

Escaping one's own notice knowing..... Meno's paradox again

Draft non-citable version.

1. Introduction

Should I apologise for coming back yet again to something that has puzzled me for forty years, back to Meno's paradox? My excuse is that the puzzle itself is a good one; and Plato's presentation of it cleverer than is often thought. If I can manage to persuade you just of that, it will suffice. But I do have a nerve talking about any of this at all – since I have no doubt that you have worried about this, and surely to better effect, than I. So this comes with an apology attached.

The recent literature is (rightly) dominated by Gail Fine¹ and Dominic Scott²; part of my purpose is to get clear just why I am still unsatisfied by what they say. Consider these dominant claims in each of their accounts:

- i) Fine: the theory of recollection, answering the paradox, does not take us to have latent knowledge all the time we are born; but that it explains how we 'have and rely on' the true beliefs with which we can embark on, and conduct, inquiry.³

I ask: What is it thus to 'rely on' a true belief?

- ii) Scott: what really matters about Meno's paradox is not how we begin inquiry, but how we finish: the issue of real interest is discovery.⁴

I ask: How does the elaborate treatment of the paradox fare, if that is true?

There is material in the way Plato presents the paradox which explains both these quite different takes on it. But that material, taken together, shows up something important here

¹ See for example, (1992) 'Inquiry in the *Meno*', in *Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. R. Kraut (Cambridge) 200-26; (2007) 'Enquiry and Discovery: A Discussion of Dominic Scott, *Plato's Meno*', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 32: 331-67; (2009) '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, forthcoming).

² (1995) *Recollection and Experience* (CUP); (2006) *Plato's Meno* (CUP)

³ Fine (2009).

⁴ (2006) 70 ff.

that is often missed. There is, I shall suggest, something quite complicated going on from the very start. So I shall argue that all of the presentation of the paradox is important, since it points to two different aspects of the puzzle(s) about inquiry – what I shall (without epistemological prejudice) call the *external* aspect, that which concerns itself with the objects of inquiry; and what I shall call (ditto) the *internal* aspect, focusing attention on the states of mind of the person who does the inquiring.⁵ If this is right, does the theory of recollection account for both aspects? That this is where Plato turned his critical eye is, I shall argue, made manifest by the theme and variations on Meno’s puzzle that we find in the *Euthydemus*. Central to the *Euthydemus*’ discussion is Socrates’ astonishment that he might ‘escape his own notice’ knowing, or being wise.⁶ I shall wonder what sort of a condition on knowing, or being wise, this might suggest, and invite the conclusion that Plato is rejecting the account of knowledge urged on Socrates by the sophists: an account of knowledge which relies on the external aspect.

2. Preliminaries to the paradox

What is it that makes the paradox puzzling – if indeed, it is puzzling at all? The crucial passage is this:

Meno: (1) And in what way will you seek, Socrates, that which you do not know at all what it is? What sort of one of the things that you do not know will you put up and then seek? (2) Or, no matter how much you come across it, how will you know that this is what you didn’t know?

Soc: I understand what you want to say, Meno. Do you see about this that you are bringing up an eristic⁷ argument, that, indeed, it is not possible for a man to seek either what he knows or what he does not know? (1) For he would not seek what he knows – for he knows it, and for such a person there is no need of seeking – (2) nor what he does not know—for he does not know what he will seek. [*Meno* 80d5-e5 my translation and numbering]

⁵ I hope not to bring in here any particular theoretical assumptions, nor to beg questions about externalism and internalism. But on the contemporary debate see e.g. H. Kornblith, ed., (2001) *Epistemology: Internalism and Externalism* (MIT Press).

⁶ This expression is picked up by Aristotle, *An.Po.* 2.19, 99b22-27.

⁷ This is commonly translated ‘contentious’; in what follows I suggest that there is an express connection being made here with sophistic argument.

Is there just one puzzle here, in two different versions – Meno’s (flowery) and Socrates’ (formalized)? But neither version replicates the other. Meno misses Socrates’ point that we don’t inquire into what we know; while Socrates misses Meno’s interest in what happens when we reach what we seek (so this may turn on differing interests in *inquiry* – the beginning of the search – and *discovery* – the end⁸). So the two versions may generate a composite puzzle, with three limbs:

1. (Meno 1 and Socrates 2) No inquiry into what we do not know.
2. (Socrates 1) No inquiry into what we do know.
3. (Meno 2) No discovery of what we don’t know.

