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Paradox and Protreptic in Plato's *Meno*¹

The *Meno* contains a host of puzzles and problems, not the least of which is the status of the theory of recollection in the dialogue. This essay aims to present both the theory of recollection and what has been called "Meno's Paradox" not as epistemological issues, but as issues of eristic and protreptic. I suggest that the true purpose of the *Meno*'s use of the theory of recollection is to be found in the implicit and explicit caveats that Socrates uses to frame the theory. These caveats, which indicate that we should not take the theory of recollection as demonstrated or proven, ultimately justify interpreting Socrates' claims about the theory of recollection serving a protreptic rôle as definitive. This paper has three sections. Section I offers some preliminary remarks on the nature of philosophical protreptic as a literary genre of the fourth century in general and its employment in Plato. Section II distinguishes the geometry problem used to 'demonstrate' the theory of recollection is employed to solve from the problem of inquiry into virtue that Socrates and Meno are facing. I show that the two problem are disanalogous. I also discuss the character of Meno as susceptible to a certain kind of persuasion, and how Socrates converts Meno's questions about the possibility of philosophical enquiry into a sophistical paradox and offers the theory of recollection as a solution to it. Finally, Section III offers evidence that Plato provides us with a number of caveats and warnings about taking the theory of recollection in the *Meno* as serious epistemology, leading to the conclusion that Plato's primary purpose in employing it in the *Meno* is as a protreptic device meant to keep Meno on the path of philosophical inquiry.

Keywords

Ancient Greek Philosophy, Plato, Meno, Epistemology, Protreptic.

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Introduction

The *Meno* contains a host of puzzles and problems, not the least of which is the status of the theory of recollection in the dialogue. This essay aims to present both the theory of recollection and what has been called “Meno’s Paradox” not as epistemological issues, but as issues of eristic and protreptic. I suggest that the true purpose of the *Meno*’s use of the theory of recollection is to be found in the implicit and explicit caveats that Socrates uses to frame the theory. These caveats, which indicate that we should not take the theory of recollection as demonstrated or proven, ultimately justify interpreting Socrates’ claims about the theory of recollection serving a protreptic rôle as definitive. This paper has three sections. Section I offers some preliminary remarks on the nature of philosophical protreptic as a literary genre of the fourth century in general and its employment in Plato. Section II distinguishes the geometry problem used to ‘demonstrate’ the theory of recollection is employed to solve from the problem of inquiry into virtue that Socrates and Meno are facing. I show that the two problems are disanalogous. I also discuss the character of Meno as susceptible to a certain kind of persuasion, and how Socrates converts Meno’s questions about the possibility of philosophical enquiry into a sophistical paradox and offers the theory of recollection as a solution to it. Finally, Section III offers evidence that Plato provides us with a number of caveats and warnings about taking the theory of recollection in the *Meno* as serious epistemology, leading to the conclusion that Plato’s primary purpose in employing it in the *Meno* is as a protreptic device meant to keep Meno on the path of philosophical inquiry.

I. Protreptic and Prosopography

To read the *Meno* without taking account of two elements vital to grasping Plato’s writing, namely literary genre and prosopography will leave the reader dissatisfied with the theory of recollection and its ostensible demonstration in the dialogue. In the first instance, protreptic is a recognizable literary genre aimed at persuasion, and not demonstration. That Meno is a good candidate for protreptic is borne out by his historical reputation for being obstinate and lazy, as well as his portrayal as such in Plato’s dialogue. Hence it is useful to say a few words about these how awareness of the protreptic genre, and Meno’s character inform our reading of the *Meno*. That protreptic, or exhortation to seek virtue and wisdom, was a popular and fundamental aspect of Greek philosophy, is attested to by the wealth of fourth century literature dedicated to it by so many Socratic writers (*Academica Posteriora* 1.4.16; cp. Slings 1999: 86). The 4th century philosopher Demetrius of Phaleron writes that there are three primary kinds of protreptic: 1. accusation (you are not caring for your soul) 2. advice (you should look after your soul) 3. elenchus (are you looking after your soul?) It is generally thought that Socratic protreptic is elenctic, and that elenctic protreptic is implicit, not explicit (Demetrius, *On Style*, 296-8; cp. Slings 1999: 83-6). Socrates’ procedure follows this pattern: initial definitional discussion leads to *aporia* (confusion) which sparks a willing desire to learn. If a dialogue ends aporetically, the reader should want to solve the *aporia*. If a *character* in a dialogue is brought to *aporia*, Plato believes that he should be inspired (protrepticized/exhorted) to willingly inquire into the topic.

