

Mind and Meaning in Plato's *Meno*: The Importance of Intentional Objects in Understanding Belief and Knowledge

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Regardless of whether we are to read the corpus of Plato's work as the progressive revelation of a unified body of teaching, or whether we are to find the unity of the corpus chiefly in its author's devotion to a set of questions and not to a single set of answers, we must understand that each of Plato's dialogues is to be read as an intentional and orderly arrangement of thoughts. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates expresses this concern for intentional and orderly arrangement when he argues that "Every speech must be put together like a living creature, with a body of its own; it must be neither without head nor without legs; and it must have a middle and extremities that are fitting both to one another and the the whole work."¹ Thus, we should expect to find within a dialogue the material at hand to interpret and elucidate difficult passages contained.

In this paper, my project is to consider the distinction between knowledge and true belief, which Socrates proposes in the *Meno* with some fanfare, in light of passages which make way for this distinction but which have not been properly used to understand the claims Socrates is putting forth when he directly speaks of the relationship between knowledge and belief. I shall argue that Socrates' account of cognition is such that beliefs play the role of intentional-objects, akin to the role Fregean senses play in propositional attitudes, and that knowledge entails both mental awareness of the intentional-object known (be it a particular term, a proposition, or something else) and an actual matching or correspondence between this intentional-object and the entities which we suppose it to denote (if a singular entity) or which we suppose fall under it (if a quality or general term).²

In support of this thesis, I shall show how Socrates makes use of intensional-entities (or objects of thought) when he argues that no one desires what is bad. Second, I shall explain how Meno's Paradox—the problem of inquiry—can be

¹264c5–8, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff. In *Plato: The Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Hackett: 1997).

²The comparison of Plato's view to Frege's does not extend to the ontology of meaning—I have nothing to say about Plato's view of where the intensional-entity resides or to what it attaches. But I do mean to argue that like Frege, Socrates believes that within an intensional context a name stands for an intensional-entity, rather than its extension.

best explained as the paradox which arises if inquiry is an intentional state in which we are ignorant of the mental object which (on his view) stands between us and the world. Third, I shall note the distinction Socrates makes between the habitual thought (e.g. hearsay) and intentional thought. I shall then turn to examining the explicit demonstration of recollection—Socrates' discussion with the slave boy—in order to show the roles played by intentional-entities and intentional thought in distinguishing knowledge and true belief. I shall take a look at prominent interpretations of recollection, showing these to be unsatisfactory, and in turn present a reading of the problem of inquiry and the doctrine of recollection based on the role of intentional-entities and the distinction between intentional and habitual thought. Thus, I argue that Plato distinguishes knowledge and true belief in the *Meno* as different mental states: knowledge of a thing entails awareness of the intentional-object known (be it a particular or an abstract entity), while true belief does not entail such awareness.

Before diving in, an introduction to the relevant passages is appropriate. The prime passage (and the passage which best introduces our puzzle) is 97a3–98a10, where Socrates comes to realize that he and Meno were in error to suppose that knowledge is necessary for guiding correct action. In its place, Socrates proposes correct belief as a possible guide, explaining the difference between this and knowledge as the difference between the state of a man who has correct belief about the way to a place but had not himself been, and the state of a man who has knowledge of the way to a place (and presumably has himself travelled this way, if we are to make the contrast complete). Both the knower and the one with correct beliefs can guide others (or themselves), but true opinions are not tied down like knowledge. Socrates explains that knowledge has been tied down by an account, and that the process of tying down is the same as recollection. What exactly does Plato have in mind? Is tying down equivalent to epistemic justification? Or is it justification plus some additional condition?

To answer these questions, I turn to the text where recollection is demonstrated: 82a8–86b5. The brief discussion here between Socrates and the slave boy—where Socrates leads an inquiry after the square with a figure twice the area of another—itself requires context in order to see the essential components of this process. Is recollection a method of deductive inference? Is it a type of intuitive insight? And why is prior sight of all things (and the corresponding collection of innate ideas) necessary? To make sense of all this, we should ask how recollection, and the innate beliefs which are recollection, function as a response to Meno's Paradox (80d5–e5).

Still we have not reached the end, for it remains to locate the problem of Meno's Paradox. It seems that everyday we discover things we did not formerly know—what does Meno have in mind when he challenges this common experience? The answer to this question lies, I believe, in the argument put forth by Socrates and strongly affirmed by Meno that all men desire what is good.