For completeness we could supply a fourth:

4. [No discovery of what we do know]⁹

This larger puzzle has pretensions to being exhaustive, via Socrates’ premise: for anything we might seek, either we know it *or not*.¹⁰ And thence it has claims to formal validity; but perhaps it is not after all well-formed.

Consider the shape and structure of the puzzle overall. First of all, does it risk equivocation on ‘know’? Suppose that ‘to know’ means ‘to have in mind’ (as seems plausible for Meno’s first limb). If, when I don’t know something, I don’t have it in mind at all, then it seems entirely plausible to deny that I can inquire into what I don’t know. But it does not seem at all plausible also to deny that I have no need to inquire into what I do know, if that just involves my having it in mind. Contrariwise, suppose that ‘know’ means ‘really *really* know’ (as seems plausible for Socrates’ first limb). Then it sounds right to say that I shan’t need to inquire into what I really *really* know; but quite wrong to infer that I shan’t inquire into what I do not really *really* know.

To fix this, do we need to say something about what we might think of as the puzzle’s theory of knowledge: that knowing is ‘an-all-or-nothing’ affair?¹¹ That would fix the logic; but might leave us with a seriously dull puzzle (since we might find subscribing to this sort

⁸ See Scott (1995).

⁹ This limb might be contradicted by the theory of recollection, on some accounts. I shall not explore this limb of the paradox as such.

¹⁰ Although Scott has a different account of this (2006) 78.

¹¹ See Fine (1992).

of absolutism uncongenial). What is more, the detail of the way the puzzle is put might discourage such a view. For Meno's way of putting it seems to be starkly juxtaposed to, and thus *contrasted* with Socrates'. That calls attention to the difference between what Meno represents as extremes (knowing absolutely versus not knowing at all), and what Socrates reduces to a bland disjunction. Does it matter how the puzzle is put?

3. Reading the puzzle

Why are there two versions of the puzzle, Meno's and Socrates? Was Plato just in a muddle (and thought them roughly the same)? Does what Plato thought matter, just so long as we could recreate a good puzzle from the mess? I shall say that he wasn't in a muddle at all; and that the good puzzle is his; although it is not clear to me that he has a definitive reply.

Suppose – if only for charity – that the differences between the two versions do matter, that they were put like this a-purpose. Then there would be two different puzzles:

Meno 1 You cannot inquire into something which you don't know at all.

Meno 2 You cannot discover something which you didn't know in the first place.

This first puzzle is missing a limb (about inquiring into what you do know) that is present in the second. The second:

Socrates 1 You cannot inquire into what you know.

Socrates 2 You cannot inquire into what you do not know.

misses a limb about discovery (although there is one such present in the first).

Now consider the three limbs which seem at first concerned with the beginnings, with inquiry, Meno 1 and Socrates 1 and 2. Meno 1 trades on the idea that in order to inquire I must be able, somehow, to specify what I am inquiring about: without that, how could this unknown object of inquiry be present *to the mind of the inquirer* at all? For this to be puzzling, the stipulation that it is unknown must be that it is not even present *under the*

*description that the inquirer does not know it.*¹² So the (impossible) inquiry has narrow scope:

Meno 1 You cannot inquire into [something] which you don't know at all where the intentional object of the inquiry is marked by [...]. Meno's first limb, that is to say, focuses on the object of inquiry, not on the description under which we (don't) know it.

Socrates' first limb, on the other hand, works differently.

Socrates 1 You cannot inquire into what you know.

If this had the same structure and scope, the expression 'what you know' would not be part of the description of the inquiry ('what' is elliptical for 'something which' and the relative clause would be outside the intentional scope, on the model of Meno1). But that would make little sense of Socrates' explanation for *why* we don't inquire into it – 'for he¹³ knows it, and for such a person there is no need of seeking'. Here 'for such a person' allows us to express his reasoning – that since this is something that he knows, he has no need to inquire. But if it is his reasoning, it must be something he has in mind when he thinks about what he should seek. So for Socrates the intentional scope of the inquiry includes the claim that the thing is question is something the inquirer already knows. Thus

Socrates 1 You cannot inquire into [that which you know].

Part of the content of the reasoning (not to inquire) is reflection on the agent's own cognitive state. This limb requires, then, not merely external, but also internal conditions to makes its puzzle felt.