However, Meno, like so many other interlocutors that Socrates brings to *aporia*, is far from being inspired to inquire willingly. Instead he becomes obstinate and dubious as to the possibility of inquiry at all. In the *Meno*, Socrates provides an appropriate response to a particular kind of student. While many scholars have remarked on the motivational function of the theory of recollection in the dialogue (Cp. Weiss 2001; Scott 1987: 346-66; Umphrey 1990; Shorey 1933; Woodruff 1990: 60-84), few have considered the possibility that the focal point of the dialogue may actually be the central Socratic theme of protreptic. Lest one doubt Plato's awareness of the historical Socrates' explicit protreptic, one need only consider Socrates' words in his defense, Clitophon's description of it (cf. Bowe 2007), the Alcibiades' account of Socratic protreptic in the *Symposium*, or Euthydemus' failure to produce it in the dialogue that bears his name (cf. *Apology* 30a; *Clitophon* 407a-b; *Symposium* 215e).² All of these examples offer instances where Socrates engages in explicit protreptic when implicit protreptic fails. I will argue that the theory of recollection is introduced as a kind of intellectual *bonbon* that is meant to restart the stalled elenctic process in this case. The implicit protreptic of Socratic elenchus is exchanged, briefly for *explicit* protreptic in the advisory and propaedeutic sense.

Meno is not capable of grasping *implicit* protreptic, but he does respond to *explicit* protreptic. Initially in the dialogue, when Socrates asks Meno if he is willing to inquire into the nature of virtue, he is met with obstinacy culminating in half-hearted eristic skepticism (75b, 80d). Socrates counters Meno's lazy skepticism, not through improving Meno's understanding, but in exhorting Meno to inquire after virtue with him. The theory of recollection is the tool whereby he entices Meno not to give up the inquiry. The theory of recollection in the *Meno*, then, functions primarily as a protreptic device, and should not be taken seriously as epistemology, or a response to Meno's so-called paradox. In claiming this, and arguing for it in what follows, I make no claims about the theory as it appears in a dialogue like the *Phaedo*. Rather I claim simply that no such epistemological status can be granted to it in the *Meno*.

II. Teaching Meno

Socrates famously offers an unconvincing "demonstration" of the theory of recollection by helping a slave boy "recollect" the solution to a geometrical problem. Even if the "demonstration" convinces Meno, it is important to note that the geometry problem is dis-analogous with the problem raised by Meno. Meno wants to know how it is possible to produce a method of inquiry regarding something that you do not know at all (*παράπαν*). What prompts Meno's question is the fact that both he and Socrates have confessed utter ignorance regarding the subject of inquiry. This is not the case with the slave boy, since Meno and Socrates both know the solution to the problem. If they did not, the demonstration would be ineffectual –Meno wouldn't know that the slave produced the right answer, and Socrates would be ineffectual, since he wouldn't ask the

² It has been suggested (i.e. Nehemas 1985: 9; Bluck 1961: 272; Sharples 1985: 143), that the *Euthydemus* raises same the paradox as the *Meno*, but the *Euthydemus* attempts to deal with who can learn, while the *Meno* is about the possibility of inquiry *carte blanche*.

questions necessary to guide the slave boy to a solution. Had Socrates demonstrated the theory of recollection by having the slave recollect a definition of virtue –that to which Meno and Socrates profess utter ignorance– we might be convinced, but that is precisely what Socrates cannot do, for indeed, how would they (or we) know if the slave arrived at the right answer? We of course must consider that Socrates is being ironic in his disavowal of knowledge, but on the face of it. If we ask whether the slave boy demonstration has shown how to inquire into something of which both interlocutors are ignorant, or if we ask whether recollection has been demonstrated, we get negative answers. But if we ask this question, “is Meno convinced by the demonstration?” the answer is yes. He is willing to continue the inquiry into virtue at this point (*Meno* 86c). As Desjardins observes:

When Meno originally posed his dilemma (with the denial of the possibility of learning carrying the implicit denial of the possibility of opinion, either true or false), it finally turned out to be not through conceptual argument that Socrates was able to convince him, but rather on empirical grounds. Through the practical demonstration with the slave boy, Socrates confronted him with an actual case of learning, that is to say, with the boy’s transition in actual practice from holding a false opinion to hold a true one. Whatever the initial plausibility of the theoretic dilemma, Meno found himself *persuaded* by confrontation with the facts. (In making his own transition from a false to a true opinion, Meno admits the persuasion: “What you say commends itself to me, Socrates, I do not know how”) (*Meno* 86b5).³

This is Socratic slight of hand with a noble purpose (cf. Weiss 2001: 64). Meno has neither sincere concern for the inquiry into virtue, nor much capacity for it. When driven to perplexity, he suggests that Socratic inquiry is impossible, and is ready to abandon the search. The theory of recollection restarts the stalled elenctic process. As I will show, Socrates offers caveats regarding the theory’s epistemological legitimacy. What this indicates is that the primary function of the theory, as it is presented in the *Meno*, is *protreptic* and hortatory, not epistemological.

It has long been acknowledged that Meno is a bad partner for inquiry because he is not particularly bright or co-operative. We can say that Meno is **1.** beguiled by poetic style, **2.** half-heartedly eristic, tending to misology, **3.** not good at subtle distinctions. I will omit a treatment of Meno’s lack of ability to grasp subtle distinctions, for this has been well rehearsed in a large body of literature (cf. Hoerber 1960: 88ff; Moline 1969: 153-61; Bluck 1961: 125). I will examine the first two characterizations of Meno before going on to suggest that all three explain why Socrates produces the theory of recollection as a specific to Meno’s attitude. It is quite surprising how easily scholars observe Meno’s laziness, yet at the same time tend to ignore the fact that Socrates characterizes the theory of recollection as a cure for the torpor that he has induced.

³ Desjardins 1990: 113; *ibid* 208 n. 8: “It will be remembered that the theory of recollection is introduced at this point in the dialogue to persuade Meno that inquiry is possible and worthwhile. Having achieved this purpose, Socrates pauses before going on, in order to warn Meno: “Most of the points I have made in support of my argument are not such as I can confidently assert; but that the belief in the duty of inquiring after what we do not know will make us better . . . this is a point for which I am determined to do battle...””

While the theory in its narrowest sense is implicitly said to be at best true belief, it is explicitly said to be propaedeutic and protreptic. My procedure is to assume that the theory of recollection is introduced precisely for the reason that Socrates says it is: it makes us energetic for inquiry and convinces us of the possibility of inquiry. Meno needs explicit exhortation before he can willingly inquire. The reason that the theory of recollection appeals to Meno is illustrated by the Socratic diagnostic elenchus, wherein we learn that Meno is attracted to the “high poetic style”.

1. The High Poetic Style: At *Meno* 75b, Socrates attempts to give a definition of figure, which he says is the only existing thing that is found always following color. Meno’s challenge is “well, what if I don’t know what color is?” to which Socrates responds, rather implicitly, that Meno is being eristic. Nonetheless he goes on to suggest, having had Meno admit to knowing what solids and terminations are, that figure is that which terminates or is the limit of a solid. Meno then asks about color again. Socrates’ approach this time is to appeal to something which Meno already knows, an Empedoclean account of sensation involving effluences that pass into the appropriate bodily orifices. Meno expresses satisfaction with this answer, to which Socrates replies:

Yes, for I expect that you find its terms familiar...It is an answer in the high poetic style, Meno, and so more agreeable to you than that about figure...But yet I think the [explanation of figure] was the better of the two; and I believe that you would also prefer it, if you were not compelled, as you were saying yesterday, to go away before the mysteries, and could stay a while and be initiated (*Meno* 76d-e).

It is no coincidence that when Socrates introduces the theory of recollection, what sparks Meno’s interest is the claim that it came from priests and priestesses, is replete with poetic verse worthy of Pindar and presented in what can only be termed “high poetic style”. The theory of recollection then is highly appropriate to Meno at a protreptic level. Meno gravitates to appeals to authority and pre-packaged presentation. He enthusiastically attempts to ascertain the source of the theory, almost breathlessly interrupting Socrates to ask “who said it.” Witness the poem of the theory at 81a:

MEN: What argument did they put forth?

