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PLATO

*Meno and Other Dialogues*

*Charmides, Laches, Lysis, Meno*



*Translated with an Introduction and Notes by*

ROBIN WATERFIELD

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~~attractive. But I'm not going to come up with an image for you in return. As for me, if the torpedo numbs other people by virtue of the fact that it's numb itself, I am indeed like it, but otherwise I'm not. It's not that I make other people stuck while being clear myself, no, I make other people stuck by virtue of the fact that I'm stuck myself. In the present instance, I don't know what excellence is, and although you probably did know before you came into contact with me, you seem not to know now. But I'd be happy if the two of us together could investigate the issue and try to find out what it is.~~

MENO: And how will you search for something, Socrates, when you don't know what it is at all? I mean, which of the things you don't know will you take in advance and search for, when you don't know what it is? Or even if you come right up against it, how will you know that it's the unknown thing you're looking for?\*

SOCRATES: I see what you're getting at, Meno. Do you realize what a controversy you're conjuring up? The claim is that it's impossible for a man to search either for what he knows or for what he doesn't know: he wouldn't be searching for what he knows, since he knows it and that makes the search unnecessary, and he can't search for what he doesn't know either, since he doesn't even know what it is he's going to search for.\*

MENO: Well, doesn't† the argument strike you as sound, Socrates? 81a

SOCRATES: No, it doesn't.

MENO: Can you say why not?

SOCRATES: Yes, I can, because I've heard both men and women who are wise in sacred lore . . .

MENO: Saying what?

SOCRATES: Something which I think is true, as well as being attractive.

MENO: What did they say? Who are they?\*

SOCRATES: They are those priests and priestesses who've taken an interest in being able to give an account of their practices, though the idea also occurs in Pindar and many other inspired poets. Here's what they say; see if you think they're right. They b

say that the human soul is immortal— that it periodically comes to an end (which is what is generally called ‘death’) and is born again, but that it never perishes.\* And that, they say, is why one should live as moral a life as possible, because

In the ninth year Persephone restores once more to the upper light  
The souls of those from whom she has accepted requital for ancient  
woe.

- c From them grow glorious kings, full mighty men, and great sages,  
And henceforth they are known on earth as holy heroes.\*

Given, then, that the soul is immortal and has been incarnated many times, and has therefore seen things here on earth and things in the underworld too— everything, in fact— there’s nothing that it hasn’t learnt. Hence it isn’t at all surprising that it should be possible for the soul to recall what, after all, it also knew before about excellence and about everything else.\* For  
d since all nature is akin\* and the soul has learnt everything, there’s nothing to stop a man recovering everything else by himself, once he has remembered— or ‘learnt’, in common parlance— just one thing; all he needs is the fortitude not to give up the search. The point is that the search, the process of learning, is in fact nothing but recollection.\* So we shouldn’t trust that controversial argument of yours: it would make us lazy and appeals to faint-hearted people, but the doctrine I’ve  
e just expressed makes us industrious and inquisitive. For my part, I will put my trust in this doctrine and take it to be true, and on that basis I’m prepared to try to find out, with your help, what excellence is.

MENO: Yes, Socrates, but what do you mean when you say that we don’t learn— that what we call ‘learning’ is actually ‘recollection’? Can you teach me how this is so?

82a SOCRATES: Didn’t I describe you a moment ago as mischievous, Meno? And now, just when I’m insisting that there’s no such thing as teaching, only recollection, you’re asking me whether I can teach you something. You’re trying to catch me out in an immediate contradiction.

MENO: By Zeus, no, Socrates, that’s not what I had in mind when I spoke; it was just a natural question. But if you can find some

MENO

way to demonstrate the truth of what you've been saying, please do so.

SOCRATES: Well, it isn't easy, but I'm prepared to do my best, for your sake. Call over one of your many attendants there for me— it doesn't matter who: you choose— and I'll use him to b prove the point to you.

MENO: By all means. [*To a slave*] Come over here!

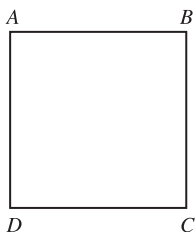
SOCRATES: He is Greek, isn't he, and speaks Greek?

MENO: Yes, certainly. At any rate, he was born and bred at home.\*

SOCRATES: Pay careful attention, then, and see whether you get the impression that he's remembering or learning from me.

MENO: I will.

SOCRATES [*drawing in the sand of the gymnasium*]: Tell me, boy,\* do you know that this is what a square looks like?

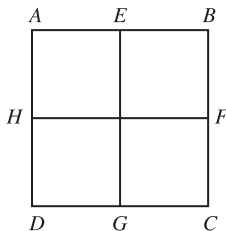


SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: So is it a rectangular figure with all these sides— all c four of them— equal in length?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: And is it a figure with these lines here through the middle equal in length as well?\*



SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES [*pointing to the two sizes of square*]: So a figure of this kind can be larger or smaller, can't it?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now, let this side [*AB*] be 2 feet long,\* and this one as well [*BC*]. How big would the whole figure be, in square feet? [*The slave hesitates*] Look at it this way: if it's 2 feet long here [*AB*], but only 1 foot long here [*BF*], then the area must be 2 feet taken once, mustn't it?

SLAVE: Yes.

d SOCRATES: But since it's 2 feet long here too [*BC*], then it must be 2 feet taken twice, mustn't it?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: So it's 2 times 2 square feet?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: And how many square feet does that make? Work it out and tell me.

SLAVE: Four, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Now, could there be another figure, twice the size of this one [*ABCD*], but the same shape, with all its sides equal, just like this one?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: How many square feet will it be?