What about Socrates 2, the limb which corresponds to Meno 1? Socrates says: 'he does not know what he will seek', and seems thus to reverse Meno's point ('in what way will you seek that which you do not know at all what it is?'). Socrates' interest, that is, seems to be in how the inquirer puts the matter to himself, in circumstances where the object of

¹² This is the point, I take it of 'that which you do not know at all what it is?' at 80d6; and of Meno's suggestion that we can't even 'put up' what we don't know for inquiry, *prothemenos* at 80d7.

¹³ The pronouns are gendered to follow the Greek.

his search is not something he knows: his problem is knowing what he is looking for, not looking for what he knows. So Socrates 2 again has broad intentional scope:

Socrates 2 You cannot inquire into [that which you do not know].

Meno 2 is not replicated in Socrates' formulation of the puzzle. 'No matter how much you come across it, how will you know that this is what you didn't know?' Meno wonders about the discovery that comes at the end of an inquiry: even if we come across the object, how are we to recognize it, since we did not have it in mind in the first place? All discovery, then, will be serendipitous; no discovery can be the recognition of the object of my search, because the object itself can't figure in the description of the search. This, on Meno's account, seems to make it not *discovery* at all. So:

Meno 2 You cannot discover [something] which you didn't know in the first place.

Meno again focuses on the object, not on its description as something I do not know.

What would be Socrates' correlate of Meno 2, if Socrates' interest is in how I represent my search to myself? Socrates should press how I understand what I am doing – how I describe my success in finding the thing I sought (if, *per impossibile*, I could even start to do so). So the puzzle would arise because I could not *know* that this was what I *didn't know*, and it focuses on how I have any kind of grasp of what I do and do not know. But if the stipulation about what I know or don't know appears in the formulation of the inquirer's intentions, on Socrates' version of the puzzle, then my grasp of any object that I might discover must be *second-order*: grasp of what I do or do not know, as such. (Notice Socrates' connective remark, 'I understand (*manthanô*) what you want to say, Meno', 80e1: both relevant to the discussion in hand, which will turn into a denial that 'learning' is as we normally conceive it, and second-order).

If that is right, then Meno's version of the puzzle and Socrates' version are significantly different, however we may gloss the sense of 'know'. Meno attends, if you like, to the external conditions of knowledge, to how the object of inquiry comes into my purview at all. Socrates attends to how my own cognitive grip on the object of inquiry can figure in the inquiry itself. But in that case, we should perhaps refrain from assuming that somehow Socrates revives and replaces Meno's account: instead, we might take the two

versions to complement each other, neither to be sufficient without the other. That would make sense, perhaps, of Socrates' earlier remark, that he is keen for them to be *joint inquirers* into virtue. And it would prefigure the discussion of learning and recollection with two separate conditions: an external one (about the object of inquiry) and an internal one (about the reflective cognitive state of the inquirer; on how something can be an object of inquiry *for him* – hence the formula at 80e4). Meno's version insists on the external conditions, Socrates' on the internal ones.

How does this fit with the odd lacunae in each version of the paradox? Meno mentions discovery, Socrates does not; Socrates mentions inquiry into what we do know, while Meno does not. The composite puzzle seems, in terms of the contrast between inquiry and discovery, to be asymmetrical. If, on the other hand, the difference between the two versions is designed to bring out the contrast between the external features of inquiry (emphasized by Meno's interest in what we do not know, in the object of inquiry) and the internal ones (emphasized by Socrates' interest in our own reflective condition), it is symmetrical. How might that help with understanding how the puzzle of the paradox might be solved?

4. Recollection

If all of that is the problem, the paradox turns out to be a pretty comprehensive one: not just Meno's paradox, nor just Socrates', but Plato's. How does recollection fare as the answer? Well, recollection is a story, and there is a lot of stuff about priests and priestesses, but it does have some promising features. Remember remembering at *Phaedo* 72ff. Here Socrates' elaborate description of the phenomenon of recollection¹⁴ reminds us that it has both a psychological component and what we might think of as a factive one. The psychological bit is the feeling of remembering – its emotional, affective, phenomenological side (this includes, I take it, both the business of being reminded by something of something else quite different; and the nagging feeling such as Simmias evinces of not quite being able to bring something to mind). The factive bit is where we get it right; remembering is of something we *knew* before, it captures the earlier memory right, or it fails to be recollection at all. Both aspects of recollection are crucial to it; they

¹⁴ Cebes talks about recollection in the context of a geometrical example: the reader recalls the *Meno*, but Simmias ostentatiously forgets: we are invited to notice our own experience of remembering just when the conditions for doing so are discussed.

correspond, loosely at least, to the twin demands of Meno's paradox – to both an internal and an external dimension to the business of coming to know. But, still, this is analogy, or worse still, myth – recollection does not, we might reasonably complain, provide us with much epistemological cash.