1 Intentional-Objects

After many failed attempts, Meno puts forth a more hopeful prospect for defining virtue: “to find joy in beautiful things and have power.”³ But very quickly Socrates somehow persuades Meno that this definition also fails, for “The desiring part of this statement is common to everybody, and one man is no better than another in this.”⁴ How does Socrates argue this initially unintuitive claim?

Let me try to make his argument explicit. The argument has two parts. The first is concerning those who “believe the bad things to be good,” the second concerns those who “know they [the bad things] are bad and nevertheless desire them.”⁵

In order to make Socrates’ argument easier to follow, I’m going to make the argument about a specific person and a specific desire. Let’s take Tom to stand in for those people who believe that bad things benefit them, and say that Tom desires to be dishonest about his taxes (and we will assume that being dishonest about one’s taxes is, in every circumstance, bad).

- (0) Tom desires that *Tom be dishonest about Tom’s taxes* and Tom believes that *Tom being dishonest about Tom’s taxes* is good.
- (1) If Tom believes that *Tom being dishonest about Tom’s taxes* is good, then Tom does not know that *Tom being dishonest about Tom’s taxes* is bad.

The next step in the argument is more philosophically interesting:

- (2) If Tom desires that *Tom be dishonest about Tom’s taxes* and Tom does not know that *Tom being dishonest about Tom’s taxes* is bad, then it not appropriate to describe Tom’s desire that *Tom be dishonest about Tom’s taxes* by asserting ‘Tom desires something bad’.⁶

We can infer from Socrates’ acceptance of statements like (2) that for Socrates there is a difference between statements in the form

‘Tom desiring something bad’

(where the attribute *bad* is within the intensional context), and statements in the form

‘Tom desires something and that thing is bad’

³77b, trans. G.M.A. Grube. In *Plato: The Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Hackett: 1997). All subsequent quotations from the *Meno* are taken from this translation.

⁴78b4–6.

⁵77c3–5.

⁶Socrates: “It is clear then that those who do not know things to be bad do not desire what is bad...” (77d7–e1). Since I am presenting a form of Socrates’ argument with a specific desire, rather than the open-ended class of ‘bad things’, it is necessary that we limit ‘do not desire what is bad’ to this specific case (we can only say that in this case, Tom does not desire something bad).

where the attribute is outside the intensional context (although clearly Socrates would not describe the difference in those terms). Further, premise (2) suggests that (barring a reason for holding *bad* to be unique in this respect) if an agent is unaware that what they desire has a certain attribute, then that attribute does not enter into the intensional context when we make statements about the desire.

Conversely, Socrates has something to say about attributes which the agent does believe (in some way) are held by the desired object. He starts with the fairly safe claim that:

- (3) If Tom desires that *Tom be dishonest about Tom's taxes* and Tom believes that *Tom being dishonest about Tom's taxes* is good, then there is something Tom desires such that Tom believes that this thing is good.⁷

The conclusion which follows from (0)–(3) is:

- (4) There is something Tom desires such that Tom believes that this thing is good.

But this is not the conclusion Socrates takes from the argument. He claims:

- (4*) Tom desires something good.⁸

So to understand Socrates' argument, we need to make his assumed premise explicit. A suitable form of the implied premise must close the gap between Tom's belief about what he desires, and what we can assert about what Tom desires. Thus, something like this would be suitable:

- (5) If there is something Tom desires such that Tom believes that this thing is good, then it is true to assert that Tom desires something good.

Why does Socrates believe something like (5)? We could think that Socrates takes (5) as an assumption because he believes the formula:

- (D) For any person S and any property P, if there is something S desires such that S believes that this thing has the property P, then it is true to assert that S that desires something P.

The problem with (D) is that it goes too far to be taken for granted as an assumption. Suppose for instance that Tom believes he should go to the dentist and have a tooth pulled, because Tom believes that this would reduce his future pain. But Tom is also aware that going to the dentist and having his tooth pulled will cause him some pain in the more immediate future. Would it be right to say that Tom desires something painful, because he desires to have his tooth pulled, and believes that having his tooth pulled will cause some pain? Possibly; but it seems much more appropriate to say that Tom desires something which will reduce his pain.

⁷"...but they desire those things that they believe to be good..." (e1-2).

⁸"It follow that [they]...desire good things" (e2-3).

Is there a generalization of (5) which is more acceptable? What we need is something to demarcate those attributes which are relevant to the intensional context of the desire. The most obvious class of relevant attributes are those attributes which supply motivation for the desire. Thus, a more plausible substitute for (D) is:

- (D*) For any person S and any property P, if there is something that S believes has the property P, and S desires this thing because it has property P, then it is true to assert that S desires something P.