SLAVE: Eight.

e SOCRATES: All right, then. Next try to tell me how long each line of this new figure will be. Each line of this figure here [*ABCD*] is 2 feet long. What about the line of our new figure, which is double in size?

SLAVE: Obviously, Socrates, each line must be double in length.

SOCRATES: Do you see, Meno, that I'm not teaching him anything, but just asking him questions? At the moment he thinks he knows what length of line will produce a figure of 8 square feet. Don't you think that's the position he's reached?

MENO: Yes, I do.

SOCRATES: Well, does he *know*?

MENO: Plainly not.

SOCRATES: But he *believes* it will be produced by a line that's twice as long?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now watch how he remembers what comes next, which is the right way to go about remembering.\* [*To the slave*] Tell me: are you saying that it's a line double in length that will produce a figure with double the area? I don't mean that this line of the figure should be long [*he extends AB to J*], while this one is short [*AD or JM*],\* but that it should be equal on all sides, just like this one [*ABCD*], but double in size, making 8 square feet. Do you still think that it will be produced from a line which is double the length of the original? 83a

SLAVE: Yes, I do.

SOCRATES: Well, isn't this line [*AJ*] twice as long as this one [*AB*], once we've added to the original another line of the same length [*BJ*]?

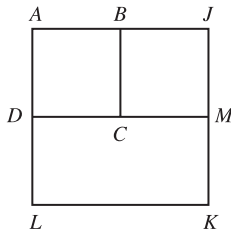
SLAVE: Yes. b

SOCRATES: And it's from this line [*AJ*], according to you, that we can produce an area of 8 square feet, if we make four lines of this length?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: All right, let's draw four equal lines, using this line [*AJ*] as our starting-point. [*He draws JK, KL, and LA, in addition to AJ*] This must now be the figure which you say has an area of 8 square feet, mustn't it?

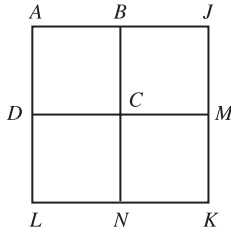
SLAVE: Yes.



SOCRATES: Now, doesn't this figure contain these four figures [*ABCD, BJMC, CMKN, DCNL*], each of which is equal in size to this one [*ABCD*], which is 4 square feet?



MENO



SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: How big is it, then? Isn't it four times as big?

SLAVE: Of course.

SOCRATES: Is something which is four times as big double the size?

SLAVE: By Zeus, no!

SOCRATES: How many times as big is it?

SLAVE: Four times.

c SOCRATES: It follows, boy, that a line double in length gives us a figure with not double the area, but four times the area.

SLAVE: You're right.

SOCRATES: Because a figure of 4 times 4 square feet has an area of 16 square feet, doesn't it?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: So what length of line is needed to produce a figure with an area of 8 square feet? We've got a figure four times the size from this one  $[AJ]$ , haven't we?

SLAVE: I'd say so.

SOCRATES: And this quarter-sized one†  $[ABCD]$  is produced by this half line here  $[AB]$ , isn't it?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well, then, a figure with an area of 8 square feet is double the size of this one  $[ABCD]$ , and half the size of this one  $[AJKL]$ , isn't it?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: So in order to produce a figure with an area of 8 square feet, we need as a starting-point a line which is longer than this one  $[AB]$ , but shorter than this one  $[AJ]$ , don't we?

d SLAVE: I think so.

SOCRATES: Good. Your answers should always express your

beliefs. Now, tell me: wasn't this line  $[AB]$  2 feet long, and this one  $[AJ]$  4 feet long?

SLAVE: Yes.

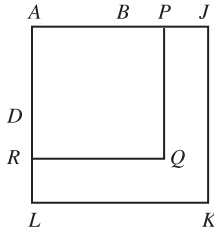
SOCRATES: So the side of a square whose area is 8 feet must be longer than this 2-foot line and shorter than this 4-foot line.

SLAVE: Yes, it must be.

SOCRATES: Then try to tell me how long you think it is.

SLAVE: Three feet.\*

SOCRATES: Now, if 3 feet is correct, shall we add half of this one  $[BJ]$ , to make one 3 feet long  $[AP]$ ? I mean, we've got 2 feet here  $[AB]$  and 1 foot here  $[BP]$ , and then, in the same way, we've got 2 feet here  $[AD]$  and 1 foot here  $[DR]$ . And we can now produce the figure you wanted  $[APQR]$ .



SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now, if it's 3 feet this way and 3 feet this way, the whole area is going to be 3 times 3 square feet, isn't it?

SLAVE: I suppose so.

SOCRATES: And how many square feet is 3 times 3 feet?

SLAVE: Nine.

SOCRATES: But what we wanted was a double-size square of how many square feet?

SLAVE: Eight.

SOCRATES: So we haven't yet produced our figure of 8 square feet. It isn't produced by a line 3 feet long either.

SLAVE: No, it certainly isn't.

SOCRATES: How long would the line have to be to produce it, then? Try to give us an accurate answer. If you don't want to use numbers, at least point to the line that would produce it.

SLAVE: By Zeus, Socrates, I just don't know.

SOCRATES: Meno, can you see where our friend here has got to on his journey towards recollection? At first, he didn't *know* which line would produce the figure with an area of 8 square feet— just as he doesn't yet know the answer now either; but he still *thought* he knew the answer then, and he was answering confidently, as if he had knowledge. He didn't think he was stuck before, but now he appreciates that he *is* stuck and he also  
 b doesn't think he knows what in fact he doesn't know.

MENO: You're right.

SOCRATES: So is he now better off with regard to what he didn't know?

MENO: Again, yes, I think so.

