. He doesn't say that, if the prolepsis of *x* is articulated, we can't, or won't, use it to inquire into something else, *y*, that lacks a prolepsis. He says only that, in this case, we can't, or won't, inquire into *x*.

Be that as it may, if an articulated prolepsis of *x* is one that says everything there is to say about *x*, premise (2) is true.<sup>36</sup> However, Epicurus can avoid (4) by rejecting (3), which is the other horn of Plutarch's dilemma. He can say that it doesn't follow from the fact that a prolepsis of *x* isn't articulated, in the sense that it doesn't express all the truths there are about *x*, that one can't inquire about *x*. On the contrary, one can use the limited information that is contained in the prolepsis of *x* to discover further truths about *x*.

Similarly, turning to (5), even if the prolepsis of *x* isn't articulated, in the sense that it doesn't express all the truths there are about *x*, one might be able to use it to inquire into things that don't have their own prolepses. Even if the prolepsis of horse doesn't express all the truths there are about horses, it says enough about them to allow one to inquire whether that object over there is, or is not, a horse; and it puts one in a good position to discover whether it is.

However, it's not clear that an articulated prolepsis of *x* is meant to be one that expresses all the truths there are about *x*. Another possibility is that an articulated prolepsis is one that is subjectively clear to me, in the sense that I am fully aware of its entire content. If a prolepsis of *x* is articulated in this sense, (3) and (5) seem false. Contrary to them, having a prolepsis of *x* that is articulated in this sense puts me in an excellent position to inquire into *x*, as well as into other things that are suitably related to *x*. If the entire content of the prolepsis is fully clear to me,

<sup>35</sup> If so, perhaps, in saying that this horn makes inquiry unnecessary, Plutarch really means that it makes it impossible. Alternatively, perhaps he thinks that inquiry is into what one *thinks* one doesn't know (rather than into what one doesn't in fact know); in that case, inquiry into *x* would still be possible. However, it would also have point, for one could inquire so as to discover whether one's belief that one doesn't know is true or false.

<sup>36</sup> But see previous note.

there's nothing left for me to inquire into *about the prolepsis*; but I could still use the prolepsis to inquire into what it is of, as well as into other things.

It's not clear, however, that Plutarch understands articulation in either of the two ways just mentioned. Another possibility, which I suggested in Chapter 8, section 5, is that articulation is the process of converting, or expanding, a prolepsis into a definition. On this account of articulation, there is, contrary to Plutarch, a point to inquiring into *x* even if the prolepsis of *x* has been articulated. For one could use one's articulated prolepsis of *x*—that is, the definition of *x*—in order to discover further properties of *x* that are not mentioned in its prolepsis. Similarly, Plato thinks that if we know what virtue is, we can use that knowledge to inquire whether virtue is teachable; and Aristotle thinks that if we know definitions, we can use them to demonstrate truths about necessary accidents. Given this account of articulation, one can also inquire into *x* even if one's prolepsis of *x* is unarticulated: that is, even if it has not been converted into a definition. For one doesn't need to grasp the definition of *x* in order to inquire into *x*. Indeed, that's part of the point of positing prolepses as a basis for inquiry, to insist that we don't need to grasp a definition of something in order to inquire into it. Similarly, turning to (5), one can use something less than a definition of *x* to help one inquire into something else, *y*, that lacks its own prolepsis. One can use an outline account of what a horse is to inquire whether that object over there is a horse.

All in all, then, Epicurus doesn't seem vulnerable to the Paradox of Epicurean Inquiry.

## 6. Conclusion

Plutarch unfortunately doesn't explain very clearly why he thinks that only Plato has a satisfactory solution to Meno's Paradox.<sup>37</sup> But it's reasonable to think he accepts something like Alcinous' and Olympiodorus' view, according to which we couldn't inquire or discover unless we had conscious explicit prenatal P-knowledge which we retain traces of in the form of inborn concepts that seem to be at least dispositionally innate. Indeed, Plutarch seems to think they are innate at least in the content sense.<sup>38</sup> If we also have innate cognition of them, this cognition (at least according to Plutarch and Alcinous) falls short of

<sup>37</sup> Perhaps this is part of what leads Schofield to say that 215 is 'somewhat garbled' ('Preconception, Argument, and God', 305).

<sup>38</sup> As we've seen, it's not clear precisely what sort of innatism Alcinous favors. Olympiodorus seems to think they are innate at least in the content sense, but defending that view is beyond my scope here.

P-knowledge; from Plato's point of view, it is, or confers, just true belief. Further and relatedly, the contents of these concepts are more like the sorts of outline accounts that prolepses provide than like full definitions.

We've seen that Aristotle, Epicurus, and the Stoics reject parts of this view. Though they agree that we need concepts for inquiry—and the Epicureans and Stoics require prolepses in particular—none of them thinks that we need prenatal or innate knowledge (in the content or cognitive-condition sense) to explain how we can inquire or discover. They all think inquiry and discovery can be wholly explained without positing either prenatal knowledge or innate knowledge in the content or cognitive-condition sense.

We have yet to look at Sextus Empiricus. Whereas Plutarch criticizes Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Stoics for thinking that we can explain our ability to inquire and discover—and, more generally, our cognitive development—without appealing to prenatal or innate knowledge, Sextus may object that, so far from needing knowledge for inquiry, we don't even need belief. Whereas Plutarch thinks that Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Stoics attempt to explain inquiry and discovery from too impoverished a starting point, Sextus may think that they require too much for inquiry. In the next, and final, two chapters, we'll explore Sextus' criticism of Epicurean and Stoic attempts to explain the possibility of inquiry, as well as their criticisms of the possibility of Skeptical inquiry.

# 10

## Skeptical Inquiry 1:

### Sextus and the Stoics

#### 1. Introduction

Though the Stoics and Epicureans think that inquiry is possible, they argue that Skeptics aren't in a position to inquire. To persuade us of this, they level a variant of Meno's Paradox, which I shall call the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry. Sextus challenges their arguments, explaining how Skeptics can inquire. He also turns to the offensive, arguing that it's the Stoics and Epicureans—or Dogmatists more generally—who can't inquire. In this chapter I consider the Stoics' challenge to the possibility of Skeptical inquiry, along with Sextus' reply.<sup>1</sup> In the next chapter, I consider the Epicureans' challenge to the possibility of Skeptical inquiry, along with Sextus' reply.

#### 2. Skeptics and Dogmatists

Sextus opens the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (PH) by saying:<sup>2</sup>

When people are inquiring into something, the likely result is either a discovery, or a denial of discovery and a confession of inapprehensibility, or else a continuation of the inquiry. This, no doubt, is why, in the case of philosophical inquiries too, some have said that they have discovered the truth, some have asserted that it cannot be apprehended, and others are still inquiring. (1.1–2)

<sup>1</sup> See sect. 6 for reasons for thinking that the argument from PH 2 that I consider in this chapter is a Stoic argument.

<sup>2</sup> Here and elsewhere in quoting the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (= PH), I generally use the translation by J. Annas and J. Barnes, *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Scepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), though I have occasionally altered it, sometimes without comment. I have also consulted B. Mates's translation in his *The Skeptic Way: Sextus Empiricus's Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); and R. G. Bury's *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1933).

This leads Sextus to say that there are three main kinds of philosophy: Dogmatic, Academic, and Skeptic (1.3). He goes on to say that Aristotle, Epicurus, and the Stoics are Dogmatists; for they are among those who think they have discovered the truth. Though he doesn't mention Plato here, elsewhere he classifies him as a Dogmatist.<sup>3</sup> The Academics, according to Sextus, assert that things can't be apprehended.<sup>4</sup> The Skeptics are still inquiring (1.3). Indeed, Sextus says that 'the Skeptic (*skeptikê*) way, then, is also called "inquiring" (*zêtêtikê*), from its activity of inquiring and investigating (*skeptesthai*)'. The verb I translate as 'to investigate' is *skeptesthai*, which is cognate with *skeptikos*, 'skeptical'. In Sextus' day, it meant 'to investigate', 'to inquire', or 'to consider', rather than 'to be skeptical' in our sense, of one who suspends judgment as to whether, or who denies that, knowledge or justified belief, either as such or in some area, is possible. So when Sextus says that the Pyrrhonists are the only genuine *skeptikoi*, he means that they are the only genuine inquirers. Hence the claim that Skeptics can't inquire challenges the appropriateness of one of the most fundamental descriptions of Pyrrhonism.

It is therefore not surprising that Sextus begins *PH* 2 by saying:

Since our inquiry (*zêtêsis*) is directed against (*pros*) the dogmatists, let us go over, concisely and in outline, each of the parts of what they call philosophy, having first answered those who always allege that skeptics can neither inquire into (*zêtein*) nor, more generally, think about (*noein*) the things about which they [i.e. dogmatists] hold opinions (*dogmatizomenôn*). (*PH* 2.1)<sup>5</sup>

Skeptics may be called 'inquirers' and 'investigators'; but the Dogmatists challenge the appropriateness of these labels. They argue that Skeptics can't inquire into, or even think about, the things the Dogmatists discuss. If so, Sextus can't undertake an inquiry against them, contrary to his claim to be doing so. Hence, before embarking on it, he attempts to rebut the Dogmatists' challenge to the Skeptic's ability to do so. Let's turn, then, to the Dogmatists' challenge to the possibility of Skeptical inquiry. We can then ask how, and how well, Sextus replies.

<sup>3</sup> See the interesting discussion of how to classify Plato in *PH* 1.220–5.

<sup>4</sup> There is dispute about the accuracy of Sextus' description of the Academics; but the issue need not concern us here. For discussion, see Striker, 'On the Difference between the Pyrrhonists and Academics', in her *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics*, 135–49.

<sup>5</sup> Ἐπεὶ δὲ τὴν ζήτησιν τὴν πρὸς τοὺς δογματικούς μετήλθομεν, ἕκαστον τῶν μερῶν τῆς καλουμένης φιλοσοφίας συντόμως καὶ ὑποτυπωτικῶς ἐφοδεύσωμεν, πρότερον ἀποκρινάμενοι πρὸς τοὺς αἰὲ θρυλουύτας ὡς μήτε ζητεῖν μήτε νοεῖν ὅλως οἷός τέ ἐστιν ὁ σκεπτικός περὶ τῶν δογματιζομένων παρ' αὐτοῖς.



### 3. The Stoics' challenge to the possibility of Skeptical inquiry

Early in Book 2, Sextus records the Stoics' challenge to the possibility of Skeptical inquiry:

[2] For they say that skeptics either do, or do not, apprehend (*katalambanei*) what the dogmatists talk about (*legomena*). If they apprehend it, how can they be puzzled (*aporoie*) about what they say they apprehend? If they do not apprehend it, they do not even know how to talk about (*oide legein*) what they have not apprehended. [3] For just as someone who does not know (*eidôs*) what, for example, the removal <argument> or the theorem in two complexes is cannot even say anything about them, so someone who does not recognize (*gignôskôn*) any of the things the dogmatists talk about cannot inquire in opposition to them about things which he does not know (*oiden*). In neither case, therefore, can skeptics inquire into what the dogmatists talk about.<sup>6</sup>

Having recorded the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry, Sextus replies to it:<sup>7</sup>

[4] Now those who put this argument forward must tell us how they are here using the word 'apprehend'. Does it mean simply 'to think', without any further affirmation of the reality (*huparxeôs*) of the things about which we are making our statements? Or does it also include a positing of the reality of the things we are discussing? If they say that 'apprehend' in their argument means 'assent to an apprehensive appearance' (an apprehensive appearance comes from something real, is imprinted and stamped in accordance with the real thing itself, and is such as would not come from anything unreal), then they themselves will perhaps be unwilling to allow that they cannot inquire into things which they have not apprehended in this way. [5] For example, when a Stoic inquires in opposition to an Epicurean who says that substance is divided or that god does not show providence for things in the universe or that pleasure is good, has he apprehended these things or has he not apprehended them? If he has apprehended them, then in saying that they are real he utterly rejects the Stoa; and if he has not apprehended them, then he cannot say anything against them. [6] And similar things are to be said against those who come from the other schools, when they want to inquire into the beliefs of those who hold different beliefs (*tois heterodoxois*) from themselves. Thus they cannot inquire into anything in opposition to one another. Or rather, to avoid talking nonsense, practically the whole of dogmatism will be confounded and the skeptical philosophy will be firmly established, if it is granted that it is impossible to inquire into what has not been apprehended in this way... [10] If they say they mean that it is not apprehension of

<sup>6</sup> φασὶ γὰρ ὡς ἤτοι καταλαμβάνει ὁ σκεπτικὸς τὰ ὑπὸ τῶν δογματικῶν λεγόμενα ἢ οὐ καταλαμβάνει· καὶ εἰ μὲν καταλαμβάνει, πῶς ἂν ἀποροίη περὶ ὧν κατελήφεναι λέγει; εἰ δ' οὐ καταλαμβάνει, ἄρα περὶ ὧν οὐ κατέληφεν οὐδὲ οἶδε λέγειν. ὥσπερ γὰρ ὁ μὴ εἰδώς, εἰ τύχοι, τί ἐστὶ τὸ καθ' ὃ περιαιρουμένου ἢ τὸ διὰ δύο τροπικῶν θεωρήμα, οὐδὲ εἰπεῖν τι δύναται περὶ αὐτῶν, οὕτως ὁ μὴ γινώσκων ἕκαστον τῶν λεγομένων παρὰ τοῖς δογματικοῖς οὐ δύναται ζητεῖν πρὸς αὐτοὺς περὶ ὧν οὐκ οἶδεν. οὐδαμῶς ἄρα δύναται ζητεῖν ὁ σκεπτικὸς περὶ τῶν λεγομένων παρὰ τοῖς δογματικοῖς.

<sup>7</sup> I omit the end of 2.6, as well as all of 2.7–9.

this sort, but rather mere thinking which ought to precede inquiry, then it is not impossible for those who suspend judgment about the reality of what is unclear to inquire.<sup>8</sup> For a skeptic is not, I think, barred from having thoughts, if they arise from things which give him a passive impression (*hupopiptontôn*) and appear clearly to him<sup>9</sup> and do not at all imply the reality of what is being thought of. For we can think, as they say, not only of real things (*huparchonta*) but also of unreal things.<sup>10</sup> Hence someone who suspends judgment maintains his skeptical condition while inquiring and thinking. For it has been made clear that he assents to any impression given by way of a passive appearance, insofar as it appears to him. [11] And consider whether in actual fact the dogmatists are not barred from inquiry. For those who agree (*homologousi*) that they do not know (*agnoein*) how objects are in their nature (*pros tēn phusin*) may continue without inconsistency to inquire into them, whereas those who think they know (*gignōskein*) them accurately (*ep'akribes*) may not. For the latter, the inquiry is already at its end, as they suppose, whereas for the former, the reason why any inquiry is undertaken—that is, the idea (*to nomizein*) that they have not discovered the answer—is fully present.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Alt: 'it is not impossible for those who suspend judgment to inquire into the reality of what is unclear'.

<sup>9</sup> I follow Annas and Barnes in omitting *logô(i)/logôn*. The main MSS have *logôn*, which is used in the Teubner (= vol. 1 of *Sexti Empirici Opera*; 2nd ed., ed. H. Mutschmann, rev. J. Mau, 1958). There is also some manuscript warrant for *logô(i)*, which is what Bury prints in the Loeb; it is also assumed by many translators. In favor of the omission is the fact that the end of 2.10 plainly recalls this remark, but it doesn't contain either *logôn* or *logô(i)*.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *M* 8.334a–336a, which I discuss in the next chapter; *M* 9.49.

<sup>11</sup> οἱ δὲ ταῦτα λέγοντες ἀποκρινάσθωσαν ἡμῖν, πῶς λέγουσι νῦν τὸ καταλαμβάνειν, πότερον τὸ νοεῖν ἀπλῶς ἄνευ τοῦ καὶ ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑπάρξεως ἐκείνων περὶ ὧν ποιοῦμεθα τοὺς λόγους διαβεβαιοῦσθαι, ἢ μετὰ τοῦ νοεῖν καὶ <τὸ> τὴν ὑπαρξίν ἐκείνων τιθέναι περὶ ὧν διαλεγόμεθα. εἰ μὲν γὰρ καταλαμβάνειν εἶναι λέγουσιν ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τὸ καταληπτικὴ φαντασίᾳ συγκατατίθεσθαι, τῆς καταληπτικῆς φαντασίας οὐσης ἀπὸ ὑπάρχοντος, κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπάρχον ἐναπομεμαγμένης καὶ ἐναπεσφραγισμένης, οἷα οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο ἀπὸ μὴ ὑπάρχοντος, οὐδὲ αὐτοὶ βουλήσονται τάχα μὴ δύνασθαι ζητεῖν περὶ ἐκείνων ἃ μὴ κατελήφασιν οὕτως. οἷον γοῦν ὅταν ὁ Στωικὸς πρὸς τὸν Ἐπικούρειον ζητῇ λέγοντα ὅτι ἀήρηται ἡ οὐσία ἢ ὡς ὁ θεὸς οὐ προνοεῖ τῶν ἐν κόσμῳ ἢ ὅτι ἡ ἡδονὴ ἀγαθόν, πότερον κατελήφεν ἢ οὐ κατελήφεν; καὶ εἰ μὲν κατελήφεν, ὑπάρχειν αὐτὰ λέγων ἄρδην ἀναιρεῖ τὴν Στοάν· εἰ δ' οὐ κατελήφεν, οὐ δύναται τι πρὸς αὐτὰ λέγειν. τὰ δὲ παραπλήσια καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων αἰρέσεων ἀναγομένους λεκτέον, ὅταν τι ζητεῖν περὶ τῶν δοκούντων τοῖς ἑτεροδόξοις αὐτῶν ἐθέλωσιν. ὥστε οὐ δύνανται περὶ τίνος ζητεῖν πρὸς ἀλλήλους· μᾶλλον δέ, εἰ χρὴ μὴ ληρεῖν, συγχυθήσεται μὲν αὐτῶν ἅπανα ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν ἡ δογματικὴ, συντόνως δὲ προσαχθήσεται ἡ σκεπτικὴ φιλοσοφία, διδομένου τοῦ μὴ δύνασθαι ζητεῖν περὶ τοῦ μὴ οὕτως κατεληγμένου... εἰ δὲ φήσουςι μὴ τοιαύτην [λέγειν] καταληψὶν ἡγεῖσθαι ζητήσεως προσήκειν, νόησιν δὲ ἀπλῶς, οὐκ ἔστιν ἀδύνατον [ἐν] τοῖς ἐπέχουσιν περὶ τῆς ὑπάρξεως τῶν ἀδήλων ζητεῖν. νοήσεως γὰρ οὐκ ἀπείργεται ὁ σκεπτικός, οἶμαι, ἀπὸ τε τῶν παθητικῶς ὑποπιπτόντων <καὶ> κατ' ἐνάργειαν φαινομένων αὐτῷ λόγων γινόμενης καὶ μὴ πάντως εἰσαγωγῆς τὴν ὑπαρξίν τῶν νοουμένων· οὐ γὰρ μόνον τὰ ὑπάρχοντα νοοῦμεν, ὥς φασιν, ἀλλ' ἡδὴ καὶ τὰ ἀνύπαρκτα. ὅθεν καὶ ζητῶν καὶ νοῶν ἐν τῇ σκεπτικῇ διαθέσει μένει ὁ ἐφεκτικός· ὅτι γὰρ τοῖς κατὰ φαντασίαν παθητικὴν ὑποπίπτουσιν αὐτῷ, καθὼ φαίνεται αὐτῷ, συγκατατίθεται, δεδῆλωται. ὅρα δὲ μὴ καὶ νῦν οἱ δογματικοὶ ζητήσεως ἀπείργωνται. οὐ γὰρ τοῖς ἀγνοεῖν τὰ πράγματα ὡς ἔχει πρὸς τὴν φύσιν ὁμολογοῦσι τὸ ζητεῖν ἔτι περὶ αὐτῶν ἀνακόλουθον, τοῖς δ' ἐπ' ἀκριβὲς οἰομένοις ταῦτα γνώσκειν· οἷς μὲν γὰρ ἐπὶ πέρας ἤδη πάρεστιν ἡ ζήτησις, ὡς ὑπελήφασιν, οἷς δὲ τὸ δι' ὁ πάσα συνίσταται ζήτησις ἀκμὴν ὑπάρχει, τὸ νομίζειν ὡς οὐχ εὐρήκασιν.

Let's look first at the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry; we can then turn to Sextus' reply. The Paradox may be formulated as follows:

- (1) For any *x* inquired into by a Dogmatist, the Skeptic either does, or does not, apprehend (*katalambanei*) *x*.
- (2) If the Skeptic apprehends *x*, he isn't puzzled about *x*.
- [(3) If the Skeptic isn't puzzled about *x*, he can't inquire into *x*.]
- (4) Therefore, if the Skeptic apprehends *x*, he can't inquire into *x*.
- (5) If the Skeptic doesn't apprehend *x*, he can't even talk about *x*.<sup>12</sup>
- (6) If the Skeptic can't even talk about *x*, the Skeptic can't inquire into *x*.
- (7) Therefore, if the Skeptic doesn't apprehend *x*, he can't inquire into *x*.
- (8) Therefore, for any *x* inquired into by a Dogmatist, the Skeptic can't inquire into *x*.

Before evaluating the argument, it will be helpful to make a few preliminary points about the nature of inquiry as it is conceived of here.

First, according to (3), if the Skeptic isn't puzzled about something, he can't inquire into it.<sup>13</sup> For if one is puzzled about something, one thinks one doesn't know it; and one inquires into something only when one thinks one doesn't know it. Similarly, in *PH* 2.11, Sextus says that one inquires only when one has the idea (*nomizein*) that one hasn't found the answer. And in *M* 7.393 he says that 'if everything were evident, there would be no inquiry or being puzzled; for one inquires into and puzzles over (*aporei*) what is unclear (*adêlon*) to one, but not about what is apparent'. If one is puzzled about something—that is, if one is in a state of *aporia* about it—one suspends judgment either way. As Sextus says, the Skeptical persuasion was called aporetic 'either (as some say) from the fact that it puzzles over (*aporein*) and inquires into everything, or (*êtoi*) from its being at a loss (*amêchanein*) whether to assert or deny' (*PH* 1.7).<sup>14</sup> These passages all seem to say that one inquires only if one thinks one doesn't know the answer.

<sup>12</sup> Sextus first says that, according to this argument, the Skeptic doesn't know how to talk about the things he's allegedly inquiring into; he then says just that the Skeptic can't talk about them. This suggests that in speaking about knowing (*eidenai*) how to talk about something, Sextus just means being able to do so. Recall the discussion of the force of *hellênizein* in the discussion with the slave, discussed in Ch. 4, sect. 6. I assume that in speaking of talking about something, Sextus doesn't mean that one must be able to utter the words out loud.

<sup>13</sup> Admittedly, I have supplied this premise, but it seems to be assumed.

<sup>14</sup> It's not clear whether Sextus gives two explanations of why Skeptics are called Aporetics (that they are in *aporia* and that they suspend judgment) or just one (such that suspending judgment explains the sort of *aporia* they are in). Either way, being an Aporetic doesn't involve doubting whether *p* is true, if (as is sometimes thought) doubting whether *p* is true involves an inclination to believe that *p* is false. See Mates, *The Skeptic Way*, 5, 30–2.

According to (4), if the Skeptic apprehends something, he can't inquire into it. Yet, as we've seen, it's one thing to apprehend something, another to think one has apprehended it. One might be excessively modest, and so apprehend something without thinking one has done so. Or one might have unrealistically high standards for knowledge that one rightly thinks one doesn't meet, though one in fact meets the standards for having knowledge, given what knowledge really is. Or one might think one knows something when one doesn't. (2), however, seems to assume the KK principle, according to which, if one knows that *p*, one knows that one knows it. Or, to use Sextus' language, it seems to assume that, if one apprehends something, one apprehends, or realizes, that one does so. So the modest knower need not concern us here, though later we shall return to the case of the immodest non-knower.

*Secondly*, we've seen that, according to the other philosophers we've considered so far, inquiry aims to discover the truth, ideally to apprehend or know the truth. The opening lines of *PH* (1.1–2, cited above) suggest that this is also how Skeptics conceive of inquiry. For Sextus compares the Dogmatists, Academics, and Skeptics in terms of their attitude to the discovery of the truth: Dogmatists think they have found it; Academics think it can't be found; and Skeptics are still inquiring—sc. for the truth.<sup>15</sup> Further, Diogenes Laertius explicitly says that Skeptics were called inquirers (*zêtêtikoi*) because they were always inquiring for the truth (*zêtein tèn alêtheian*) (DL 9.70).<sup>16</sup>

*Thirdly*, we should ask what the 'objects' of inquiry are here. Sextus initially gives two examples: the removal argument and the theorem in two complexes. Unfortunately, it's not clear what the removal argument is.<sup>17</sup> But presumably inquiring into an argument involves asking whether it is valid or invalid, sound or unsound.<sup>18</sup> The theorem in two complexes is the argument or inference

<sup>15</sup> To say that Skeptics are inquiring in order to discover the truth doesn't imply that they are committed to thinking that any claims are true. Rather, they inquire in order to discover which *if any* claims are true. By contrast, all the other philosophers we've considered take some claims—including claims that Sextus would characterize as Dogmatic—to be true.