A running theme of the *Meno* is how we are able confidently to distinguish knowledge – knowledge fully fledged, really-got-there knowledge – from belief (especially when we get to the road to Larissa, 97a ff.) This question centres upon the end of inquiry – on the nature of discovery, and what makes that knowledge. One answer to it might be an externalist one: whether or not we can successfully distinguish it, it is knowledge just if it is true and arrived at by reliable processes. Those processes need not be reflective processes; the externalist knower could be un-self-conscious about it without losing his claim to know. If this is what is going on *here* (if, that is, Meno's version of the paradox is all we need) then recollection's elaborate features seem lamentably beside the point.

A different view would be that an externalist account just misses what is interesting about knowledge – that it is, somehow or other, self-intimating. Knowing something just is a different, a manifestly different, cognitive state from believing something; so that knowledge is borne in on the knower – when she knows, in some sense or other she knows that she knows. The theory of recollection might fit the demand for a phenomenology of knowing, for a mark that knowing is what we have actually managed. But there is, of course, at the centre of epistemology both ancient and modern a dispute about how that works. What is it to know that I know; and why would it matter?

If Meno's paradox – as a complex whole – asks about this feature of knowledge, then perhaps recollection is designed to explain what it is to know that we know.¹⁵ But one might complain that this won't work – because recollection seems to trade on two different kinds of knowing (a self-conscious phenomenal sort – recollection – and some real first order knowing – what is recollected) whose difference the label of 'recollection' tends to obscure. Or one might complain – as many have done – that recollection is otherwise regressive: not only must it explain how we learned before what we only remember now, but also it needs to show us how we knew that we knew before we now

¹⁵ I concede to Scott (1995), (2006), that discovery is important here; but I still maintain that inquiry matters too. The point of the paradox, however, on the interpretation I offer here, is not restricted to either inquiry or discovery.

know that we know it. If this is resolved – as I long thought, but no longer do¹⁶ – by supposing that there is an externalist account of the first principles of knowledge (so that knowing that you know does not go all the way up the orders, but is blocked by some unmediated knowing of *something*) then other problems follow for Plato (for example, a thoroughgoing externalist epistemology causes notorious problems in the *Republic*).¹⁷ If any of that is worth consideration – by us, or by Plato – perhaps we might need to rethink what is going on when we reach the end of inquiry, and know that we know.

And perhaps, at the same time, we need to explain what it would be to start, to *conduct* an inquiry – perhaps by means of true beliefs on which we rely.¹⁸ The problem here is both that reliance, and the way in which *inquiry* cannot occur as a matter of occurrent beliefs. In asking about *asking* (not just about believing), Meno’s paradox raises a puzzle about the intentionality of inquiry; and here, as in the problem of discovery, an externalist answer may not suffice. From the start, Meno’s worry about inquiry is reflective:

For in truth I am numb in my soul and in my mouth [clearly *not*, at the second – order], and I do not have an answer to give you. And yet I have given many speeches about virtue, in front of many people, and extremely well, as it seemed to me at the time; but now I am not able to say at all¹⁹ what it is. (80a8-b4)

Even although Meno’s remarks are pervaded by talk about how he feels, however, about the phenomenology of *aporia* (and clearly enough there is in all of this something about how all these cognitive states *feel*), the phenomenology does not exhaust the content of these states. On the contrary, they are fully explicit, second-order, reflections on the failure of the first order states to be true, or defensible, or even explicable. In order, then, for true beliefs to underpin *inquiry*, the status of those beliefs must itself be under scrutiny. But then how does inquiry start? How do we ever reach the stage of explicitly relying on or wondering about beliefs we hold true? How would the theory of recollection help with that?

¹⁶ McCabe, (1994) *Plato’s Individuals* (Princeton) 53 ff.

¹⁷ McCabe (2006) ‘Dialectic is as dialectic does’ in B. Reis, ed., *The Virtuous Life in Greek Ethics* (CUP).

¹⁸ See Fine, references in note 1.

¹⁹ This expression recurs at 80d6: I take it that the echo is designed to connect the two passages, and to make the earlier puzzling, as a consequence of the paradox.