SOC: To me it seemed true and fine.

MEN: What was this? And who were the speakers?

SOC: The speakers were priests and priestesses who have studied so as to give an account⁴ of what they practice; and Pindar also says it and many other poets who are divinely inspired. (*Meno* 81a-b, my trans.).

⁴ *περὶ ὧν μεταχειρίζονται λόγον οἷοις τ’εἶναι διδόναι.* Hence Wally Lamb’s translation “in order to give a reasoned account of their ministry” suggests that the theory is a *reasoned account*, which I think is an incorrect reading. For an important part of the demonstration with the slave centers around (causal reasoning) *aitias logismo* but that is not what is happening here. The divine men and women are giving only an *account* of what they propound. The myriad of nuances and meanings of the word *λόγος* in Greek is well known and need not be rehearsed here. cp. Grube: “to be able to give an account of their practices.” Day, “to be able

It is no accident that Socrates brings places the theory in the mouths of priests, and poets and Pindar. These kinds of authorities appeal to Meno, and will rejuvenate his interest in the inquiry after virtue (cf. Klein 1965: 94; Weiss 2001: 50-54; Nails 2002; Blondell 2002, *passim*; Robinson 1953: 1-2; Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* I,3).

2. Meno's Questions, Meno's Inferences, and the Sophistical Paradox:⁵ It has long been acknowledged that Meno is not particularly bright. Here we come to the heart of the beguiling nature of Meno's so-called paradox. Some have suggested that Meno's questions and Socrates' subsequent reformulation of his questions amount to the same thing (Phillips 1965: 77; White 1975: 290, n. 4; Seeskin 1987: 113, n.1; Nehemas 1985: 228. *pace* Weiss 2001: 52, 59); I claim that they are very different things, and that Socrates propounds a paradox that is incommensurate with the inferences of Meno's questions. Meno's inability to recognize this, and his refusal to really say "yes" or "no" when Socrates asks if he knows that his questions are eristic, result in the formulation of a sophistic paradox that *Socrates*, not Meno propounds. Meno's eristic lies not in what he tacitly embraces, but in *the half-hearted embracing of it*.

Strictly speaking Meno propounds no paradox, for the simple reason that a paradox must make a claim that conflicts with received opinion (such as "no man does wrong knowingly"), or a claim that asserts two opposing fundamental truths, or a claim that exhibits recalcitrance to classification (Cargile 1995: 642-44). A paradox must claim something that is *prima facie* puzzling. Meno makes no claims in what has been called his paradox -he only asks questions (Moline 1969: 159). His questions certainly do *infer* something, but not anything that is *prima facie* puzzling. If Meno's questions are to be understood as inferences, they must infer claims based on premises. In order to grasp what they infer, we must pay attention to the premises that give rise to them. Meno has confessed to having no knowledge of virtue. Socrates has confessed to the same. Socrates then suggests that he and Meno conduct a joint inquiry into its nature. Meno asks three questions, quite reasonably, and not at all paradoxically, regarding how Socrates proposes to do this (Moline 1969: 155; contra Shorey 1933: 157; Taylor 1948: 135; Guthrie 1956: 107; Bluck 1961: 8; Klein 1965: 1-2). The three questions Meno asks then, are the following (I will call these collectively **Meno's Questions (MQ)**):

MQ1. Socrates, since you say you know nothing at all (parapan) about virtue, how will you look for it?

MQ2. Socrates, since you say you know nothing at all about virtue, what will you identify as the object of your search?

MQ3. Socrates, since you say you know nothing at all about virtue, how will you conclude such a search?

to give an account of their practices," Guthrie, "to be able to account for he functions which they perform." Bluck remarks that this refers not to any unified organization, but "held certain *dogmata* and were ready to explain them." (Bluck 1961: 276).

⁵ I am deeply indebted to Jon Moline's article "Meno's Paradox?" for what follows. While I am not totally in agreement with Moline's conclusions, the observation that Meno propounds no paradox is certainly right and lamentably ignored by almost everyone.