SOCRATES: So have we done him any harm by making him stuck and by our torpedo-like numbing of him?

MENO: No, I don't think we have.

SOCRATES: At any rate, it would seem that we've increased his chances of finding out the truth of the matter, because now, given his lack of knowledge, he'll be glad to undertake the investigation, whereas before he was only too ready to suppose  
 c that he could talk fluently and well to numerous people on numerous occasions about how a double-sized figure must have double-length sides.\*

MENO: I suppose so.

SOCRATES: Do you think he'd have tried to enquire or learn about this matter when he thought he knew it (even though he didn't), until he'd become bogged down and stuck, and had come to appreciate his ignorance and to long for knowledge?

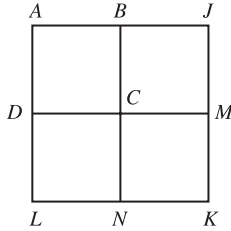
MENO: No, I don't think he would, Socrates.

SOCRATES: The numbing did him good, then?

MENO: I'd say so.

SOCRATES: Have a look, then, and see what he'll discover even under these circumstances as he undertakes the enquiry with me, with his puzzlement as our starting-point. All I'll be doing is asking him questions, not teaching him anything, but you  
 d should make sure that you don't catch me teaching and explaining things to him, rather than just asking him for his thoughts. [*To the slave*] Tell me, then. This is our figure with an area of 4 square feet [*ABCD*], isn't it? Do you understand?

MENO



SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: And we could add another one, equal in size [ $BJMC$ ], couldn't we?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: And here's a third square, which is again the same size as either of the other two [ $DCNL$ ]. Right?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: And we could also fill up the corner with this one [ $CMKN$ ], couldn't we?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: And then, of course, we'd have these four equal figures here, wouldn't we?

SLAVE: Yes.

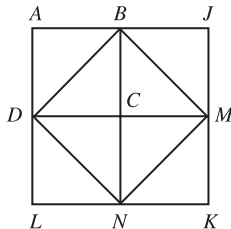
SOCRATES: Well, now, how many times as big as this figure [*e.g.*  $ABCD$ ] is this whole figure here? e

SLAVE: It's four times as big.

SOCRATES: Whereas what we wanted was one twice as big, didn't we? Do you remember?

SLAVE: That's right.

SOCRATES: Now, here's a line that runs from one corner to another and cuts each of these figures in two [ $DBMN$ ].\* 85a  
Right?



SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: And what we've got are four equal lines which form the perimeter of this figure here [*DBMN*]. Yes?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: Here's a question for you, then. How big is this figure [*DBMN*]?

SLAVE: I don't understand.

SOCRATES: Hasn't each line [*e.g. DB*] cut off the inner half of each of these four squares [*e.g. ABCD*]? Well, has it?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well, how many half-squares are there in this figure [*DBMN*]?

SLAVE: Four.

SOCRATES: And how many are there in this figure here [*ABCD*]?

SLAVE: Two.

SOCRATES: And 4 is what in relation to 2?

SLAVE: Double.

SOCRATES: So how many square feet is this one [*DBMN*]?

b SLAVE: Eight.

SOCRATES: Which line produces it?

SLAVE: This one [*DB*].

SOCRATES: The one that runs from one corner to another of the square whose area is four square feet?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: The technical term for this line is a 'diagonal', so—making use of this term 'diagonal'— what you're saying, boy, is that it is the diagonal that will produce the double-sized figure we were after.

SLAVE: Absolutely, Socrates.

SOCRATES: What do you think, Meno? Did he come up with any reply that was not his own opinion?

c MENO: No, they were all his own.

SOCRATES: But, as we said a short while ago, he didn't *know* the answer.

MENO: That's right.

SOCRATES: But these views of his were inside him, weren't they?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: So someone who doesn't know about whatever it is

that he doesn't know has true beliefs inside him about these things that he doesn't know.

MENO: So it seems.

SOCRATES: At the moment, these beliefs have only just been stirred up in him and it all feels like a dream, but if he were to be repeatedly asked the same questions in a number of different ways,\* he'd certainly end up with knowledge of these matters that is as good and as accurate as anyone's. d

MENO: I suppose so.

SOCRATES: And it won't be as a result of any teaching that he'll have become knowledgeable: he'll just have been asked questions, and he'll recover the knowledge by himself, from within himself.

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: And recovering knowledge from within oneself is the same as recollection, isn't it?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: And isn't the case either that at some point he acquired the knowledge he now has,\* or that he always had it?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: If he always had it, there's never been a time when he wasn't knowledgeable, and if he acquired it at some point, he couldn't have done so in *this* lifetime— unless you tell me that someone has taught him geometry. After all, he'll do the same e for any aspect of geometry, and for all other subjects too.\* So has anyone taught him every subject there is? You should know, I suppose, especially since he was born and bred in your household.

MENO: Yes, I do know— and what I know is that he's never had a teacher.

SOCRATES: But he does have these opinions, doesn't he?

MENO: It looks as though we have to say so, Socrates.

SOCRATES: But if he didn't acquire them in this lifetime, then it immediately follows that he had already learnt them and gained 86a them at some other time.

MENO: Apparently so.

SOCRATES: And this other time must be when he wasn't a human being, mustn't it?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: So if during both periods of time— both when he is and when he isn't a human being— there are true beliefs inside him which are awoken by questioning and become pieces of knowledge, doesn't it follow that his soul will have been in a state of knowledge for all time? After all, throughout the whole of time he clearly either is or is not a human being.