According to the argument which Socrates puts forth, when Tom desires to cheat on his taxes, we would be correct to say ‘Tom desires something good’ and wrong to say ‘Tom desires something bad,’ even though it is bad to cheat on one’s taxes. This claim becomes interesting when we consider desire as an intentional state—an intentional state which is of something. What is Tom’s desire of?

We could say that the object of Tom’s desire is the action ‘being dishonest on Tom’s taxes,’ on the principal that:

- (OD) For any agent S and any desire P, if it is true to assert that ‘S desires P,’ then P is the object of S’s desire.

But this becomes problematic when we remember that we have also been led to assert that ‘Tom desires something good.’ According to (OD), we would conclude that the object of Tom’s desire is (also) something good. Since (as we have granted for the sake of the illustration) the action of being dishonest about one’s taxes is never good, either Tom’s desire has two (conflicting) objects, or (OD) is false. I take the second disjunct as the more plausible, thus unless we can find some non-arbitrary modification of (OD) which would entail that the action of being dishonest on Tom’s taxes is the object of Tom’s desire, and at the same time not entail that something good is the object of this same desire, I believe we are compelled to look for some other way of discovering the object of Tom’s desire.

If we go back to (D*), we see that for Socrates, it is the beliefs motivating a desire which are especially relevant for describing the desire. I propose that for Socrates, in place of (OD), something closer to the following is true:

- (OD*) For any agent S and any desire P, the object of S’s desire of P is whatever S has in mind in so far as he desires P.

This thing which Tom has in mind is not the object which Tom believes he has in mind—namely, the action of being dishonest on his taxes—since this action has different attributes—namely, being bad—than the attributes which Tom has in mind—being desirable (which Socrates takes to imply being good). And since we granted that the action of being dishonest on one’s taxes is necessarily not good, we cannot say that Tom has in mind some possible counterpart of the action, differing from the actual action of being dishonest on one’s taxes only by being good instead of bad. If the object of Tom’s desire is not an action,

whatever Tom has in mind must be just that: an object in Tom's mind. I shall call this object of desire which resides in Tom's mind an 'intentional-object' (since we have defined it as the object of the intentional state of desire).⁹

This takes care of the first part of Socrates' argument. Socrates has argued that if someone desires something bad and believes that this thing is good, then in truth we should say that the person desires something good. Now, in the second part of Socrates' argument, he considers the possibility of someone desiring what is bad and believing that this thing is bad. By arguing (i) that someone who believes that what they desire is good in fact desires what is good, and (ii) that no one desires what they believe is bad, Socrates is able to conclude that no one desires what is bad.¹⁰

- (6) If someone desires something bad and this person believes that having a bad thing will harm him, then this person knows that he will be harmed this thing.¹¹
- (7) Everyone who is harmed is miserable and unhappy to the extent that he is harmed.¹²

Of special interest is the premise:

- (8) No one desires to be miserable and unhappy.¹³

For of course on the standard view of desire, people do desire things which will make them miserable and unhappy. As Socrates and Meno have both accepted something like (OD*), they hold that for someone to desire to be miserable and unhappy, it must appear before his mind when he desires that something that it will make him miserable and unhappy, and choose to pursue the object for these qualities. And on that view of desire, exceptions to (8) are much harder to come by. Having put forth (8), Socrates is free to conclude that:

- (9) No one desires what is bad and believes that this thing is bad.

⁹Admittedly, this use of 'intentional-object' is somewhat idiosyncratic, as I use it to specifically designate the intensional entities which function as objects of intentional states. On the reading of Plato I am here arguing for, only intensional entities should be taken as the objects of intentional states.

¹⁰It's worth noting that Socrates argument rests on the premise that these two cases—believing that something is good, and believing that something is bad—are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive. This in itself is a dubious assumption. I suggest that Socrates assumes something can be on the whole good or not good, and also assumes that to be bad is to fail to be good. From these, it would follow that goodness (on the whole) and badness (on the whole) are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive attributes of a thing. Further, it appears that Socrates believes one cannot have a desire without also having a belief (of some sort) about whether or not that thing is good, especially as Socrates appears to equate believing something to be desirable and believing it to be good.

¹¹Socrates: "those who desire bad things, believing that bad things harm their possessor, know that they will be harmed by them" (77e5-7).

¹²78a1-3.

¹³77a4-5. Plato here switches from using ἐπιθυμεῖν, usually translated 'desire', to βούλειν, which is usually translated 'wish'. I do not see a relevant difference, so I will continue to translate both words as 'desire'.

