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**The Underlying Paradox  
of  
Plato's *Meno* 80d5-e5**

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Department of Classics and Ancient History

*The Underlying Paradox of Plato's Meno 80d5-e5*

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## **Abstract**

*Meno* 80d5-e5 is one of the most well-known passages in the Platonic dialogues. It has traditionally been called 'Meno's paradox' by commentators. Meno asks Socrates, who claims not to know what virtue is at all, how he will inquire into the thing which he does not know at all. Although there have been a considerable number of studies on the interpretation of the passage, there has as yet been no consensus amongst commentators on what paradox the argument presents. There are three main puzzles in the traditional interpretations: (1) why what is regarded as an 'eristic' argument by Socrates might be of any philosophical importance: (2) where exactly 'the paradox' is situated: (3) whether Socrates' response disarms 'the paradox'. My thesis will give clear accounts of these puzzles. Firstly, Socrates' evaluation of Meno's question as 'eristic' has a two-fold meaning: it is eristic because Meno makes use of two horns of the ready-made eristic argument that one cannot *come to* know either what he knows or what he does not know, the original technique of the refutation of which appears in the *Euthydemus*. Then, Meno's question is eristic also in a deeper sense, because the argument is committed to the denial of 'knowledge'. Socrates detects this deeper counterargument against the possibility of 'knowledge' and attempts to disarm it with the myth of the immortality of the soul. Finally, my main suggestion will be that the question presented by Meno originates with Gorgias' Περὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἢ Περὶ φύσεως, a rhetorical challenge to Eleatic epistemology, which demonstrates that it is impossible for human beings to access the truth of reality either through intellect or sense perception. It will be demonstrated that the paradox of *Meno* 80d5-e5 is in fact concerned with a conflict between Gorgias' rhetoric and Socratic dialectic.

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Needless to say, none of those I have mentioned above have any responsibility for remaining errors in my thesis.

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## **Introduction**

In Plato's *Meno*, there is a well-known passage which has traditionally been called 'Meno's paradox', and it has for a long time attracted the attention of many commentators with its ambiguous features and controversial way of being presented by Plato. Despite the fact that there have been a considerable number of studies on the interpretation of the passage,<sup>1</sup> no consensus has yet been reached on what paradox it presents. The passage reads:

### **Meno:**

καὶ τίνα τρόπον ζητήσεις, ὦ Σώκρατες, τοῦτο ὃ μὴ οἶσθα τὸ παράπαν ὅτι ἐστίν; ποῖον γὰρ ὧν οὐκ οἶσθα προθέμενος ζητήσεις; ἢ εἰ καὶ ὅτι μάλιστα ἐντύχοις αὐτῷ, πῶς εἴση ὅτι τοῦτό ἐστιν ὃ σὺ οὐκ ἤδησθα;

Then, Socrates, how will you inquire into the thing which you do not know at all what it is? Placing what of the things which you do not know will you inquire into it? Or, even if you happened to meet it, how could you know that this is what you did not know?

### **Socrates:**

μανθάνω οἶον βούλει λέγειν, ὦ Μένων. ὀρθῶς τοῦτον ὡς ἐριστικὸν λόγον κατάγεις, ὡς οὐκ ἄρα ἔστιν ζητεῖν ἀνθρώπῳ οὔτε ὃ οἶδε οὔτε ὃ μὴ οἶδε; οὔτε γὰρ ἂν ὃ γε οἶδεν ζητοῖ - οἶδεν γάρ, καὶ οὐδὲν δεῖ τῷ γε τοιούτῳ ζητήσεως - οὔτε ὃ μὴ οἶδεν - οὐδὲ γὰρ οἶδεν ὅτι ζητήσει.