<sup>16</sup> For a challenge to the view that the goal of Skeptical inquiry is to discover the truth, see J. Palmer, 'Sceptical Investigation', *Ancient Philosophy* 20 (2000), 351–75. For a convincing reply, see C. Perin, 'Pyrrhonian Scepticism and the Search for Truth', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 30 (2006), 383–401; and his *The Demands of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), ch. 1.

<sup>17</sup> See Annas and Barnes, note *ad loc*; Mates, *The Skeptic Way*, 265. According to Mates, MS T says that the removal argument is 'omnis triangulus habet tres angulos equales duobus rectis', which is half of theorem 32 in Book I of Euclid's *Elements*. Bury, note *ad loc.*, speculates that the removal argument is some form of the Sorites.

<sup>18</sup> If the removal argument is a theorem rather than an argument (see last note), then Sextus doesn't here give an example of inquiring into an argument. Nonetheless, arguments are possible objects of inquiry, and inquiring into them involves asking about validity and soundness.

schema 'If  $p$  then  $q$ ; if  $p$ , then not  $q$ ; therefore not  $p$ .'<sup>19</sup> Sextus goes on to give further examples of possible objects of inquiry: he asks whether Stoics can inquire into such Epicurean claims as that being is divided, or that god doesn't have foreknowledge, or that pleasure is good (*PH* 2.5). These are all single propositions. Inquiring into an individual proposition presumably involves asking whether it is meaningful and, if it is, whether it is true or false. One can also inquire into its grounds: the reasons why, for example, the Epicureans believe that pleasure is good. One can also inquire into what something is. In *M* 7.426, for example, Sextus says that Skeptics inquire into what apprehensive appearances are. Inquiring into what something is involves attempting to articulate a satisfactory concept or definition of it. Accordingly, Sextus spends a great deal of time investigating various Dogmatic concepts and definitions—for example, of proof (2.134–92), man (2.22–34), and time (3.136–50). More generally, he speaks both about inquiring into the beliefs of others (about, for example, Stoics inquiring into Epicurean beliefs) and also about inquiring into the things various statements are about (see e.g. 2.4–5). Presumably in the second case, one inquires about something by asking what if any propositions are true of it. Possible substituends for 'x' are therefore quite broad; and different questions arise, depending on what sort of thing one is inquiring into. I shall for the most part focus on individual propositions. But at some stages it will be useful to consider other substituends for 'x'.

#### 4. Evaluation of the Stoics' argument

These preliminaries out of the way, let's now ask how good the Stoics' Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry is. In this section, I provide my own assessment, by looking at the argument in the abstract. In subsequent sections, I turn more directly to Sextus.

If 'apprehend' is used univocally, the argument is valid.<sup>20</sup> For it is then a constructive dilemma of the following form:

- (1')  $p$  or not- $p$ .
- (4')  $p$  implies  $q$ .
- (7') Not- $p$  implies  $q$ .

<sup>19</sup> See Annas and Barnes, note *ad loc.*; Mates, *The Skeptic Way*, 265. Mates also suggests that perhaps it is rather 'the metatheoretic assertion that all instances of the schema are sound'. An account of this theorem is given in Origen, *Contra Celsum* 7.15.

<sup>20</sup> More accurately, (1), (4), (7), and (8) then constitute a valid argument. However, since (4) and (7) are supported by sub-arguments, the argument as a whole (1–8) might not be valid.

(8') Therefore q.

For any x inquired into by a Dogmatist, the Skeptic either does, or does not, apprehend x. Whichever of these two exclusive and exhaustive options obtains, the Skeptic can't inquire into x. Therefore, Skeptics can't inquire into any x inquired into by a Dogmatist. The argument obviously recalls Socrates' dilemma in the *Meno*; the main difference is that the Stoic argument is phrased in terms of apprehension (*katalêpsis*), whereas Socrates' is phrased in terms of knowledge (*eidenai*).

Let's assume for now that the argument is of this form. Not only is it then valid, but (1) is also then non-problematically true: the Skeptic either does, or does not, apprehend x; *tertium non datur*. To know whether the argument is sound, we therefore need to look at (4) and (7). Since (4) is supported by (2) and (3), and since (7) is supported by (5) and (6), we also need to look at them. Let's look first at (2)–(4):

- (2) If the Skeptic apprehends x, he isn't puzzled about x.
- (3) If the Skeptic isn't puzzled about x, he can't inquire into x.
- (4) Therefore if the Skeptic apprehends x, he can't inquire into x.

This argument is clearly valid.<sup>21</sup> But is it sound? I shall assume that (3) is true. For we've said that one inquires only into what is unclear to one, and so only into something one is in some sense puzzled about. And that seems to be all (3) means.<sup>22</sup>

We've seen that (2) is true only if we assume the KK principle, or a corresponding apprehension principle according to which, if one apprehends something, one apprehends, or is aware, that one has done so. Leaving that issue to one side, there's another issue we can raise about (2). We've already looked at this sort of issue in detail; so here we can be brief. Let's suppose that 'x' is a proposition p, and that to apprehend p is to know that it is true. (2) is then true: if one knows that p is true, one won't be puzzled about whether it's true. If, however, to apprehend p is just to understand what it means, (2) is false. I might understand the proposition that substance is divided, but be puzzled about whether it is true.

<sup>21</sup> Again assuming that the key terms are used univocally.

<sup>22</sup> One might argue that what's true is rather that if one isn't puzzled about something, one *won't* inquire into it—not that one *can't* (though here we might want to distinguish psychological from logical impossibility, and argue that, in this case, one can't inquire only in the first sense). If so, either we should take (3) to be making that point, or else (3) is false. I won't worry about this possible complication here.

There is, then, a reading of (2) on which it's true, and another reading of it on which it's false.<sup>23</sup>

Let's read (2) so that it's true. (2)–(4) is then a sound sub-argument. So Sextus can avoid the conclusion of the overall argument only if he can avoid the second sub-argument. Let's now consider it.

If 'apprehend', in (2), means 'know', then 'not apprehend', in (5), should mean 'not know': at least, that's what it needs to mean if the argument is of the suggested form. So read, however, (5) is false: even if I don't know that, or whether, Goldbach's conjecture is true, I might be able to talk about it, in the sense that I can formulate it and consider various questions about it.

Suppose, however, that 'not apprehend' means 'not have a clue', 'being in a cognitive blank'. Not only does one not know that (or whether) *p* is true; one is in a complete cognitive blank about it. (As we've seen, Meno, in raising his three questions, understands not knowing as being in a cognitive blank.) On this reading, (5) is true. If one is in a cognitive blank about something, one isn't in a position to talk about it. (5)–(7) can therefore be read so as to be a sound sub-argument. If, however, that is how we understand 'not apprehend', then, if the overall argument is of the suggested form, 'apprehend', in (2)–(4), would have to mean 'have an idea about, not be in a cognitive blank about'. But if that is how we understand 'apprehend', (2) is false: having an idea about *x* doesn't mean that one isn't puzzled about it. I might have the idea that Goldbach's conjecture is a mathematical conjecture, but be puzzled about whether it is true, and so proceed to inquire whether it is. Hence, on this reading, (2)–(4) (and so (1)–(8)) is unsound.

We can, then, read (5)–(7) so that it is a sound sub-argument. We can also read (2)–(4) so that it is a sound sub-argument. But if we so read both (2)–(4) and (5)–(7), the argument as a whole is invalid. For it is then of the following form: *p* or not *p* (= (1)); *r* implies *q* (= (2)–(4)); *s* implies *q* (= (5)–(7)); so *q* ((8)).<sup>24</sup> We can restore validity by retaining the readings of (2)–(4) and of (5)–(7) on which they are sound, and revising (1) to say: 'For any *x*, the Skeptic either knows *x* or is in a cognitive blank with respect to it.' But then the argument is unsound. For if (1) is so read, it is false: knowing something, and being in a complete blank with respect to it, are not exhaustive options. For example, there are also (true) beliefs.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> There are yet further possibilities: for example, ones involving objects rather than individual propositions. But the two I've canvassed will do for our purposes.

<sup>24</sup> I assume that *p*, *q*, *r*, and *s* are all different, non-equivalent propositions.

<sup>25</sup> Whether the Skeptics wish to appeal to them is of course another matter.

There are yet further ways in which the argument can be read. But it seems reasonable to conclude that the argument, on any reasonable reading of it, is either valid but unsound or else has all true premises but is invalid. As we have seen, the same is true of Meno's Paradox, as well as of the variants of it that we've considered.

## 5. The Some Belief View and the No Belief View

Even if the argument as a whole isn't sound, we've seen that it contains two sub-arguments, each of which can be read so as to be sound. We should therefore ask whether Skeptics are vulnerable to either of these sub-arguments when they are so read. In order to decide about this, we need to know what the Skeptic's cognitive condition is—or, more precisely, what he takes it to be. For my concern here is not whether Skeptics can in fact inquire, given their actual condition (which might be different from the one they take themselves to be in) but whether they could inquire if they were in the condition they take themselves to be in.

There is, however, to say the least, considerable dispute about what that cognitive condition is. Here we may contrast the *No Belief View* with the *Some Belief View*.<sup>26</sup> According to the No Belief View, Skeptics take themselves to have no beliefs.<sup>27</sup> According to the Some Belief View, Skeptics take themselves to have some beliefs. Among those who favor the No Belief View, there is dispute about what nondoxastic cognitive condition Skeptics take themselves to be in.<sup>28</sup> Among those who favor the Some Belief View, there is dispute about what beliefs Skeptics take themselves to have. Among defenders of both views, there is dispute about the operative sense of 'belief'.

If the No Belief View is correct, Socrates' reply to Meno's Paradox—that one can inquire even if one lacks knowledge, if one has and relies on relevant true beliefs—is not available to the Skeptics. Indeed, one might think that, if the No

<sup>26</sup> I introduced these labels in 'Scepticism, Existence, and Belief', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 14 (1996), 273–90, at 284ff. Others use other labels for these or related positions.

<sup>27</sup> One might well ask what it would be to take oneself to have no beliefs, but I shall not pursue that matter here.

<sup>28</sup> By a nondoxastic cognitive condition, I mean one that falls short of belief (*doxa*). For example, it might appear to me that the oar is bent in water, without my believing that it is bent in water; it might appear to me that an argument is sound, without my believing that it is. As the second example is meant to show, nondoxastic appearances are not restricted to perceptual appearances. Nor need the content of a nondoxastic appearance be nonconceptual. It can appear to me that the oar is bent in water only if I have a concept of oar; it can appear to me that an argument is sound only if I have a concept of soundness.



Belief View is correct, Skeptics are vulnerable to the second sub-argument, (5)–(7), when it is read so as to be sound. As we’ve seen, on this reading it says that if one is in a cognitive blank with respect to something—if one doesn’t have a clue about it—one can’t inquire into it. And one might think that if skeptics lack all beliefs, their minds are cognitive blanks.<sup>29</sup> In that case, they would instantiate the antecedent of (5), and so be vulnerable to (5)–(7).

It might seem, by contrast, that if the Some Belief View is correct, Sextus could reply to the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry in a way analogous to the way in which Socrates replies to Meno’s Paradox, by saying that Skeptics have beliefs and can inquire on that basis. However, to know whether the Some Belief View (if it is correct) provides the Skeptics with an escape route from the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry, we would need to know more than that Skeptics take themselves to have some beliefs. We would also need to know what they claim to have beliefs about, and in what sense of ‘belief’ they claim to have beliefs. For example, if their beliefs are minimal enough, it’s not clear they can inquire. Animals and infants are sometimes said to have beliefs. But it’s not clear that having the sorts of beliefs they have is sufficient for being able to inquire whether god exists, or whether there are atoms.<sup>30</sup> Even if the Skeptics accord themselves beliefs that are more sophisticated than are those of animals or infants, it might matter what their beliefs are about. Perhaps their beliefs are irrelevant to the particular inquiries they claim to undertake. Suppose, for example, that they take themselves to have beliefs just about perceptible properties; it’s not clear that would enable them to inquire about the removal argument.<sup>31</sup>

With these issues in mind, let’s now look at Sextus’ reply to the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> As we saw in Ch. 3, sects. 1 and 2, Meno seems to infer from his current lack of beliefs that he is in a cognitive blank.

<sup>30</sup> In *PH* 1.62–78, Sextus argues that dogs (which, according to Sextus, were thought by some to be the lowest animals of all: 63) are more cognitively sophisticated than was sometimes supposed. For example, he says that, contrary to what is sometimes supposed, dogs do not lack reason; they can even engage in dialectic (69)—and so presumably they can inquire. Sextus’ point is not that dogs can engage in dialectic in some reduced sense; it is that they can do so even as the Stoics conceive of dialectic. But it’s not clear how seriously Sextus intends this argument. He says he is offering it in addition to other, more substantial, arguments, because ‘we do not rule out a little ridicule of the deluded and self-satisfied dogmatists’ (62). As we’ve seen, the Stoics deny that children and animals can reason at all; and so, according to the Stoics, neither can they inquire.

<sup>31</sup> I ask later what if any beliefs Skeptics accord themselves. The point for now is just that having some beliefs or other doesn’t guarantee that one can inquire.

<sup>32</sup> It’s not clear that the Skeptics can consistently defend any given reply in their own right—at least, as a matter of belief—though whether they can do so depends on what we say about the Some Belief and the No Belief View. However, they can and do argue *ad hominem*; and they can and do say how things nondoxastically seem to them to be. One can also step outside the Skeptical stance and

## 6. Sextus' reply: two types of apprehension

Sextus begins in just the right way, by asking, in 2.4, what apprehension is. He initially mentions two possibilities:

- (a) to apprehend is simply to think, without affirming the reality (*huparxis*) of what one is thinking about; or
- (b) to apprehend is to think, and to posit the reality of what one is thinking about.

He then abruptly mentions a third possibility:<sup>33</sup>

- (c) to apprehend is to assent to an apprehensive appearance (*phantasia kataléptikê*), that is, to an appearance that 'comes from something real, is imprinted and stamped in accordance with the real thing itself, and is such as could not come from anything unreal'.

I consider (a) in the next section; here I focus on (b) and (c). (b) construes apprehension as belief, in the sense of taking something to be true.<sup>34</sup> As such, it corresponds to the Stoics' notion, not of apprehension (*katalêpsis*), but of assent (*sunkatathesis*). As we've seen, in their view to assent to p is to take p to be true. They recognize two species of assent: *doxa* (which for them is *mere* belief, not belief as such), and apprehension (*katalêpsis*), which they understand, not in way (a) or (b), but in way (c). In their view, one apprehends that p is true when one assents to an apprehensive appearance that p (or to the *axiôma* that expresses the content of the appearance). Not only does one then believe that p (in the broad sense of taking p to be true, though not in the Stoics' sense of having *doxa*), but p is also true and indeed is 'such as could not come from anything unreal'; hence it

ask whether, if Skeptics are in fact in the position that defines Skepticism, they could inquire. When I speak of Sextus' reply, I don't mean that he believes his reply, in the sense of taking it to be true. His reply should rather be taken either to express his nondoxastic appearances or to be *ad hominem*; or perhaps he is stepping outside the Skeptical stance to say what resources are available to the Skeptic if he is in the position that defines Skepticism. For my purposes, the choice among these options doesn't matter.

<sup>33</sup> J. Brunschwig, 'Sextus Empiricus on the *kritêrion*: the Sceptic as Conceptual Legatee', in J. Dillon and A. A. Long (eds.), *Questions of Eclecticism* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1988), 145–75, reprinted in his *Papers in Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 224–43 (latter pagination), 228, thinks Sextus distinguishes just two senses of 'apprehend', or two kinds of apprehension ((a) and (c)). Cf. Mates, *The Skeptic Way*, 264, 47. Thanks to Roald Nashi for suggesting to me that Sextus distinguishes three sorts of apprehension. However, perhaps (c) is an instance of (b). If it is, then there is a sense in which Sextus mentions just two possibilities ((a) and (b)), and a sense in which he mentions three ((a), (b), and (c)).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *PH* 1.14.

is guaranteed to be true. This is S-knowledge, knowledge as the Stoics conceive of it. Whether or not we think apprehension (c) constitutes knowledge (we've seen that Plato wouldn't think it does so), Sextus treats it as knowledge. For in 2.3 he uses 'apprehension' (in sense (c)) and its cognates interchangeably with *eidenai* and *gignôskein* and their cognates. *Eidenai* normally indicates knowledge. As we've seen, *gignôskein* can be used more extensively than for knowledge. But it can be used for knowledge; and the fact that Sextus uses it interchangeably with *eidenai* here suggests he uses it for knowledge here.

Though apprehension (c) is the Stoics' account of apprehension, we've noted that not everyone understands apprehension as they do.<sup>35</sup> The fact that Sextus explains apprehension in Stoic terms suggests that the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry at issue here is due to the Stoics. Further, he immediately goes on to give the example of a Stoic inquiring into an Epicurean claim; and then, in 2.6, he says that a similar argument can be used against other sects. That too suggests that he's discussing a specifically Stoic challenge to the possibility of Skeptical inquiry.<sup>36</sup>

Sextus proceeds to focus on apprehension in senses (b) and (c). He asks whether, when the Stoics say that Sceptics don't apprehend what they purport to inquire into, and so can't inquire into it, they mean that one must apprehend that *p* is true, in way (b) or (c), in order to inquire whether it is true. If that's what the Stoics mean, and if one must in fact apprehend that *p* is true, in way (b) or (c), in order to inquire whether it is, then the Sceptics may be in trouble. For they suspend judgment about the truth of the Dogmatists' claims; hence they don't take themselves to know or believe them. Yet apprehension (b) and (c) involve doing so. Suppose they don't apprehend what they claim to inquire into in either of these ways. In that case, they instantiate the antecedent of (5), and so are vulnerable to (5)–(7).

Sextus' first reply is *ad hominem*: he argues that the Stoics shouldn't advance this argument, for it has repercussions they wouldn't welcome. For suppose that, in order for a Stoic to inquire whether (as the Epicureans believe) pleasure is good, he must apprehend, in way (b) or (c), that pleasure is good. If he apprehends that pleasure is good in way (c), then pleasure *is* good, since apprehension of this sort (assent to an apprehensive appearance) is truth-entailing. Even if he merely believes that it is (= apprehension (b)), still, he takes it to be true that it is (since to believe that *p* is to take *p* to be true). Hence, if one can inquire whether *p*

<sup>35</sup> See Ch. 7, n. 26.

<sup>36</sup> So also Striker, 'Kritêrion tês alêtheias', 65. Contrast Grgic, 'Sextus Empiricus on the Possibility of Inquiry', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 89 (2008), 436–59. As we shall see in the next chapter, in *M* 8.337–336a Sextus considers a version of the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry that he says is due especially (*malista*) to the Epicureans.

is true only if one apprehends in way (b) or (c) that it is, a Stoic could inquire into the truth of Epicurean claims only if those claims were true or, at least, only if he believed they were. Of course, no Stoic would want to accept this; nor, *mutatis mutandis*, would any Dogmatist want to do so. For were they to do so, they would either need to embrace contradictory claims (their own, as well as those of their opponents) or abandon their own claims.<sup>37</sup> Obviously neither option is attractive. Hence, the Stoics shouldn't say that one can inquire whether a given claim is true only if one already apprehends it in way (b) or (c). The Stoics wanted to argue that it's just Skeptics who can't inquire. Sextus urges that if their argument succeeds, it shows that neither can the Dogmatists inquire—at least, not into their opponents' claims.

Sextus sees that the Stoics might well agree: 'they themselves will perhaps be unwilling to allow that they cannot inquire into things which they have not apprehended in this way' (2.4). It's not clear, however, whether he means that they antecedently require apprehending, in way (b) or (c), that which one is inquiring into, though they will abandon that view in the face of Sextus' argument; or whether he is admitting that they never intended that view in the first place. Be that as it may, we saw in Chapter 8 that the Stoics don't think one needs to apprehend (in way (c)) that *p* is true in order to inquire whether it is. Nor do they require one to believe that *p* is true in order to inquire whether it is. Rather, they inquire in order to decide whether a given proposition is true or to find the answer to a question. To be sure, they require prolepses for inquiry. But, as we've seen, they don't think that requires one to know or even believe that *p* is true; nor does it require one to know or believe the answer to the question under consideration. One can, for example, use one's prolepsis of justice in order to decide whether a given action is just, or in order to discover the definition of justice, where one doesn't already know or believe that the action is just, or that the definition is thus and so. Sextus takes the Stoics to accept a matching version of a prior-apprehension-(b)-or-(c) principle for propositions. But they are not committed to this principle. They accept just a stepping-stone version of a prior-apprehension-(c) principle, or of a prior-prolepsis principle.

## 7. Sextus' reply: a third type of apprehension

So far Sextus has argued that if apprehension is construed in way (b) or (c), and is required for inquiry, neither Stoics nor Skeptics can inquire.<sup>38</sup> Hence we can

<sup>37</sup> Thanks to Roald Nashi for this way of putting the point.

<sup>38</sup> At least, Stoics couldn't in that case inquire into their opponents' claims.

dismiss the first sub-argument when it is so read; for the Stoics will wisely refrain from arguing that one must apprehend something, in way (b) or (c), for one to inquire into it. Hence, even if Skeptics don't (or don't claim to) apprehend something in that way, that isn't a bar to their ability to inquire into it; for one doesn't need to apprehend that which one is inquiring into in that way, in order to be able to inquire into it.

In 2.10 Sextus turns to (a), on which to apprehend is simply to think (*noein haplôs*). He says that Skeptics apprehend in this way, and that that is sufficient for them to be able to inquire.

Sextus is making two related points. First, he is now disarming (2)–(4): there is a sense in which Skeptics apprehend; and so there is a sense in which they satisfy the antecedent of (2). But the way in which they do so does not prevent them from inquiring; on the contrary, it enables them to do so. Secondly, he is challenging the truth of (7), if 'apprehension', in it, is understood in way (b) or (c): contrary to (7), one doesn't need to apprehend something, in either of those two ways, in order to inquire into it. For Skeptics don't (claim to) apprehend in either of those two ways; yet they can inquire. If (7) is false, then, to avoid commitment to it, one must reject at least one of (5) and (6) (given that the argument is valid). Sextus is presumably targeting (5). At least, we've seen that (5) is false if it says that one needs to apprehend something in sense (b) or (c) in order to inquire into it.

Looking at the paradox as a whole ((1)–(8)), along with Sextus' reply so far, we can say that he doesn't dispute the argument's validity. He also concedes that Skeptics can't inquire if, to do so, they must apprehend what they are inquiring into in way (b) or (c). But, since Dogmatists shouldn't impose that constraint on inquiry—since if they did, they couldn't inquire (at least, not into their opponents' claims)—we can set that interpretation to one side. If, however, we understand apprehension in way (a), then there is no bar to Skeptical inquiry; for Skeptics apprehend what they inquire into in that way. The paradox is therefore unsound if we read apprehension in way (a). For so read, (2) is false; hence we can't conclude to (4).

How should we characterize the way in which Skeptics think about things they apprehend only in way (a) (and not in way (b) or (c))? Sextus means, I think, that they think about various claims without taking them to be true; and they think about ostensible objects without taking those objects to exist.<sup>39</sup> For he explains

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Striker, 'Review of H. Tarrant, *Scepticism or Platonism?*', in *Ancient Philosophy* 11 (1991), 202–6. I discuss the notion of an ostensible object in 'Sextus and External World Scepticism', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 24 (2003), 341–85.

the relevant sort of apprehension by saying it is 'simply "to think", without any further affirmation of the reality (*huparxeôs*) of the things about which we are making our statements'. For a proposition to have *huparxis* is for it to be true (see e.g. *M* 8.10). If Sceptics think about dogmatic claims without affirming their reality, they think about them without affirming that they are true. Similarly, if they think about an ostensible object, they don't thereby take it to exist. When Macbeth asks 'Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand?' and wonders whether it is 'a dagger of the mind, a false creation, proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain', the dagger is an ostensible object: it purports to exist; but it may not exist, and Macbeth is not committed to its existence. Or again, in 2.10 Sextus says that 'a skeptic is not, I think, barred from having thoughts if they arise from things which give him a passive impression and appear clearly to him and do not at all imply the reality of what is being thought of. For we can think, as they say, not only of real things but also of unreal things'. Once again, the point is that Sceptics can think about things—whether propositions or ostensible objects—without taking those things to be real (true, in the case of propositions; or existent, in the case of ostensible objects). There are a variety of ways in which one can think about a proposition without taking it to be true: one can entertain it, or wonder whether it is true, or consider it, and so on. We do this all the time. I read a philosophy article and wonder whether its main claims are true; scientists test new hypotheses; and so on. Moreover, having such an 'acceptance attitude' to a proposition is sufficient for being able to inquire into it; one doesn't need to know or believe that it is true.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, one can think about an ostensible object without taking it to exist: like Macbeth, one can wonder whether it exists.

Sextus is quite right to say to say that one can inquire whether *p* is true without knowing or believing that it is; and that one can inquire whether an ostensible object exists without knowing or believing that it does. He is right to reject a matching version of a prior-apprehension-(b)-or-(c) principle, whether for propositions or ostensible objects. If any of his dogmatic opponents endorse such a principle, they are wrong to do so. However, though it's been argued that some of his opponents accept such a principle, I've argued that Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans, and Stoics don't do so. But even if Sextus doesn't have a good *ad hominem* point, he is nonetheless to be commended for making a good point quite clearly.