5. Entr'acte

I have offered three suggestions so far:

- In the *Meno* paradox²⁰ there is a thoroughgoing contrast between the external component of inquiry and discovery (the 'object' that is sought and found) and the internal cognitive state of the person doing the seeking.
- The internal state generates second order reflection on both the object on the subject's grasp of the object. In cases of inquiry, on Socrates' account, this is essential to the inquiry's beginning and to its being successfully concluded (if indeed there could be any such conclusion: Socrates, at least, claims to be perennially ignorant)
- All of these cognitive states *also* have a phenomenology, which is both additional to, and not exhaustive of, the higher-order cognitive features.²¹

All of this suggests that the very complexity of the paradox is central to its seriousness.

Perhaps then the *Meno's* response to it, the theory of recollection, is a serious answer to the puzzle, somehow or other, and correspondingly complex. But Socrates complains that at least *Meno's* version of the puzzle is eristic: does this mean we should give it any head-room?

In answer to this question, I shall consider the *locus classicus* of Plato's account of eristic, the *Euthydemus*. Two preliminaries:

- There is plenty of evidence in the *Euthydemus* to support the claim that it belongs with other dialogues commonly designated 'late', especially the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*, as well as the *Parmenides*. Although I do not wish to engage in the battle about developmentalism here, at least it seems reasonable to suppose that in fact the *Euthydemus* was written (or at the very least supposed to be read) after the *Meno*.
- There is other evidence in the *Euthydemus* that it is peculiarly critical of the *Meno* (note especially the discussion of the things that are good 'themselves in themselves' at 278-81).²²

²⁰ As I shall call it henceforth, on the grounds that *Meno's* version of the paradox is only a part of it.

²¹ That is to say: these puzzles are not just about how it feels to know, and not, therefore, just about subjective consciousness.

In particular, I shall suggest that the *Euthydemus* offers a critical view of the eristic features of the *Meno* paradox, and on the theory of recollection. There are two crucial passages:

- 275d-278e, the first sophistic engagement, in which Euthydemus and Dionysodorus get young Cleinias (their unfortunate interlocutor) to agree both that it is those who are wise, those who know that learn, and that it is those who are not wise or do not know who learn.
- 293b-297b during the third sophistic engagement, where the sophists argue that Socrates knows everything, always (if they so desire). It is on this passage that I concentrate now.

6. Knowing everything

At 293b Euthydemus gives Socrates a choice. Should he teach Socrates the knowledge he has long sought, or should he show Socrates that he (Socrates) had this knowledge all along? Socrates professes himself amazed: certainly, he would like to be shown that he already has the knowledge – after all, that would be far easier than learning it, old as he is (293b).²³ Thus the sophist invites Socrates to suppose that knowledge is either present all along or acquired *by learning*; and Socrates seems to agree. There follow three brisk arguments to the conclusions that Socrates knows everything and that he knows everything all along, always:

Argument 1 (293b-d) If (as he agrees) there is something that he knows, then Socrates is a knower. Socrates qualifies: of the thing that he knows. It makes no difference, says the sophist: if Socrates is a knower, then he knows everything. No, no, says Socrates, there are many things that he does not know. But then he is not a knower. Socrates qualifies again, of the things which he does not know. No matter, insists the sophist, he is still not a knower, whereas before he conceded that he was a knower. But he cannot be both a knower and not a knower (via a principle of non-contradiction, 293b); so either he knows

²² McCabe (2002) 'Indifference readings: Plato and the Stoa on Socratic Ethics', in T.P. Wiseman, ed., *Classics in Progress: Essays on Ancient Greece and Rome* ed., (British Academy) 363-398.

²³ The theme of Socrates' antiquity, and whether he can learn anything at all, is thematic in the *Euthydemus* from 272c ff.

everything, or nothing. If, then, he concedes that he knows something then he must know everything (293d6).

Socrates appears to be smitten:

As the saying goes, a hit, a palpable hit! So then how do I know the knowledge that we seek? Since indeed it is impossible that the same thing is and is not, if I know one thing, then I know everything (for I could not be both knowing and unknowing at the same time). But if I know everything, then I have that very knowledge which we seek. Is that what you are saying, and is this your piece of wisdom?

Argument 2 (293e-294e) Amid some squabbling about self-refutation (itself a reflective relation) they all agree that everyone – just if they know one thing – knows everything. Socrates now leads the questioning (so that the argument that follows commits the sophists themselves to its conclusion²⁴). If there is nothing that the sophists do not know, was this always so? Is it just *now* that they know everything (the opening discussion describes how they have learned new skills at 271-2) or have they *always* done so? They reply that they have always done so. So they knew everything since childhood – indeed, as soon as they were born?²⁵ They agree that they have – and Socrates and Ctesippus find this claim incredible.