These statements can be read for their illocutionary force as **Meno's Inferences (MI)**. In what follows the phrase “nothing at all” (*parapan*) shall be referred to as “the *parapan* clause”:⁶

MI1. Socrates cannot provide a method for inquiring into virtue, since he knows nothing at all (*parapan*) about it.

MI2. Socrates cannot provide an object to search for when looking for virtue since he knows nothing at all (*parapan*) about it.

MI3. Socrates cannot provide a criterion for concluding a search for virtue since he knows nothing at all (*parapan*) about it.

The Sophistical Paradox (SP)

Here is the paradox that Socrates propounds, asking Meno if he realizes that he is introducing it. This I will call **SP**:

SP1. It is impossible for anyone to inquire into what he knows since he already knows it and hence has no need to do so.

SP2. It is impossible for anyone to inquire into what he doesn't know because he doesn't know what to look for.

MI and SP are different. MI claims that *Socrates* cannot provide a method of inquiry or a method of concluding an inquiry into virtue, whereas SP claims that *all inquiry* is impossible for *everyone*. MI suggests the impossibility of producing a *method* of inquiry, whereas SP says that inquiry itself is impossible. MI does not say that inquiry is impossible. It merely claims that it is *impossible for Socrates to inquire after virtue*, because he in particular knows *nothing at all about virtue* (Weiss 2001: 156). Someone who knew *something* about virtue, or knew about virtue *in some fashion or other* might produce a method for inquiry into it, but Socrates has no such knowledge. SP claims that it is *impossible for anyone* to inquire into what one does not know. The theory of recollection, trading as it does on an ambiguity of knowing, responds to SP by saying that in a way you do know, but have merely forgotten. Because in a way you do know, it is possible to recover that knowledge. There is no room for this ambiguity in MI, precisely because of the *parapan* clause. The theory of recollection can only respond to SP, and it cannot respond to MI, since it depends on defining inquiry as recollection of something that you do know *in some fashion or other* (cf. Bluck 1961: 9). To refute MI Socrates would have to say that indeed there is nothing that in a way he does not know at all, but Socrates does not do this. In fact he has said that I have *no idea at all* what virtue is: “οὐδὲ αὐτό, τι ποτ' ἐστὶ τὸ παράπαν ἀρετῆ, τυγχάνω εἰδῶς” (71a) I do not happen to know at all (*parapan*) what virtue is. “καὶ ἑμαυτὸν καταμέμφομαι ὡς οὐκ εἰδῶς περὶ ἀρετῆς τὸ παράπαν” (71b). I reproach myself for not knowing about virtue at all (*parapan*). Moreover, whereas MI3 asks about how Socrates will *conclude* an inquiry into virtue, SP makes no mention of a method for concluding such an

⁶ Several commentators have claimed that the paradox founders on the “all or nothing” aspect of knowledge (cf. Cornford 1971; Moravcsik 1971: 53-69; Calvert 1974: 143-52; Weiss 2001: 56).

inquiry. It only refers to the *possibility* of inquiry (cf. Penner 1973: 35–68). While it is the case that the theory of recollection implies that recognition of something known but forgotten will conclude the inquiry, no method is given for ascertaining whether the recognition is correct. This in any case is ruled out by the *parapan* clause in MI3 (Scott 1987: 29; Weiss 2001: 53). The distinction between “possessing:” and “having” knowledge in the famous aviary analogy in the *Theatetus* (197c ff.) – ultimately abandoned because it offers no epistemological explanation for how we come to recognize the correct knowledge that we are seeking– does away with SP, but what is left over is MI3.

3. Meno's Half-Hearted Eristic: Socrates couches SP in the form of a question. Does Meno *know* that he is returning this sophistical paradox from exile?

SOC: Do you see what an *eristikon logon* you are dragging back from exile?⁷

MEN: Doesn't *that* argument seem well said to you Socrates?⁸

SOC: Not to me at any rate.

MEN: Why do you say so? (*Meno* 80e-81a, my trans.).

Socrates has already raised the question of eristic once, but charitably, if warily, proceeds on the assumption that Meno is not being so. In the previous instance, the appeal to the Empedoclean explanation of color in the high poetic style confirms Socrates' suspicion that Meno is not being intentionally eristic; he is simply beguiled by what he has heard before. Socrates is well aware that laziness can lead to eristic; that is why when Meno asks his questions (MQ), Socrates cannot help but point out that that his questions are suggestive of Sophistic eristic.