MENO: I suppose you're right.

b SOCRATES: So if the truth of things is always in our souls, the soul must be immortal, and this means that if there's something you happen not to know at the moment— which is to say, something you happen not to remember at the moment— you can confidently try to search for it and recall it. Yes?

MENO: I can't quite explain it, Socrates, but I think you're right.

SOCRATES: Yes, I think so too, Meno. I wouldn't support every aspect of the argument with particular vigour,\* but there's one proposition that I'd defend to the death, if I could, by argument and by action: that as long as we think we should search for what we don't know we'll be better people— less faint-hearted and less lazy— than if we were to think that we had no chance of discovering what we don't know and that there's no point in even searching for it.\*

MENO: I think you're right about this too, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Well, since we're in agreement on the importance of undertaking a search in cases of ignorance, shall we combine forces and try to find out what excellence is?

MENO: By all means. However, Socrates, above all I'd like to consider and hear what you have to say on the issue I raised right at the beginning. That is, as we attempt to find out what excellence is, are we taking it to be something teachable or a natural endowment? And if not, how do people come to have excellence?

d SOCRATES: Well, Meno, if I could regulate not just myself, but you too, we wouldn't investigate whether or not excellence is teachable until we'd first looked into the question of what it is in itself. But since you're not even trying to regulate yourself— because you want to preserve your status as a free man, I suppose— and since you're trying, successfully, to tell me what to

- king of Persia; on guest-friendship, see the note on *Lysis* 212e; on Meno's relations with the Persian royal family (if not the king, exactly), see Xenophon, *The Expedition of Cyrus 2 passim*, with T. S. Brown, 'Menon of Thessaly', *Historia*, 35 (1986), 387–404.
- 79d *not yet agreed upon*: see 75d. Plato is obviously right here: no valid definition can name the thing to be defined as part of the definition.
- 79e *your friend*: Gorgias (71c, 76b).
- 80a *in appearance*: Socrates had flat, snub-nosed features.
- 80b *arrested as a magician*: this is not to say that magicians were acceptable in Athens, but that in Athens, as a citizen, Socrates was not liable to summary arrest; at worst, a citizen could be summoned to face trial. In any other city, Socrates would not have this legal protection.
- 80d *the unknown thing you're looking for*: the background to 'Meno's paradox' is both general and specific. Specifically, Socrates himself had come up with a version of it at 71b, and Meno is remembering that; generally, certain Sophists had used this tactic to demolish the arguments of opponents. For discussion, see the following notes and pp. xxxviii–xli.
- 80e *going to search for*: there are subtle differences between Socrates' formulation of the paradox and Meno's original a few lines earlier. Socrates' version uses the third person, rather than Meno's pointed 'you', in order to frame the paradox as a genuine philosophical problem, not just an *ad hominem* outburst by Meno, and Socrates' version is more elegant. But most importantly, (1) Socrates omits Meno's 'at all', because he will claim, in effect, that even something unknown is in another sense known; (2) Socrates omits the second part of Meno's statement—how will you know that a search has been successfully concluded? Nevertheless, he does implicitly cover this aspect of the paradox in what follows. (3) He makes Meno's original far more of a paradox than it was. Additional bibliography: B. Calvert, 'Meno's Paradox Reconsidered', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 12 (1974), 143–52; J. Moline, 'Meno's Paradox?', *Phronesis*, 14 (1969), 153–61; M. Welbourne, 'Meno's Paradox', *Philosophy*, 61 (1986), 229–43.
- 81a *Who are they?*: we cannot now make a safe identification, though Pythagoreans seem to be the best bet: see P. Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 160–5.
- 81b *it never perishes*: for Plato's commitment to the immortality and transmigration of the soul, see *Phaedo* 81c–82d, 107c–108c, *Republic* 608d–611a, *Phaedrus* 245c–246a, 248c–249c, *Timaeus* 41d–42d, 90e–92c.
- 81b–c *In the ninth year . . . holy heroes*: Pindar, Fragment 133 (Bergk). Her



- 'ancient woe' was occasioned by the murder of her son by the Titans, who were seen as the progenitors of the human race. We human beings pay off this debt not just by undergoing a certain number of incarnations (otherwise Persephone would automatically 'accept the requital'), but also by moral behaviour during those incarnations. It is unclear whether 'in the ninth year' refers to normal years or to Great Years (large astronomical cycles) or to incarnations.
- 81d *about excellence and about everything else*: it is an implication of the idea that here on earth we only *recollect* knowledge that in our lifetimes we are less conscious than whenever it was that we knew things immediately: 'Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting', as Wordsworth said in 'Intimations of Immortality'.
- 81d *all nature is akin*: Plato clearly means us to think that there are natural and necessary links between things, such that I can seamlessly move from one truth or idea or fact to another. Vlastos may well be right to say that 'what Plato means by "recollection" in the *Meno* is any advance in understanding which results from the perception of logical relationships' (p. 97 in Day (ed.)). Additional bibliography: S. Tigner, 'On the Kinship of All Nature in Plato's *Meno*', *Phronesis*, 15 (1970), 1-4.
- 81d *nothing but recollection*: the two most important questions (for a further list, see Weiss, pp. 70-1) are (1) if the soul knows 'everything', when did it learn it? And (2) how much is meant to be covered by 'everything'? If it did not learn things in this lifetime, could it have learnt things in previous lifetimes? After all, if *all* learning is recollection (81c), the soul can never have *learnt* anything; nevertheless, Plato uses the term 'learn' here and at 86a for the soul's acquisition of knowledge. Perhaps Plato might say that we have had infinite incarnations, and that over the course of these incarnations we have gradually built up our innate knowledge. (There may even be the possibility of learning something genuinely new even this late in our incarnations.) It is true that in a later dialogue, *Timaeus*, Plato seems to think that both the soul and the world are created, which would render the idea of infinite incarnations implausible; but elsewhere (e.g. *Phaedrus* 246a) he says that the soul is immortal, and that seems to be his position here in *Meno*. But if we take seriously the idea that *all* embodied learning is actually recollection, then perhaps the soul did its learning in its periods of disembodied existence, or in some indefinite (or even timeless) time before a first incarnation. When the doctrine of recollection recurs (especially in *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*), the objects of recollection are Forms and they become known between incarnations, but it is far from clear that Plato had this metaphysical theory in mind when he wrote *Meno*. It is true that at 86a he has Socrates say that the slave first learnt his geometry when