<sup>40</sup> On acceptance attitudes, see e.g. R. Stalnaker, *Inquiry* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1979). Entertaining a proposition and so on are perhaps best called *mere* acceptance attitudes, to distinguish them from e.g. belief, which is a kind of acceptance that goes beyond mere acceptance, since it involves taking a proposition to be true (with the aim of its being true).

Although the other philosophers we've explored don't accept a matching version of a prior-apprehension-(b)-or-(c) principle, we've seen that they all accept one or another version of a stepping-stone prior-cognition principle. We haven't yet asked what Sextus says about this. Nor, more generally, have we asked whether the passage sheds any light on the debate between the Some Belief View and the No Belief View. To say, as Sextus does, that Skeptics think about and inquire into propositions they neither know nor believe implies that they suspend judgment about *some* propositions, and so lack *some* beliefs. But it isn't to say that they disclaim *all* beliefs. Nor is it to say that they take themselves to have any beliefs.

## 8. Thinking, concepts, and nondoxastic appearances

Whatever Sextus says on the matter, it has been argued that one can inquire only if one has some knowledge. According to one version of this view, one can inquire whether a given proposition is true only if one understands what it means; and one can inquire what the answer to a question is only if one understands what the question means. Further, to understand what a proposition or question means is to know what it means. On this view, understanding a proposition, or question, requires what is sometimes called conceptual knowledge. If Sextus accepts this view, he is committed to the Some Belief View. Indeed, he would also be committed to a foreknowledge principle and to the view that Skeptics have some knowledge.<sup>41</sup>

R. J. Hankinson thinks that this is Sextus' view. In commenting on 2.10, he says: 'Skeptics, then, are allowed conceptual knowledge... [T]he Sceptic has no qualms about allowing himself to understand, for instance, the content of the Stoic concept of cataleptic impression—all he doubts is whether such a concept is instantiated.'<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> For the view that Skeptics have, and take themselves to have, not only belief but also knowledge, see Frede, 'The Sceptic's Beliefs', in his *Essays in Ancient Philosophy*, 179–200, at 179–80 (originally published as 'Des Skeptikers Meinungen' in *Neue Hefte für Philosophie*, Heft 15/6 (1979), 102–29). However, his reasons are not those just mentioned in the text.

<sup>42</sup> *The Sceptics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 281. I discuss Hankinson more fully in 'Scepticism, Existence, and Belief'. Hankinson first says that Skeptics have conceptual knowledge. He then says that they understand various concepts. Yet one might argue that understanding a concept doesn't require knowledge. Cf. H. Maconi, who says that Sextus 'did not cut himself off from conceptual knowledge: his *epochê* was compatible with the possession and use of concepts' ('Nova Non Philosophandi Philosophia', 244). Again, however, perhaps one can have and use concepts without having anything properly called *knowledge*.

However, I don't think 2.10 accords Skeptics anything Sextus calls, or would want to call, conceptual *knowledge*. He says that Skeptics think (*noein*); and thinking involves having concepts.<sup>43</sup> But he doesn't mean to suggest that thinking, or having concepts, is a kind of *knowledge*.<sup>44</sup> At least, he certainly doesn't mean to accord Skeptics P-knowledge, A-knowledge, E-knowledge, or S-knowledge. For Skeptics suspend judgment about whether these even exist. Hence Sextus presumably isn't according Skeptics knowledge of any of these sorts, whether about the meanings of Dogmatic claims or about anything else. Further, he uses *noein* here as an *alternative* to apprehension in senses (b) and (c). He seems to be suggesting that Skeptics think in a way that falls short of apprehending in those two ways. The Skeptical thoughts at issue here are lower-level than that.

It's also worth noting that, contrary to Hankinson, Sextus' skepticism extends beyond doubting—or, perhaps more accurately, suspending judgment as to whether<sup>45</sup>—various Dogmatic concepts are instantiated. In *PH* 2.22–8, for example, he argues that (so far as what the Dogmatists say goes) man is not only inapprehensible but also inconceivable (22: *anepinoëtos*); indeed, 'what they say is actually unintelligible' (22: *asuneta*). This seems to question whether Dogmatic concepts are ultimately coherent. This too suggests that Sextus doesn't take Skeptical thoughts about Dogmatic claims to involve any sort of knowledge. Perhaps he thinks that to do so would misleadingly imply commitment as to the adequacy, or at least the coherence, of the concepts involved. To be sure, perhaps one can know what a concept means without being committed to the concept's being fully satisfactory or adequate, and even if the concept is not in fact fully

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, *M* 8.337, where Sextus either equates thinking (*noësis*) with having concepts (*ennoia*, *epinoia*, and *prolēpsis* are all used) or at least takes thinking to imply having concepts. I discuss this passage in the next chapter.

<sup>44</sup> If Sextus did accord Skeptics conceptual knowledge, his position would be interestingly similar to Descartes'. In the Sixth Set of Objections, it is argued that 'from the fact that we are thinking it does not seem to be entirely certain that we exist. For in order to be certain that you are thinking you must know what thought or thinking is, and what existence is; but since you do not yet know what these things are, how can you know that you are thinking or that you exist?' (*AT* 7.413/*CSM* 2.278). Descartes replies that '[i]t is true that no one can be certain that he is thinking or that he exists unless he knows what thought is and what existence is' (*AT* 7.422/*CSM* 2.285). But, he goes on to say, '[t] his internal awareness of one's thought and existence is so innate in all men that, although we may pretend that we do not have it if we are overwhelmed by preconceived opinions and pay more attention to words than to their meanings, we cannot in fact fail to have it'. The knowledge at issue here is what Descartes calls 'internal awareness' as opposed to 'reflective knowledge'. Cf. the Appendix to the Fifth Objections and Replies, at *AT* 9A.206; and, for different but interestingly related points, *AT* 8A.37–8/*CSM* 1.220f. and *AT* 5.152/*CSM* 3.337. If Descartes but not Sextus exempts the meanings of terms from the scope of his skepticism, there is a way in which his skepticism is less extensive than Sextus'.

<sup>45</sup> See n. 14.



satisfactory or adequate. It's less clear, however, whether one can know what an unintelligible concept means. For if it is unintelligible, it has no meaning.<sup>46</sup>

Even if Skeptics don't claim to *know* what Dogmatic claims and concepts mean, they might claim to have *beliefs* about what they mean. And 2.10 implies that Skeptics have *some* beliefs. For at the end of this passage Sextus says that 'it has been made clear that he [the Skeptic] assents to any impression given by way of a passive appearance, insofar as it appears to him'. This refers back to 1.13, the only passage in which Sextus explains the sense in which Skeptics have, and lack, *dogmata*. The interpretation of this passage is much disputed. I argue elsewhere that Sextus says that Skeptics have beliefs about how they are appeared to, though not about anything unclear.<sup>47</sup> So, for example, if it appears to a Skeptic that the sky is blue, she believes that it appears to her that the sky is blue; but she suspends judgment as to whether the sky is blue. This is a version of the Some Belief View, one I take Sextus to be advertent to here.

However, though Sextus implies in 2.10 that Skeptics have beliefs about how they are appeared to, I don't think he does so in order to suggest that Skeptics also have beliefs about whether any Dogmatic claims are true, or even about what Dogmatic claims or concepts mean. For one thing, he doesn't seem to mention the fact that Skeptics have beliefs about how they are appeared to as a direct explanation of how Skeptics can inquire; he seems to mention this only in order to defuse the objection that Skeptics don't rely on their nondoxastic appearances. The reply is that so far from rejecting their appearances, they believe they have them.<sup>48</sup> But it seems to be the mere having of, and reliance on, their appearances,

<sup>46</sup> However, perhaps in saying that man is *anepinoëtos* (so far as Dogmatic attempts to say what man is goes) and that what the Dogmatists say is *asuneta*, Sextus means—not that what they say is literally unintelligible, but—just that it is unsatisfactory in some weaker way. Certainly, despite saying that man is *anepinoëtos*, Sextus discusses various *epinoiai* of man. However, this may just be an example of his concessive strategy: strictly speaking, man is *anepinoëtos*. But if you aren't persuaded by that, consider various purported concepts of man; various difficulties still result. Alternatively, perhaps there can be an *epinoia* of x even if x is *anepinoëton*.

<sup>47</sup> See 'Sceptical *Dogmata*'.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. PH 1.19, where the context is the *apraxia* argument. The charge is that since Skeptics reject their appearances, they can't act. The reply includes the claim that so far from rejecting their appearances, Skeptics rely on them. The similarity between the present passage and 1.19 is hardly surprising. For the paradox of Skeptical inquiry is an *apraxia* argument: it alleges that there is something Skeptics cannot do, viz. inquire. In this connection, it's interesting to note that Margaret Wilson has argued that having beliefs about how one is appeared to is sufficient for action, and so for dissolving the *apraxia* argument. See her *Descartes*, 48. She is discussing Descartes, not Sextus; but I argue in 'Descartes and Ancient Skepticism: Reheated Cabbage?', *Philosophical Review* 109 (2000), 195–234, that similar issues confront them both, and that their replies are more similar than they are sometimes taken to be. Of course, even if having beliefs about how one is appeared to is sufficient for some actions, it doesn't follow that having them is sufficient for Skeptics to be able to inquire into Dogmatic claims in particular.

rather than the fact that the Skeptics believe they have them, that, so to speak, does the work of the reply. Further, again, Sextus is aiming to articulate a notion of thinking that differs not only from apprehension (c) but also from apprehension (b).

But how can Skeptics think about Dogmatic claims and concepts if they don't apprehend them in ways (b) or (c)? Sextus seems to say that they can do because they have nondoxastic appearances about them: the Skeptical thoughts at issue here are nondoxastic appearances. Sextus' point is that having nondoxastic appearances is a kind of thinking. Since Skeptics have nondoxastic appearances, they think; and the sorts of thoughts they have are sufficient for inquiry.

Whatever we might think of this point ourselves, the Stoics should concede that having nondoxastic appearances, at least of the sort that those who have reached the age of reason have, is sufficient for thinking; and so, if Skeptics apprehend in way (a), the Stoics should concede that the Skeptics think, as the Stoics conceive of thinking. For, as we've seen, the Stoics think that all the appearances of those who have reached the age of reason are thoughts. Hence, if Skeptics have nondoxastic appearances, they think—contrary to what the Stoics allege in 2.1.<sup>49</sup>

## 9. Thinking, understanding, and inquiry

Even if one agrees that having a nondoxastic appearance about what a proposition means is a kind, or way, of thinking, one might argue that it doesn't involve understanding what it means. And one might then argue that inquiry requires one to understand what the propositions being inquired into, or the questions being considered, mean; and so one might conclude that the sorts of thoughts Sextus accords Skeptics aren't sufficient for inquiry. On this view, Skeptics can think, but not in a way that allows them to inquire; their thoughts are too reduced to enable inquiry.

The first step of this argument—that having a nondoxastic appearance about what a proposition means is not sufficient for understanding it—will appeal to anyone who thinks that, to understand what a proposition means, one must know, or have true beliefs, about what it means. And, as we've seen, that is a

<sup>49</sup> It's also worth recalling that the Stoics think that everyone who has reached the age of reason has some apprehension (c), and so some thoughts that are guaranteed to be true. So the Stoics will have to allow that, whatever the Skeptics say about their own cognitive condition, they in fact have some apprehension (c). And since the Stoics don't seem to think that one needs to be aware of apprehending something in order to be able to inquire, they should for this reason too concede that Skeptics can inquire.

familiar view about what is involved in understanding a proposition. However, Dean Pettit argues that ‘to understand a bit of language with a certain meaning it is sufficient that it *seem* to the speaker to have that meaning, even if the speaker does not believe (tacitly or otherwise) that it does’.<sup>50</sup> If he is right, perhaps Skeptical nondoxastic appearances about what propositions mean are sufficient for understanding what those propositions mean.

Pettit, however, appeals to nondoxastic appearances only in a very local and limited way. He focuses on understanding a word in a foreign language, and on cases in which a person has relevant associated true beliefs, though not about what the word at issue means. In a variant on one of his examples, someone knows (and so has a true belief about) what ‘water’ means, but doesn’t know (or have a true belief about) what ‘l’eau’ means, though she has a normal repertoire of true beliefs about what water (the stuff) is, and though she has a correct nondoxastic appearance about what ‘l’eau’ means. Perhaps, for example, it nondoxastically appears to her that ‘l’eau’ means water, but she doesn’t believe that it does, because she believes she is being manipulated by a neurologist in such a way that she systematically associates the wrong meanings with various words. Pettit argues that she nonetheless understands what ‘l’eau’ means; her correct nondoxastic appearance is sufficient, in the circumstances, to confer linguistic understanding. However, the Pyrrhonists’ disclaimer of belief is much more extensive than that involved in Pettit’s examples. Sextus could use something like Pettit’s argument only by extending it far more widely than Pettit himself does. Even if one finds Pettit’s argument persuasive, one might find an extended version of it less persuasive.

Further, it’s crucial to Pettit’s account that, though the speaker doesn’t believe that *p* means what it in fact means, his nondoxastic appearance is (as it happens, and unbeknownst to the speaker) accurate. Sextus, however, can’t claim that Skeptical nondoxastic appearances about meaning are correct. It’s one thing for a third party to say that someone else’s nondoxastic appearances are correct; it’s another thing for one to say this about one’s own nondoxastic appearances. If one says this about one’s own appearances, they are beliefs, not nondoxastic appearances. Perhaps Skeptics in fact understand what Dogmatic claims mean, precisely because their nondoxastic appearances are correct. And saying this would have some *ad hominem* force, if the Stoics believe that skeptical nondoxastic appearances are by and large accurate. But the Skeptics can’t say this from the inside, as it were, using only their own resources.

<sup>50</sup> ‘Why Knowledge is Unnecessary for Understanding Language’, *Mind* 111 (2002), 519–50, at 543. See the reply by S. Gross, ‘Linguistic Understanding and Belief’, in *Mind* 114 (2005), 61–6, and Pettit’s reply to Gross, ‘Belief and Understanding: A Rejoinder to Gross’, *Mind* 114 (2005), 67–74.

But does Sextus claim that Skeptics not only think about but also understand Dogmatic claims? According to Benson Mates, he doesn't do so.<sup>51</sup> In saying this, however, Mates seems to have in mind a rather robust notion of understanding. For though he says that Skeptics don't claim to understand Dogmatic claims, he also says that they "catch on", to some extent, to what the dogmatists are talking about.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps this amounts to a sort of understanding.

There are, at any rate, different levels or degrees of understanding. Even if Skeptics don't claim to understand Dogmatic claims about, say, proof in the way in which a Dogmatic expert logician might claim to do so, perhaps they understand them in a weaker sense. Tyler Burge, for example, distinguishes minimal from greatest competence, where the former 'consists in conformity to the practice of others'.<sup>53</sup> Skeptics say they conform to the practices of others; they follow *bios*, ordinary life. So, for example, at *PH* 1.21–4, Sextus describes the Skeptics' four-fold way of life, which includes following ordinary customs and laws. Perhaps this enables them to understand Dogmatic claims.

But just as there is, or might be, a difficulty in Sextus' using something like Pettit's argument in order to defend the claim that Skeptics understand, so there is a difficulty in his appealing to Burge's argument for that purpose. For I've argued elsewhere that Sextus is an External World Skeptic: he suspends judgment as to whether anything exists other than his own states of being appeared to.<sup>54</sup> If so, he's not in a position to claim that Skeptics conform to the practices of others. Perhaps Skeptics do understand Dogmatic claims, if they in fact conform to the practices of others; but this isn't something Skeptics can say from the inside. Moreover, just as Pettit requires the nondoxastic appearances that confer understanding to be correct, so Burge assumes that the practices of others are coherent and involve correct normative practice; they by and large correctly distinguish how things are from how they merely seem to be.<sup>55</sup> In both cases, externalism, coupled with certain assumptions about correctness, are needed in order to explain how skeptics can understand.

<sup>51</sup> *The Skeptic Way*, 30–2. Despite saying this, he translates *noeite*, in a parallel argument in *M* 8.337aff., as 'understand' (*The Skeptic Way*, 25).

<sup>52</sup> *The Skeptic Way*, 25.

<sup>53</sup> 'Intellectual Norms and the Foundations of Mind', *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986), 697–720, at 702.

<sup>54</sup> See 'Sextus and External World Scepticism'.

<sup>55</sup> As Pettit acknowledges, he is indebted to Burge's arguments. Thanks to David Charles for emphasizing to me the importance of the point that relying on the practices of others won't help Skeptics understand dogmatic claims unless those practices are coherent, and unless they involve drawing a roughly-accurate distinction between how things seem and how they are.

Sextus can, however, turn to the offensive. He can say that if Dogmatic practice is incoherent, neither Skeptics nor Dogmatists can understand or, therefore, inquire. If, however, as the Stoics believe, we all have apprehension of a sort that allows us to inquire, and if, as the Stoics also think, there is an external world and everyone by and large stands in the right causal connections to things, Skeptics can inquire just as well as Dogmatists can. That's not to say that Skeptics can inquire. It's to say only that if Dogmatists can inquire, so too can Skeptics. Further, the argument achieves this result only by saying that Skeptics could inquire if they were in the cognitive condition the Stoics take them to be in. It falls short of saying that Skeptics could inquire if they lack knowledge and beliefs as widely as they say they do—if, that is, they are in the cognitive condition that defines Skepticism.

One might try to defend the Skeptics' ability to inquire without appealing to externalism, by taking a leaf out of Berkeley's book. He argues that materialism is incoherent or meaningless; yet he nonetheless manages to talk about it and to argue against it. As Jonathan Bennett says: 'In declaring materialism to be incoherent or meaningless . . . Berkeley does not treat it as mere gabble. He rightly concedes that it has enough structure for us to be able to operate with it in a fashion, and to pretend that it is consistent in order to criticize it in other ways'.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps, in the same way, Skeptics can inquire into Dogmatic claims even if, as they allow is possible, those claims turn out to be meaningless.

However, it's not clear that Sextus can say this. Berkeley might be happy to say that materialism is not 'mere gabble'; but he doesn't disclaim belief to the extent that Skeptics do. Perhaps the beliefs he has allow him to talk about materialism even if there's a sense in which he takes materialism to be ultimately incoherent. It's less clear whether Skeptics can consistently allow that Dogmatic claims are not mere gabble. And if they are mere gabble—which the Skeptics seem to allow is possible—it's not clear that one could use them as the basis for inquiry.

One might then argue, as Mates does, that even if Skeptics don't understand Dogmatic claims, they can inquire into them—but only because Skeptical inquiry 'turns out to be, in most cases, nothing more than the raising of questions around the meaning and seeming implications of Dogmatic assertions purporting to be true'.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> *Learning from Six Philosophers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), vol. 1, 145; cf. 142–5. Thanks to Nick Sturgeon for suggesting both the reference and the parallel.

<sup>57</sup> *The Skeptic Way*, 32. Mates doesn't describe the nature of the few cases of Skeptical inquiry that aren't like this, nor does he say whether Skeptics can consistently claim to inquire in these further cases. Nor is it clear why Mates thinks one can inquire into the meaning and implications of claims one doesn't understand, or why, if one can do so, one can't also engage in further inquiries.

But perhaps, even if Skeptics don't understand Dogmatic claims, or do so only in the thin sense just described, they can nonetheless inquire in a more robust sense than Mates allows. Here again we might appeal to Burge, who argues that conforming to the practices of others is 'sufficient for responsible ratiocination'<sup>58</sup>—and perhaps that, in turn, is sufficient for inquiring more deeply, or extensively, than Mates thinks Skeptics are able to do. Sextus' argument also has *ad hominem* force; for the Stoics have to concede that Skeptics conform to the practices of others, and so they should concede that Skeptics can inquire.

## 10. Sextus' challenge to Dogmatic inquiry

Sextus next (in 2.11) turns to the offensive and argues that it's the Dogmatists who can't inquire.<sup>59</sup> He says that it's not inconsistent for those who agree that they do not know how objects are in their nature to inquire. But Dogmatists think they know such things accurately; and that is inconsistent with inquiry. For, Sextus says, one inquires only when one has the idea (*nomizein*) that one hasn't found the answer.

Socrates, we've seen, makes a similar point: if one thinks one knows the answer, one won't inquire. Further, Socrates and Sextus both aim to rid people of their false pretenses to knowledge.<sup>60</sup> However, though that's a good, and important, point, it

Others have also argued that Skeptical inquiry is limited. M. F. Burnyeat, for example, says that Skeptics don't have 'an active programme of research' ('Can the Sceptic Live His Scepticism?', in M. Burnyeat and M. Frede (eds.), *The Original Sceptics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1997), 25–57, at 56). Cf. Hankinson, *The Sceptics*: 'The Sceptic's continuing investigation will not amount to a research program—rather it will be a gentle sort of pottering about comparing and contrasting things' (299). I'm not sure why they think Skeptics can't have (active) research programs. (Burnyeat uses 'active', Hankinson doesn't.) At least, Sextus says that Skeptics can teach kinds of expertise (*PH* 1.24). Perhaps Burnyeat and Hankinson mean that Skeptics don't engage in research in the sense that they aren't committed to the truth of the claims they teach. It's not clear, though, whether that's necessary for engaging in research.

<sup>58</sup> 'Intellectual Norms', 713.

<sup>59</sup> Earlier Sextus argued that if the Dogmatists insist that one must have apprehension (b) or (c) in order to inquire whether *p* is true, they couldn't inquire whether their opponents' claims are true. He is now suggesting a different argument for the claim that Dogmatists can't inquire, at least in a certain range of cases. I again leave to one side the question of what Sextus' attitude to the cogency of his argument is.

<sup>60</sup> And they both do so for philanthropic reasons. Socrates does so in order to enable others to inquire, so that they are more likely to discover the truth and thereby to become virtuous and so happy. For Sextus' philanthropy, see *PH* 3.280 (with Sextus' medical metaphor, cf. Plato's *Sophist* 230). Sextus claims here that Skeptics will sometimes use feeble arguments, if doing so is adequate to the task of ridding someone of his 'conceit and rashness'. Socrates is sometimes thought to use bad arguments deliberately. If he does so, perhaps that is for Sextus' reason. Further, Socrates aims to cure people of beliefs that he thinks are false or unjustified. As a Skeptic, Sextus takes no stand on the truth or falsity or justification of Dogmatic beliefs. However, he may think, in some sense of 'think',

isn't effective against his Dogmatic opponents. For the Dogmatists whose views we've considered don't think they have all the answers. For example, we've seen that Socrates disclaims moral knowledge. Further, though the Stoics think that everyone who has reached the age of reason has some apprehension (c), they don't think everyone knows, or even has true beliefs about, all the answers. Even in at least some of the cases in which they think they have apprehension (c), they can inquire further. For example, they might take themselves to apprehend that there are apprehensive appearances. But that leaves room for debate about their exact scope, role, and definition. Inquiry into something is precluded only if knowing accurately how things are in their nature involves having, and taking oneself to have, complete knowledge about those things. But none of the philosophers we've looked at takes themselves to be in that position.

It's also worth asking what Sextus means in saying that Skeptics have the idea (*nomizein*) that they have not found the answer. Elsewhere, Sextus seems to use *nomizein* for belief.<sup>61</sup> If that's how he's using it here, then he's claiming that Skeptics believe they have not found the answers. I've suggested that Skeptics claim to have beliefs about how they are appeared to. But the belief that one hasn't found the answer doesn't seem to fall under this rubric. If it doesn't, then Sextus is now ascribing a further kind of belief to the Skeptics. This might seem to be a very modest increase in the Skeptics' repertoire of beliefs. But it might be the thin end of the wedge. Perhaps once we see what is really involved in inquiry, we will see that it requires more beliefs than is at first apparent, perhaps more beliefs than Skeptics take themselves to have. On the other hand, if *nomizein* just indicates a further non-doxastic appearance, we can ask whether, if it merely nondoxastically seems to the Skeptic that he doesn't know the answer, he can inquire, or whether inquiry requires him to believe that he doesn't know the answer.<sup>62</sup> We can also ask whether, if it merely seems to him that he doesn't know the answer, it likewise only seems to him that he inquires.

We've now looked at the Stoics' version of the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry, along with Sextus' reply. In the next and final chapter, we'll look at the Epicureans' version of the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry, along with Sextus' reply.

that various Dogmatic beliefs fail to be justified according to the Dogmatists' conception of justification.

<sup>61</sup> Sextus doesn't use *nomizein* very often. But at *PH* 3.218 (cf. 219) he uses it of those who believe in the traditional gods. In *M* 11.147, it also seems to indicate belief: cf. *kata doxan*.

<sup>62</sup> Similarly, in the last section we asked whether inquiry requires more beliefs than Skeptics accord themselves, in particular, beliefs (or knowledge) about what Dogmatic claims mean.

# 11

## Skeptical Inquiry 2:

### Sextus and the Epicureans

#### 1. Proof

Having looked at the Stoics' challenge to the possibility of Skeptical inquiry, along with Sextus' reply, let's now turn to the Epicureans' challenge to the possibility of Skeptical inquiry, along with Sextus' reply. Before doing so, it will be helpful to look at the context in which they occur.