What Meno asks or infers is not itself eristic, but rather, given the context, completely justified. How will Socrates seek something of which he has just confessed complete ignorance?⁹ Because Meno does not realize that Socrates has reformulated his

⁷ “ὄραξ τοῦτον ὡς ἐριστικὸν λόγον κατὰγεις”

⁸ *that* – *houtos*. Plato here indicates the difference between what Meno asks and what Socrates (ostensibly) takes him to mean.

⁹ In the *Republic*, the city-soul analogy is famously introduced as one way into the unknown nature of justice, but there is no such methodology being suggested here; perhaps significantly, although space does not permit me to discuss it here, recollection is not taken up as an epistemological theory in the *Republic* at all. Desjardins argues convincingly that the epistemological progression in *Meno* maps neatly on to the divided line of Plato's *Republic* (Desjardins 1985: 279). However, implicit in Desjardins' argument is her wider approach, wherein “interpretation of a dialogue as a complex inquiry simultaneously addressing both participants and readers, what we are really witnessing in these cases is rather a question of contrast and interplay between the two levels, with the participants taking what is said in one way, and the reader taking it (or intended to take it) in another.” (Desjardins 1990: 137). This implies in part that the reader is aware of the wider body of Plato's work, and can make necessary connections between and among dialogues in order to determine Plato's true intentions. However, since we may say with some confidence that *Meno* does not have a copy of the *Republic* to hand nor, considering an uncontroversial composition ordering of the dialogues, do any of the *Meno*'s first readers – i.e. the *Republic* had not yet been written– we

questions as a sophistic paradox, but *is willing to take credit for the paradox anyway* (cp. White 1975: 290, n.4; Weiss 2001: 61, n. 28), Meno shows himself to be eristic in action if not in intention. That is, even though he has unintelligently hit upon a famous theory, he is willing to take credit for and employ it as if he arrived at it through intellectual means. The eristic is half-hearted because it was not willfully intended, nor explicitly embraced –Meno simply asks if the argument seems good or not. In short Meno's questions and his willingness to accept Socrates' reformulation of his inferences suggest that he is lazy more than that he is combative or particularly bright. Meno neither knows whether his questions are commensurate with SP or not, nor that MI3 cannot be refuted. If he had realized the latter, Socrates would be in real trouble, for nowhere in the *Meno* is any criterion for concluding an inquiry into virtue actually given (Weiss 2001: 61). In the slave boy demonstration, Socrates shows how he would proceed to help someone inquire into something that is known. Further, the method of hypothesis at the end of the *Meno* shows how one would proceed in cases where one does not know, but forming a hypothesis requires knowing *something* about the object of inquiry, and in SP, the *parapan* clause rules this out. Socrates does not answer the more important question (MQ3/MI3) of how one concludes such a search into virtue. Neither recollection nor hypothesis actually explain a method of concluding a sequence of causal reasoning (αἰτίας λογισμῶ), that which in this dialogue is identified with the process of recollection.

III. Protreptic and Caveats about Recollection

The ultimate test of Meno's ability to grasp subtle distinctions and his propensity to become eristic is his half hearted acceptance of Socrates' reformulation of the inferences of his questions. In response, Socrates offers Meno something of an intellectual *bonbon* –the theory of recollection presented in the high poetic style, attributed to priests, priestesses and poetic authority. That the attribution of the theory to priests and poets is intended as a caveat and a warning should be evident. One need not look beyond the *Meno* to find one of myriad examples in the Platonic corpus where poets and religious orators are said to be divinely inspired but lack αἰτίας λογισμῶ (cp. Weiss 2001: 66, n. 40). At *Meno* 99c-d virtuous politicians are said to be divinely inspired and similar to priests and poets who have no knowledge of what they say. The theory of recollection, because placed in the mouths of priests and poets, is introduced with a caveat, and concluded with a caveat about its lack of αἰτίας λογισμῶ. Here again is the initial proem:

MEN: What argument did they put forth?

SOC: To me it seemed true and fine.

MEN: What was this? And who were the speakers?