I understand what you want to say, Meno. Do you see what an eristic argument you are bringing up: that it is not possible for a man to inquire into either what he knows or what he does not know? For, he would not inquire into what he knows, since he knows, and there is no need for such a person to inquire, nor into what he does not know, since he does not even know what he is going to inquire into (80d5-e5; my translation).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Phillips 1948; Eckstein 1968; Moline 1969; Moravcsik 1971; Calvert 1974; White 1974-5; Scott 1978, 1995, 2006; Nehamas 1985; Welbourne 1986; Fine 1992, 2007, 2010<sub>A</sub>; Irwin 1995; Tarrant 2005; Kahn 2006; Ionescu 2007; McCabe 2009; Charles 2010; Sedley 2011.

<sup>2</sup> For English translations, I use *Plato: Complete Works* (1997), ed. by J.M. Cooper for Plato; *Aristotle: Complete Works* (1984), ed. by J. Barnes for Aristotle; *Early Greek Political Thought from Homer to the Sophists* (1995), eds. by M. Gagarin & P. Woodruff for Gorgias; *The Presocratic Philosophers* (1983), eds. by G. Kirk, J. Raven & M. Schofield for the Presocratics; *Outline of Scepticism* (2000), eds. by J. Anna & J. Barnes and *Against Logicians* (2005), ed. by R. Bett for Sextus Empiricus, modifying where necessary to clarify my points. I also specify the relevant source where the argument depends on a particular translation (my own or otherwise).

The dialogue containing this passage begins with Meno's abrupt question of how 'virtue (*aretē*)'<sup>3</sup> is to be acquired. "Is it possible for you to say", Meno asks Socrates,<sup>4</sup> a young man from an aristocratic Thessalian family, "whether virtue is teachable (*didakton*)<sup>5</sup>? Or, can it not be taught, but learned by training? Or, neither be taught or learned, but do men possess it by nature or in some other ways? (70a1-4)"<sup>6</sup> However, Socrates does not straightforwardly

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<sup>3</sup> While 'virtue' is the most widely accepted translation for the Greek '*aretē*', Sharples maintains that 'excellence' is more appropriate for the context, because the Greek *aretē* was used not only in the moral sense, which can be considered one of the distinctive features of the Socratic use, but also in the wider sense, e.g. military prowess, and the governmental or administrative ability which brings social success (1991: 4). It is certainly the case that not only Meno but also Socrates sometimes uses *aretē* in the later meaning in the *Meno* (e.g. 91a1-6). In such contexts, this Greek term implies a sense of superiority to other people (cf. also Meno's first statement of men's *aretē*, and his second and third attempts to state what *aretē* is. 71e2-5, 73c9, 77b2-5). However, in order to avoid the confusion that the different translations might bring, I will use the traditional translation 'virtue' in this thesis fully accepting, as Sharples points, that the term embraces various distinct implications.

<sup>4</sup> When I use 'Socrates' in this thesis, I simply mean Plato's Socrates as presented in the Platonic dialogues, but not the historical Socrates nor any other 'Socrates' mentioned by other authors. While I do not think that Plato's Socrates is merely a representation through which Plato articulates his own views, I am also suspicious of Scott's alternative approach, according to which (i) Meno's questions are Plato's own challenges to the historical Socrates, and (ii) Plato puts the historical Socrates on philosophical trial as the object of his own analyses specifically in the *Meno* (Scott 2006: 27-30, 71-74, 87-91, 140-142). It is unclear from Scott's argument (i) why Meno can be specifically considered to represent Plato's own positions, and (ii) what conclusions Plato draws as his own beyond those thought to be historically 'Socratic'. It seems to me more plausible to suppose that Plato's Socratic views are always one of the objects of Plato's investigations like those of any other interlocutor in any other dialogue. It is, then, more important to differentiate Plato the author from Plato's Socrates, rather than Plato's Socrates from the historical Socrates. This thesis will show that the *Meno* is actually not a response to Plato's own challenges but to Gorgias, the rhetorician and his epistemological challenge to the Eleatics (or, more precisely, to what can be considered to be a problem of the Eleatics). What is presented as a contrast by Plato in the *Meno* is, according to my interpretation, the difference between his Socratic epistemology and Gorgias'. Cf. also Frede 1992.