Bringing both parts of the argument together, Socrates concludes that:

(10) No one desires what is bad.

Socrates advances the thesis expressed in (10) in order to counter Meno's suggestion that good desire is part of virtue: for if no one desires what is bad, then virtuous people are no better in what they desire than people who are not virtuous. But of course, virtuous people do pursue different goals than unvirtuous people. How might Socrates respond?

In analyzing cases of bad or 'mistaken' desire, we have a choice in where to locate the mistake. One could say: when there is something undesirable and Person S claims to desire this thing, they are *mistaken to desire this thing*, and this mistaken desire rests on a mistake in their grounds for desiring the thing (namely, the belief that this thing is something else which is desirable). If we followed this account of mistaken desire, we would say that people do desire certain specific objects which happen to be bad, and people are wrong, perhaps foolish and shortsighted, to desire these specific objects. On this view, people do not (necessarily) make mistakes when they claim to have certain desires; they are wrong in having (some of) the desires which they correctly claim to have.¹⁴ This is not the approach taken by Socrates.

According to Socrates' analysis of desire, the object of desire is a mental object, not an action or external good. People do claim to desire certain things which are not beneficial to them, and act as if they desire these things: they attempt to obtain things which are not beneficial to them, they anticipate pleasure in obtaining those things, and may have a feeling of satisfaction if they do obtain those things. Nonetheless, according to Socrates, it is not correct to say that people desire these things. For on Socrates' analysis of desire, someone who believes that he desires P, but in fact he desires Q, wrongly believes that P is a Q, and so wrongly infers (either consciously or unconsciously) that he thus desire P. On the model of desire in keeping with (D*), it is quite possible for people to be incorrect when they claim that the desire something; in fact, this may happen often.

Thus again we see that central to Socrates thesis about desire is the belief that the object of desire is not the action or external good which someone believes that they desire, and further, that just because Socrates believes that the object of desire is a mental object does not mean that he takes our beliefs about the mental object to be incorrigible, as we frequently are mistaken in our attempt to correspond the intentional-object of desire with specific external goods or actions.

If Socrates makes use of intentional-objects for desire, as I have attempted to demonstrate, it is likely that he makes use of intentional-objects when he considers other intentional-states: believing P, knowing P, etc. Just as no one desires what is bad, even though people do act upon desires as if the bad things

¹⁴This is not to say that people cannot on this view be mistaken when the claim to have certain desires, or that they are not frequently mistaken in making such claims; rather, it is to say that it *is* possible for someone to be stating a correct proposition when they claim that they desire something bad.

were desired, so Socrates could say (for instance) that no one believes what is false, even though people do act as if they did believe certain propositions which are false. Intentional-states, like believing, knowing and desiring, take mental objects as their objects.

2 Meno's Paradox

If Socrates makes use of intentional-objects to explain desire in the *Meno*, as I have argued, then we have some justification for reading intentional-objects into other discussions in the *Meno*, especially in cases where such a reading illuminates an otherwise obscure passage. We should expect Plato to provide the material necessary to interpret the dialogue, and I intend to show that intentional-objects are an important though overlooked part of this material.

Shortly after Socrates has refuted Meno's latest attempt to define virtue (as we saw above), Socrates asks once more what virtue is. But this time, Meno does not attempt to answer. Instead, he complains that though he could once give good speeches concerning virtue, now Socrates has made him unable to give a good answer. Socrates, Meno claims, has driven away knowledge. Perhaps now that Socrates has brought Meno to admit defeat, Socrates will be willing to prove how wise his own definition is. But Socrates does not do this, for he himself does not know "what virtue is."¹⁵ Given our prior elucidation of intentional states, how are we to understand this ignorance? Let us suppose that knowing is an intentional state analogous to desiring. Then, just as desiring x is to have x as the intentional-object of desire, so to know x is to have x as the intentional-object of knowledge. Contrawise, if a person does not know x , then he does not know the intentional-object x : to be ignorant of x is to be unacquainted with the intentional-object x .

There is though another way to be ignorant of x , not analogous to the errors possible in desiring. If a person is aware of the intentional object x with the mental state appropriate to knowledge yet believes that x is y , where x is not identical to y , then he does not know x . Similarly, if he believes that x has property p , where p is incompatible with the essential properties of x , then he does not know x . Socrates in fact implies as much when he slips into referring to the people who desire things which are bad as "those who have no knowledge of these things and believe them to be good," thus taking it for granted that believing bad things to be good entails having no knowledge of these things.¹⁶ Having in mind the intentional-objects corresponding to one's notions of 'bad', 'beneficial', and 'being dishonest on Tom's taxes' is not sufficient for having knowledge that being dishonest on Tom's taxes is bad.