he was not incarnated as a human being, but the slave recalls something considerably more complex than a Platonic Form (Forms are characterized by singleness, simplicity, and eternally being just what they are) and it is hard to see how anyone could learn geometry or even the a priori principles of geometry (etc.) while disembodied. The Gordian knot of these complexities is simply cut by saying that 'souls acquired or learnt their knowledge at the moment when time began' (Bluck, p. 317), but there is no trace of this in our dialogue, where Plato's main concern is just to argue that the soul did not acquire its knowledge in *this* lifetime. It seems safest to think that for the time being Plato is not restricting 'everything' to Forms and that he is not prepared to take the theory further than the minimum required to answer Meno's paradox (hence at 86b he has Socrates decline to support every detail of the argument); all he needs for the time being is the vague idea that the soul 'always' knew 'everything' (81c, 86a). If pushed, he would surely have restricted 'everything' to all general principles and timeless truths (especially the supposedly objective truths of morals and mathematics), and would have eliminated empirical studies from the blanket assertion that *all* learning is recollection (81d). Just conceivably, there is the beginning of such a restriction at 85e, if we take 'subjects' there to mean propositional subjects such as geometry, not e.g. learning *how* to do things. There is certainly a restriction in that, as 84a shows, the slave has not by then begun to recollect; he has, however, already come up with an opinion or two; since they were false, falsehoods are excluded from recollection. See also the end of the first note on 98a.

82b *born and bred at home*: it was felt to be somewhat improper to enslave fellow Greeks (pan-hellenism infused the rival city-states of Greece at least to that extent), and slaves generally came from abroad (see the second note on *Lysis* 223a). The other main source, however, was breeding slaves at home— and it looks as though they could be referred to as 'Greek'. The best short introduction to Greek slavery is N. R. E. Fisher, *Slavery in Classical Greece* (2nd edn., London: Bristol Classical Press, 2001). It has been suggested (by D. Gera, 'Porters, *Paidagogoi*, Jailers, and Attendants: Some Slaves in Plato', *Scripta Classica Israelica*, 15 (1996), 90–101) that Plato has Socrates choose a slave for this demonstration not just because Socrates needs someone uneducated, but also because he is not concerned with the personal, probing aspect of the elenchus, but only with drily demonstrating the process of recollection.

82b *boy*: the slave may be young— part of the point is that he should be untutored— but the Greeks addressed slaves of any age as 'boy' (as in the Southern States of America, or in South Africa, in the bad old days).

- 82c *equal in length as well*: some scholars take these two new lines to be diagonals rather than transversals. Nothing very substantial hinges on this, in terms of the slave's recollection or the geometrical problem involved. Transversals seem to me to fit the text better. The issues are debated between G. J. Boter (*Phronesis*, 33 (1988), 208–15) and R. W. Sharples (*Phronesis*, 34 (1989), 220–6), with a useful addendum by D. H. Fowler (*Phronesis*, 35 (1990), 175–81).
- 82c *let this side be 2 feet long*: nothing significant hinges on the fact that Plato gives a value to the length of the side; it saves him having to talk in the abstract about equal lines, lines double in length, half as long, and so on. What follows is the earliest extended piece of evidence about Greek mathematics (the evidence for earlier mathematics comes from reports in later writers). Apart from anything else, it suggests (and other evidence proves) that at this stage Greek mathematics was geometrized rather than arithmetized: see D. H. Fowler, *The Mathematics of Plato's Academy* (2nd edn., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- 82e *just asking him questions*: Socrates' repeated insistence (here, and at 82b, 84c, and 85d) on his not teaching is due to the fact that Meno's paradox at 80d–e effectively denied that one could search for knowledge without the help of a teacher, as someone who already knows. Plato's reply comes in two stages: both the theory of recollection and the method of hypothesis are supposed to show, at the very least, that progress can be made even when both parties to the discussion are ignorant or at any rate are not making use of their knowledge.
- 82e *the right way to go about remembering*: because memory works by association. Plato is claiming that Socratic argumentation follows natural chains of association. I take it that the talk of the kinship of all nature at 81d was just a high-falutin way of making the same point.
- 83a *while this one is short*: this would of course produce a figure  $AJMD$  which would be double the area of the first square  $ABCD$ , but Socrates wants a *square* with double the area, not an oblong.
- 83e *Three feet*: this is a guess, based on Socrates' pointing out that the line must be longer than 2 feet and shorter than 4 feet. It is wrong (because the square of 3 feet is 9 square feet), but it is less wrong than the previous guess (and not a stupid guess, given that, arithmetically speaking, we are in the realm of irrational numbers), so progress is being made. Socrates has led the slave towards this incorrect answer by means of his questions, but the whole process is constructive, not so much because the slave is now more nearly right than he was before, as because he has shed his false conceit of knowledge, and thereby created space for the 'recollection' of knowledge. As the image of the 'journey towards recollection' at 84a suggests, the false opinions that the slave has voiced so far do not count as recollection