<sup>5</sup> The Greek '*didakton*' can also be translated variously into modern English, as, for example, 'teachable', 'something taught', 'that can or ought to be taught'. Since this dialogue, unlike other Platonic dialogues, lacks an introduction to explain the situation and contexts of Meno's question, Meno's way of stating the question so far does not guide us towards any restricted translation. Although Sedley maintains that the question is understood not as whether it is in actuality taught, but as whether it is "the sort of thing whose transmission is via teaching (2011: xii)", we should probably be more open-minded because both Socrates and Meno, I think, use '*didakton*' in various senses depending on different contexts, as they also use the other term, '*aretē*' (see note 3). While the whole interest throughout the dialogue, at least for Socrates, could lie in whether *aretē* in its nature is teachable or not, for Meno, it would require a more complicated interpretation: From 86c7-d2 and 91a2-6, Meno's main concern can be interpreted to be his personal interest in how to acquire such virtue as would enable him to rule over people rather than his wish to know 'virtue' for the sake of its essential features. There is, on the other hand, another possibility, namely that Meno is at the outset attempting to refute Socrates, whatever answers Socrates gives to the question, rather than purely wondering and asking it to Socrates (cf. Socrates' comments on an eristic questioner at 75c8-d2. See also chapter III). Meno's intention could be, as will be argued in this thesis, more eristic, following the manner of Gorgias' rhetoric, which, as is immediately pointed out by Socrates, had a strong influence on the Thessalians including Meno (this interpretation will explain better the reason for the lack of contexts of Meno's question). Although it is difficult to determine firmly what Meno's question exactly intends, it is likely that Meno asks the same question twice with different purposes: Meno might change his mind as he finds that it is not possible for him to refute someone, i.e. Socrates, who does not answer Meno's question by claiming not to know whether virtue is taught. Cf. also Weiss 2001: 3; Tarrant 2005: 11; Scott 2006: 14-18 for various different commentaries on Meno's first question.

<sup>6</sup> My translation: Ἐχεις μοι εἰπεῖν, ὦ Σώκράτης, ἄρα διδασκτὸν ἢ ἀρετή; ἢ οὐ διδασκτὸν ἀλλ' ἀσκητὸν; ἢ οὔτε ἀσκητὸν οὔτε μαθητὸν, ἀλλὰ φύσει παραγίγνεται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἢ ἄλλῳ τινὶ τρόπῳ; See Sharples 2004: 4-6;



answers Meno's question, but maintains that if Meno wants to ask anyone in Athens such a question, everyone will say that he is so far from knowing whether virtue can be taught and that he even does not know what virtue itself is. He too, Socrates continues, is the same as anyone else, as he blames himself for not knowing what virtue is *at all* (ὥς οὐκ εἰδὼς περὶ ἀρετῆς τὸ παράπαν) (71a1-b3). Meno is surprised and asks whether Socrates really does not know even what virtue is. Socrates answers that not only does he not, but he has also never met anyone else who does know what it is (70c3-71c4).

Socrates' disavowal of knowledge over virtue is strongly contrasted with Gorgias' art of rhetoric.<sup>7</sup> When Meno asks in what way virtue is acquired, Socrates immediately identifies Meno's educational background as that by which Gorgias accustomed the Thessalian citizens especially in Larissa to give a bold and grand answer to any questions which one may be asked, as someone who does know is likely to do. Gorgias is, according to Socrates, able to answer anyone who wishes to question him, and every question is answered (70b5-c3). Socrates' evaluation of Gorgias' art of rhetoric implies that the person who has acquired it is capable of answering whatever is asked even when he does not know it at all.<sup>8</sup> This state is described as the complete opposite to that of Socrates who cannot answer either the question of the teachability of virtue or even that of what virtue is. Meno, on the other hand, thinks that to be able to answer a question means to know the answer of it, so he believes that both Gorgias and himself know what virtue is (71c5-e).<sup>9</sup> Socrates asks Meno, if he knows, to tell him what virtue is. Then, Meno attempts to state what virtue is three times in different ways.