Beginning in *Against the Mathematicians* (*M*) 8.300, Sextus embarks on an inquiry about proof (*apodeixis*). He starts by saying that 'for the survey not to be unmethodical, and for the suspension of judgment and the rebuttal of the dogmatists to go ahead more safely, we should indicate the concept (*epinoia*) of proof' (300–1).<sup>1</sup> What, then, is the relevant concept of proof? Although Sextus doesn't say so, he seems to describe four non-equivalent concepts (302; 310; 314

<sup>1</sup> Throughout I use R. Bett's translation of *M* 8 (= *Against the Logicians* 2), in *Sextus Empiricus: Against the Logicians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), though I have sometimes modified it without comment. I have also consulted R. G. Bury's translation in his *Sextus Empiricus: Against the Logicians* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1935). Bury doesn't translate 'more safely' (*asphalesteron*) in 300, yet it may be significant: see sect. 4 (n. 31) and sect. 7.

In addition to using *epinoia* (301, 315, 321, 322, 337), Sextus also uses *prolēpsis* (321, 337, 331a, 332a, 333a, 334a, 335a) and *ennoia* (337, 331a, 332a). I translate both *epinoia* and *ennoia* as 'concept'. As before, I translate *prolēpsis* as 'prolepsis'. Sextus seems to use *epinoia*, *ennoia*, and *prolēpsis* interchangeably here. But as we shall see, he indicates that they may be understood in more than one way.

Sextus also discusses proof at *PH* 2.134–92; cf. *M* 8.411–62.

<sup>2</sup> This view is defended by J. Brunschwig, 'Proof Defined', in M. Schofield *et al.* (eds.) *Doubt and Dogmatism*, 125–60. I say 'ultimately due to the Stoics' because, as Brunschwig notes (159), one of the concepts may be a hybrid devised by Sextus from Stoic originals. For a different account of the relation among the various accounts of proof, see J. Allen, *Inference from Signs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 170–84; and next note.



(twice)), all of them ultimately due to the Stoics.<sup>2</sup> Despite their differences, they overlap. Extracting their common features, we may say that proof (according to the Stoics) ‘has to be first of all an argument (*logos*); second, conclusive (*sunaktikos*); third, also true (*alêthês*); fourth, also having an unclear (*adêlon*) conclusion; and fifth, having this conclusion revealed (*ekkaluptein*) by the force of the premisses’ (310).<sup>3</sup> If there is an argument with all these features, proof subsists (*huphistatai*) (314).<sup>4</sup> What it is for there to be a proof is for there to be an argument with these features.

According to the concept just described, proofs have unclear conclusions. This is one reason Sextus turns next to the Dogmatists’ distinction between what’s clear (*enarges*, *dêlon*, *prodêlon*) and unclear (*adêlon*).<sup>5</sup> According to them, something is clear just in case it is ‘grasped involuntarily through an appearance (*phantasia*) and affection (*pathos*), such as (right now) “It is day”’ (316). Something is unclear just in case it is not grasped in this way (316–17). There are different ways of being unclear. For example, some things are unclear by nature, since they will never be apprehended; whether the number of stars is even or odd is said to be unclear in this way. Such things aren’t unclear in their own nature, considered in themselves, though they are unclear to our nature (317–18).<sup>6</sup> Other things are unclear in the sense that ‘they are hidden in terms of their own nature, but are held to become known (*gnôrizesthai*) through signs and proofs—for

<sup>3</sup> According to Barnes, though the Stoics offered more than one concept, or definition, of proof, the one just cited in the text ‘contains all and only the elements of... “the” Stoic analysis’ (‘Proof Destroyed’, in M. Schofield *et al.* (eds.), *Doubt and Dogmatism*, 161–81, at 165 n. 6).

<sup>4</sup> The Stoics distinguish something’s subsisting from something’s existing (*einai*) or being real (having *huparxis*). According to Brunschwig, they generally reserve *huphistatai* for the nonexistent or for what merely subsists, whereas they use *einai* for what exists, and *huparchein* for actual states of affairs, which are at a lower ontological level than what exists but at a higher ontological level than what merely subsists. See Brunschwig, ‘Stoic Metaphysics’, in B. Inwood (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, 206–32, notes 19 and 26. (But see Galen, *On Medical Method* 10.155.1–8 = LS 27G, for what may be skepticism about the distinction between what exists and what subsists.) Whatever may be true of the Stoics, so far as I can see Sextus doesn’t intend any distinction between subsisting, existing, and being real here, though perhaps he speaks of subsisting to hint that he will later challenge the allegedly Epicurean view that it follows from there being a concept of *x*, that *x* exists.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *M* 8.141 and 145–50, and *PH* 2.97–103. Sextus indicates that he is not committed either to the classification itself or to any particular way of classifying various things according to it: ‘some things are believed (*pepisteutai*) to be clear, others unclear’ (316) (sc. are believed by the Dogmatists to be clear and unclear); ‘And of the unclear ones (as some people say who draw a distinction)’ (*hōs tines diairoumenoi phasin*, 317). Sextus describes the distinction in different, not obviously equivalent, ways. His initial way of drawing the distinction is due to the Stoics. The differences won’t matter to us here.

<sup>6</sup> In 8.145, such things are said to be unclear ‘pure and simple’ (*kathapax*).

example, that there are indivisible elements moving around in an unlimited void' (319).<sup>7</sup> The Dogmatists think the conclusions of proofs are unclear in this way.<sup>8</sup>

Not only are the conclusions of proofs unclear in this way, but so too is proof as such:<sup>9</sup> it is among the things that 'have their nature down in the depths and obscure to us, but seem to be apprehended by philosophical reasoning' (320).<sup>10</sup> Sextus gives a variety of arguments for this claim. For example, he argues that proof doesn't satisfy the criteria for being clear: it isn't made known (*egnôrizeto*) through itself. Nor is it grasped involuntarily through an affection. Moreover, for something to be clear, it must be agreed by all and admit of no dispute; but there

<sup>7</sup> In 319, Sextus calls this being unclear homonymously with the genus. In 8.145, he calls this being unclear by nature.

<sup>8</sup> The Stoics also discuss a third way of being unclear: being temporarily unclear. For example, if I am not now in Athens, Athens is now unclear to me; but it is not—or at least might not be—unclear to me when I am there (*M* 8.145). According to Brunschwig, 'Proof Defined', 132–3, the Stoics believe that what's temporarily unclear can also be made known through a proof. Be that as it may, Sextus doesn't mention this way of being unclear in our context, so I shall leave it to one side.

<sup>9</sup> *phamen* at 320 suggests Sextus is asking whether Skeptics take proof to be clear or unclear. However, as we've seen, he indicates that Skeptics are not committed either to the Dogmatists' general account of clarity and unclarity or to any particular way of classifying things in those terms. See also 320 ('However, if there is such a difference among things') and 321 ('But we do not say this firmly'). So perhaps he is asking how proof is or should be classified, given the Stoics' account of proof and their account of clarity and unclarity. Be that as it may, he says that, given the Stoics' account of proof, proof as such is unclear 'homonymously with the genus', though it can become known through signs and proofs. If so, though, the Stoics encounter various objections that Sextus records elsewhere; see next note, and sect. 3. Sometimes Sextus calls proof as such generic proof, in contrast to specific proof (see e.g. *M* 8.340–7). This misleadingly suggests that proof as such is a kind of proof. See Mates, *The Skeptic Way*, 282–3.

<sup>10</sup> In 8.340–7, Sextus argues that everything that's unclear is untrustworthy (*apiston*) unless it's been proven. So if proof is unclear, we should accept the Dogmatists' claim that there is such a thing as proof only if it can be proved that there is. But there are evident difficulties in trying to prove that there is such a thing as proof. For example, how will we know whether anyone has succeeded in doing so? For (as Sextus proceeds to say in our passage) it's a matter of dispute what proof is; and so it's a matter of dispute whether anyone has succeeded in proving that there is such a thing as proof. Sextus records various Dogmatic replies to this line of argument, one of which is the following: do the Skeptics think they've proven that there is no such thing as proof? If the answer is 'yes', they undermine their claim that there's no such thing as proof. But if the answer is 'no', why should anyone believe their claim that there is no such thing as proof? Sextus replies that Skeptics don't take themselves to have proven that there is no such thing as proof. Rather, they offer arguments against proof that are (or seem to be) plausible enough to counterbalance the Dogmatists' claim that there is such a thing as proof. Hence we should (or will be caused to) suspend judgment either way. And this is just the Skeptical result Sextus wants. See *M* 8.463–81; and the next section. As in the last chapter, so here, when I speak of what Sextus argues, I don't mean that he believes that the argument is sound or even valid.

<sup>11</sup> Earlier Sextus said that what's clear is grasped involuntarily through an appearance and an affection. He now says that what's clear is made known through itself and admits of no dispute. He seems to intend these to be equivalent; but it's not clear either that they are or that the Stoics would think that they are. However, I shall not pursue this issue here.

is dispute about proof (322).<sup>11</sup> For example, some Dogmatists and the Logical Doctors think that there are proofs; the Empiricists, and perhaps Democritus, deny that there are; Skeptics suspend judgment (327–8). Even those who think there is such a thing as proof disagree about it in various ways (328); we can see that this is so from the fact that Sextus has already described four non-identical concepts of proof. Sextus also notes that the truth of various premises in particular proofs is disputed (329–34), in which case they too are unclear (cf. 356–66).

## 2. A challenge to the possibility of inquiry about proof

In 322–8, Sextus asks how, if proof is unclear, we can know whether we've ascertained the truth about it. For it seems that we could know this only by checking claims about proof against proof itself. For a statement (*logos*) is true if and only if it accords with the thing (*pragma*, 323) it's about.<sup>12</sup> For example, suppose someone says that it's day. We refer his claim to the fact. If it's day, what he says is true; otherwise it's false. Yet proof is unclear. It is therefore, so to speak, unavailable to us in our effort to decide what if any claims about proof are true. The best we can hope for is persuasion and likelihood (*katapithaneuesthai, eikotôn*). But, Sextus says:

Since different people make different judgments of likelihood and persuasiveness, disagreement arises, with neither the person who has missed the target knowing that he has missed it, nor the one who has hit it knowing he has hit it. This is why Skeptics very aptly compare those who are inquiring about unclear things with people shooting at a target in the dark. For just as it is likely that one of these people hits the target and another misses it, but who has hit it and who has missed it are unknown (*agnôston*), so, as the truth is hidden away in pretty deep darkness, many arguments are launched at it, but which of them is in agreement with it and which in disagreement is not possible to know (*ouk hoion te gignôskein*), since what is being inquired into is removed from plain experience. (324–5)<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Bett translates *pragma* as 'subject matter', which is perhaps more suggestive of a stepping-stone, as opposed to a matching, version of some sort of prior-cognition principle than is warranted.

<sup>13</sup> ἄλλον δὲ ἄλλως εἰκάζοντος καὶ διαπιθανεομένου φύεται ἡ διαφωνία, μήτε τοῦ ἀποτυχόντος εἰδότες ὅτι ἀπέτυχεν, μήτε τοῦ ἐπιτυχόντος εἰδότες ὅτι ἐπέτυχεν. ταῦτά γέ τοι καὶ σφόδρα χαριέντως ἀπεικάζουσιν οἱ σκεπτικοὶ τοὺς περὶ ἀδήλων ζητοῦντας τοῖς ἐν σκότῳ ἐπὶ τινὰ σκοπὸν τοξεύουσιν· ὥσπερ γὰρ τούτων εἰκὸς ἐστὶ τινὰ μὲν τυχεῖν τοῦ σκοποῦ τινὰ δ' ἀποτυχεῖν, τὸ δὲ τίς ἐπέτυχεν ἢ ἀπέτυχεν ἄγνωστον, οὕτως ἐν βαθεῖ σχεδὸν σκότῳ τῆς ἀληθείας ἀποκεκρυμμένης ἀφίενται μὲν ἐπὶ ταύτην πολλοὶ λόγοι, τὸ δὲ τίς ἐξ αὐτῶν σύμφωνός ἐστιν αὐτῇ καὶ τίς διάφωνος οὐχ οἷόν τε γινώσκειν, ἀρθέντος ἐκ τῆς ἐναργείας τοῦ ζητουμένου.

Sextus' argument recalls Meno's questions, especially M3.<sup>14</sup> As we've seen, Meno first asks how, if one doesn't know that which one is inquiring into, one can inquire into it. For, he thinks, if one doesn't know that which one is inquiring into, one can't fix a target to aim at; yet having a target to aim at is necessary for inquiry. Hence, since they don't know anything at all about virtue, they can't inquire about it. Like Meno, Sextus says that we don't know what target we are aiming at. However, unlike Meno, he doesn't say that we therefore can't inquire. He doesn't raise the Targeting Objection. But Meno also asks how, if one doesn't know that which one is inquiring into, one will know, or realize, when one has found it should one do so. This is the Recognition Objection; and it is what Sextus focuses on. We might hit the target, in the sense that we might find what we were inquiring into. But, if we do so, we won't know, or realize, that we have done so.

Sextus suggests that to answer the Recognition Objection one would have to be able to compare one's account of proof with proof itself, just as to know whether 'It is day' is true or false one must look and see. But how do we know what to look at? After all, proof itself is unclear: it isn't made known through itself. It won't just announce itself. Hence, it seems, we can 'find' proof itself only by means of a proof. But we can know that we are relying on a genuine proof only if we know proof itself. We seem caught in a vicious circle.<sup>15</sup> Presumably to know proof itself is to know what proof is. If so, the claim is that we can't discover what proof is unless we already know what it is. This assumes a matching version of a foreknowledge principle.

Earlier<sup>16</sup> we noted that Scott thinks that, in *Meno* 79, Plato faces the problem of discovery, at least in the case of definitions: knowledge must be based on knowledge; in the case of definitions, the only knowledge that will do is knowledge of the very definition we are seeking. But if we already have this knowledge, we can't then go on to discover it; for we can discover only what we don't already know. Scott then argues that Plato dissolves this problem by distinguishing explicit from latent knowledge: we'd be 'boxed into a corner' if we already had explicit knowledge; but we aren't boxed into a corner if the knowledge is merely latent. One might think to argue that we can arrive at knowledge, even of a definition, even if, at the outset, all we have are true beliefs. Against this, however, Scott raises the circle-of-beliefs objection. According to it, if we begin with mere beliefs, though we can add to our stock of beliefs, we can't emerge from the circle

<sup>14</sup> However, he doesn't mention Plato. Rather, he goes on to say that Xenophanes was the first to say this. For Xenophanes, see Ch. 1, n. 7. Sextus doesn't say who else argued in a similar way.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Mates, *The Skeptic Way*, 284.

<sup>16</sup> See Ch. 3, sect. 3, and Ch. 5, sect. 10; cf. Ch. 2, sect. 10.

of beliefs so as to have knowledge; hence we must have knowledge at the outset. Against this, I argued that, in *Meno* 79, Plato doesn't box himself into the corner; for he doesn't there commit himself to any version of a foreknowledge principle. Nor, I suggested, does he solve the circle-of-beliefs objection in the way Scott suggests. Plato doesn't think we can emerge from the circle of beliefs only if we have some knowledge to start with. He doesn't think we need to have prior knowledge in this life, whether of that which we're looking for or of anything else, in order to acquire knowledge. We can emerge from the circle of beliefs by inquiring—in particular, by doing the elenchus—over a long period of time. For in doing so, we gradually refine our concepts and beliefs, and acquire new ones; eventually, if all goes well, we will acquire knowledge. To be sure, there is no iron-clad guarantee that we will succeed. But the fact that we have and tend to rely on true beliefs (or claims) makes it reasonable to think we at least can, and sometimes do, do so. It's true that Plato seeks to explain our remarkable ability to make progress in this way by positing prenatal knowledge that, when we inquire successfully, we recall. But he doesn't think we need prior knowledge in this life.

But whatever Plato may think, Sextus raises a version of the circle-of-beliefs objection, as well as of the Recognition Objection. He argues that, to emerge from the circle of beliefs, and to realize that we've found what we were looking for, we need prior knowledge of that which we are looking for. But he doesn't suggest that this is a satisfactory reply. On the contrary, he says that it leads to a vicious circle of its own.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. An Epicurean challenge to Skeptical inquiry

Though Sextus has articulated a concept of proof according to which proof is the sort of thing that can be apprehended by philosophical reasoning (320), he makes it clear that he isn't committed to the view that there is such a thing as proof: 'But we do not say this firmly, since it would be laughable to be still investigating [whether proof has *huparxis*] if we have accepted its reality (*huparxis*); rather, we say that it turns out to be like this in terms of its concept' (321). That is, all he's done so far is to describe the Dogmatic concept of proof he's going to explore. But, Sextus suggests, one can describe, and even use and rely on, a concept of *x* without thinking the concept is ultimately satisfactory, and without thinking there is such a thing as *x*. He makes this clear by saying that he will next ask 'whether there is such a thing as proof' (*ei estin apodeixis*, 336). He also

<sup>17</sup> Naturally enough, he doesn't suggest that the problem is eased if we say that the prior knowledge is latent rather than explicit.

says that he will try ‘to get a grip on the arguments that make [proof] shaky, inquiring whether its reality (*huparxis*) follows from its concept (*epinoia*) and prolepsis’ (337).

Before doing so, however, he considers an Epicurean challenge to this stance:<sup>18</sup>

Some people, especially those of the Epicurean school, tend to resist us in a rather crude way, saying: ‘Either you understand (*noeite*)<sup>19</sup> what proof is, or you do not. If you understand it, and (*kai*)<sup>20</sup> have a concept (*ennoia*) of it, there is such a thing as proof. But if you do not understand it, how can you inquire into what you have not the slightest understanding of (*nooumenon*)?’ (337)<sup>21</sup>

The Epicureans here level a version of the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry. Like the Stoic version considered in the last chapter, the Epicurean version doesn’t aim to show that inquiry as such is impossible. Rather, it aims to show only that Skeptics can’t inquire. According to the Epicurean version of the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry, one can inquire into something only if one has a concept of it. Sextus has a concept of proof; indeed, he’s just described four non-equivalent concepts of it. But, according to the Epicureans, it follows from there being a concept of proof that there is such a thing as proof. Hence Sextus can’t reasonably claim *both* that he has a concept of proof *and* that he suspends judgment as to whether there is such a thing as proof.

If we set this argument in its fuller context, we can schematize it as follows:

<sup>18</sup> Since Sextus has described a Stoic concept (or concepts) of proof, there is perhaps a certain irony in having the Epicureans challenge him here; for it’s not as though they are fans of Stoic views about proof. Further, they are well known for being dismissive of proof in some ways. However, they aren’t entirely dismissive of proof. For example, Epicurus says that prolepses halt a regress of proofs (*Hdt.* 37); hence he presumably thinks proof exists (though he needn’t therefore accept the Stoic account(s) of it.). At 348 Sextus considers an objection that Demetrius the Laconian (an Epicurean) offers to another Skeptical objection to proof. In any case, though Sextus phrases the Epicureans’ argument in terms of proof, it can be generalized to further cases.

Sextus says the argument is due especially (*malista*) to the Epicureans: so presumably they aren’t the only ones who raise it. Perhaps he has in mind the related argument explored in the last chapter which, I suggested, he associates with the Stoics.

<sup>19</sup> *noeite*. In the last chapter, in considering Sextus’ reply to the Stoic version of the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry, I translated *noein* as ‘to think’.

<sup>20</sup> I take *kai* to be inferential: if you understand what proof is, you have a concept of proof. But it might be exegetical: to understand what proof is just is to have a concept of proof. Either way, *kai* is not genuinely conjunctive. That is, it doesn’t link two independent phenomena: understanding, on the one hand, and having a concept, on the other. It doesn’t matter for my purposes whether *kai* is exegetical or inferential. If it is exegetical, premise (3) below should be: ‘One can inquire into something only if one understands it, i.e. has a concept of it.’ Similar adjustments can be made throughout.

<sup>21</sup> τινες εἰώθασιν ἡμῖν, καὶ μάλιστα οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Ἐπικούρου αἰρέσεως, ἀγροικότερον ἐνίστασθαι, λέγοντες “ἤτοι νοεῖτε, τί ἐστὶν ἡ ἀπόδειξις, ἢ οὐ νοεῖτε. καὶ εἰ μὲν νοεῖτε καὶ ἔχετε ἔννοιαν αὐτῆς, ἐστὶν ἀπόδειξις· εἰ δὲ οὐ νοεῖτε, πῶς ζητεῖτε τὸ μὴδ’ ἀρχὴν νοοῦμενον ὑμῖν”.

- (1) Skeptics claim to inquire whether there is such a thing as proof, while suspending judgment as to whether there is.
- (2) Skeptics either do, or do not, understand what proof is.
- (3) If one understands what *x* is, one has a concept of *x*, and so there is a concept of *x*.
- (4) If there is a concept of *x*, there is such a thing as *x*.
- (5) One can inquire whether there is such a thing as *x* only if one has a concept of *x*.
- (6) Therefore, if Skeptics inquire whether there is such a thing as proof, they have a concept of proof.
- (7) Therefore, if Skeptics inquire whether there is such a thing as proof, there is such a thing as proof.
- (8) Therefore Skeptics should abandon the stance described in (1).
- (9) Assuming they do so, if Skeptics continue to say that they inquire whether there is such a thing as proof, they should concede that there is such a thing as proof.
- (10) It would be laughable (*geloion*) to inquire whether there is such a thing as *x* if one concedes that there is. (321)
- (11) Therefore, if Skeptics understand what proof is, it would be laughable for them to inquire whether there is such a thing as proof.
- (12) If Skeptics don't understand what proof is, they can't inquire whether there is such a thing as proof. (From (3) and (5).)
- (13) Therefore it is either laughable or impossible for Skeptics to inquire whether there is such a thing as proof. (From (2), (11), and (12).)

Before looking at Sextus' reply, let's look at the argument on its own. Assuming that the key terms are used univocally, the argument is valid. (1) simply describes what Sextus has said Skeptics do. (2) is clearly true: one either does, or does not, understand what proof is; *tertium non datur*. (3) also seems true—though, as we saw in the last chapter, there are different degrees or levels of understanding, and what level is at issue here affects the issue of what if any sort of concept is involved in understanding.

Premise (4), however, is a premise Sextus challenges.<sup>22</sup> For, as we've seen, he says that he has described a concept of proof without conceding that there is such a thing as proof. We shall need to see whether the Epicureans in fact advocate (4), and what if anything can be said in its favor.

<sup>22</sup> Which, again, is not to say that he believes that it is false.

Premise (5) seems true. For it seems reasonable to suppose that one can't inquire into something unless one has some sort of grasp or specification of what one is inquiring into; for only if one does so can one answer the Targeting Objection. There is, however, room for discussion about what sort of concept inquiry requires.

Premises (6)–(8) are validly inferred, and (9) seems reasonable. Sextus doesn't here challenge (6). But he wishes to resist (7). He does so, we shall see, by challenging (4).

'Laughable', in (10), might mean just 'silly', 'ridiculous', or 'pointless'. If so, the Epicureans would be conceding that one can inquire in this case, though there'd be no point in doing so. However, the underlying motivation for (10) is presumably that one inquires whether *p* is so only if one doesn't already know that it is so, precisely in order to discover whether it is. Hence, if one concedes that *p* is so, the inquiry into whether it is so is already at an end. So perhaps (10) means to challenge the possibility of inquiring whether *p* is so, if one has already conceded that it is so.<sup>23</sup>

Premises (11), (12), and (13) are all validly inferred.

The argument is valid, then, and many of its premises seem plausible. But at least (4) is open to question. So let's follow Sextus' lead and consider it in more detail.

## 4. Concepts and prolepses

Jacques Brunschwig thinks (4) assumes what he calls the Ontological Implication, according to which essence implies existence.<sup>24</sup> On one way of understanding this suggestion, it makes (4) false. To be sure, if one accepts the Ontological Argument for the existence of God, one will think there is at least one essence that implies existence, or one concept that is necessarily instantiated; for according to the Ontological Argument, it follows from the concept of God that God exists. However, that's supposed to be the exception, not the rule. Indeed, it's a standard objection to the Ontological Argument to say that if one can prove the existence of God from the concept of God, one can by a parallel argument prove the

<sup>23</sup> As we saw in Ch. 9, Plutarch, in describing Meno's Paradox, says that it would be pointless (*mataion*) to inquire into what we know; and, in criticizing the Epicureans, he says that if prolepses are articulated, inquiry is superfluous (*perittê*). Similarly, we saw in Ch. 3 that there's a question about whether S2 in Socrates' dilemma means to say that we can't, or won't (because it would be pointless to), inquire into what we know.

<sup>24</sup> 'Sextus Empiricus on the *Kritêrion*'. He first mentions the Ontological Implication at 226. Although Brunschwig's wording suggests the interpretation I go on to explore, I'm not sure he intends it. Be that as it may, it's worth discussing.



existence of anything whatever. One could, for example, prove that there are winged horses or perfect islands; for there are concepts of these things.<sup>25</sup> If the Epicureans accept the Ontological Implication, it seems that, rather than taking this to be an objection, they embrace the consequence: they think that every concept is necessarily instantiated. If we can avoid attributing this view to the Epicureans we should do so; similarly, if we can avoid saying that Sextus attributes that view to them, we should do so.