- itself (except in the broader sense that recollection is a process), but as clearing the ground for recollection to take place. Moreover, the slave has been allowed to express his own opinions, rather than being merely spoon-fed someone else's ideas. Socratic questioning is educational in the literal sense: *educare* in Latin implies eliciting information, not putting information in.
- 84c *double-length sides*: mimicking Meno's remarks about his fluency on excellence (80b). At the time, Meno thought that he had knowledge, which he could not express because he had been bewitched by Socrates; but, given the parallelism with the slave, Socrates is suggesting that Meno did not have knowledge, but a false belief. This is not the only parallel Socrates implicitly draws between Meno and the slave: the conversation with the slave passes through much the same stages as the earlier conversation with Meno, so that one could almost say that although at 80c Socrates refused to come up with a counter-image for Meno, in response to his simile of the torpedo, he has in effect likened Meno to an ignorant slave. See D. E. Anderson, 'The Theory of Recollection in Plato's *Meno*', *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 9 (1971), 225–36. However, the reason the conversation with the slave parallels the conversation with Meno is simply that both follow the pattern of the elenchus: from conceit of knowledge, to *aporia*, to true belief— and maybe beyond, to knowledge.
- 85a *cuts each of these figures in two*: it is hard to see how the slave could have come up with the diagonal on his own (even if it were already given: see the first note on 82c). This is where Socrates goes beyond eliciting replies and seeds new information. There is of course a large element of teaching in what Socrates does with the slave: his use of an interrogative tone of voice barely disguises this. But this is not enough to invalidate the whole lesson as an illustration of recollection, because (a) recollection is a process, not a flash of insight (85c with 98a), and (b) Plato insists that *all* learning is recollection (81d–82a), so that even straightforward geometry lessons are meant to be covered.
- 85c *in a number of different ways*: since mere repetition of the same questions would hardly advance anyone towards understanding, Plato must mean this phrase 'in a number of different ways' to adumbrate the 'working out the reason' of 98a.
- 85d *the knowledge he now has*: his latent knowledge of geometry.
- 85e *all other subjects too*: there are of course enormous differences in the ways we learn different subjects, but at the moment Plato seems prepared to ignore the differences and allow his geometry lesson with the slave to stand as a model for how we acquire *any* knowledge.
- 86a *for all time?*: no, it doesn't follow. Plato has not shown that there was not a time when the soul was ignorant (at best, he has shown only

- that it acquired knowledge some time in the past). And even apart from this mistake, all that could follow from the argument as it stands is that the soul is in a state of knowledge for as long as it exists; it does not follow that the soul has always existed.
- 86b *with particular vigour*: how much does Plato mean us to doubt? It is hard to see what elements of the story could be jettisoned without undermining the whole theory of recollection. In that case, he must mean that since there is no way to *prove* the immortality of the soul (a problem he thinks he has resolved by the time he wrote *Phaedrus*), there is no way to *prove* that the recovery of true beliefs is actually recollection. Nevertheless, he does believe that true beliefs *are* recoverable, and that we have within us a coherent system of beliefs corresponding to the objective matrix of concepts (81d). For reflections on this sentence, see R. Jenks, 'On the Sense of the Socratic Reply to Meno's Paradox', *Ancient Philosophy*, 12 (1992), 317–30.
- 86c *no point in even searching for it*: though the point about laziness is important, it is not clear that Socrates has overcome all of Meno's worries. Meno's question (80d) was raised in the context of a search where *neither* of them knew the answer: neither of them knows what excellence is. Socrates' leading (and sometimes deliberately misleading) questions to the slave, however, make it clear that he already knows the answer to the geometrical problem. But all Plato is trying to do at this point is have Socrates convince Meno of the reality of latent knowledge; he responds to the worry later (86d–87b), when he argues that where both or all interlocutors are ignorant, the way to proceed is to make an assumption. Another question that arises is whether Plato has resolved Meno's paradox at all, or just pushed it back. Could one not still ask how you can know that what you recollect is your quarry? But if recollection is seen specifically as a response to prompting (that is, to questions, whether asked by someone else or by oneself), you can know that you have found your quarry, because it was the specific result of specific questioning.
- 86d *or a natural endowment*: scholars complain that Meno has failed to notice that the question has already been answered, by implication: the experiment with the slave was meant to show that recollection is the way to find out what *everything* is, including excellence. Since 'teaching' has now been reformulated as 'recollection', we are surely entitled to say that excellence is teachable, in the sense of recollectable. But there is a gap: it is still relevant to ask how even someone who knows what it is gains it as a personal quality.
- 87b *inscribing the area inside a circle*: Plato has not given us enough information to securely identify the geometrical problem he has in mind, because that is not what is important to him: all that is important