In the case of desiring, the specific objects which were supposed to correspond to the intentional-object were accidental to the intentional-state, such that Socrates would describe people who desire different objects as all desiring what is good. The specific objects which correspond to the intentional-objects of

¹⁵80d1.

¹⁶77e2-3.

knowledge are essential to knowledge. If two people have the same intentional-object before their minds, yet these two people happen to be situated such that the belief one person has is true while that of the other is false, then we would not say that these people equally have knowledge, even though their mental states are identical. It is not appropriate to treat knowledge as merely a mental state (consisting of an intentional-state and intentional-objects within the mind), as we could with desire. For this reason, knowledge requires a more sophisticated analysis. Knowledge takes three terms: the intentional-state, the intentional-object which the knower has in mind, and the external object which corresponds to the intentional-object. So, if someone knows what virtue is, it is necessary that (i) he is aware of an intentional-object of what he supposes virtue to be and that (ii) this intentional-object appropriate corresponds to what virtue in fact is.

Returning to the text of *Meno*, we can now see the grounds both for Meno's paradox and for its solution. If we take not knowing x to be analogous to not desiring x , where x is the intentional-object, then we can see why Meno finds inquiry paradoxical. Someone who does not have the intention-object x cannot be in any intentional state requiring x : he cannot desire x , believe x , know x . And if we take inquiring to be the intentional state of looking for x , then inquiry is likewise ruled out. As Meno says: "How will you look for it, Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know?"¹⁷ The problem Meno rightly sees is the paradox of the intentional state of inquiry: inquiry cannot have the same intentional-object which we are inquiring after, and if it is this intention-object of which we are ignorant, then the knowledge we lack cannot be gained by inquiry.

Meno's paradox comes about if: to not know x is to lack the intentional-object x , and inquiring for x is an intentional state with x as its intentional-object being sought. In order to resolve this paradox, the following possibilities lie open:

- A. To not know x is to lack the intentional-object x , but
 - a. inquiry for x is not an intention state, or
 - b. inquiry for x is an intention state with a different intentional-object.
- B. To not know x is to have (does not exclude having) the intentional-object x , but to lack some other requirement of knowledge, such as
 - a. correct belief about the object(s) corresponding to x , or
 - b. the mental state of knowing, with x as its intentional-object.

Already in (2), Socrates has noted that one way to not know something is by having incorrect beliefs about this thing's identity. Thus, it is open for Socrates

¹⁷80d5–8.

to avoid (A) and follow (B). To see which method Socrates chooses for resolving Meno's paradox, we must examine his response: the doctrine of recollection, and the demonstration of recollection with Meno's slave boy.

3 Intention and Habit

Just as Meno's failed attempt to define virtue brought out the distinction between intentional-objects and the specific things we often take to be the objects of desire, so another of Meno's mistakes brings out another important distinction. The passage I have in mind falls directly between Meno's paradox and the demonstration of recollection:

MENO: Yes, Socrates, but how do you mean that we do not learn, but that what we call learning is recollection? Can you teach me that this is so?

SOCRATES: As I said just now, Meno, you are a rascal. You now ask me if I can teach you, when I say there is no teaching but recollection, in order to show me at once as contradicting myself.

MENO: No, by Zeus, Socrates, that was not my intention when I spoke, but just a habit. If you can somehow show me that things are as you say, please do so.¹⁸

Before we can understand recollection, it is important to see what this mistake is, and why Meno makes it.

Throughout the dialogue, Meno has a weakness for what might be called hearsay. He is a follower of Gorgias, and is surprised when Socrates disclaims knowledge of what virtue is, for does not Socrates remember what Gorgias said? Socrates disclaims recollection of what Gorgias said, but invites Meno to answer the question on his own, leaving "Gorgias out of it, since he is not here."¹⁹ Again, when Socrates mentions, replying to Meno's paradox, that he heard "both true and beautiful" things from "wise men and women," Meno displays an interest in knowing both "What was it, and who were they?"²⁰ As Klein notes, Meno "seems to sense an opportunity to add something 'new' to the treasures of his vast storehouse, his memory."²¹ Meno is the sort of person who naturally drops names while quoting the wise words of others.

The problem with hearsay is that it often comes without understanding. One of Meno's weaknesses—and is it not a weakness we all share?—is speaking without understanding. After Socrates states "that what we call learning is recollection," Meno nonetheless asks to learn (and to learn this) from Socrates. Socrates assumes that this request is intentional, that Meno has in mind both

¹⁸81e3–82e6.