SOC: The speakers were priests and priestesses who have studied so as to give an account¹⁰ of what they practice; and Pindar also says it and many other poets who are divinely inspired. (*Meno* 81a-b).

While Socrates here says that the theory of recollection is true and fine, he has to mean that it is a true and fine *opinion*. When arguing that virtue cannot be taught, Socrates remarks that if it could, virtuous rulers like Themistocles and Pericles surely would have seen to the proper education of their sons. As their sons turned out not to be virtuous, it seems that virtue cannot be taught. These men ruled virtuously by good opinion (εὐδοξία), not by knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) (99b). Socrates says that these men have nothing more to do with φρόνησις than soothsayers and diviners, who speak truly about many things but have no knowledge of what they say (99c):

SOC: And may we, Meno, rightly call those men divine who, having no understanding, yet succeed in many a great deed and word?

MEN: Certainly.

SOC: Then we shall be right in calling those divine of whom we spoke just now as soothsayers and prophets and all of the poetic turn;¹¹ and especially we can say of the statesmen that they are divine and enraptured, and being inspired and possessed of God when they succeed in speaking many great things, while knowing naught of what they say. (99c-d Lamb).¹²

If recollection is opinion, not knowledge, it does not appear to be a solution to the epistemic problem raised by Meno, for in the *Meno* opinions are said to be unstable, unless tied down by causal reasoning. The demonstration with the slave boy is meant to give an example of this causal reasoning, and ends with Socrates' caveat that he will not insist on all of the details being exactly right. (86b) If the theory of recollection is good and fine, one may well ask what is it good and fine for? Socrates *does* give an explicit

¹⁰ περὶ ὧν μεταχειρίζονται λόγον οἷος τ'εἶναι διδόναι. Hence Wally Lamb's translation "in order to give a reasoned account of their ministry" suggests that the theory is a *reasoned account*, which I think is an incorrect reading. An important part of the "demonstration" with the slave centers around causal reasoning (*aitias logismo*) but that is not what is happening here. The divine men and women are giving only an *account* of what they propound. The myriad of nuances and meanings of the word λόγος in Greek is well known and need not be rehearsed here. cp. Grube: "to be able to give an account of their practices." Day, "to be able to give an account of their practices." Guthrie, "to be able to account for the functions which they perform." Bluck (1961: 276) remarks that this refers not to any unified organization, but "held certain *dogmata* and were ready to explain them."

¹¹ οἱ χρησμοδοὶ τε καὶ οἱ θεομάντιες. Hence there is here no Greek corresponding to "all those of the poetic turn, but χρησμοδοὶ implies reciting oracles in verse. Lamb almost makes it sound as though the reference is *directly* to those who say true things while inspired to refer to those who propounded the theory of recollection, but this would not be consistent with his rendering of "λόγον" at 81a as a *reasoned* account. Plato at many points, however remarks that poets have knowledge by divine inspiration. cf. *Apology* 22c, *Phaedrus* 244a, *Ion* 534.

¹² If the knowledge of soothsayers and those who pronounce oracles is such as can be true, but not knowledge, we should question the source of the theory of recollection that Socrates has placed in the mouths of priests and priestesses who are divinely inspired. It is good and fine *opinion*, but not *knowledge*.

account of what it is good and fine for, both after the statement of the theory of recollection, and after the ostensible demonstration of the process. It has protreptic or hortatory value. After the theory:

SOC: So we must not be persuaded by that eristic argument [τῷ ἐριστικῷ λόγῳ]; it would make us barren and is pleasing only to the hearing of the languid, whereas the other makes us capable of work and inquiry. (*Meno* 81d, my trans)¹³

After the “demonstration”:

SOC: Most of the points I have made in support of my argument are not such as I can confidently assert; but that the belief in the duty of inquiring after what we do not know will make us braver and better and less helpless than the notion that *there is not even a possibility of discovering what we do not know*, nor any duty of enquiring after it – this is a point for which I am determined to do battle, so far as I am able, both in word and deed [καὶ λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ]. (*Meno* 86b-c, Lamb trans., *my italics*).