Another possibility is that (4) assumes a version of the view that thought is object-dependent. Epicurus is sometimes thought to hold some such view. Long and Sedley, for example, speak of 'Epicurus' lingering Platonist assumption that any object of thought must somehow objectively exist in order to be thought of'.<sup>26</sup> (4) would then imply that if Skeptics can think about proof (as they say they can), proof exists; for one can think about something only if it exists. Although the view that one can think about something only if it exists has been defended, it is controversial; we seem able to think about centaurs and Santa Claus, even though they don't exist.

Be that as it may, I favor a different interpretation of (4), one that doesn't assume or imply either the Ontological Implication or the view that one can think of something only if it exists. The key is to notice that at various stages Sextus uses the term 'prolepsis'<sup>27</sup> which, as we've seen, is an Epicurean term of art. It's true that, in Sextus' day it no longer had its specialized Epicurean meaning.<sup>28</sup> And sometimes in our passage (as at 321; cf. 334a), Sextus seems to use the term broadly for concepts as such, and hence interchangeably with *ennoia* and *epinoia*, as he normally uses these latter two terms. However, sometimes he uses the word in its specialized Epicurean sense. For example, in *M* 11.21 he says that 'according to the wise Epicurus, it is not possible either to inquire or to be puzzled without a prolepsis'. And sometimes in our context (as at 337 and 331a), he seems to be hinting at its technical Epicurean use. That he is doing so is suggested not only by the fact that he

<sup>25</sup> For a classic discussion of the Ontological Argument, see Descartes' Fifth Meditation. For objections to his version(s), see the First Set of Objections (AT 7.98–73, to which Descartes replies at 7.115–19); the Second Set of Objections (AT 7.127, to which Descartes replies at AT 7.149–51); and the Fifth Set of Objections (AT 7.322–6, to which Descartes replies at AT 7.382–4).

<sup>26</sup> LS 1.147; 1.78 says, more weakly, that Epicurus *may* assume this. The passage cited in the text may contain an important caveat, since it says only that objects of thought 'must *somehow* objectively exist' (emphasis added). Unlike Long and Sedley, I don't think Plato accepts the allegedly 'lingering Platonist assumption'; see my *On Ideas*, esp. ch. 9.

<sup>27</sup> 337, 331a, 332a, 333a, 334a, 335a. Though Sextus uses the term both in introducing and in discussing the argument, he doesn't use it in the argument itself.

<sup>28</sup> For ways in which Sextus uses *prolēpsis*, see R. Bett, *Sextus Empiricus: Against the Ethicists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 95–6.

says that the argument he's considering is an Epicurean one, but also by the fact that, as we shall see, he explains one way of understanding concepts in terms of apprehension; and, as we've seen, that's one way in which Diogenes explains Epicurean prolepses. As we shall see, the way in which Sextus uses the argument against the Epicureans also suggests that he uses 'prolepsis' to recall the Epicureans.

In Chapter 7, we looked at various features of Epicurean prolepses. Though many of the details are obscure, for our purposes the key points here are that there are not prolepses corresponding to every word; that prolepses can be expressed as true propositions about basic features of reality; and that if there is a prolepsis of *x*, *x* exists. This last feature doesn't involve the Ontological Implication. For prolepses are just a subclass of concepts. Although it follows from there being a prolepsis of *x* that *x* exists, it doesn't follow from the fact that there is any old concept of *x* that *x* exists. Just as a standard defense of the Ontological Argument says that, though we can infer from the concept of God that God exists, we can't infer from the concept of winged horse that there are winged horses, so an Epicurean would say that although we can infer from there being a prolepsis of god that god or gods exist, we can't infer from the concept of a centaur that centaurs exist. If there is a prolepsis of *x*, *x* exists—not because one can think of something only if it exists, but because prolepses are, or can be expressed as, basic truths about basic features of reality.

I suggested earlier that we should expect Sextus to challenge (4). For he says that he has a concept of proof; but he suspends judgment about whether there is such a thing as proof. Yet (4) says that if there is a concept of *x*, *x* exists. And if 'concept' indicates an Epicurean prolepsis, (4), so far from being false, is virtually true by definition: given what an Epicurean prolepsis is, if there is a prolepsis of proof, there is such a thing as proof. But if we understand (4) in terms of Epicurean prolepses, it's not the claim Sextus was challenging when he said that, though he'd described a concept of proof, he wasn't implying that there is such a thing as proof. For in saying that, he didn't mean that, though there is an Epicurean prolepsis of proof, proof might nonetheless lack *huparxis*. He wasn't using 'concept' for Epicurean prolepses.<sup>29</sup>

There therefore seem to be two ways of reading (4): one can have a concept of something in the sense of having an Epicurean prolepsis of it; or one can have a concept of something, where the concept is not an Epicurean prolepsis. If we read (4) in the first way, it is true. If we read it in the second way, it might be false: whether it is would depend on the alternative construal of concepts.

<sup>29</sup> I ask later how to understand the alternative account of concepts he has in mind.

Correspondingly, there are also two readings of (5).<sup>30</sup> On one reading, it says that one can inquire into something only if one has an Epicurean prolepsis of it. On another reading, it says that one can inquire into something only if one has a concept of it, where the concept need not be an Epicurean prolepsis. On the first reading, (5) is false. On the second reading, it might turn out to be true—again depending on what the operative view of concepts is. But it seems that one needs a concept of some sort of what one is inquiring into to fix the target being aimed at. Nor, as we shall see, does Sextus challenge the view that one needs a concept of what one is inquiring into—though that leaves room for debate about what sort of concept is needed.<sup>31</sup>

Hence the reading of (4) that makes it true makes (5) false; and the reading of (5) that makes it true makes (4) false. The argument is therefore either valid but unsound (because either (4) or (5) is false), or else has all true premises but is invalid (because it equivocates on ‘concept’).<sup>32</sup> Or so at least it seems to me. But let’s now look at Sextus’ reply.

## 5. Concepts as apprehension

Sextus replies by distinguishing two ways of understanding concepts (*ennoia*, *epinoia*) and prolepses.<sup>33</sup> On one account, having a concept is apprehension (*katalêpsis*) (334a). On another account, it is ‘a bare motion of thought (*psilon kinêma esti tês dianoias*)’ (336a).<sup>34</sup> I suggest that this is the distinction I drew in the last section between Epicurean prolepses, on the one hand, and concepts understood more broadly, on the other hand.<sup>35</sup> Sextus is disambiguating (4) in

<sup>30</sup> And of (3), depending on whether understanding is low-, or high-, level, and on whether concepts are Epicurean prolepses or are more broadly conceived.

<sup>31</sup> At least, he doesn’t do so here. However, in 300 he says it will be safer to begin by laying out a concept of proof. Perhaps he means to suggest that one can inquire into something even if one doesn’t have a concept of it. However, he doesn’t develop that point in responding to the Epicurean version of the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry.

<sup>32</sup> As we’ve seen, Meno’s Paradox and the Stoic version of the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry are also either valid but unsound or else have all true premises but are invalid. The same is true for Plutarch’s Paradoxes of Epicurean, and of Stoic Inquiry.

<sup>33</sup> As we saw in the last chapter, in replying to the Stoic version of the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry Sextus instead distinguishes two ways of understanding apprehension, one of which is *noêsis*.

<sup>34</sup> *Dianoia*, *ennoia*, *epinoia*, and *noêsis*, all of which are used in the context, are cognates.

<sup>35</sup> In *Whether Land or Sea Animals are Cleverer*, 961c–d, Plutarch says that the Stoics ‘call *noêsis* “*ennoiai*” when they are stored, and “thoughts” (*dianoêsis*) when they are activated’. (In Plutarch’s *Moralia*, vol. 12, ed. and trans. H. Cherniss and W. Helmbold.) So perhaps a ‘bare motion of thought’ is any old *ennoia* when it is activated. Be that as it may, Sextus is distinguishing any old thought (bare motion of thought) from thought as apprehension.

just the way I suggested he should. Let's now see exactly how he does so, beginning with his account of concept conceived as apprehension.

Though (4) is true if it is read in terms of Epicurean prolepses, Sextus argues that if we so read (5), it is false—or, at least, so the Epicureans should think, given their views (335a–336a). For the Epicureans either do, or do not, think there is a prolepsis of (for example) the four elements. Either way, they are in trouble. If there is a prolepsis of the four elements, there are four elements; but the Epicureans don't think there are. But if there is no prolepsis of the four elements, how can they inquire whether there are four elements, as they claim to be able to do? For, according to Sextus, they think one must have a prolepsis of something in order to be able to inquire into it.

Sextus' argument is partly *ad hominem*: the Epicureans can have (4) (read in terms of Epicurean prolepses) if they like; but then, given other things they believe, they shouldn't accept (5) (read in terms of Epicurean prolepses). But this *ad hominem* argument is also a partial defense of the Skeptics. For the Skeptics don't take themselves to apprehend that there is such a thing as proof.<sup>36</sup> Suppose, then, that they don't have any apprehension or prolepsis about proof.<sup>37</sup> The Epicureans argue that, in that case, the Skeptics couldn't inquire into proof, as they claim to be able to do. But if, as Sextus argues, the Epicureans should, given their other beliefs, abandon (5), they lose this objection to the Skeptics' ability to inquire. For if (5) shows that Skeptics can't inquire into things they don't apprehend, it equally shows that the Epicureans can't do so. If the Epicureans want to defend their ability to inquire even in such cases, they will have to abandon (5). If they do so, they lose one of their arguments against the Skeptics.

## 6. An Epicurean reply

Before looking at the second way in which Sextus explains concepts, it's worth noting that Sextus' criticism fails from the exegetical point of view. For, as we've seen, the Epicureans think we can inquire into things that lack their own

<sup>36</sup> At least, they don't take themselves to have the sort of apprehension allegedly involved in having an Epicurean prolepsis. Nor do they take themselves to have apprehension understood in Stoic terms. It doesn't follow that they don't take themselves to apprehend anything on every understanding of the term; as we've seen, apprehension is understood in different ways. I discuss the closely-related issue of whether the Skeptics take themselves to have any beliefs in 'Sceptical *Dogmata*'.

<sup>37</sup> Even if they don't take themselves to have any apprehension or (Epicurean) prolepses, they could in fact have some. Similarly, it's been argued that, though the Skeptics say they have no beliefs, they in fact have some beliefs. I shall leave that issue to one side here.

proprietary prolepses.<sup>38</sup> We need to have some prolepses or other in order to inquire; and we need a concept of *x* in order to inquire about *x*. But we don't need a prolepsis of *x* in order to inquire about *x*; nor do we need to apprehend that *p* is true in order to inquire whether it is. Sextus seems to assume that the Epicureans think that one needs a prolepsis of *x* in order to inquire about *x* and to apprehend that *p* in order to inquire whether *p* is true. But that is not the Epicureans' view.

Sextus may agree. For he says that some would defend Epicurus by saying that, though he thinks one needs a concept of the four elements in order to inquire whether there are four elements, he doesn't think the concept needs to confer apprehension. A concept conceived as a bare motion of thought will do; and the Epicureans have that.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, as we shall see more fully in the next section, this more minimal sort of concept doesn't imply *huparxis*.<sup>40</sup>

## 7. Concepts as bare motions of thought

Let's now look at Sextus' alternative construal of concept as a bare motion of thought. Unfortunately, he doesn't say much about what this amounts to. It's clear, however, that he thinks one can have a concept in this sense while lacking apprehension of what the concept is of, and without its following that what the concept is of has *huparxis*; one can have a concept of proof, in the sense of a bare motion of thought, without one's having apprehension of proof and without proof's having *huparxis*. Nor need one believe that the concept is accurate; nor does it need to be accurate. And Sextus makes it clear that he is not committed to the accuracy of the Dogmatists' concepts. Though he uses them as the basis for his inquiries, he doesn't take them to be true.<sup>41</sup>

Sextus is making the same point here as he made in *PH* 2: Skeptics entertain various propositions—about, for example, what proof is—without believing that they are true, and without believing that there is such a thing as proof. Sextus' suggestion here, as in *PH* 2, is that insofar as having thoughts is necessary for

<sup>38</sup> I discussed this in Ch. 7.

<sup>39</sup> *schedon*, at 331a, also suggests that Sextus sees that his objection to the Epicureans can be answered. Similarly, we saw in Ch. 10, sect. 6, that Sextus may admit that the Stoics are not clearly committed to a view he ascribes to them.

<sup>40</sup> This is compatible with Epicurus' maintaining that one can think about something only if one has some prolepses or other. I noted earlier that, according to Long and Sedley, Epicurus believes that one can think only of what objectively exists. However, we've now seen that, according to Sextus, some of Epicurus' defenders deny that Epicurus believes this. Hence, the sort of interpretation of Epicurus favored by Long and Sedley was challenged in antiquity. Of course, this doesn't show that Long and Sedley are wrong. And, as we've seen (n. 26), they may qualify their claim.

<sup>41</sup> Nor, of course, does he take them to be false: he suspends judgment either way.

inquiry, the Skeptics satisfy that condition in virtue of the fact that they entertain propositions about it. One need not take those propositions to be true; nor do they need to be true; nor does there need to be such a thing as proof for one to entertain propositions about proof.

Or, to put the point in terms of concepts: suppose we concede that one can inquire into something only if one has a concept of what one is inquiring into. Still, one can satisfy that necessary condition without taking the concept to be fully accurate, nor does it need to be fully accurate. People inquired into the nature of water before it was known or believed that water was H<sub>2</sub>O. They did so with the aid of a concept which, however, was not fully accurate; nor must the inquirers have thought it was fully accurate. (Indeed, they were presumably spurred to further inquiry precisely because they didn't think it was fully accurate.) Similarly, Skeptics suspend judgment about the accuracy of the concepts they rely on. But even if the concepts turn out to be inaccurate, they nonetheless fix the targets to be aimed at, and so, by relying on them, Skeptics satisfy that condition for inquiry.<sup>42</sup>

In 8.331a (cf. 324, discussed above), Sextus says: 'For how can anyone even inquire if he has no concept (*ennoia*) of the thing being inquired into? For neither will he know (*eisetai*) that he has hit the target when he has hit it, nor that he has missed it when he has missed it.' Here Sextus concedes that having a concept of what one is inquiring into is necessary for answering both the Targeting Objection and the Recognition Objection.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, however, in 300 he says that it will be *safer* to begin by laying out a concept of what one is inquiring into: perhaps he means to suggest that it isn't strictly speaking necessary to have a concept of what one is inquiring into. Still, he concedes it here. Since he thinks that Skeptics have concepts, he has no need to object that having concepts isn't necessary; for Skeptics satisfy that necessary condition for inquiry.

Sextus seems to be suggesting that, though the Epicureans should not accept (5) if a concept is an Epicurean prolepsis, they can accept it if a concept is just a bare motion of thought. However Skeptics have concepts in this sense, they

<sup>42</sup> In the last chapter, however, we saw that Sextus sometimes suggests that concepts might be incoherent or meaningless; and one might wonder how one could inquire into something on the basis of such a concept. However, he doesn't suggest here that concepts might be incoherent or meaningless.

<sup>43</sup> Sextus' first question recalls M1; his second question recalls M3. However, Sextus raises his second question to suggest that one can't inquire into x unless one would realize one had found it if one had done so. He raises his analogue to M3, not as an additional question beyond the question of how one can inquire if one doesn't know that which one is inquiring into (= M1), but as a reason why, if one doesn't know that which one is inquiring into, one can't inquire into it.

satisfy this condition on inquiry; and so the Epicurean argument has no force against them.

Let us now take stock. Sextus replies to the Epicurean argument in just the right way, by distinguishing two ways of understanding concepts: as apprehension and as bare motion of thought. In raising the argument against the Skeptics, the Epicureans seem to understand it in the first way. Sextus argues that if they do so, (5) has consequences the Epicureans would not welcome. Hence, they should understand concepts, in (5), in the second way. So read, however, (5) doesn't count against the Skeptics.

Moreover, if we read 'concept' as 'bare motion of thought' in (5), then, for the argument to be valid, that's how it has to be read in (4). But the Epicureans don't accept (4) so read; nor should they do so. They accept (4) only if it is read in terms of Epicurean prolepses. Nor does Sextus challenge the truth of (4) if it is read in terms of Epicurean prolepses; that is, he doesn't deny that it would follow from there being an Epicurean prolepsis of proof (if there were one, a matter about which he suspends judgment), that proof has *huparxis*. But he can set (4) to one side when it is so read since, as he thinks the Epicureans will agree, one doesn't need to have a concept of proof in this sense in order to inquire into proof. Hence even if Skeptics don't have a concept of proof in this sense, it doesn't follow that they can't inquire into proof.

There is, then, no univocal reading of 'concept' such that the Epicureans can accept the argument. They will admit that the reading of (4) that makes it true makes (5) false, and that the reading of (5) that makes it true makes (4) false. There is no reading of the argument on which the Epicureans can take it to be sound. Hence they can't use it against the Skeptics. As we saw in the last chapter, Sextus' argument against the Stoic version of the Paradox of Skeptical Inquiry is structurally similar: he argues there that the reading of the argument that raises difficulties for the Skeptics likewise raises difficulties for the Stoics; hence the Stoics shouldn't level the argument so read. If, however, we don't require apprehension in the Stoic sense for inquiry but just bare thought, then the argument doesn't threaten the Skeptics; for they have bare thoughts.

## 8. Skepticism and concepts

Sextus goes on to say:

So that we grant (*didomen*) this point [that one needs a concept of what one is inquiring into]. Actually, so far are we from saying that we do not have a concept (*ennoia*) of the whole object of inquiry that, on the contrary, we maintain that we have many concepts (*ennoiai*) and prolepses of it; and thanks to our being unable to discriminate among them

and to find the one that is most accurate (*kuriôtatên*), we come round to suspension of judgment and equilibrium. For if we had just one prolepsis of the thing being inquired into, then, by following it closely, we would believe that the matter was such as it struck us in virtue of that one concept. But, in fact, since we have many concepts of this one thing, which are also varied and conflicting and equally trustworthy (both on account of their own persuasiveness and on account of the trustworthiness of the men who support them), being unable either to trust all of them (because of the conflict) or to distrust all of them (because of having no others that are more trustworthy than they are), or to trust one and distrust another (because of their equality), we necessarily arrive at suspension of judgment. (332a–333a)<sup>44</sup>

If having a concept is necessary for inquiry, Skeptics are especially well off. For they have lots of concepts, indeed conflicting ones! Since (up to now, at any rate) they can't decide which if any of these concepts are accurate (or which are closest to being accurate), they suspend judgment about the accuracy of all of them. Indeed, if they had just one prolepsis of what they were inquiring into, they'd assume it was correct—and hence would have no incentive to inquire.<sup>45</sup>

Brunschwig thinks there are two difficulties with what Sextus says here.<sup>46</sup> The first is that Sextus says that Dogmatists have conflicting views about, say, proof. They can do so only if they are talking about the same thing. If they are talking about different things, their beliefs don't conflict. If I say 'Ithaca is in New York State' and you say 'Ithaca is not in New York State', we might seem to contradict one another. But we don't really do so if it turns out that I was thinking of the city where Cornell University is located and you were thinking of the Greek island. Yet Sextus says not only that Dogmatists have conflicting views about proof but also that they define proof in different ways, or have different concepts of proof.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> ὥστε τοῦτο μὲν δίδομεν, καὶ τοσοῦτόν γε ἀπέχομεν τοῦ λέγειν ἔννοιαν μὴ ἔχειν παντὸς τοῦ ζητουμένου πράγματος, ὡς καὶ ἀνάπαλιν πολλὰς γ' ἐννοίας αὐτοῦ καὶ προλήψεις ἔχειν ἀξιούσιν, καὶ χάριν τοῦ μὴ δύνασθαι ταύτας διακρίνειν καὶ τὴν ἐξ αὐτῶν κυριωτάτην ἀνευρεῖν εἰς ἐποχὴν καὶ ἀρρεψίαν περιίστασθαι. εἰ μὲν γὰρ μίαν εἶχομεν τοῦ ζητουμένου πράγματος πρόληψιν, καὶ ταύτη συνεξακολουθήσαντες τοιοῦτ' ἐπιστεύομεν ὑπάρχειν, ὅποιον κατὰ μίαν προσέπιπτεν ἔννοιαν· νῦν δ' ἐπεὶ πολλὰς ἔχομεν τοῦ ἐνὸς ἐννοίας καὶ πολυτρόπους καὶ μαχομένας καὶ ἐπ' ἴσης πιστὰς διὰ τε τὴν ἐν αὐταῖς πιθανότητα καὶ διὰ τὴν τῶν προϋσταμένων ἀνδρῶν ἀξιοπιστίαν, μήτε πάσαις πιστεῦσαι δυνάμενοι διὰ τὴν μάχην, μήτε πάσαις ἀπιστῆσαι τῷ μηδεμίαν ἄλλην ἔχειν αὐτῶν πιστοτέραν, μήτε τινὲ μὲν πιστεῦσαι, τινὲ δὲ ἀπιστεῖν διὰ τὴν ἰσότητα, κατ' ἀνάγκην ἤλθομεν εἰς τὸ ἐπέχειν.

<sup>45</sup> It's odd that Sextus says this. For in *PH* 1.34, he says that there is always the possibility of conflicting appearances, and that awareness of that fact is sufficient for Skeptics to suspend judgment. Hence even if they had just one concept of something, they would, contrary to what Sextus suggests here, suspend judgment about its accuracy—unless 'prolepsis' is used here for Epicurean prolepses rather than for concepts more generally; but that doesn't seem to be the case.

<sup>46</sup> 'Sextus Empiricus on the *Kritêrion*', 225–7.

<sup>47</sup> Brunschwig talks both about definitions and concepts. In our passage, Sextus mentions only concepts (*epinoia*, *ennoia*, *prolēpsis*). However, the Stoic concepts of proof that Sextus describes are meant to be definitions of proof: they are accounts of what proof is.



If they define proof in different ways, or have different concepts of proof, they seem to be talking about different things—in which case they aren't contradicting one another.<sup>48</sup>

Now in one way, I don't think there is a genuine problem here. The mere fact that two people define something differently, or have different concepts of it, does not by itself imply that they are talking about different things. Consider the famous problem discussed in connection with *Republic* 4, of whether Plato's account of justice as psychic harmony is so different from Glaucon and Adeimantus' understanding of justice that he isn't addressing their concerns but is talking about something else—Platonic rather than Ordinary Justice. Maybe one has reason to want Platonic Justice—psychic harmony—for its own sake. But what has that got to do with justice as ordinarily conceived? One reply is that, though Plato's account of justice differs from Glaucon and Adeimantus', it overlaps enough with their understanding of justice to ensure that they are all talking about the same thing. The definitions or concepts differ; nonetheless, they are definitions or concepts of the same thing, justice.

Even if two definitions or concepts don't overlap at all, they might nonetheless be of the same thing. I might use 'Aristotle' to mean 'tutor of Philip'; you might use it to mean 'pupil of Plato's'. Even if we don't associate any of the same descriptions with the name, we might nonetheless be talking about the same person.

Even if two definitions or concepts not only differ but also have contradictory implications, they might be of the same thing. Platonic Justice might sanction some actions precluded by Ordinary Justice (and conversely); nonetheless, they are of the same thing, justice.

Moreover, as we saw above, the actual definitions, or concepts, of proof that Sextus discusses have a common core. They overlap enough so that it is reasonable to think that they are all of the same thing—proof—whatever that turns out to be in the end.<sup>49</sup>

Hence it is not in principle problematical to think that different, even conflicting, definitions or concepts can be of the same thing. Nor is it problematical

<sup>48</sup> Brunschwig also says that 'the Sceptic must assume that dogmatists, when quarreling about their opposite dogmas, all have *the same notions* and use *the same words* to express them: only on this condition can he claim that he understands what their debates are all about and attack their dogmas from a position of knowledge' (225). However, even if Dogmatists A and B are talking past one another, that wouldn't preclude Sextus from seeing that that's so. Even if A and B don't understand one another, Sextus might understand both of them. Nor does he claim to criticize the Dogmatists from a position of *knowledge*; he claims to inquire into Dogmatic claims and debates on the basis of a more minimal grasp of them. Cf. Bett, *Against the Ethicists*, 62–4.

<sup>49</sup> However, this is not to say that every purported concept of proof is about the same thing.

to think that the definitions or concepts of proof that Sextus considers are of the same thing, namely, proof.