¹⁹71c8–d8.

²⁰81e9.

²¹Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (University of Chicago:1998), p. 94.

Socrates' statement and the significance of his request to be taught, and so Meno intends to involve Socrates in another contradiction. But Socrates is wrong to suspect Meno in this case. Meno has no such intention. He is not thinking about what he is saying. Meno explains the confusion by saying: "that was not my intention when I spoke, but just a habit."

How are we to understand Meno's ability to speak without intention, out of habit? While Plato draws attention to the distinction between speaking out of habit and speaking with understanding, he does not pause to explain the mental states behind these acts. I must therefore beg pardon for doing something Plato refrains (perhaps wisely) from here doing, and attempt to explain how this corresponds to our previous discussion of intentional states.

Characteristic of Socrates is his requirement that those speaking with him say what they themselves believe: speech should follow belief.²² If someone is speaking according to his beliefs, then he has intentional states and intentional-objects which appropriately correspond to the propositions he puts forth in speech. But surely it is possible to state propositions without these mental states and intentional objects. This, I suspect, is what it means to speak without intention, out of habit. Similarly, it is possible to act as if one believed a certain proposition, without having that proposition before the mind, or to act as if one desired an object, without ever considering an intentional-object of desire.

Often, we speak without having the appropriate intentional-objects before our mind. In doing so, we speak out of habit. Since habit can lead to identical actions as would be caused by the appropriate intentional state, the state bringing about action is often denoted by the name for the appropriate intentional state. When someone asserts a proposition, we say that he believes this proposition (assuming that he is not lying). When someone arranges his actions in order to gain possession of some object, we say that he desires this object. Habitual states, without intentional-objects, are common substitutes for intentional-states.

4 Recollection

After a discussion with Meno's slave, intended to demonstrate recollection to Meno, Socrates makes the following claims:

- i. The "man who does not know has within himself true opinions about the things that he does not know."²³
- ii. In recollection, these true beliefs which are held within are "stirred up" in such a way that if someone "were repeatedly asked these same questions in

²²E.g. "Let us leave Gorgias out of it, since he is not here. But Meno, by the gods, what do you yourself say that virtue is?" (71d4-5). Vlastos views "the 'say what you believe' constraint" as the second requirement Socrates places on the *elenchus* (Gregory Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus" in *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays*, vol. 1: Metaphysics and Epistemology, ed. Gregory Vlastos (Notre Dame: 1978), p. 44).

²³85c6-7. Note that belief and opinion are translations of the same Greek word $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$.

various ways, you know that in the end his knowledge about these things would be as accurate as anyone's."²⁴

iii. Recollection is "finding knowledge within oneself."²⁵

Recollection is intended to answer Meno's challenge to inquiry, so it is understandable that Socrates identifies recollection as a sort of finding (in iii). Numerous attempts have been made to state that in which this 'finding within oneself' consists. Socrates explains the process as one in which the beliefs within us are made manifest through questions (in ii). This implies that there are beliefs within the soul waiting to be 'stirred up' (in i). Still, all of this remains somewhat figurative. Let us see if we can find a more precise way of stating what happens in recollection.

A lot of thoughts and words have been put forth concerning recollection. In "Anemnesis in New Dress," Thomas brings together some of the major views. He starts with the "mythical-religious view," which attempts to explain how we now acquire knowledge by claiming that we acquired it before birth.²⁶ As Thomas rightly points out, this fails as a response to Meno, since it does not show how it is possible to acquire knowledge in the first place. Cherniss "introduces a sophistication of the mythical-religious view," claiming that it is both necessary to posit this knowledge in order to explain the knowledge we now acquire and possible to acquire knowledge before birth on account of "(a) the distinct mode of its acquisition (direct intuition), and (b) the special nature of intuition's objects (Platonic *eidê*)."²⁷ According to Thomas, Cherniss fails to address Meno's paradox of inquiry; Cherniss does not explain how gaining knowledge is possible, instead claiming that Socrates does have knowledge of virtue, knowledge which must be recollected.²⁸ Like Thomas, I am unsatisfied with this 'solution' to Meno's paradox. I take it that when Socrates disclaims knowledge of what virtue is, he speaks accurately. To successfully address Meno's paradox, and to allow Socrates to inquire into the nature of virtue even though he is ignorant of what virtue is, recollection must allow knowledge to be gained.