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Tarrant 2005: 11-12; Scott 2006: 15; Ionescu 2007: 1-2 for historical and political background of the question over the teachability of virtue. Cf. also *Protagoras* 322d ff.

<sup>7</sup> In the Platonic dialogues '*hē rhētorikē tekhnē*' is traditionally translated as the art of 'oratory (e.g. D.J.Zeyl's translation in Cooper 1997)' or the art of 'rhetoric (e.g. Dodds 1959; Thompson 1971; Allen 1984)'. Translators of Aristotle, on the other hand, tend to use the word 'rhetoric', which I also use throughout this thesis on the grounds that the two are commonly used interchangeably. There are, however, two possible different nuances, one in each translation, depending on how the rhetorical art is being understood, i.e. either as piecemeal memorized speech focusing on the practice and a merely apparently persuasive tool (cf. *Gorgias* 448d8-10; "what is called oratory") or the technical and analytical ability to apply different speeches to different listeners on different occasions for the purpose of persuasion (cf. *Gorgias* 452e1-4; *Phaedrus* 270b4-9; Aristotle's *Rhetoric* 1377b21 ff.). See also the *Sophistical Refutations* 184a1-8 for Aristotle's diagnosis of Gorgias' teaching which regards it as the former, although I think that this does not necessary need to correspond to Gorgias' own view on the art of rhetoric.

<sup>8</sup> In the *Gorgias*, Gorgias himself accepts that his art of rhetoric merely produce a kind of persuasion that results in being convinced without knowing, but that does not make someone know (454e5-9). Cf. chapter V-3, 4 for a detailed analysis on Gorgias' arguments on knowledge and teaching.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Irwin 1995: 131; Scott 2006: 13.

Socrates' inquiry into what virtue is leads Meno into the same state of *aporia* as Socrates.<sup>10</sup> Socrates asks “what do you say virtue is? (τί φης ἀρετὴν εἶναι;) (71d5)”, and Meno's three answers are all refuted. Firstly, Meno maintains that there are *many* virtues (πάμπολλαι ἀρεταί εἰσιν) for every action, every age, every task of ours, and everyone of us: e.g. the virtue of a man, of a woman, of an elderly man, of a boy, of a girl, of a free man, of a slave, etc.; Meno continues, for example, that the virtue of a man consists of being able to manage public affairs to benefit himself and his friends, and to harm his enemies, while the virtue of a woman is being capable of managing domestic matters well and being submissive to her husband (71e1-72a4).<sup>11</sup> Socrates, however, objects that *the essence (ousia)* of virtue is not many but should be *one* (72b1). Since Socrates wishes him to say that which fits all of those virtues, Meno presents the second answer that virtue is to be able to rule over people (73c9). Socrates again objects that this answer cannot be applied for the cases of a child or a slave, and also ‘justly and not unjustly’ should be added to it, because if someone rules over people unjustly, that should not be virtue. Meno agrees. Socrates also maintains that if they always have to add justice as an essential element for virtuous behaviours, since not only justice, but also courage, moderation, wisdom, munificence etc. are also a kind of virtue, but not the same as virtue as a whole, they again grasp a messy variety of virtues, but not the one thing which covers all virtues (73d-74a).