One might also argue that one can have a concept of *x* even if that concept is quite inaccurate. Kripke, for example, thinks one can refer to Aristotle even if none of the descriptions one associates with the name 'Aristotle' are true of him. He secures this result by appealing to the existence of an appropriate causal chain linking one's use of the term 'Aristotle' to the right person.<sup>50</sup>

But it is one thing to say that one or another Dogmatist can say all these things. It is another thing to say that Sextus can say them. To be sure, he needn't accept any of these strategies as a matter of belief. But there are limits to what he can say on the basis of Skeptical resources, so to speak. For example, Skeptics suspend judgment about what the causes of things are, and even about whether there are any causes, indeed even about whether there is an external world. Hence Sextus can't, in his own right as a Skeptic, rely on the existence of a causal chain in order to defend the view that one can refer to *x* even if all the descriptions one associates with the term '*x*' are false of it.<sup>51</sup>

But we needn't say that he is doing so. Rather, he can be understood as follows: the Dogmatists think their definition, or concept, of proof is accurate. If it is, Skeptics can rely on it to inquire into proof; and they can do so without themselves thinking the concept is accurate. They might accept it as a mere hypothesis about whose truth they suspend judgment. Even if the Dogmatists are wrong, and the definition or concept is wildly off-base, perhaps some Dogmatists would argue that one can succeed in inquiring into proof if their use of the term is caused in the right way. Sextus can then say that, if that's so, Skeptics can also inquire on the basis of those concepts, so long as they acquired them by the right causal route; and there's no reason to think Dogmatists but not Skeptics did so. Skeptics and Dogmatists are therefore in the same boat, so far as satisfying the Targeting Objection goes: if Dogmatic concepts can fix the targets aimed at, then if Skeptics rely on those concepts, they too will succeed in fixing targets to aim at. If the Dogmatist challenge to Skeptical inquiry succeeds, it counts against the Dogmatists' own ability to inquire. If, however, Dogmatists can inquire—as they think they can—Skeptics can also do so. Still, saying that Skeptics can inquire if and only if Dogmatists can do so falls short of saying that Skeptics can, in fact, inquire.

A related issue is worth considering. Sextus says (333a) not only that Dogmatic concepts conflict (or at least seem to do so) but also that their (seemingly)

<sup>50</sup> Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*.

<sup>51</sup> For a related argument, see Ch. 10, sect. 9.

conflicting concepts are (or seem to be) equipollent. He adds that one can't accept them all, on pain of contradiction. Nor can one reject them all, since it's been agreed that one needs a concept for inquiry; nor is there anything more trustworthy than the available concepts. But given their (seeming) equipollence, it would be arbitrary to accept one and reject the others. The remaining alternative is suspension of judgment.<sup>52</sup>

In 333a, Sextus says that the (seemingly) conflicting concepts are equal in respect of trustworthiness both because they are persuasive in themselves and also because of the trustworthiness of those who put them forward. He might be speaking either tongue-in-cheek or from the Dogmatists' point of view. Or he might mean that the conflicting concepts seem subjectively on a par, so far as their plausibility and persuasiveness goes, which doesn't commit him to thinking in his own right that any of them is in fact trustworthy or reliable. However, 'trustworthiness' might indicate that he thinks the Dogmatists are worthy of being believed, at least to some extent. And that, in turn, might mean that he thinks their concepts are to some extent reliable: even though Skeptics suspend judgment as to whether Dogmatic concepts are fully satisfactory, they think they are accurate enough to fix the targets being aimed at. Saying this would be compatible with suspending judgment as to whether any Dogmatic concepts are true or of things that have *huparxis*. But if Sextus concedes in his own right that Dogmatic concepts fix the targets aimed at, that would seem to conflict with the scope of his skepticism.

## 9. Is Sextus inconsistent?

So far we've looked at the first of Brunschwig's two criticisms of Sextus: namely, that Sextus can't say both that Dogmatists have conflicting views about proof and also that they define proof in different ways or have different concepts of it. I now turn to Brunschwig's second criticism: that Sextus inconsistently both accepts and rejects the Ontological Implication.<sup>53</sup> First Sextus says that one can inquire into something even if one doesn't have an Epicurean prolepsis of it, but has only

<sup>52</sup> In *PH* 1.88, Sextus explains why, given the (seeming) equipollence among seemingly conflicting beliefs, Skeptics don't accept all, or just some, of them. But in contrast to *M* 8.333a, *PH* 1.88 doesn't mention the option of rejecting them all.

<sup>53</sup> 'Sextus Empiricus on the *Kritêrion*', 226–7. On the Ontological Implication, see above, sect. 5. Brunschwig doesn't separate his two criticisms as sharply as I have done, but it is useful to do so. Interestingly, he thinks the second alleged difficulty infects the *M* 8 discussion but not the parallel discussion in *PH* 2.

a bare motion of thought that doesn't imply *huparxis*. In saying this, he rejects the Ontological Implication; for according to it, we may infer from the concept of proof that proof has *huparxis*. But Sextus also says that if Skeptics had just one concept of what they were inquiring into, 'by following it closely, we would believe (*episteuomen*) that the matter was such as it struck us in virtue of that one concept (*ennoia*)' (333a). Brunschwig thinks this remark assumes the Ontological Implication.<sup>54</sup> Hence Sextus both accepts and rejects the Ontological Implication.

However, Sextus seems to mean only that if the Skeptic had just a single concept of something, he would, as a psychological matter of fact, assume that the concept was both correct and also of something that has *huparxis*. That's the unfortunate position the Dogmatists are said to be in. The Skeptic, who is acutely aware that there are (or seem to be) conflicting concepts, is not in this unhappy condition. So understood, Sextus is not now accepting the Ontological Implication. He's simply alluding to an unfortunate fact of human psychology: if, unlike the Skeptics, one isn't aware of alternative views, one will tend to be more sanguine, more wedded to one's views, than one should be. Skeptical therapy, like Socratic elenchus, aims to cure us of this sort of dogmatism.

Indeed, the similarity between Sextus and Socrates is quite striking: both argue that the fact that others have false pretensions to knowledge is an impediment to their incentive, or ability, to inquire; and both take themselves to be free of such false pretensions, and so in a better position to inquire than others are. There is, however, a significant difference between Socrates and Sextus: Socrates allows himself a variety of beliefs, including beliefs on topics where Skeptics suspend judgment. And though Socrates disclaims knowledge, he takes at least some of his beliefs to be well-enough justified for it to be reasonable for him to rely on them. Sextus seems to think that even that would be an impediment to inquiry. It's an interesting question how Sextus would argue that Socrates is either not in a position to inquire or is in a less good position to inquire than Skeptics are. For Socrates is well aware of the existence of conflicting beliefs; and though he's more wedded to some beliefs than to others, he expresses willingness to re-examine his beliefs.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> 'Sextus Empiricus on the *Kritêrion*', 226. Brunschwig also says that Sextus' earlier discussion of proof—which canvasses more than one concept of proof but focuses on what's common to all of them—implies that 'all philosophers have an almost identical notion of proof' (226). But since, as Brunschwig argues, the concepts of proof that Sextus canvasses are all Stoic, the most that follows is that all Stoics—not all philosophers—have almost the same concept of proof. Nor is having almost the same concept of something the same as having the very same concept of it.

<sup>55</sup> See e.g. *Crito* 46d–e, where, however, he also says that he always relies on the argument that seems best to him. Hence he doesn't think conflicting arguments are always equipollent and hence

Though Brunschwig thinks Sextus contradicts himself, Long and Sedley praise him for his ‘admirable comments on the criterial impotence of conceptions and preconceptions’.<sup>56</sup> They take Sextus to be saying—correctly, in their view—that one person’s prolepses are another person’s false beliefs; what I take to be fundamentally true, you might take to be false. Yet, as Sextus argues, these conflicting beliefs are, or seem to be, equipollent. Hence we can’t tell which of our beliefs (or concepts) are prolepses, and which are simply false beliefs (or inaccurate concepts). Yet the Epicureans claim that prolepses are criteria of truth, in that it’s by reference to them that the truth and falsity of (other) beliefs is assessed. Since we can’t tell which of our beliefs (or concepts) are prolepses, prolepses can’t play their criterial role.

Epicurus is not as obviously vulnerable to this objection as Long and Sedley take him to be. They seem to think—and Sextus may well assume, if only *ad hominem*—that for prolepses to play their criterial role, they would have to wear their evidence on their face: that something is a prolepsis would have to be immediately clear to anyone who has it. Sextus has a good argument against that view. For we can’t infallibly tell which of our concepts or beliefs are prolepses, and then use them to decide about the truth or falsity of (other) beliefs. But the Epicureans agree. As we’ve seen, they themselves say that prolepses can be confused with false suppositions. They take prolepses to be objectively, not subjectively, evident. Even though we can’t infallibly tell which of our concepts or beliefs are prolepses, prolepses are nonetheless in fact evident and true; and that is sufficient for them to play their criterial role. Perhaps the Epicureans think that having prolepses causes us to make largely correct discriminations among things, even though we aren’t always aware of what enables us to do so. They also think we can become better over time at identifying which of our concepts or beliefs are prolepses: by, for example, studying Epicurus’ works. We then learn that, for example, there is a prolepsis of god that says that gods are blessed and everlasting; and we learn that the view that gods care for human beings is just a false belief. Once we learn which of our concepts or beliefs are prolepses, we can use them as criteria in a more ‘internalist’ way.<sup>57</sup>

he doesn’t always suspend judgment but, in at least some cases, has, and takes himself to have, beliefs.

<sup>56</sup> LS 1.253. Cf. Ch. 8, sect. 11.

<sup>57</sup> See Scott, ‘Epicurean Illusions’. Similar points have been made in defending the Stoic view of apprehensive appearances against Skeptical criticisms. See, for example, Frede, ‘Stoics and Skeptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions’.

## 10. Skeptical and Dogmatic inquiry: a compromise

We've seen that Sextus says that Skeptics understand, or think about (have *noêseis* about, have concepts of), what proof is, though they suspend judgment about whether there is such a thing as proof. In explaining how they can do this, he makes a number of good points: one can inquire into something even if one doesn't have an Epicurean prolepsis of that very thing; having a concept that isn't fully accurate, and that doesn't imply *huparxis*, will do. Nor does one need to know, or have a true belief, or even believe, that *p*, in order to inquire whether *p* is true; entertaining *p* will do.

It's not clear, however, whether these points are enough to vindicate Skeptical inquiry. Though an ordinary non-Skeptic can inquire by entertaining propositions to whose truth she isn't committed, she entertains such propositions against a background of other propositions she believes. Even though that's possible, it would take further argument to show that one can inquire even if one has no beliefs at all, even if one suspends judgment about the truth of all propositions. And, as we've seen, it's often thought that Skeptics disavow all belief.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, it's one thing to say that one can inquire even if one doesn't have an Epicurean prolepsis of what one is inquiring into, or indeed any Epicurean prolepses at all. It's another thing to say that one can inquire even if all of one's concepts are wildly off-base. Yet the Skeptics seem to allow that all the concepts they rely on might, for all they know or believe, be wildly off-base;<sup>59</sup> yet they also say that they can use them so as to inquire (though this might be merely an *ad hominem* argument).

Rather than choosing between these two extremes, one might be tempted by a compromise position: though one doesn't need any Epicurean prolepses (or any P-knowledge, A-knowledge, E-knowledge, or S-knowledge) in order to inquire, neither can all of one's concepts and beliefs be wildly off-base. One must understand, in at least a roughly accurate way, the question being considered; and that requires one to have some concepts and beliefs that are at least roughly accurate. Saying only so much, however, leaves unanswered the important questions of exactly how deep one's grasp of the questions one is asking must

<sup>58</sup> For the No Belief View (according to which Skeptics disclaim all beliefs) and the Some Belief View (according to which Skeptics do not disclaim all beliefs) see Ch. 10, sect 5. In my view (which I discuss briefly in Ch. 10 and defend in more detail in 'Sceptical Dogmata'), Skeptics take themselves to have some beliefs, though only about how they are appeared to. But they don't appeal to these beliefs to explain how they can inquire. Rather, they argue that they can inquire on the basis of their nonadoxastic appearances, and by entertaining propositions. In this sense, it's as though they attempt to vindicate the possibility of inquiry in the absence of all belief.

<sup>59</sup> Unless 333a says that the Dogmatists are reliable to some extent; see above. On the other hand, we've also seen that Sextus might say that Skeptics leave open the possibility that Dogmatic concepts are incoherent. This is not to say that he is inconsistent: he uses different arguments, depending on the adversary at hand.

be and of how close to being accurate one's concepts or beliefs must be. To say that P-knowledge, A-knowledge, E-knowledge, and S-knowledge aren't needed, but that neither can all of one's concepts (or beliefs) be wildly off-base, leaves open a number of intermediate possibilities. Nonetheless, we can say that the truth lies somewhere in between the No Belief View, on the one hand, and requiring something as robust as prolepses, on the other hand.

Although the Epicureans and Skeptics both go too far in their respective directions, they both have important insights. The Epicureans—like Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics—see that one can inquire, and have a reasonable hope of discovery, only if at least some of one's concepts or beliefs are at least roughly accurate. The Skeptics see that one can inquire even if there are no such things as Epicurean prolepses—and even if there is no such thing as P-knowledge, A-knowledge, or S-knowledge: but Sextus doesn't mention these sorts of knowledge in our context, since he is considering an Epicurean argument. But if E-knowledge isn't needed, a *fortiori* neither are these other sorts of knowledge needed.

Despite various disagreements among the various philosophers whose views we've been exploring—for example, about what if any version of innatism is correct, and about whether we had prenatal knowledge—the agreements might impress us more than the disagreements. For contrary to what is often suggested, none of them accepts either content or cognitive-condition innatism. Nor do any of them accept any version of a foreknowledge principle—at least, not if knowledge is understood as Plato understands it, and not if we restrict our attention to us as we are in this life. With the possible exception of Sextus, they all rightly see that it's sufficient for inquiry, and for successful inquiry, that we have and rely on what Plato, at any rate, would classify as true beliefs (even if we can't initially identify them as such). These need not be about the answers to our questions, and typically they aren't: just as we initially lack knowledge of the answers, so we often don't have any beliefs, true or false, about the answers. Rather, we have beliefs about suitably relevant issues that enable us systematically to refine and revise our initial beliefs in such a way that, if all goes well, we will find the answers to our questions and realize that we have done so.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Sextus can accept some of what I've just said. For, though he argues that there are some beliefs such that having them prevents inquiry, he doesn't argue that having beliefs as such prevents inquiry. On the contrary, he accords Skeptics some beliefs, though only about how they are appeared to; he doesn't think that having these beliefs prevents inquiry. (Nor, however, as we've also seen, does he think that having them is a direct explanation of what makes inquiry possible.) However, he isn't committed to the view that successful inquiry, in the sense of coming to know the answers, is possible; nor does he reject it. He suspends judgment about whether we can, or will, ever acquire knowledge of the correct answers to our questions. But, like the other philosophers we've considered, he allows that inquiry is possible in the absence of knowledge.

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# Index Locorum

## AETIUS

### *Placita*

- 4.7.4 248 n. 74
- 4.11.1–4 258

## ALCINOUS

### *Handbook* (= *Didaskalikos*)

- 155.20–156.23 307
- 155.27 307
- 155.32 307
- 155.33–6 307
- 155.33 307 n. 18
- 158.1–4 305 n. 15
- 177.45–178.10 306
- 177.45–178.1 163 n. 82

## ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS

### *De Mixtione*

- 217.2–4 267 n. 36

### *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* (*in Met.*)

- 176.25–6 271 n. 48

### *Commentary on Aristotle's Topics* (*in Top.*)

- 1.8–14 270
- 421.23–32 271 n. 48

## AMMONIUS

### *Commentary on Porphyry's Isagoge* (*in Isag.*)

- 54.23–55.2 271 n. 48
- 55.2–7 267

## ANONYMOUS

### *Commentary on Plato's Theaetetus*

- 22.39–47 237
- 22.46–7 268 n. 38

## AQUINAS

### *in Libros Posteriorum Analyticorum*

#### *Expositio*

- Lecture 1, Book 1 183 n. 14, 186 n. 21
- Lecture 2, Book 1 192, 192 n. 38
- Lecture 3, Book 1 202 n. 66, 211 n. 89
- Lecture 20, Book 2 219 n. 111, 220 n. 114, 309, 309 n. 23

### *Summa Theologiae*

- 1a.17.3 189 n. 32

## ARISTOTLE

### *Generation and Corruption* (GC)

- 335b6 240 n. 47
- 335b35 240 n. 47

### *De Anima* (DA)

- 2.1 146 n. 25
- 2.5 146 n. 25

- 3.3 189 n. 31

- 3.4 225, 308–9

- 402a9 269 n. 41

- 418a20–25 310

- 420a2–5 219

- 424a21–4 219, 310

- 427b25 192 n. 40

- 429b30–430a2 222

- 430a 259

### *De Interpretatione* (*De Int.*)

- 7 219

- 17a39 57 n. 79

### *De Memoria* (*De Mem.*)

- 449b12–14 189 n. 29

- 451b7–10 107 n. 6

- 451b9–12 151

- 452a11 148 n. 38

- 453a12 107 n. 6

### *Generation of Animals* (GA)

- 731a30 189 n. 29

### *History of Animals* (HA)

- 620b 69 n. 1

### *Metaphysics* (*Met.*)

- 1.1 218 n. 110, 221, 259, 310

- 1.6 215 n. 95

- 5.12 202 n. 68

- 10 202 n. 68

- 980a21 220

- 981a6 218

- 981a30–b6 310

- 981b11–13 189 n. 29

- 982b17–21 5 n. 13

- 992b18–993a10 179 n. 1, 216 n. 101

- 992b30–2 192 n. 39

- 995a27–995b4 72–3, 75 n. 19, 128, 179 n.

- 1, 297

- 1004b11 269 n. 41

- 1029b3–12 55 n. 71

- 1048a32–3 143 n. 17

### *Nicomachean Ethics* (EN)

- 1.7 269

- 2 184 n. 15

- 6.3 184 n. 15

- 1095a32–b4 55 n. 72

- 1095b2–4 55 n. 71

- 1139b15–18 192 n. 40

- 1142a34–b1 5

### *Parts of Animals* (PA)

- 640b30–5 240

- 640b30 240 n. 47



ARISTOTLE (*cont.*)*Physics (Phys.)*

- 1.1 55 n. 71
- 2.3 37 n. 20
- 2.7 37 n. 20
- 193a30 240 n. 47

*Politics (Pol.)*

- 1333b34 258 n. 4
- 1336b40 258 n. 4

*Posterior Analytics (APo.)*

- 1.1 2, 12, 26 n. 63, 179, 186–7, 189, 190 n. 34, 193 n. 44, 194, 196, 202 n. 66, 208, 209 n. 84, 217, 255 n. 87, 290, 297, 308–9, 316 n. 33
- 1.2 189, 190
- 1.12 184 n. 15
- 1.24 202 n. 66, 209 n. 84, 308 n. 23
- 2.1–2 179 n. 1
- 2.3 186
- 2.8–10 179 n. 1
- 2.19 179 n. 1, 185 n. 18, 186, 211 n. 89, 215–21, 308 n. 23, 309–10
- 71a1–2 179, 187
- 71a2–11 183
- 71a11–17 191
- 71a13 193 n. 42
- 71a15–16 193 n. 42
- 71a17–30 197–8
- 71a17 186
- 71a21 192 n. 39, 197
- 71a22 185, 186
- 71a24 192 n. 39, 198 n. 57
- 71a26–7 200
- 71a29–30 203
- 71a30–71b5 211
- 71b5–8 210
- 71b33–72a5 55 n. 71
- 72b10–11 311
- 73a7 269 n. 41
- 75b18 269 n. 41
- 76a17 269 n. 41
- 79b28 192 n. 40
- 86a22–9 202
- 87b28–30 219, 310
- 89a3–4 192 n. 40
- 89a39 192 n. 40
- 89b24 182 n. 10
- 89b27 182 n. 10
- 90a24 182 n. 10
- 93a22–4 193
- 93a25 182 n. 10
- 98b21 186
- 99b25 203 n. 70
- 98b28–9 186
- 99b23–34 216
- 99b29 185
- 99b35 217, 310
- 100a3–9 218, 259

100a13–14 220, 309 n. 23

100a16 218 n. 108

100a16–b1 219, 310

100b5–6 186

*Prior Analytics (APr.)*

- 2.21 144 n. 19, 174 n. 109, 179, 202 n. 66, 212–15
- 24a22 184 n. 15
- 67a21–6 213
- 67a22 179 n. 2
- 67a24–5 197 n. 56
- 67a25 187 n. 21
- 68b13–14 184 n. 15

*Rhetoric (Rhet.)*

1355a15–17 220

*Sophistici Elenchi (SE)*

- 4 26 n. 63
- 165b 84
- 183b39 184 n. 15

*Topics (Top.)*

- 1.4–5 269
- 5 269 n. 41
- 6.4 49 n. 54, 55 n. 71, 59 n. 89
- 105a10 184 n. 15
- 141a26 49 n. 54
- 157a18 184 n. 15

## AUGUSTINE

*Confessions*

- 1 4 n. 7
- 10 4 n. 7

*City of God*

- 8.7 267 n. 37

## CICERO

*Academica (Acad.)*

- 2.21 257, 258 n. 4, 287
- 2.26 5–6, 287
- 2.30 257 n. 1
- 2.77–8 263 n. 21
- 2.145 262

*De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum (Fin.)**On Ends*

- 1.22 237
- 2.3–4 241 n. 48

*De Natura Deorum (ND; On the Nature of the Gods)*

- 1.43–9 227
- 1.43–5 228, 230, 247
- 1.43–4 235–6
- 1.43 257 n. 1
- 1.45 232

*Tusculan Disputations (TD)*

- 1.57 2 n. 5, 138 n. 1
- 5.81–2 270

## CLEMENT

*Stromateis (Strom.)*

- 2.4 227 n. 5, 233 n. 24
- 6.14 6 n. 15

## DAMASCIUS

*Commentary on the Phaedo*

253 154 n. 51

262 154 n. 51

267 154 n. 51

## DEMOCRITUS

DK A109 248 n. 74

DK B10 348

DK B165 240

## DIOGENES LAERTIUS (DL)

7.43 274

7.46 263 n. 21

7.49 273–4

7.50 263 n. 21

7.51 292

7.52–3 237 n. 37

7.53–4 281–2

7.53 260, 265 n. 30, 266 n. 32, 278

7.54 236 n. 34, 257, 260, 263, 265

7.55 258 n. 4

7.60–2 270 n. 43

7.60 239 n. 44, 268, 271–2, 271 n. 48

7.65 273 n. 51

7.103 270

7.147 288

9.70 6, 375

10.31 231 n. 19

10.32 237, 240

10.33 227–9, 231, 232 n. 23, 233, 235, 238,  
243, 243 n. 56, 249, 252, 253 n. 84, 257 n.