Also unsatisfactory is the account of recollection as proof that someone "can extend the knowledge he already has," introduced by Thomas and present as Vlastos' view of "Anamnesis as *Inference*."²⁹ Vlastos' position, quoted by Thomas, is that

By 'the truth of all things being always in the soul' (*Men.* 86B 1–2) and 'knowledge and right reason being in' us (*Phdo.* 73A 9–10, ...) Plato can only mean that all men have (i) some (not, all) knowledge, (ii) the ability to make correct judgments (=to perceive logical relations) and, therefore, (iii) the ability to extend their knowledge (by

²⁴85c9–d1.

²⁵85d6–7

²⁶J.E. Thomas, *The New Scholasticism* 51 (1977), p. 329.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 330–331.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 331.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 333.

persevering in inquiry) without any pre-assigned limit (81D 2–4).³⁰

While certainly an interesting account of how we might acquire certain articles of knowledge, Vlastos' view fails to properly account for the presentation of recollection by Plato in the *Meno*. First, if Plato considers recollection as a method of deductive inference, why is the demonstration of recollection not carried out in this form? Plato could simply produce a list of known premises, then show the conclusions which follow from these premises, and end with a q.e.d.—knowledge can be acquired. Instead, he gives us a dialogue with a faulty interlocutor, even drawing attention to the slave boy's realization of his own ignorance as a stage in the process of recollection.³¹ Further, Socrates does not say that we have knowledge already, and that it is from these known truths we can deduce others. He does say that we have true opinions (or beliefs) within ourselves. To confuse innate beliefs with innate knowledge is to misunderstand the very difference between knowledge and belief, namely, the change brought about by the process of recollection.

Another approach to explaining recollection is to look at the problem of inquiry as the problem of verifying a specification of an object or meaning of a term. Thomas explains that Hare “distinguishes between the ability to use a term, and the ability to offer a satisfactory definition of it.”³² For Hare, in recollection we move from grasping the meaning of a term, remembering the words and concepts which “we learned at our mother's knees,” to stating the “meaning” or “analysis.”³³ Similarly, White takes inquiry to be the process of verifying a specification.³⁴ On this reading, inquiry is problematic if the inquirer “is said to need to examine the object to see whether his specification actually fits it...because the possibility is left open that his specification is incorrect.”³⁵ More directly, the problem of inquiry comes about if we conclude our inquiry as successful when we come across the object which matches our specification, for if our specification is incorrect, then this object is not in fact what we intended to search for.

While the approach of Hare and White—focusing on meanings and specifications—provides an interesting conceptual framework, this approach fails to explain how recollection is a satisfactory solution to the problem of inquiry. White himself argues this, “that the claim that we recollect, as Plato uses it, cannot, by itself, solve his paradox.”³⁶ For White, the problem of inquiry only appears to go away when recollection is introduced, but resurfaces immediately. We need some way to determine if we have successfully recollected something—perhaps we thought we were recollecting true opinion, but we end up recollecting a false opinion. Just as we needed a specification for successful inquiry, so we need one for recollection; just as we could err in our specification of inquiry, so we can

³⁰Vlastos, “Anamnesis in the *Meno*,” p. 153 n. 14, quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 333–334.

³¹*Meno*, 84a1–b1.

³²Thomas, p. 337.

³³*Ibid.*, 338.

³⁴Nicholas P. White, “Inquiry,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 28 (1974), p. 292.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 294.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 305.

err in recollection. The problem remains. Similarly, Hare fails to explain how we sort out our true and false notions about the meaning of some term, unless we already know that the meaning we have of a term is correct. And how that comes about, in turn, remains unexplained.

Putting these readings aside, can we come up with a more plausible reading of recollection? I will consider this task done if we find a reading which satisfies these (hitherto unsatisfied) conditions: (a) does not contradict Socrates' claim that he does not know what virtue is, (b) explains why Meno believes that there is a paradox of inquiry, (c) explains why Socrates is untroubled by Meno's dilemma, (d) locates the essential difference between prior innate beliefs and the knowledge found through recollection.

We have already seen how we can explain Meno's paradox on the (mistaken) supposition that to be ignorant of something is to lack the intentional-object required for the intentional state of inquiry after that thing, thus our account of intentional objects shows the grounds for Meno's confusion, meeting condition (b). Meno rightly sees that there would be a dilemma for inquiry in holding both that not knowing x entails not having x as an intentional-object and that inquiry for x requires having x as an intentional-object. But by denying either side of this conjunct, we can preserve the possibility of inquiry, meeting condition (c), without denying that Socrates is ignorant of what virtue is, meeting condition (a). In order to say something to meet condition (d), we need to determine which side of the conjunct Socrates denies. Does not knowing x entail not having the intentional-object x (method A, introduced above in section 2), or is there some other relevant necessary condition for knowing x which is unmet (method B)?