Following both the presentation of the theory, and the “demonstration” of it with the slave boy, Socrates indicates that the theory has *protreptic* value, that is, it inspires us not to give in to the sophistical *eristikon logon*. Both the caveat about the details of the demonstration, and the placing of the theory into the mouths of those who can only be said to have true opinion, not knowledge, suggest that this is not an epistemic position, but a protreptic one. If the argument is to have epistemic force, it must explain not merely *the possibility of knowledge*, but *a method whereby* knowledge is obtained. Because the details of the theory of recollection as presented in the *Meno* are not such as to be certain, the latter is not provided. What the concluding caveats indicate is what we are supposed to learn from the theory of recollection, namely that inquiry is possible. The possibility of inquiry is the problem of the eristic SP, and is thus refuted -if recollection is possible then inquiry is possible. However recollection must be understood only as an image, an analogy, but not itself a real epistemology. If possible, then we are implicitly exhorted to seek it. Socrates makes this exhortation explicit in the caveats themselves. The impossibility of Socrates’ having a criterion of concluding an inquiry is the problem of MI3, which suggests that Socrates cannot conclude a search for virtue. No method for concluding an inquiry is presented in the theory of recollection. All that is presented is the hypothetical statement that if someone could recollect one piece of previously acquired knowledge, one could remember all previously acquired knowledge. The slave boy “demonstration,” again, is dis-analogous, and in any case provides no criterion for concluding an inquiry. This too is implicit protreptic. We want to find a way to conclude the inquiry. But that is not Socrates’ purpose in employing it in the *Meno*. Meno needs to believe that inquiry is possible and desirable before he can begin. The theory of recollection explicitly provides precisely that possibility and desideratum, but not its certainty or an explanation of how knowledge is obtained.

¹³ barren = ἀργούς, languid = μαλακοῖς; both are pastoral images of husbandry. Socrates, who in the *Theaetetus* puts himself forth as a barren midwife, meant to bring forth intellectual births, here exhorts Meno to cultivate his garden.

Platon'un *Menon*'unda Paradoks ve Protreptik

Menon diyalogu *anamnesis* kuramının statüsü de dahil olmak üzere bir dizi bulmaca ve problem içerir. Bu makale hem *anamnesis* kuramını hem de "Menon'un Paradoksu"nu epistemolojik meseleler olarak değil, tartışmalı ve protreptik sorunlar olarak ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Menon'un *anamnesis* kuramını kullanmasının asıl amacının Sokrates'in kuramı çerçevelemek için kullandığı örtük ve açık ikazlarda bulunabileceğini öneriyorum. *Anamnesis* kuramını ispat edilmiş veya kanıtlanmış olarak benimseyemeyeceğimizi gösteren bu ikazlar sonuç olarak Sokrates'in *anamnesis* kuramının *protreptik* bir role sahip olduğunu hakkındaki iddialarının kesinliğini yorumlamayı haklı kılmaktadır. Bu yazı üç bölümden oluşmaktadır. Birinci bölüm genel olarak dördüncü yüzyılın edebi bir türü ve bunun Platon'daki kullanımı olarak felsefi protreptiğin doğası üzerine bazı ön yorumları sunmaktadır. İkinci bölüm Sokrates ve Menon'un yüz yüze kaldığı problemleri çözmek için kullanılan *anamnesis* kuramını 'ispatlamak' için kullanılan geometriyi, erdeme dair soruşturma probleminden ayırt eder. Bu iki problemin kıyas götürmez olduğunu gösteriyorum. Ayrıca, Menon karakterinin belirli bir iknaya elverişli olduğunu, Sokrates'in Menon'un felsefi soruşturmaya dair sorularını nasıl karmaşık bir paradoksa dönüştürdüğünü ve bir çözüm olarak *anamnesis* kuramını önerdiğini tartışıyorum. Son olarak, üçüncü bölüm Platon'un *Menon*'da *anamnesis* kuramını ciddi bir epistemoloji olarak kabul etmemize dair çeşitli ikaz ve uyarılar sunduğuna ilişkin kanıtlar sunmaktadır; bu da Platon'un *anamnesis* kuramını *Menon*'da *protreptik* bir araç olarak kullanmasının birincil amacının Menon'u felsefi sorgulama yolunda tutmak anlamına geldiği sonucuna götürmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Antik Yunan Felsefesi, Platon, Menon, Epistemoloji, Protreptik.

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