Before Meno's third attempt, Socrates provides examples of how to say what ‘shape’ and ‘colour’ are. Socrates firstly gives the example “Shape is that which alone of existing things (τῶν ὄντων) always accompanies colour (75b10-11)”, but Meno is not convinced by this answer, and contentiously argues that the questioner, if not sure what colour is, would be still in *aporia* about ‘shape’ (75c2-7). Socrates, then, replies that “Shape is the limit of a solid (76a7)”, and, following Empedocles' and Gorgias' way as required by Meno, also gives another example, “Colour is an effluvia from shapes which fits sight and is perceived (76d4-5)”. Meno is finally satisfied with the last answer, although Socrates in fact says that it is not better than the former one (76e3-77a4).<sup>12</sup> Then, Meno's final attempt to state what

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<sup>10</sup> ‘*aporia*’ is usually translated into English as ‘being at a loss’, ‘perplexity’, or also ‘lack of resourcefulness’: Cf. Politis (2006: 96). Meno, for example, describes his state as a feeling of numbness for both his mind and his tongue (80b1). I use the Greek ‘*aporia*’ without translation, because this Greek term is a key word with its philosophical significance as I will argue (cf. chapter V-5).

<sup>11</sup> Scott compares this answer with Wittgenstein's attack on the unitarian assumption (2006: 25). Although it might be the case that Wittgenstein accepts this sort of answer by Meno and that Gorgias objects Socrates' assumption, it will require further investigation to determine whether Gorgias attacks the unitarian assumption for the same reason and in the same way as Wittgenstein does (as I suspect and Scott also notes). Cf. chapter V.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. also chapter V-3.

virtue is borrowed from an anonymous poet; virtue is to desire beautiful things (τῶν καλῶν) and have the power to acquire them (77b4-5). However, Socrates and Meno agree that no-one does not desire good, namely beautiful, things, and so that it should be common to everyone in any way (78b4-5). And, the acquisition of good things again must be accompanied by justice, moderation, piety or some other parts of virtue, since if it is not acquired in virtuous ways, it will again not be virtue. This answer, therefore, also has to be refuted for the same reason as the second answer (78d7-e2). Socrates maintains that when it is not just, conversely, 'not to acquire (*aporia*)' is virtue (78e3-5), and that it follows that every action is virtue if it is performed with a part of virtue (79b9-c1).<sup>13</sup> Socrates then tells Meno to return to the same question again to think about what he takes virtue to be as a whole (ὅλος) when he says what he says (79d-e2). Meno has finally been led into a state of speechlessness (79e7-80b2).

The *Meno*, according to my interpretation, contains an underlying conflict that continues throughout, that is, between Socratic method of dialectic vs. Gorgias' art of rhetoric. Since Socrates does not remember what Gorgias says virtue is, Socrates urges Meno, who believes that Gorgias knows, to remind him of what Gorgias used to say (71c10-d1). Meno is obviously relying on his memory of what Gorgias said, and his manner of answering is also affected by Gorgias' rhetoric. Nevertheless, it is controversial to simply believe that Meno's answers can be straightforwardly understood as Gorgias' own views.<sup>14</sup> As Meno recollects later, Gorgias denies that he teaches virtue, unlike some other contemporary sophists,<sup>15</sup> but only claims to be able to make other people clever at speaking (λέγειν οἷεται δεῖν ποιεῖν

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<sup>13</sup> This is a striking conclusion, which is led through three refutations, for two reasons: first, while Meno always describes virtue in terms of behaviours, actions and their actual outcomes, Socrates clarifies that, depending on whether it contains virtuous elements or not, completely opposite behaviours, actions, and outcomes can be virtue. It could imply Plato's interest in the relation between the essence of virtue, as knowledge, and 'virtuous' actions, as often merely true opinion (see 96e1 ff.). Cf. also 79b4-5. Second, Socrates here uses the same term '*aporia*' which generally expresses Socrates' or his interlocutor's intellectual state, as well as what is considered the characteristic conclusions, namely *aporetic* ends, of some other Platonic dialogues (e.g. the *Euthyphro*, *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Euthydemus*, *Protagoras*, *Theaetetus*), which may, again, implies that, when it is just, not only the state of being poor but that of intellectual '*aporia*' is also virtue.