5 Thought, Knowledge and Belief

Consider again the three claims Socrates makes concerning his demonstration of recollection. Socrates' first claim is that a man who is ignorant nonetheless "has within himself true opinions about the things that he does not know."³⁷ Second, Socrates claims that these innate beliefs are the material for recollection, and that questioning somehow brings about a state of knowledge. Third, Socrates identifies this bringing about as what recollection is. To understand what recollection is, we must see what is accomplished by Socrates' questioning of the slave boy, and what role the slave boy's innate beliefs (i.e. the opinions he has within himself) play in this questioning.

Two things stand out in the discussion between Socrates and the slave boy. First, that the slave boy's entire contribution to the discussion is to answer Socrates' simple questions. Most of these questions can be answered with a 'yes' or a 'no', a few require a numeric answer (e.g. 'twice the length', 'three feet'). Second, there are a few points where the slave boy is unable to answer Socrates' question. This happens once when Socrates repeats a question after showing the slave boy that his initial answer was incorrect.³⁸ A second time, it

³⁷ *Meno*, 85c6-7.

³⁸ 84a.

occurs when the slave boy fails to understand one of Socrates' questions.³⁹ But this case of the slave boy failing to understand the question Socrates asks him is, so to speak, the exception that proves the rule: the slave boy is otherwise able to answer Socrates because he does understand the questions Socrates asks. Socrates draws attention to this ability. First, by asking Meno whether the boy speaks Greek, a condition necessary for understanding the questions.⁴⁰ Second, by asking the slave boy during the discussion whether he understands one of the questions.⁴¹ Socrates wants to make sure that the slave boy can understand. For if the slave boy did not understand the questions which Socrates asks, recollection would not be demonstrated.

When the slave boy realizes that his initial answer was incorrect, he responds to the repetition of the question thus: "By Zeus, Socrates, I do not know."⁴² Prior to this, the slave boy thought that his answer was sufficient; now he sees that it is not. What brought about this change? Socrates never tells the boy that his initial answer was incorrect. Instead, he asks the slave boy simple questions. Somehow, by answering these questions, the slave boy realizes that he does not know what he thought he did.

Do we have a way to explain what happens? I believe so. Through questions, Socrates draws out the non-intentional beliefs held by the slave boy. Many of these beliefs have been given insufficient thought: they have not been held before the mind and properly examined. By asking questions, Socrates encourages the slave boy to do just this—to bring the content of his beliefs before his mind as intentional-objects of thought. By doing so, the slave boy comes to recognize that some of these beliefs are false. And, at the end of the discussion when he brings Socrates final, correct suggestion before his mind, he is able to recognize it as correct. An important part of the process of recollection is moving from innate, habitual beliefs to a state of intentional thought.

This is why Socrates takes pains to emphasize both (i) the slave boy's natural ability to communicate, which shows his non-intentional beliefs, and (ii) the importance of bringing the content of these beliefs before the mind as intentional objects of thought, which allows the slave boy to recognize the falsity or the truth of certain beliefs. Inquiry is possible because of (i), necessary because of (ii), for to inquire is to begin considering a belief.

If the distinction in mental states is central to the process of recollection, as I have argued, then the analysis of knowledge and belief given by Plato in the *Meno* is significantly different from the standard analysis of knowledge as justified true belief, or justified true belief plus some additional condition. The process of recollection which 'ties down' belief is not one of justifying the belief, where a belief is justified for some person if it is rational for that person to hold the proposition expressed by the belief. A proposition can be such that we both assert it and are rationally justified in asserting it, without us appropriately bringing the content of the belief before our mind as an object of

³⁹85a3–5.

⁴⁰82b4–5.

⁴¹84d3–4.

⁴²84a1–2.

thought. On the other hand, if knowledge simply is true belief tied down by recollection, as Plato appears to propose in the *Meno*, then proof is not central to distinguishing knowledge from belief, as proof is primarily concerned with the relation of propositions to each other, and only incidentally concerned with the mental state of the knower in regard to these propositions. In so far as justification is a property of a proposition, Plato does not in the *Meno* show it to be necessary or sufficient for knowledge. Recollection, the condition of knowledge which sets it apart from true belief, is the process of bringing the content of true beliefs before the mind as intentional objects of thought.