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- Abaris the Hyperborean:** a legendary shamanistic healer from the far north. The Hyperboreans were supposed to live 'beyond the north wind (Boreas)' in a kind of magical paradise sacred to Apollo.
- Aeneas:** a Trojan hero from the legendary Trojan War, later credited with the foundation of Rome.
- Aleuadae:** see ARISTIPPUS.
- Anacreon:** a famous sixth-century lyric poet, from the island of Teos. Over 150 fragments of his work survive, in various metres.
- Anytus:** a prominent democratic politician at the end of the fifth century, he is best known as one of the three prosecutors of Socrates at his trial in 399—so it is perhaps not surprising that Plato's portrait is barbed.
- Aristeides:** a famous Athenian statesman, prominent along with his political rival Themistocles in the second Persian invasion of 480–479, and called 'the Just' for his equitable treatment of Athenian allies.
- Aristippus:** from Larisa in Thessaly, a friend and the lover of Meno. He was due to join Cyrus on the ill-fated expedition to Persia, and so features briefly in Xenophon's *The Expedition of Cyrus*. He was a member of the Aleuadae clan, the leading family of Larisa.
- Chaerephon:** a constant friend and a disciple of Socrates whose devotion bordered on fanaticism (hence his 'madness'—*Charmides* 153b), best known for the story of his visit to the Delphic oracle to ask whether there was anyone wiser than Socrates (Plato, *Apology* 20e–21a). He was exiled during the junta of the Thirty Tyrants (404–403 BCE), returned to Athens after they had been driven out, and died in about 401.
- Charmides:** the uncle of Plato and a recurrent figure in his dialogues, he became a confirmed oligarch who died fighting against the democratic counter-revolution after the Thirty Tyrants had taken over the government of Athens in 404 BCE. During this brief period of oligarchy, Charmides was one of the ten-man committee which administered Athens' port, Piraeus.
- Cleophantus:** son of Themistocles, and famous for being a spoiled brat.
- Critias:** the leader of the Thirty Tyrants whose brutal oligarchic regime in Athens was a cacophonous coda at the end of the Peloponnesian War. He died during the democratic counter-revolution of 403, after only a few months in power. He was the uncle and guardian of Charmides, and a composer of tragedies.
- Critias the son of Dropides:** the great-great-grandfather of CRITIAS, and a contemporary of SOLON.
- Ctesippus:** a young Athenian, and part of the inner circle of Socrates'

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- followers, if his presence at Socrates' death is anything to go by (Plato, *Phaedo* 59b). He also plays a part in Plato's dialogue *Euthydemus*.
- Cydias:** a little-known lyric poet. The lines paraphrased and partially quoted at *Charmides* 155d constitute his longest, and perhaps his only fragment. He may have come from the town of Hermione in the Argolis area of the Peloponnese.
- Daedalus:** a legendary sculptor, creator (most famously) of the labyrinth in Knossos, the wings on which he and his son Icarus flew from Crete, and numerous statues which were said to be so lifelike that they could move.
- Damon:** a prominent Athenian Sophist in the middle of the fifth century, and a personal friend and adviser of Pericles, the leading statesman of the era. He was particularly famous for his musical teaching (about which we can do little more than conjecture now), and had studied under the most famous teacher of the previous generation, Agathocles (also mentioned at *Protagoras* 316e).
- Darius:** the name of several Achaemenid rulers of the Persian empire. Before or during Socrates' time, there had been Darius I (522–486), the invader of Greece in 490, and Darius II (424–405).
- Empedocles:** from Acragas in Sicily, a prominent fifth-century philosopher, scientist, and shaman.
- Eudorus:** an otherwise unknown wrestling coach.
- Gorgias:** c.480–376 BCE, from Leontini in Sicily, one of the most prominent members of the Sophistic movement. He specialized in the budding art of rhetoric (*Meno* 95c), in which he was a great innovator. Although many elements of his style seem florid and artificial to us today, he appears to have dazzled his contemporaries.
- Hera:** the divine wife of Zeus, king of gods and men. Her chief provinces were royalty, childbirth, and marriage.
- Heracles:** the legendary son of Zeus, famous for his civilizing labours, who transcended his mortal nature to become a god.
- Hesiod:** fl. c.700 BCE; considered the second epic poet of Greece, after HOMER. His *Theogony* orders the gods into rationalistic genealogies and recounts stories about many of them, while *Works and Days* is full of practical and moral advice on daily life for the peasant farmer.
- Hippothales:** a youngish Athenian at the time of *Lysis*; nothing is known of him beyond his presence in this dialogue.
- Homer:** fl. c.750; the greatest epic poet of Greece. His *Iliad* sings of the death and glory of the legendary Trojan War, while his *Odyssey* recounts the fanciful and marvellous adventures of one Greek hero, Odysseus, returning from the war to his homeland.
- Ismenias:** a democrat and leader of Thebes at the end of the fifth and beginning of the fourth century BCE.
- Laches:** a prominent Athenian general and political conservative during the early part of the Peloponnesian War, he was killed at the Battle of Mantinea in 418.

- Lamachus:** one of the leading Athenian generals in the Peloponnesian War, and one of Nicias' colleagues on the expedition to Sicily, where he lost his life in 414.
- Lysimachus:** a wealthy but undistinguished Athenian nobleman. His son Aristoteles was for a short while a member of Socrates' circle, but left (according to Plato, at *Theaetetus* 150e–151a, imitated by ps.-Plato, *Theages* 130a–e) before reaping the full benefits. Born about 480 BCE, Lysimachus was still alive in 402, the dramatic date of *Meno*: see *Meno* 94a.
- Lysis:** a young aristocratic Athenian boy, aged about 12 at the time of this conversation with Socrates. As was usual in Athenian society, he was named after his paternal grandfather.
- Melesias:** virtually unknown apart from his mentions in *Laches*. His son Thucydides may have been an associate of Socrates (ps.-Plato, *Theages* 130a–b). Melesias himself was one of the moderate oligarchs who seized power in Athens in 411 and ruled for a few months as a Council of 400 members.
- Menexenus:** a young aristocratic Athenian associate of Socrates, cousin of Ctesippus, and the chief interlocutor of the dialogue *Menexenus*.
- Meno:** a young Thessalian aristocrat from Pharsalus, whose family had long had ties to Athens. Xenophon gives him a savage obituary (*The Expedition of Cyrus* 2.6.21–9), after his death during the campaign of the Persian prince Cyrus to wrest the throne of the Persian empire from his brother, as avaricious, scheming, self-interested, and lacking any sense of justice.
- Miccus:** the owner of the wrestling-school where the conversation of *Lysis* takes place, and otherwise unknown.
- Nicias:** an Athenian nobleman who combined enormous wealth with political and military caution, and died partly as a result of the latter trait during the catastrophic Athenian attempt to conquer Sicily in 415–413. His son Niceratus (*Laches* 200d) was put to death by the oligarchs who were briefly in control of Athens in 404 and 403.
- Paralus:** along with Xanthippus, the two legitimate sons of PERICLES, who also had a son by his non-Greek mistress Aspasia, and adopted both Alcibiades and his brother Cleinias. Both Paralus and Xanthippus died of the plague in 429 BCE.
- Pericles:** c.495–429, an outstanding statesman and the virtual ruler of supposedly democratic Athens from about 450 until his death from the plague.
- Persephone:** legendary daughter of Demeter and, as wife of Hades, queen of the underworld.
- Pheidias:** the most famous sculptor of fifth-century Greece, famed for his statue of Zeus in Olympia (one of the wonders of the ancient world) and in Athens especially for the statue of Athena Promachos on the Acropolis and the cult statue of Athena in the Parthenon. He was a close associate of Pericles, at whose instigation the great temples and