Once again the argument is embedded in some wrangling about how to proceed; and Euthydemus boasts that so long as Socrates is prepared to answer his questions, he will show that Socrates agrees with these astonishing things too. Socrates responds that he would be delighted to be refuted in respect of these matters:

²⁴ It is rare in the dialogue that the sophists are the respondents; usually it is the interlocutors who are committed to the so-called sophisms.

²⁵ At 294d9 *euthus genomenoi* recalls the other recollection passage, *Phaedo* 75b10, where we are said to use our senses as soon as we are born. If there is a reference here to *two* major recollection passages we may suppose that the reference is one we should take up. Notice, too, that *Phaedo* 75e talks about the equivalence of recollection and ‘what we call learning’. The question of nomenclature has been at issue in the *Euthydemus* from the beginning, e.g. at 277d ff.

For if I have escaped my own notice²⁶ being wise²⁷, and you demonstrate that I know everything and always did, what greater piece of luck could I have for my whole life?

Argument 3 (296a-d) Now Socrates agrees that when he knows, he knows with something (his soul), and always with that same something; so since he knows something, he always knows something, and always everything. Just as before, the sophist proceeds by disallowing the importance of the qualifications of Socrates' concessions, qualifications which reflect each time on the scope and duration of the knowledge he does concede he has. From the sophists' point of view those are irrelevant to an account of what Socrates' knows; but without them, Euthydemus takes himself to be allowed the following conclusion:

So indeed it is always that you have agreed that you know with that with which you know, whether it's whenever you know or however you like; for you have agreed always to know everything at once. So clearly you knew when you were a child; and when you were born, and when you were conceived; and before you were born, even before the heavens and the earth came into being, you knew everything, since you always know. And, by Zeus, you yourself will always know, and know everything, if I please (296c-d).

Once again, the argument is punctuated by an increasingly tense interchange between the sophists and Socrates and Ctesippus; and it is followed by a unique collapse of the partnership of the sophists – Socrates asks them whether they know that good men are unjust. The sophists are already committed to saying that everything is true; so they should agree, and have no qualms at the manifest falsity of what they are invited here to know.²⁸ But Dionysodorus now hesitates, inclined to deny it; and Euthydemus loses his

²⁶ The question about self-knowledge was set up at the end of the previous Socratic episode, 292d, where the discussants find it hard to account for its content.

²⁷ The shift of terminology, from what I have translated as 'knowledge', *epistêmê* (with reservations: better for many of these contexts would be 'understanding') to 'wisdom', *sophia*, is revealing; I shall return below to the connection between these discussions and an account of virtue. The sophistic version is found in their 'piece of wisdom' at 293d8.

²⁸ There is a parallel here with the way in which recollection may or may not figure in the elenchus: if we recollect what we learn, are we always right? See Scott, (1994) ch 1, and the

temper, complaining that Dionysodorus will commit himself to the implication that he is both a knower and not a knower at once (297a). So neither Euthydemus nor Dionysodorus know what they know; they merely agree to everything (or try to do so). This global acceptance is itself a mark of what is going wrong here. But why should we think it matters?

7. The *Euthydemus* and the *Meno*

First of all, notice how strong and how particular are the echoes of the *Meno*. Notice, too, how they are distorted – perhaps by the sophistic context, or perhaps by the critical relation between the *Meno* and the *Euthydemus*.

- The account of knowledge the sophists press on Socrates supposes that knowing one thing implies knowing everything; compare *Meno* 81d. But what are we to make of this in the context of sophistic argument?
- The shift they rely on between knowing something and being a knower is one they have exploited already, in the first exchange with Cleinias back at 275 ff.: this, translated by Socrates in terms of *wisdom*, recalls to us the *Meno*'s terms of engagement: an account of virtue.
- The opening set of puzzles in the *Euthydemus* about knowing and learning begin with the question: 'Who learns, the wise or the ignorant?' (275d) and continue to the claim that both those who know and those who do not, learn... and do not learn. The terms of Socrates' version of the paradox have been in the background of the dialogue all along.
- The question of how knowledge is acquired (is it there all along, or learned *de novo*?) picks up the paradox (and the *Meno* as a whole) especially in the context of Socrates' *search*, in the *Euthydemus*, for some knowledge.
- The conclusion – that we know always, before we were born, before even the world was created – is phrased in *Meno* language (compare 81c-d): our knowledge is pre-natal, universal (knowledge of everything) and mythically presented (it was, before the heavens and the earth came into being).