1, 260 n. 11, 261

10.34 232 n. 23, 249 n. 75

10.123 234, 239

## DIOGENES OF OENOANDA

10.2.11–5.15 244 n. 61

## EPICETUS

*Discourses (Diss.)*

1.22 252 n. 82

2.17 252 n. 82

1.6.12–15 280 n. 67

1.22.1–3 287

2.11.2–4 266, 276–7

4.1.44–5 287 n. 88

4.8.6 266

4.8.10 266

## EPICURUS

*Kuriai Doxai (KD)*

37 229 n. 9

38 229 n. 9

37–8 239

*Letter to Herodotus (Hdt.)*

37–8 226–7, 232 n. 23, 246, 5

37 233 n. 24, 235, 239 n. 45, 244, 351 n. 18

72 228 n. 9, 236, 237 n. 37

75–6 244 n. 61

82 231

*Letter to Menoeceus (Men.)*

123–4 232 n. 23

123 238–9

124 228 n. 9

*On Nature*

28 229 n. 9, 233 n. 24

34.26–30 229 n. 9

*Vatican Sayings*

14 248 n. 74

## EROTIANUS

*Vocum Hippocraticarum Collectio*

34.10–20 241, 249 n. 75

## EUSEBIUS

*Evangelical Preparation*

15.20.6 285

## GALEN

*Medical Definitions*

19.348.16–17 239 n. 44

*On Hippocrates' and Plato's Doctrines*

2.5.9–13 272

5.3.1 258 n. 4

*On Medical Method*

10.155.1–8 346 n. 4

## HERODOTUS

8.239 303

## LUCRETIIUS

*De Rerum Natura*

2.741–5 244 n. 60

3.417–829 248 n. 74

3.670–8 249

3.972–7 248 n. 74

5.1028–90 244 n. 61

5.1169–82 247 n. 71

## OLYMPIODORUS

*Commentary on the Gorgias*

3.2 284 n. 79

38.3 284 n. 79

39.6 284 n. 79

*Commentary on the Phaedo*

Lecture 12, 17–21 310

## ORIGEN

*Contra Celsum*

7.15 326 n. 19

## PHILODEMUS

*On Household Management (De Oec.)*

20.8–32 236 n. 33

*On Poems (De poem.)*

5.33.32–6 236 n. 33

*On Signs*

34.7–11 238

## PHILOPONUS

*in Aristotelis Analytica Posteriora*
*Commentaria cum Anonymo in Librum II*

4.16–22 115 n. 27

5 184 n. 15, 186 n. 21

PHILOPONUS (*cont.*)

- 6.19–23 190 n. 33
- 7.1–5 184 n. 15
- 7.8 192
- 8.6–19 198 n. 56
- 8.12 202 n. 66
- 12.1–15 182 n. 11
- 16.20–5 210 n. 86
- 437.5–6 220 n. 114
- 437.26–7 311 n. 25
- in De Intellectu*
  - 16 224
  - 33.82–9 223 n. 120
  - 36.70–37.80 222 n. 19, 222–3
  - 39 223
  - 39.27–40.43 223 n. 120
  - 62.6–63.18 223 n. 120

## [PHILOPONUS]

- in De Anima*
  - 520.1–12 224 n. 122
  - 524.13–16 224 n. 122
  - 533.25–35 224 n. 123

## PLATO

- Apology (Ap.)*
  - 20d–24a 121 n. 43
  - 21d 5 n. 11
  - 22b2 150 n. 40
  - 23a–e 5 n. 11
  - 25d9 131 n. 68
  - 30e 73
  - 33d2 131 n. 68
- Charmides (Ch.)*
  - 165bc 5 n. 12
- Cratylus (Crat.)*
  - 391a 116 n. 29
  - 432b–433b 44 n. 39
- Crito*
  - 46d–e 365 n. 55
- Euthydemus (Eud.)*
  - 275d–278d 26
  - 277e3–278a5 159 n. 68
  - 293c–294a 112 n. 19
  - 296a–297a 163 n. 81
- Euthyphro (Eu.)*
  - 5–6 39 n. 24
  - 6e 230 n. 15
- Meno (M.)*
  - 71ab 7, 76
  - 70a1–4 31
  - 71a5–71b8 31–2
  - 71a5–7 33 n. 10, 86
  - 71b 7, 19, 40, 52, 74 n. 15, 131 n. 72
  - 71b4–6 33 n. 10
  - 71b9–c2 86
  - 71b9 7, 33 n. 9

- 71c7–d8 69 n. 2
- 71e 92
- 71e1–72a2 42
- 72a6–8 42
- 72a7 42 n. 31
- 72b1 35, 43
- 72c6–d1 35, 230 n. 15
- 72c6–8 33, 43
- 72c7–8 39
- 72c7 35
- 72d8 35
- 73a4–5 45
- 73b6 196
- 73d 56
- 73d1 55 n. 73
- 73d2 55 n. 73
- 74a11–b1 45
- 74a11 42 n. 31, 55 n. 73
- 74b3–4 43
- 74d5–e2 43
- 74d6–e1 62
- 75a8–9 46
- 75b10–11 46, 53
- 75b11–c1 47
- 75c4–5 53 n. 67
- 75c6–7 53
- 75c8–d7 48
- 75c9 83
- 75d 50–4, 62, 63 n. 101, 64 n. 105
- 75d6 47 n. 46
- 75d7 48 n. 46
- 75e1–6 53
- 76a4 53 n. 69
- 76a8 54
- 76b4–5 32 n. 5
- 76b4 131 n. 68
- 76c1 131 n. 68
- 76c4–5 54
- 76d8 54
- 76e3 54
- 76e6–7 54
- 77a5–7 57 n. 78
- 77a6 55, 219
- 77a9–b1 57 n. 78
- 77b2–5 57 n. 80
- 77b4–5 57
- 78b9–c1 57
- 78c1–2 57
- 78d1–79a1 58
- 78d7–e2 58 n. 83
- 79 349–50
- 79a–e 168
- 79b4–c9 58–61
- 79c–e 68
- 79c2 131 n. 70
- 79c8–e1 39

79d 64 n. 105, 65–6, 114  
 79d1–4 48, 50 n. 57, 61–2, 63 n. 102, 64,  
 114 n. 22  
 79d1 63 n. 102  
 79d3 47 n. 46  
 79d6–e1 62–3  
 79d6 63 n. 102  
 80a1 69  
 80a2–3 69 n. 1  
 80a3 70  
 80a4 69  
 80a6 69 n. 1  
 80a7 69 n. 1  
 80b1 69, 69 n. 1  
 80b4–6 130  
 80b4 69  
 80b6–7 69 n. 1  
 80b7 83 n. 35  
 80c8–9 70  
 80d–e 180  
 80d1–3 69  
 80d1 87  
 80d3–4 42 n. 31, 55 n. 73, 71, 74 n. 14  
 80d5–8 7, 74–81, 132  
 80d5 96  
 80d6–8 99  
 80d6 74 n. 15, 96  
 80d8 96  
 80e1–5 7–8, 83–94  
 80e2–3 87 n. 49, 93  
 80e2 26, 48 n. 47  
 80e3–5 7 n. 22  
 81a1–3 84  
 81a1 105  
 81a3 105  
 81c–e 156 n. 58  
 81c5–e2 106  
 81c6 110 n. 13, 111  
 81c7–9 112  
 81c9 154 n. 52  
 81de 170  
 81d1 111  
 81d2–3 118  
 81d3 108  
 81d4–5 26, 107, 182  
 81e1–2 107  
 81e3–5 114–15, 118  
 82a1–3 115, 116, 117–18  
 82a5–6 115  
 82a6 105  
 82b–d 119  
 82b2 105, 115  
 82b4 119, 130  
 82b9–c2 119  
 82b9–10 129  
 82b9 119, 131

82d–e 119  
 82e1–2 122 n. 48  
 82e4–5 115–16  
 83d 122  
 83d4–e1 122 n. 48  
 83e11–84a1 121 n. 44  
 85b–d 119, 167  
 85b5–6 129  
 85b8–d1 148  
 85c2 154 n. 53  
 85c4 132, 157 n. 63, 160, 161, 161 n. 77  
 85c6–7 132  
 85c6 157 n. 63, 160, 161, 161 n. 77  
 85c9–d1 119, 151 n. 43, 161 n. 77  
 85c9 304, 305 n. 15  
 85d 114 n. 22, 174  
 85d3–86c2 147  
 85d3–4 148, 150  
 85d4–5 153 n. 47  
 85d4 150, 151 n. 43  
 85d6–7 149, 150  
 85d6 150, 151 n. 43  
 85d9–10 149  
 85d9 152–3  
 85d10 153, 154 n. 52, 156, 159 n. 67  
 85d12–86c2 149  
 85d12 152 n. 45  
 85e1–3 156  
 86a1 155, 156, 156 n. 57  
 86a6–7 158 n. 64  
 86a8–9 158, 159  
 86a8 159 n. 67  
 86a9 157 n. 60, 159 n. 67  
 86bc 170  
 86b6–c2 107 n. 8  
 86b6 165 n. 85  
 87a 115  
 87b7–c1 116–17  
 87c–89c 115  
 87e5 150 n. 40  
 89e–96d 115  
 96b 117 n. 30  
 96d5 33 n. 12, 51  
 96e4 131 n. 70  
 97a 36 n. 19  
 97a9 33 n. 12  
 97b2–5 34 n. 12  
 97e2–98a8 161 n. 78  
 98a 16, 33, 36, 41, 50–1, 54, 131, 304  
 98d1 33 n. 12  
*Phaedrus (Phdrs.)*  
 237b–d 241 n. 48  
 246e 307  
 265d–e 241 n. 48  
 265e1–2 44  
 277b–c 241 n. 48

PLATO (*cont.*)*Phaedo* (*Phd.*)

- 72e3–73a3 172
- 73a 172
- 73a2–3 163 n. 82
- 73a7–10 151 n. 42
- 73b 172
- 73c2 179 n. 2
- 74e3 179 n. 2
- 74e9 179 n. 2
- 74a–75c 173
- 75cd 173
- 75c4–76d4 154 n. 51
- 75d7–11 173
- 76e–77c 163
- 105e2–107a1 163 n. 81

*Philebus* (*Phil.*)

- 38c11–d1 249 n. 76

*Politicus* (*Pol.*)

- 261c5 150 n. 40
- 262b 44

*Republic* (*Rep.*)

- 375e3 131 n. 68
- 376a6 131 n. 68
- 435d 239
- 476e7 141
- 504d 239
- 606e4 150 n. 40

*Sophist* (*So.*)

- 230 343 n. 60
- 255e9 150 n. 40

*Symposium* (*Symp.*)

- 185e1 150 n. 40

*Theaetetus* (*Tht.*)

- 149a–151d 69 n. 1
- 184–186 218 n. 109
- 198d6 173
- 203a1 150 n. 40

## [PLATO]

*Sisyphus* (*Sis.*)

- 388b–c 15 n. 45
- 388d5–7 83
- 391a3 75 n. 19
- 391a5 75 n. 19
- 391a6 75 n. 19

## PLUTARCH

*Fragments*

- 215c 301, 302
- 215c–f 9, 300
- 215d 287 n. 86, 302, 303–5
- 215e 6 n. 17, 79 n. 26, 301, 302–3, 304 n. 10, 305
- 215f 93 n. 54, 257, 299 n. 2, 301–2
- 216a–e 300 n. 2
- 216a 303
- 217c 303 n. 8

*On Whether Land or Sea Animals are Cleverer*

- 961c–d 356 n. 35

*Stoic Self-Contradictions*

- 1041e–1042a 278
- 1041e–f 281 n. 70, 288
- 1041e 304 n. 12
- 1053d 285

*Common Conceptions*

- 1059b–c 268
- 1060a 281 n. 70
- 1070b–c 278
- 1084f 260
- 1085a–b 231 n. 18
- 1085a 260

*Against Colotes* (*adv. Col.*)

- 1117f 234 n. 28
- 1119f 229 n. 14

*That Epicurus Actually Makes a Pleasant Life Impossible* (*Non Posse*)

- 1091b 244 n. 57

*Platonic Questions*

- 1000d–e 304
- 1000e 268 n. 38

## PROCLUS

*Commentary on the Alcibiades* (*in Alc.*)

- 258.21–259.12 130 n. 65

*Commentary on the Cratylus* (*in Crat.*)

- 61.5–9 116 n. 29

*Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*

- 1.12.9–13.27 306 n. 16

## SCHOLIASTS TO DIONYSIUS THRAX

*Scholia in Dionysii Thracis Artem**Grammaticam*

- 107.5–7 268, 271
- 116 238

## SENECA

*Epistulae Morales* (*Ep. Mor.*)

- 76.9–10 270
- 120 277 n. 59

## SEXTUS EMPIRICUS

*Against the Professors* (*M*)

- 7.151–2 262 n. 19
- 7.151–7 263, 264 n. 26
- 7.154 262 n. 19
- 7.205 229 n. 11
- 7.208–15 236 n. 34
- 7.228 261
- 7.230 261
- 7.237 261, 262
- 7.241 261
- 7.244–6 273 n. 51
- 7.248 229 n. 11, 263 n. 21
- 7.267–8 240
- 7.267 240 n. 46

7.393 324  
 7.402 263 n. 21  
 7.426 263 n. 21, 326  
 7.443 267 n. 35  
 8.10–12 273 n. 51  
 8.10 274 n. 55, 310  
 8.58–60 237 n. 37  
 8.70 274  
 8.74 273 n. 51  
 8.85–6 273 n. 51  
 8.141 346 n. 5  
 8.145–50 346 n. 5  
 8.145 346 n. 6, 346 n. 7, 346 n. 8  
 8.275–6 280 n. 67  
 8.300–1 345  
 8.300 345 n. 1, 356 n. 31, 359  
 8.301 345 n. 1  
 8.302 345  
 8.310 345–6  
 8.314 345–6  
 8.315 345 n. 1  
 8.316–20 346–7  
 8.316 346 n. 5  
 8.317 346 n. 5  
 8.319 347 n. 7  
 8.320–1 350  
 8.320 347 n. 9, 350  
 8.321 345 n. 1, 347 n. 9, 350, 352, 354  
 8.322–8 348  
 8.322 345 n. 1, 347  
 8.323 348  
 8.324–7 4 n. 7  
 8.324–5 348  
 8.324 359  
 8.327–34 348  
 8.336 350  
 8.337–336a 332 n. 36  
 8.337 337 n. 43, 345 n. 1, 351, 354, 354 n. 27  
 8.331a–332a 294 n. 107  
 8.331a 345 n. 1, 354, 354 n. 27, 358 n. 39, 359  
 8.332a–333a 360–1  
 8.332a 345 n. 1, 354 n. 27  
 8.333a 345 n. 1, 354 n. 27, 363–4, 365, 367 n. 59  
 8.334a–336a 323 n. 10  
 8.334a 345 n. 1, 354, 354 n. 27, 356  
 8.335a–336a 357  
 8.335a 345 n. 1, 354 n. 27  
 8.336a 356  
 8.337a 341 n. 51  
 8.340–7 347 n. 9, 347 n. 10  
 8.348 351 n. 18  
 8.356–66 348  
 8.397 262 n. 19  
 8.411–62 345 n. 1

8.463–81 347 n. 10  
 9.49 323 n. 10  
 9.124 267 n. 36  
 9.211 274 n. 55  
 10.219–27 236  
 11.21 227, 354  
 11.22 267 n. 36  
 11.147 344 n. 61  
 11.182 262 n. 19  
 11.183 263 n. 21  
*Outlines of Pyrrhonism (PH)*  
 1.1–2 320, 325  
 1.3 321  
 1.7 324  
 1.13 338  
 1.14 331 n. 34  
 1.19 338 n. 48  
 1.21–4 341  
 1.24 343 n. 57  
 1.28 6  
 1.34 361 n. 45  
 1.62–78 330 n. 30  
 1.62 330 n. 30  
 1.63 330 n. 30  
 1.69 330 n. 30  
 1.88 364 n. 52  
 1.215 233 n. 26  
 1.220–5 321 n. 3  
 1.235 233 n. 26  
 2.1 321, 339  
 2.2–6 322  
 2.3 332  
 2.4–5 326  
 2.4 263 n. 21, 331, 333  
 2.5 326  
 2.6 332  
 2.10–11 322–3  
 2.10 334–5, 336–9  
 2.11 4–5, 71, 324, 343  
 2.19 344 n. 61  
 2.22 337  
 2.22–34 326  
 2.22–8 337  
 2.25 240  
 2.97–103 346 n. 5  
 2.134–92 326, 345 n. 1  
 2.195–7 306 n. 16  
 2.204 306 n. 16  
 2.207–8 241 n. 48  
 2.211–12 237 n. 39  
 2.212 239, 239 n. 45  
 3.136–50 326  
 3.218 344 n. 61  
 3.219 344 n. 61  
 3.241 262 n. 19  
 3.280 343 n. 60

SIMPLICIUS

*Commentary on the Categories (in Cat.)*  
30.13–15 271 n. 48

STOBAEUS

*Eclogae*  
2.73.16–74.3 264

THEODORET

*Graecorum Affectionum Curatio*

1.90 233 n. 24

XENOPHANES

DK B18 4 n. 7  
DK B34 4 n. 7

ZABARELLA

*in Duos Aristotelis libros Posteriorum*  
*Analyticorum Commentaria*  
620 185–6

# Index Nominum

- Ackrill, J. L. 165 n. 84, 179 n. 1, 199 n. 59  
Adamson, P. 217 n. 105  
Allen, J. 345 n. 2  
Annas, J. 259 n. 7  
Annas, J. and Barnes, J. 323 n. 9, 325 n. 17,  
326 n. 19  
Asmis, E. 228 n. 7, 231 n. 17, 232 n. 21, 234,  
235 n. 31, 236 n. 33, 236 n. 34, 237 n. 36,  
245 n. 65, 248 n. 73, 251–2
- Barnes, Jonathan 11 n. 32, 12, 13 n. 40, 21 n. 55,  
55 n. 71, 93 n. 54, 180–1, 184 n. 15, 185 n. 20,  
186 n. 21, 187, 189, 190 n. 33, 191 n. 36, 192 n.  
38, 193 n. 41, 197 n. 56, 198 n. 57, 199 n. 60,  
201 n. 64, 202 n. 65, 202 n. 66, 203 n. 71, 208,  
211 n. 87, 211 n. 88, 213 n. 91, 216 n. 100, 216  
n. 103, 217 n. 106, 218 n. 108, 233 n. 24,  
242–3, 250 n. 77, 254, 261 n. 15, 262 n. 17,  
271 n. 48, 273 n. 50, 274 n. 54, 286 n. 85, 290,  
315 n. 32, 346 n. 3  
Barnes, Joseph 117 n. 32  
Bennett, J. 342  
Benson, H. 40 n. 24  
Bett, R. 348 n. 12, 354 n. 28, 362 n. 48  
Beversluis, J. 41 n. 28  
Black, D. 4 n. 7  
Bluck, R. S. 32 n. 4, 47 n. 46, 74 n. 14, 116 n. 29,  
133 n. 76, 153 n. 50, 158 n. 64  
Bobzien, S. 273 n. 51, 274 n. 55  
Boer, S. and Lycan, W. 36 n. 18  
Bolton, R. 184 n. 16, 190 n. 33  
Bostock, D. 175 n. 111  
Brennan, T. 262 n. 18, 265 n. 27  
Brittain, C. 13, 189 n. 32, 233 n. 26, 244 n. 60,  
258 n. 4, 263 n. 22, 264 n. 24, 265 n. 30, 271 n.  
48, 273 n. 52, 279 n. 66, 288 n. 89, 288 n. 91,  
290–4  
Brody, B. A. 35 n. 16  
Bronstein, D. 11 n. 35, 148 n. 38, 185 n. 18, 192  
n. 38, 192 n. 39, 197 n. 56, 200 n. 61, 203 n. 70,  
204 n. 74, 205 n. 76, 205 n. 77, 206 n. 78, 214  
n. 94, 215 n. 97, 216 n. 100, 217 n. 104,  
218 n. 108  
Brown, L. 12, 47 n. 43, 53 n. 66, 59 n. 88, 59 n.  
89, 60 n. 93, 65 n. 107, 79 n. 27, 95 n. 57,  
111 n. 18, 155 n. 53, 157 n. 59, 167 n. 89,  
171 n. 102, 172 n. 103, 173 n. 106, 207 n. 79  
Brown, M. 121 n. 44
- Brunschwig, J. 331 n. 33, 345 n. 2, 346 n. 4, 347  
n. 8, 353, 361, 362 n. 48, 364–6  
Burge, T. 341, 343  
Burnyeat, M. F. 45 n. 40, 49, 55 n. 72, 58 n. 87,  
174 n. 107, 174 n. 108, 184, 185 n. 15, 189,  
216 n. 100, 343 n. 57  
Bury, R. G. 323 n. 9, 325 n. 17, 345 n. 1
- Cantini, A. 25 n. 59  
Canto-Sperber, M. 95 n. 57  
Carpenter, A. and Ganeri, J. 4 n. 7  
Cavini, W. 189 n. 32,  
Charles, D. 11 n. 35, 46, 47 n. 44, 56, 76, 94,  
99–103, 129–32, 134, 179 n. 1, 190 n. 35,  
193–4, 195 n. 50, 196 n. 51, 196 n. 52, 197 n.  
54, 216 n. 100, 218 n. 108, 219 n. 111, 341 n. 55  
Cherniss, H. 278 n. 63, 281 n. 71, 288 n. 90,  
304 n. 12  
Chomsky, N. 165–8  
Crivelli, P. 205 n. 77, 261 n. 15, 267 n. 37,  
269, 271
- Dancy, R. 10 n. 31, 44 n. 35, 74 n. 14, 75 n. 15,  
75 n. 16, 76, 80 n. 31, 81 n. 33, 83 n. 37, 87 n.  
49, 96 n. 60, 105 n. 2, 106 n. 4, 108 n. 10, 111  
n. 17, 121 n. 44, 125 n. 56, 141 n. 11, 147,  
153 n. 46, 153 n. 50, 155 n. 53, 157 n. 61,  
157 n. 63, 160–1  
Day, J. 75 n. 15, 75 n. 16, 75 n. 18, 75 n. 19,  
83 n. 37  
Denyer, N. 163 n. 81  
Descartes, R. 143–4, 147, 166 n. 88, 215 n. 98,  
247, 337 n. 44, 338 n. 48, 354 n. 25  
Devereux, D. 116 n. 29, 117 n. 31  
Devitt, M. 131 n. 66, 245 n. 63  
Dewitt, N. 246 n. 66  
Dillon, J. 307 n. 18  
Dimas, P. 25 n. 60, 80 n. 31  
Dummett, M. 245  
Dyson, H. 277 n. 60, 290 n. 95
- Ebert, T. 107 n. 7, 161 n. 76  
Eklund, M. 166 n. 87  
Everson, S. 233 n. 24, 242, 244, 245 n. 62  
Fara, M. 145 n. 23  
Ferejohn, M. 201 n. 63, 202 n. 65  
Fine, G. 5 n. 11, 11 n. 34, 16 n. 46, 33 n. 12, 43 n.  
34, 44 n. 38, 44 n. 39, 46 n. 41, 47 n. 44, 51 n.



- 60, 60 n. 93, 99 n. 63, 103 n. 67, 119 n. 36, 131 n. 68, 131 n. 71, 133 n. 75, 139 n. 6, 140 n. 8, 151 n. 43, 153 n. 47, 162 n. 78, 172 n. 104, 175 n. 110, 188 n. 26, 189 n. 30, 189 n. 32, 235 n. 32, 237 n. 36, 253 n. 83, 262 n. 17, 329 n. 26, 334 n. 39, 336 n. 42, 338 n. 47, 341 n. 54, 354 n. 26, 357 n. 36, 367 n. 58
- Fine, K. 35 n. 16
- Fodor, J. 245
- Fowler, D. 241 n. 49
- Franklin, L. 48 n. 48, 52 n. 63, 57 n. 77, 63 n. 101
- Frede, M. 13, 130 n. 64, 170 n. 100, 216 n. 100, 222 n. 118, 228 n. 7, 259 n. 7, 260 n. 12, 263 n. 21, 263 n. 22, 264, 266, 290 n. 95, 294 n. 106, 336 n. 41, 338 n. 48, 366 n. 57
- Geach, P. T. 34 n. 13
- Gentzler, J. 122 n. 46, 147, 160–1
- Gifford, M. 198 n. 57, 202 n. 64, 204 n. 74, 215 n. 97
- Glidden, D. 231 n. 17
- Goldin, O. 218 n. 108
- Goldschmidt, V. 237 n. 36
- Goodman, N. 44 n. 36
- Grgic, F. 20 n. 54, 41 n. 30, 117 n. 31, 169 n. 94, 332 n. 36
- Grice, H. P. 242 n. 43
- Gross, S. 340 n. 50
- Grote, G. 108 n. 10, 112 n. 19, 138 n. 2
- Grube, G. M. A. 61 n. 97, 63 n. 102, 75 n. 16, 75 n. 18, 83 n. 37, 121 n. 44
- Guthrie, W. K. C. 33 n. 10
- de Haas, F. 222 n. 119, 223 n. 120, 224 n. 121
- Hamlyn, D. W. 180 n. 4, 198 n. 57
- Hankinson, R. J. 219 n. 111, 259 n. 7, 263 n. 21, 311 n. 25, 336–7, 343 n. 57
- Hare, R. M. 171 n. 101
- Harte, V. 205 n. 76
- Helmig, C. 308 n. 20
- Hintikka, J. 6 n. 18, 18
- House, D. 3 n. 6
- Hunter, G. and Inwood, B. 21 n. 55, 110 n. 16, 111 n. 18, 138 n. 1
- Hussey, E. 4 n. 7
- Inwood, B. 279 n. 65
- Irwin, T. 11 n. 34, 26 n. 66, 35 n. 17, 47 n. 44, 48, 49 n. 52, 57 n. 77, 60, 81 n. 33, 112 n. 20, 115 n. 28, 146 n. 24, 150 n. 40, 153 n. 47, 172 n. 104, 189 n. 32, 215 n. 98, 216 n. 100, 281 n. 70
- Irwin, T. and Fine, G. 218 n. 108
- Jackson-McCabe, M. 277 n. 60
- Jenkinson, A. J. 213
- Jolley, N. 21 n. 55, 143 n. 18
- Jordan, W. 26 n. 65
- Kahn, C. 26 n. 66
- Karasmanis, V. 54 n. 70
- Klein, J. 263 n. 22
- Konstan, D. 231 n. 17, 232 n. 21, 238 n. 41, 248 n. 73
- Kraut, R. 112 n. 19, 115 n. 28, 116 n. 29, 117 n. 31
- Kripke, S. 35 n. 16, 363
- LaBarge, S. 109 n. 11, 185 n. 20, 189 n. 32, 197 n. 56, 198 n. 57, 203 n. 73, 204, 205 n. 76, 207 n. 79, 214 n. 94, 215 n. 97, 218 n. 108
- Leibniz, G. 2, 22, 110–11, 119, 138, 141, 143, 147, 222, 224, 247, 278
- Locke, J. 22–3, 143, 222
- Lodge, P. 138 n. 2
- Long, A. A. 230 n. 15, 242, 274 n. 53, 277 n. 59, 283–4
- Long, A. A. and Sedley, D. 13, 227 n. 3, 232 n. 21, 235 n. 31, 235 n. 32, 244 n. 61, 245 n. 64, 246–8, 253 n. 84, 264 n. 23, 269–71, 272 n. 49, 273 n. 50, 273 n. 51, 274 n. 53, 286 n. 85, 294–5, 354, 358 n. 40, 366
- Lyons, J. 34 n. 12, 130 n. 65, 131 n. 68
- McCabe, M. M. 84 n. 42, 205 n. 76
- MacDonald, S. 4 n. 7, 189 n. 32
- McKirahan, R. 185 n. 19, 197 n. 56, 198 n. 57, 209 n. 82
- Maconi, H. 263 n. 20, 336 n. 42
- Mangoni, C. 236 n. 33
- Margolis, E. and Laurence, S. 171 n. 101
- Mates, B. 325 n. 14, 325 n. 17, 326 n. 19, 331 n. 33, 341–3, 347 n. 9, 350 n. 15
- Matthews, G. 7 n. 22, 9 n. 26, 26 n. 63, 26 n. 66, 73 n. 10, 74 n. 12, 75 n. 16, 76, 79 n. 25, 94 n. 57, 97 n. 61, 139 n. 5
- Meinwald, C. 262 n. 18, 265 n. 27
- Mignucci, M. 183 n. 14, 186 n. 21
- Miller, J. 22 n. 55, 145
- Moline, J. 25 n. 58
- Moravcsik, J. M. E. 11 n. 32, 25 n. 62, 86 n. 45, 94 n. 57, 97 n. 61, 108 n. 10, 112 n. 20, 116 n. 29, 139 n. 5, 151 n. 44
- Morel, P. 231 n. 17
- Morison, B. 202 n. 65, 203 n. 71
- Mure, G. R. G. 183 n. 14
- Nagel, T. 166 n. 88
- Nashi, R. 331 n. 33, 334 n. 37
- Nehamas, A. 32 n. 5, 32 n. 7, 33 n. 8, 36 n. 19, 108 n. 10, 123 n. 50
- Opsomer, J. 299 n. 2