- memorials of classical Athens were built, and was the supervisor of the construction of the Parthenon.
- Pindar:** 518–c.440, from Cynoscephalae in Boeotia, the most famous lyric poet of ancient Greece. Quite a few of his poems survive, particularly those he was commissioned to write in celebration of athletic victories.
- Polycrates:** an Athenian democrat at the end of the fifth and beginning of the fourth centuries BCE. Some time early in the fourth century, he wrote a pamphlet attacking Socrates on political grounds. The pamphlet forms the background to much of the defence of Socrates in the first two chapters of Xenophon's *Memoirs of Socrates*.
- Prodicus:** originally from the island of Ceos, Prodicus was one of the most famous of the itinerant Sophists who spent time in Athens. He was an atheist and a moralist, but was most famous for his work towards establishing what we might call the first Greek dictionary, especially by distinguishing near synonyms. Plato is generally more respectful of him than he is of most Sophists, though from time to time he gently mocks this aspect of his work— in this volume, at *Charmides* 163d and *Meno* 75e— and when he has Socrates claim to be the pupil of Prodicus (as at *Meno* 96d), this is certainly ironic.
- Protagoras:** from Abdera in northern Greece, the first and greatest Sophist (c.490–c.420 BCE). His views are extensively discussed by Plato in *Protagoras* and *Theaetetus*. An original thinker in many fields, he was a relativist, a humanist, a liberal political thinker, and an agnostic, but was most famous as a teacher of rhetoric.
- Pyrilampes:** a fifth-century Athenian aristocrat, famous for having introduced peacocks into Athens, which he brought back from a diplomatic mission to Persia. He became Plato's stepfather when he married his niece, Plato's mother Perictione.
- Socrates:** the constant protagonist of Plato's dialogues, witty, wise, merciless with his interlocutors' pretensions, and equipped with a devastating method for exposing flaws in their thinking. He was born in Athens in 469 BCE and was put to death by the restored democracy in 399 on the charges of irreligion and corrupting the young men of the city.
- Solon:** the Athenian lawgiver of the early sixth century, whom fourth-century Athenians looked back on as the founder of their democracy, though the system he established was actually a graduated timocracy: the wealthier one was, the more political power one could gain. Solon became one of the traditional Seven Sages of Greece, and many wise and pithy sayings were attributed to him. He was an excellent poet— poetry being in his day the only medium for didactic work— and he wrote poems to explain and justify his political policies as well as on lighter subjects. He was the remote ancestor of the family to which Critias, Charmides, and Plato himself belonged.
- Stephanus:** brother of Melesias, otherwise unknown.
- Stesilaus:** the teacher of the art of fighting in armour whose display occasions the conversation of *Laches*. He is otherwise unknown, but his

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- subject was popular. At any rate, we know of others working in the same or similar fields at much the same time: the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus (Plato, *Euthydemus* 271c–d; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 3.1), and Phalinus (Xenophon, *The Expedition of Cyrus* 2.1.7).
- Taureas:** owner of a wrestling-ground, and wealthy enough to be required under Athenian law to finance the production of plays at a dramatic festival (Plutarch, *Life of Alcibiades* 16), but otherwise unknown. The wrestling-grounds and gymnasia of Athens were popular meeting-places for men of the leisured class.
- Teiresias:** legendary blind prophet, capable of understanding the language of birds and beasts as well as of predicting the future, whose adventures included a spell as a woman.
- Themistocles:** c. 530–462 BCE. A great Athenian military commander during the second Persian War (490–489), and one of the statesmen chiefly responsible for establishing Athens' potential for greatness afterwards.
- Theognis:** elegiac poet of the later sixth century BCE, from Megara. A large number of short poems or couplets survive under his name, but not all are genuine.
- Thucydides:** not to be confused with the historian, this Thucydides was one of the most important conservative politicians in Athens in the 440s, during the inexorable rise to power of his rival, PERICLES. His son Melesias features in *Laches*.
- Xanthias:** an otherwise unknown wrestling coach.
- Xanthippus:** see PARALUS.
- Zalmoxis:** a god of the Getae (a tribe from Thrace – roughly, Bulgaria and the bit of northern Greece just south of Bulgaria), who was said by Herodotus to have been originally a slave of the mystic Greek philosopher Pythagoras, from whom he learnt his shamanistic powers. He returned to his people, used his knowledge to become their king, and was later deified.
- Zeus:** the divine lord and father of gods and men.