So are we to suppose that what we have in the *Euthydemus* just *is* the theory of recollection? Is this now the province of sophists? Socrates' response to the sophists'

question of how the slave-boy comes to make mistakes; Scott is surely right to suppose that one of the things that is of interest in the *Meno* is the nature of critical reflection.

promise unnervingly inverts his own lazy argument from the *Meno* (81d): if they can show him that he knows what he seeks all along, he won't need to bother to learn it. On that choice, that is, knowledge is either such that it escapes our notice; or it is learned. Socrates, worried about the effort of learning, goes for having had it all along, without noticing it; and so will end up preferring having it pointed out to him (that it had escaped his notice) to the labour of learning. How does this set of arguments bear comparison with what he avows in the *Meno*, the hard struggle of finding out? What is going on, when the *Euthydemus* asks us both to recall, and to recoil from, the *Meno*'s account of learning?

8. Knowing, learning, and discovery

At the centre of the *Euthydemus* lies a dialectical exchange in which the sophists force their interlocutors to agree that there is no such thing as falsehood; and that it is impossible to contradict someone else (283-88). Their argument is dialectical: and it suggests an account of truth in which statements are true just if they say the things they are 'about'; otherwise they do not say anything at all. This account of truth, if it is to imply both that every statement is true and that contradiction is impossible, has truths as piecemeal utterances, cognitive episodes, if you like, which are disconnected from each other and discrete. It precludes, therefore, truth-functional relations between truths; and precludes also reflective relations between them (no truth can meaningfully fall in the scope of any other: Socrates' version of the *Meno* paradox will disappear).²⁹ That directly rules out the significance of a reflective notion of *knowledge*: no claim to know can be falsified (because nothing is false) so that the higher-order claim that I know what I know is – if it can make sense at all – empty. I may know everything, since I can just keep knowing one thing after another, but there is no room for the thought that I know that I know – or, more perhaps to the point, when I know that I don't.

If we compare and contrast this with what I suggested emerges from Socrates' version of the *Meno* paradox, we may see what is at stake here. Suppose we take the sophistic (forced by the sophists on Socrates) account of knowledge to be objectionable, barren, a

²⁹ On the sophists on truth and falsehood see N. Denyer (1991) *Language, Thought and Falsehood* (London); McCabe (1998) 'Silencing the Sophists: The Drama of Plato's *Euthydemus*', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 139-168, (2000) *Plato and his Predecessors* (Cambridge) ch. 2.

repudiation of the difficult process of learning. Then, conversely, we might see that we would want to include, as conditions on knowledge, those very things the sophists deny, or claim to be unimportant:

- Knowledge is not merely of truths; knowledge can account for its *field*, how its truths are collected together. Knowing everything is more than just knowing one thing after another.
- Knowledge is *reflective*: where that reflectiveness involves more than mere consciousness. When I know that I know, my higher-order knowledge is not merely a phenomenal concomitant of the first-order cognition, but an active reflective stance.
- That reflective stance shows up in the intentional scope of what is known, at the higher-order:
 - knowing that I know (so knowing something about my own cognitive condition);
 - knowing what I know (knowing the field of my cognition)
 - being able to give an account of my knowledge, to respond in question and answer (knowing the explanatory structure of what I know)
- This kind of reflectiveness requires effort; it can't be just delivered by means of a dodgy sophistic argument.
- And yet the surprise with which Socrates greets the possibility that he might escape his own notice knowing suggests something more: that (in fact) it is an absurd suggestion that we might escape our own notice knowing. Instead, then, perhaps knowing that we know is a necessary condition of knowledge.

Now all of those conditions for knowledge might make us think quite hard about just what the *Meno* might seek, and the *Euthydemus* may (ostentatiously) miss. And the cross-references between the two dialogues might encourage us to think that there is a critical relation between them. After all, the *Euthydemus* seems to give us an exhaustive account of what it might be to call an argument eristic (as Socrates complains of Meno's version of the paradox, 80e2). And the shocking prospect of Socrates' taking the easy route to knowledge in the *Euthydemus* reminds us of his own complaint that the eristic argument encourages us to be lazy (81d6). But now these echoes from one dialogue to the other focus our attention on the deficiencies of an external account of knowledge, just because

they involve a conception of inquiry and discovery without reflective features. The lazy view of learning trades on an externalist account, and invites scrutiny of what it would be to escape one's own notice knowing.