- Palmer, J. 325 n. 16  
 Penner, S. 27 n. 69  
 Penner, T. 61 n. 95  
 Perin, C. 325 n. 16  
 Pettit, D. 340–1  
 Politis, V. 70 n. 5  
 Powers, L. 209 n. 83  
 Prior, A. 25 n. 59
- Ross, W. D. 183 n. 14, 186 n. 21, 190 n. 33, 192 n. 38, 198 n. 57, 200 n. 60, 213 n. 91, 214, 215 n. 97, 218 n. 108  
 Ryle, G. 10, 84 n. 40, 94–5, 98–9, 106, 112 n. 19, 120, 302
- Sandbach, F. H. 277 n. 60, 281 n. 71, 283 n. 73, 288 n. 89, 299 n. 2  
 Schaffer, J. 80 n. 30  
 Schofield, M. 231 n. 20, 241 n. 49, 280 n. 68, 288 n. 89, 318 n. 37  
 Scott, D. 11 n. 33, 11 n. 35, 13, 21 n. 55, 22, 25 n. 61, 26 n. 65, 35 n. 15, 36 n. 19, 39 n. 24, 41 n. 29, 44 n. 35, 44 n. 38, 46 n. 40, 46 n. 43, 47 n. 46, 48 n. 48, 50, 52 n. 64, 60 n. 93, 62, 63 n. 101, 64–6, 69 n. 2, 74 n. 13, 75 n. 16, 75 n. 18, 79 n. 25, 79 n. 28, 80 n. 32, 83 n. 37, 88 n. 49, 95 n. 57, 99 n. 64, 105 n. 1, 107 n. 7, 109, 110 n. 16, 111 n. 17, 113 n. 21, 114, 116 n. 29, 133 n. 75, 138 n. 1, 139 n. 5, 140 n. 8, 142 n. 13, 142 n. 15, 145–7, 151 n. 42, 152 n. 45, 153 n. 47, 153 n. 48, 153 n. 50, 155 n. 53, 156 n. 55, 157 n. 61, 161 n. 78, 167 n. 91, 168–70, 172 n. 103, 185 n. 18, 216 n. 100, 220 n. 115, 228 n. 8, 232 n. 21, 233 n. 25, 241 n. 48, 242 n. 52, 244 n. 59, 245 n. 65, 246 n. 66, 246 n. 68, 246 n. 70, 247 n. 71, 248 n. 73, 250–2, 276 n. 57, 277–8, 280–4, 303 n. 9, 308 n. 20, 349–50, 366 n. 57  
 Sedley, D. 130 n. 65, 229 n. 9, 232 n. 21, 236 n. 35, 244 n. 60, 246, 247 n. 71, 247, n. 72, 275 n. 56, 305 n. 15, 307, 308 n. 20, 315 n. 32  
 Sedley, D. and Long, A. 61 n. 97, 63 n. 102, 75 n. 16, 75 n. 18, 75 n. 19, 83 n. 35, 83 n. 37
- Sellars, J. 279 n. 66  
 Sharples, R.W. 11 n. 35, 46 n. 43, 47 n. 46, 74 n. 14, 75 n. 16, 75 n. 18, 83 n. 35, 83 n. 37, 111 n. 17, 116 n. 29, 119 n. 34, 121 n. 44, 152 n. 45, 157 n. 62, 159 n. 68, 163 n. 80  
 Silverman, A. 52 n. 63  
 Sorabji, R. 286 n. 85  
 Stalnaker, R. 335 n. 40  
 Stanley, J. 167 n. 89  
 Stich, S. 21 n. 55, 131 n. 66, 166 n. 88  
 Striker, G. 228 n. 7, 229 n. 10, 230 n. 15, 231 n. 20, 233 n. 26, 234 n. 29, 238 n. 41, 241 n. 49, 264 n. 23, 321 n. 4, 332 n. 36, 334 n. 39  
 Sturgeon, N. 342 n. 36
- Tarrant, H. 2 n. 5  
 Taylor, C. C. W. 12, 13 n. 40, 46, 57 n. 77, 69 n. 1, 153 n. 47, 179–81, 187  
 Thomas, J. E. 86 n. 45  
 Thompson, E. S. 47 n. 46, 84 n. 41, 155 n. 53  
 Tsouna, V. 236 n. 33
- Velleman, D. 232 n. 22  
 Verbeke, G. 222 n. 119  
 Vlastos, G. 10 n. 31, 51 n. 60, 108 n. 10, 112 n. 19, 122 n. 46, 122 n. 48, 133 n. 76, 147, 153 n. 46, 159 n. 68, 186 n. 21, 215 n. 98, 284
- Wallies, M. 218 n. 108  
 Wedgwood, R. 47 n. 45  
 Weiss, R. 25 n. 61, 54 n. 70, 85 n. 44, 94 n. 57, 120 n. 40, 154 n. 53, 155 n. 54  
 Westerink, L. G. 299 n. 2  
 White, N. P. 11 n. 32, 14 n. 44, 26 n. 64, 35 n. 15, 36 n. 19, 44 n. 38, 80 n. 31, 83 n. 39, 139 n. 4, 164 n. 83  
 Williamson, T. 123 n. 49  
 Wilson, J. C. 18  
 Wilson, M. 166 n. 88, 338 n. 48  
 Wittgenstein, L. 45

# General Index

- abstract entities 229, 231, 242, 260, 273–4  
accessibility, *see* knowledge  
actuality, *see* potentiality  
A-knowledge, *see* knowledge  
*analambanein* 149–51, 173–4  
*aporia*, *aporêma* 2, 5, 26, 69, 71–3, 128, 179, 185,  
196, 198, 203–6, 208, 211, 213, 226, 297,  
304, 324  
appearance, appearances 258, 260–3, 264, 273,  
278–9, 322–3, 331–2, 338–9, 344, 346,  
347 n. 11, 361 n. 45  
nondoxastic 24, 70 n. 6, 329 n. 28, 331 n. 32,  
338–9, 340–1, 344, 367 n. 58  
rational 260–1, 274  
apprehend, apprehension (*katalêpsis*) 6 n. 15,  
227–9, 233–5, 237, 245, 254, 257, 261–5,  
287, 288 n. 93, 290, 314 n. 30, 320–1, 322,  
324–8, 331–6, 337, 339, 342, 343 n. 59, 344,  
346–7, 350, 355, 356–7, 358, 360  
articulation 250, 268, 288, 290, 316, 318  
atoms 230 n. 15, 236, 238, 242, 315, 330  
aviary 173–5  
  
belief (*doxa*) 6, 10, 11–12, 16–19, 20, 21–2, 23,  
24, 33, 37, 41, 56, 63–4, 70, 73, 77–8, 82,  
88–90, 101–2, 109, 117, 119–23, 124–8,  
131–2, 134–5, 140–9, 155–64, 167 n. 88,  
168–71, 174–6, 187–90, 191 n. 36, 195,  
199–200, 206, 226, 227, 229, 230, 231–3,  
234–5, 235 n. 30, 240–1, 249, 250–1,  
253–4, 255–6, 259, 261–5, 284–5, 292–5,  
296–8, 303, 305, 322, 326, 328, 331–3,  
335–6, 338–40, 342, 344, 349–50, 361,  
365, 366, 367–8  
No Belief v. Some Belief View 329–30, 336,  
338, 367 n. 58, 368  
v. knowledge, *see* knowledge  
blank tablet (*tabula rasa*) 23, 143, 222, 278  
  
circle, circularity 60–1, 170–1, 210, 349–50  
cognitive blank 12, 33, 34 n. 12, 41, 70–1, 76–82,  
88–90, 91–3, 94–6, 98, 100, 102, 103, 118,  
125–6, 128, 130, 134, 135, 169–70, 176,  
206, 208, 328, 330  
common conceptions, *see* prolepses  
concepts 9, 13, 21, 22, 24, 140–1, 145, 156 n. 55,  
275–6, 300, 304–7, 309–11, 318–19  
Aristotle on 218–19, 220 n. 112, 311  
Epicurus on 226–7, 229–31, 235, 237, 242,  
243, 245, 246–7, 249, 252–4, 255  
natural 9, 13, 236 n. 34, 257–8, 260, 266,  
268 n. 38, 276, 300, 307–8, 312  
nonconceptual content 218, 221, 259, 260,  
329 n. 28  
Sextus on 326, 336–9, 345–6, 348, 350–68  
Stoics on 143 n. 16, 257, 258–60, 265 n. 30,  
266, 268, 272–4, 276–7, 279, 282, 283–4,  
287, 289–90, 292–5, 296  
criterion of truth 230–1, 233–4, 238 n. 40, 263,  
292, 294  
  
definition 14 n. 44, 35, 45–50, 51, 54, 57–61,  
62–3, 64–7, 77, 113, 168, 170, 305, 309–10,  
314, 318–19, 349  
Aristotle on 185–6, 192 n. 39, 209–10  
Epicurus on 237–41, 249 n. 75, 250, 253,  
255–6  
Sextus on 326, 362–3  
Stoics on 267–72, 288, 290, 291, 292  
dialectic 183–4, 190 n. 33, 270, 330 n. 30  
Dialectical Requirement 34 n. 12, 42 n. 31, 47 n.  
45, 48–55, 57–8, 61–4, 67–8, 78, 82, 118,  
195, 241 n. 48, 255, 297  
discovery 5–6, 9, 23, 25, 64–8, 79 n. 26, 104,  
108–10, 124, 128 n. 58, 135, 150–1, 168–70,  
176, 182 n. 10, 195, 287, 300–2, 304–5,  
312 n. 27, 319, 320, 325, 349, 368  
disposition, *see* innate  
Dogmatists, dogmatic 3, 23–4, 320–1, 322–6,  
327, 332, 333, 334, 335, 337–9, 340–2,  
343–4, 345, 346, 347, 350, 358, 361,  
362 n. 48, 363–5, 367 n. 59  
*doxa*, *see* belief  
  
*eidenai*, *see* knowledge  
E-knowledge, *see* knowledge  
elenchus 6, 121–2, 171, 350, 365  
*emphutos* 276–7, 280–1, 304  
*enarges*, *see* evident  
*ennoia*, *see* concepts  
*epinoia*, *see* concepts  
*epistêmê*, *see* knowledge  
eristic 7, 26, 48, 83–4, 106–8  
essence 15–16, 19–20, 24, 35–8, 40, 43–5, 46–7,  
53 n. 67, 54, 56–7, 68, 76–8, 81, 98, 99–103,  
129 n. 61, 131 n. 72, 132, 134 n. 77, 193–4,

196–7, 228, 239–40, 249 n. 75, 255–6, 267,  
269–72, 291, 304 n. 13, 353

*see also* signification

evident 227, 231, 233, 234, 235, 245, 264,  
324, 366

experience 23, 142, 143–6, 166, 169, 172,  
218–21, 228, 230, 233, 236, 242, 244,  
245–7, 258–9, 266–7, 273, 275–6, 278,  
279, 285, 303, 305, 311

foreknowledge 11, 15, 19–20, 23, 31, 77–8, 336

Aristotle on 17, 180, 182, 187, 191, 194,

196–7, 208–10, 255–6, 296, 368

Epicurus on 17, 252–3, 254 n. 84, 255–6,  
296, 368

matching v. stepping-stone version of 12–15,  
18–19, 66, 78, 113, 129, 132, 168, 180–1,  
187, 194, 208–10, 252–3, 255, 288–9,  
296, 349

and prior cognition 19–20, 78, 190–8, 216,  
227, 255, 297, 299

Plato on 16–17, 50, 64–7, 78, 113–14, 132,  
168–9, 180–1, 195, 214, 255–6, 303, 305,  
350, 368

Stoics on 17, 288–9, 296, 368

forms 33, 35, 39, 43–5, 49, 116 n. 29, 138, 196 n.  
52, 222–3, 230 n. 15, 237 n. 36, 240 n. 47,  
251, 255–6, 310–11

*gnôrimon hêmin v. phusei* 55

*gnôrisein* 131 n. 68, 189, 197–9

*gnôsis*, *see* knowledge

god, gods 4 n. 7, 22, 144, 230, 232, 235 n. 32,  
238–40, 246, 247–48, 250, 288, 294–5, 322,  
326, 330, 353, 355, 366

*hupographê*, *see* outline

*hupolêpsis*, *see* supposition

immortality, *see* soul

incorporeals 270, 274–5

induction, inductive 166, 180, 183–4, 186, 190,  
191, 192, 198, 213

innate, innatism 21, 24, 111, 113, 116 n. 29,  
138–9, 140, 166, 167, 303–5, 307–8,  
310–11, 318–19

dispositional innatism 21–2, 141–7, 152,  
160–1, 163, 167, 217, 220–1, 223, 246–8,  
275, 277–86, 296, 307, 318

Aristotle on 22–3, 214, 216–17, 220–5

cognitive-condition innatism 21–2, 141–2, 146,  
152, 160, 163, 165, 166, 167, 217, 223, 245,  
259, 275, 277, 283, 285–6, 296, 307, 368

content innatism 21–2, 141–2, 147, 152, 163,  
165, 167, 173, 217, 223, 245, 259, 275, 277,  
283–6, 296, 307, 318, 368

Epicurus on 22–3, 228, 230, 245–8, 249, 255

Plato on 11, 21, 23, 137, 139–40, 146–9,  
151–2, 153, 157–8, 159 n. 68, 160–1, 163,  
164, 165–7, 169 n. 96, 170, 171–5

Stoics on 22–3, 259, 265 n. 29, 275–86, 296  
*see also* recollection

inquiry 1–3, 7–9, 25–7, 42 n. 31, 45, 57, 71,  
78–80, 114, 117, 169, 301–3, 306 n. 16,  
312–14, 315–18, 319

Aristotle on 5, 17, 180–1, 182 n. 10, 183–4,  
186–7, 188, 193–4, 195, 197, 207–8

as belief revision 18

conditions for 3, 12, 14, 16–20, 48 n. 48, 49–50,  
54–7, 61–4, 66–8, 72–8, 81–2, 84 n. 42,  
85–98, 100–3, 113, 118, 128, 132, 133, 134,  
135, 137, 167, 181, 183, 187–8, 194, 195, 196,  
226–8, 240–1, 249, 251–6, 286, 287, 288–9,  
291–2, 305, 336, 339, 349, 359–60, 361

definition of 4–7, 75

Epicurus on 5, 17, 226–8, 237 n. 38, 240–1,  
249–56

Plato on 5, 10–12, 20, 54–7, 74–8, 83–94,  
106–11, 113, 120–3, 124–8, 129, 132–4,  
135–6, 139–40, 148, 149–51, 164–5, 167,  
169–71, 174–6

and priority of knowledge what 41–2, 55–6,  
75, 82, 118

propositional and objectual 14–16

Sextus on, Skeptical 6, 23–4, 70 n. 6, 71, 73,  
320–30, 324, 326, 332–5, 338–9, 342–4,  
348–53, 356–60, 361, 363–8

stages of 100, 110, 193–4

Stoics on 5, 17, 257–8, 286–92, 295–8

vindication of 24, 367

*see also* recollection

interrogative, *see* knowledge what

*katalêpsis*, *see* apprehension

knowledge

accessibility condition on 166, 173, 175, 216,  
234–5, 265 n. 29, 276

Aristotle on (A-knowledge) 17, 188–91,  
192–4, 197, 199–200, 208, 209, 233, 235,  
264–5, 297, 309, 337, 367–8

*eidenai*, *oiden* 9, 33, 33 n. 12, 48, 51, 79 n. 29,  
130 n. 65, 131, 131 n. 68, 198, 199, 199 n. 59,  
201 n. 64, 300, 308, 322, 324 n. 12, 327, 332

Epicurus on (E-knowledge) 17, 234–5,

235 n. 30, 239, 251–4, 297, 337, 367–8

*epistêmê*, *epistasthai* 16, 33 n. 12, 51, 131, 131  
n. 68, 170 n. 100, 172, 179 n. 2, 184 n. 15,  
186, 189, 189 n. 30, 190, 192, 198–9, 200 n.  
62, 201 n. 64, 210, 213, 216, 218, 259, 263–5,  
288 n. 93, 304, 305, 307 n. 18, 314 n. 30

*gignôskein*, *gnôsis* 9, 17, 61 n. 96, 131, 131 n.  
68, 179, 184 n. 15, 187–90, 191 n. 36, 197,  
199, 217 n. 106, 218 n. 109, 221, 234, 255,  
297–8, 300, 323, 332, 348

knowledge (*cont.*)

- high-level 51, 189 n. 28
- innate, *see* innate
- KK 5 n. 10, 79 n. 29, 325, 327
- latent 11, 139, 141–2, 146, 148, 152–3, 158, 166–9, 173, 214, 250, 265, 292, 303, 305, 307–8, 311, 349
- Meno's conception of 52, 82, 91–3, 103–4, 126–7
- v. not knowing 8, 11–12, 27, 75–7, 81–2, 86–7, 88–90, 91–4, 103–4, 124–7, 128, 167 n. 90, 176, 201, 205–6, 208, 212–13, 301
- Plato on (P-knowledge) 16–17, 33, 37, 41, 50–2, 53, 56–7, 77, 81, 82, 88, 98–9, 112, 120, 122, 124–7, 129–32, 134–6, 166 n. 87, 176, 181, 182–3, 187–8, 195, 197, 206, 208, 209–10, 233, 235, 239, 240, 251–2, 253, 254, 255–6, 264–5, 289, 296–8, 299, 303–5, 307–8, 309, 318–19, 337, 367–8
- prenatal, *see* foreknowledge
- priority of knowledge what 31–4, 35–8, 39–42, 49, 50, 52, 55–6, 61, 63 n. 102, 65, 67–8, 70 n. 5, 74 n. 14, 75, 77, 78 n. 24, 82, 86, 88, 91, 98, 118
- Socrates' disclaimer of 50–2, 70–1, 74, 76, 91, 117, 117 n. 30, 118, 126, 139, 254, 344, 364
- Stoics on (S-knowledge) 17, 263–5, 286, 288, 296–7, 332, 337, 367–8
- and superior cognition 188, 190–4, 195, 197, 199, 200, 201 n. 64, 208, 209, 210, 229, 233–5, 240, 251, 253–4, 255–6, 262, 263 n. 22, 264, 296–7, 309
- v. true belief 2, 11, 16, 17 n. 47, 33, 33 n. 12, 37, 117 n. 30, 131, 162, 169, 174, 188
- universally, of universals 190, 197–9, 201–2, 203–4, 206–8, 209–10, 211, 212–14, 218–21, 227, 229, 236, 257, 259, 260, 265, 306–8, 309–11
- what: relative clause v. interrogative clause 7 n. 22, 84 n. 42, 94–9, 120, 132 n. 73, 205 n. 77, 300 n. 3
- see also* foreknowledge
- Law of the Excluded Middle 8, 12, 88, 90–2, 135, 193 n. 41, 206, 316
- learning 2, 10, 25–6, 106–7, 108–9, 110, 150–2, 159 n. 68, 164–5, 166, 172, 179–81, 188–90, 193–4, 197, 199, 200, 201, 204–6, 207–8, 209–10, 211, 213–15, 217 n. 106, 306, 309
- and teaching 17, 114–18, 182–3, 297
- zetetic 109, 115 n. 26, 118, 171, 182–7, 188 n. 25, 195, 196, 204, 215, 306 n. 16
- see also* recollection
- lekta*, sayables 229 n. 14, 232 n. 20, 263 n. 22, 273–5
- see also* meaning

matching, *see* foreknowledge

- meaning 237 n. 36, 241–5, 272–5
- see also* *lekta*; prolepses; signification
- memory 146, 218, 221, 227, 229, 231, 235, 237, 250, 258, 259, 260 n. 11, 261, 307, 311
- Meno's questions 1, 7–8, 25–7, 74–81, 82–3, 84–7, 94, 96–8, 99, 101, 103–4, 105, 114, 120, 124, 127–8, 132–3, 135, 137, 140, 169–70, 175–6, 181 n. 8, 206, 297–8, 301–2, 349, 359 n. 43
- mental representations 21, 160, 230–1, 260–1, 268 n. 38, 273, 296
- natural, nature 9, 13, 49 n. 54, 55, 220, 233, 235–6, 245, 247, 248, 257–8, 259–60, 264, 265–7, 268 n. 38, 276–7, 279–85, 293–4, 296–7, 304 n. 12, 307–8, 310, 311, 312 n. 28
- see also* concepts
- nonconceptual content, *see* concepts
- Oneness Assumption 42–5, 46–9, 52, 63, 182, 196 n. 52
- outline account (*hupographê*, *tupos*) 227, 238–40, 250, 267–8, 271–2, 289, 291, 295, 305 n. 14, 314, 318–19
- particulars 38, 39, 183, 190–1, 198, 201 n. 63, 204, 213–15, 219, 229–30, 242, 252, 260, 264, 273, 287, 289–90, 295, 306–7, 310–11
- prolepses of 236, 265, 282
- perception, senses 20, 23, 38, 110 n. 13, 112 n. 20, 143–4, 146, 172, 186, 189, 217–19, 221, 227, 231 n. 19, 237, 251–2, 257–9, 261, 267 n. 37, 279, 281–2, 310–11, 330
- phantasia*, *see* appearance
- phusikai ennoiai*, *see* concepts
- P-knowledge, *see* knowledge
- poion* 32, 38–40, 74 n. 15, 96
- potential intellect 9, 13, 220 n. 114, 222–5, 259, 300, 308–9, 313
- potentiality
  - and actuality 145–6, 202–3, 216, 222–3, 225, 259
  - see also* potential intellect
- prenatal knowledge and belief, *see* foreknowledge
- prolepses
  - common prolepses and common conceptions 267, 280, 292–3
  - Epicurus on 5, 9, 13, 17, 22, 226–56, 315–18
  - Sextus on 337 n. 43, 345 n. 1, 351, 353–61, 364, 366–8
  - Stoics on 13, 17, 143 n. 16, 257–68, 272–6, 279–98, 312–15
- proof 172, 326, 341, 345–68
- reason, rational 6–7, 171, 186–7, 192, 257, 258, 260–1, 263–4, 274, 292–3, 313, 330 n. 30, 347, 350

- age of 145, 258 n. 4, 260 n. 12, 264, 280, 287,  
288 n. 93, 313, 339, 344  
*see also* appearances; soul
- Recognition Objection 73, 80, 128, 134, 292,  
349–50, 359
- recollection 1–2, 9, 25, 67, 70 n. 2, 80 n. 32, 105,  
106, 111–12, 136, 137, 144, 149–50, 154–6,  
163, 168–70, 173, 179, 268 n. 38, 300–1,  
304 n. 10, 308, 310  
and innatism 21, 137, 139, 140, 148, 151–2,  
158, 160, 164, 167  
and inquiry 2, 10, 11, 23, 106–11, 113, 114, 123,  
124, 139–40, 148, 150–1, 165, 167–8, 175–6, 303  
teaching, and learning 2, 10, 26, 107–8,  
114–18, 164, 172–3, 174 n. 109, 182, 213,  
215, 224, 306–7
- relative clause, *see* knowledge
- representations, *see* mental representations
- signification 46–7, 53 n. 67, 56–7, 67–8,  
76, 99–103, 129–30, 132–4, 191–7, 198 n.  
56, 220, 240, 269  
*see also* meaning; essence
- Socrates' dilemma 1, 8, 10–12, 26–7, 73, 83–90,  
91, 93–4, 95–6, 98, 100, 103–4, 105, 107–8,  
114, 120, 122, 124, 126, 127, 135–6, 137, 140,  
169–70, 175–6, 180–1, 204–6, 207 n. 79, 226  
n. 1, 251, 255, 298, 301, 327, 353 n. 23
- soul 23, 110, 111, 116 n. 29, 143, 145, 218–20,  
240, 258–9, 260–2, 268 n. 38, 278 n. 61,  
281, 307, 308 n. 23, 310
- pre-existence of; immortality of 1–2, 10,  
111, 106, 138, 147–65, 172, 221, 223–4,  
248 n. 74, 249, 253 n. 84, 255–6, 285–6,  
303, 306
- rational part of 222–4
- stepping-stone, *see* foreknowledge
- S-knowledge, *see* knowledge
- superior cognition, *see* knowledge
- supposition (*hupolēpsis*) 189, 191 n. 36, 192–3,  
232, 366
- tabula rasa*, *see* blank tablet
- Targeting Objection 8, 72–3, 75, 127, 134,  
226–7, 292, 349, 353, 363
- teaching, *see* learning; recollection
- torpedo fish 69–74, 121
- tupos*, *see* outline account
- universal, *see* knowledge
- zetetic learning, *see* learning