Suppose, on the one hand, that knowing that I know is a condition for my knowing at all; and suppose, further, that knowledge can come relatively easily: that there are plenty of things that I know. In that case, we might think that the knowing-that-I-know condition must be a low one – mere awareness that I know, nothing very complicated (and in that case, we might further think, the higher-order knowledge is rather a different beast than the lower: perhaps, on this account, the knowing-that-I-know principle would be equivocated).³⁰

Suppose, on the other hand, that the knowing-that-I-know condition is a demanding one, in which knowing that I know is tied to a difficult process of learning at the first order: the sort of learning that Socrates says he still struggles with, and the sort of thing the sophists could not possibly provide. And suppose, further, that the higher-order knowledge is knowledge of the same sort as the lower ('know' is not said in many ways, even if at many levels). Then the higher-order condition will be as difficult as the lower. But then both knowing, and knowing that I know, might be the objects of aspiration, not mere commonplaces. If that is so, knowledge demands a teleological explanation, of some kind: and that explanation will extend to knowledge at the second order, and beyond.

This teleological demand might itself be connected to something else: if knowing demands knowing *what* I know, it might be hard to give a satisfactory account of higher-order knowing without a further condition that the lower-order knowing is somehow or other complete (that its field is determinate, even if not exhaustive). But this may lead us to think that knowledge is somehow holistic; and we might then wonder just how much of a difference there might be between knowledge and virtue. The demands of the *Meno*, on this account, would be met by an internalist response to the paradox.

³⁰ I stick here to the laborious 'knowing-that-I-know' to avoid collapsing these puzzles into the problems about knowledge involved in modern discussions of a 'KK' principle; see e.g. T. Williamson (2000) *Knowledge and its limits* (Oxford).

But this needs to be moderated. If the sophistic outcome is to be avoided, then Socrates should not be counted as a knower just if the sophists please (296d). If the condition on knowledge were *merely* internal, then we might think that knowing could happen just when the sophists want it to happen, or just when someone had knowing in mind. But of course this condition on knowing is by far too thin; and the effect of the complex *Meno* paradox is to insist that an external condition – the factive aspect of recollection – is necessary too. So knowledge, on this account, demands the right objects (external) and the right state of mind (internal) before it can evade the sophists' trap.

9. The *Meno* paradox again

Suppose that I am right that the *Euthydemus* offers a critique of the *Meno* paradox; and right I suggesting that we should read that as a rejection of a strictly externalist account of knowledge. What should we say, now, about inquiry and discovery? Does the contrast between the external and the internal aspects of the puzzle help us with them?

First, inquiry: how does this deeper account of what is involved in knowing (that it has both internal and external conditions) help us with the problem of inquiry, of asking a question to which we don't know the answer? If we inquire because we 'have and rely on' true beliefs, how do we come to have them, and what is it to rely on them? This seems to involve both external and internal conditions, too. Suppose that the beliefs are themselves acquired by external means (by empirical means, for example), my relying on them must surely itself be a reflective feature of my inquiring. And the paradox, if it bites at all, demands an account of how that reliance could be achieved, without itself having been acquired by inquiry. So inquiry itself looks regressive, if the paradox is to be answered at all. Does recollection stop the regress? The *Euthydemus* suggests that it does not; for recollection as it is caricatured in that dialogue can escape my notice, and thus fail as an internal condition of how I come to inquire.

Second, discovery: the internal condition on knowing, that we know that we know, seems right for discovery. However discovery may come about, we should agree, perhaps, that a discovery only counts as such when we realize that a discovery is what it is. So this condition shows us what it would be to know, by insisting that part of it is to know that we know. But there is, of course, a sting in this tail. Suppose that the choice Socrates is

offered by the sophists is a genuine one. Either there is some knowledge of which we are just aware: part of its being knowledge is its self-intimating character. This will accord with the phenomenology of the theory of recollection; and will not demand of it that it account for the cognitive content of higher-order knowledge. But then the answer to the part of the *Meno* paradox that concerns discovery will be objectionable: this isn't knowing that you have found what you sought, but feeling it. Or, if we think that higher-order knowledge is knowledge just as the first-order kind is, but with different (more) content, then doesn't the paradox bite even deeper? If then we ask how we know that we know, in the case where what we know is that we know that we know, the account will be obviously regressive. This, indeed, may be the point of Socrates' failure to deal with discovery in his version of the paradox. Does Plato have an answer to that? Do we?

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