<sup>14</sup> Cf., e.g. Sharples 2004: 125-126. Although some commentators do not distinguish Meno's answers from Gorgias' views (e.g. Weiss 2001: 24; Ionescu 2007:10), it is not likely that Gorgias, regarding himself as a rhetorician, devotes himself to any specific claims as Meno presents. It would be worth noting how Meno's first and second answers are similar to Polus' and Callicles' views in the *Gorgias* (466c, 486a-b), and Protagoras' in the *Protagoras* (319a, 334b-c), and comparing their views with Gorgias' comments that the art of rhetoric is concerned only with *logos* (*Gorgias* 450c1), and those who has learned it should be careful to use it 'justly' (Ibid. 456c-d, 457a-b), which are quite different from their views. Cf. also chapter III and V.

<sup>15</sup> Those sophists who are said to have claimed that they teach virtues in Plato's dialogues include, e.g., Euthydemus, Dionysodorus (*Euthydemus* 273d) and Protagoras (*Protagoras* 323c).

δεινούς) (95c3-4).<sup>16</sup> Socrates' memory is, therefore, right, as Gorgias is unlikely to be committed to the claim that he really 'knows' what virtue is and more likely teaches nothing except the art of rhetoric. Socrates, moreover, at the outset also says that they should leave Gorgias out of their arguments, since he is not there, and ask Meno to give his own view, since it is probably the same as Gorgias' (71d1-5). It is more plausible that Meno is an example of what someone who has learned from Gorgias is like, rather than that Meno directly represents Gorgias' positions.

Meno is, on the other hand, being invited into the metaphysical inquiry into the nature of virtue through Socratic dialectic. Socrates raises three requirements which they should follow for dialectical practice (διαλεκτικός; 75d4), and Meno gradually accepts them. The first thing is the priority of knowing what it is over what sorts of thing it is. Socrates maintains that, before inquiring into the way in which virtue is acquired, they should know what virtue is.<sup>17</sup> He asks Meno "If I do not know what something is, how could I know what qualities it possesses? Or do you think that someone who does not know at all who Meno is could know whether he is good-looking or rich or well-born, or the opposite of these? (71b3-8)" Meno agrees that it would not be possible.<sup>18</sup> The second thing is that each interlocutor should answer with the form (*eidos*) of virtue. Socrates claims "even if they [the virtues] are many

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<sup>16</sup> In the *Gorgias*, it is also said that Gorgias contradicts his own words by hesitating to admit that he does not teach his pupils what is just, beautiful and good, even though there is a possibility that they might use the art of rhetoric for unjust purposes (463a, 461b, 482d). Cf. also chapter V-4.

<sup>17</sup> This is called 'Socratic priority of definition' by some commentators (e.g. Robinson 1953: 49-60; Charles 2006, 2010; Karasmanis 2006). Charles summarizes that it is traditionally said that there are three different types of definitions in the *Meno*, namely (a) real definitions, (b) conceptual definitions, and (c) true factual claims which identify the phenomenon (2006: 110-111). I am, however, slightly hesitant to use the term 'the priority of definition' for the *Meno*, because, as I will argue about the practice of stating what shape and colour respectively are (see note 177), I cannot find any clear evidence that Socrates requires Meno to give any kind of 'definition' of virtue. The priority of knowing what it is over what it is like, taking the former to be *identifying* what it is, quite different from *defining* what it is: it would be possible for you to know what it is like without knowing the definition, but it would *not* be possible without identifying what it is. See also note 18, chapter III.

<sup>18</sup> Although some commentators maintain that this example is not sound, this line of interpretation, I think, ignores the fact that Socrates assumes someone who does not know who Meno is *at all* (71b5-6: ὅστις Μένωνα μὴ γινώσκει τὸ παράπαν ὅστις ἐστίν), which obviously means the impossibility of identification of who Meno is. For example, White points that if you do not know who Meno is at all, you have to rely on hearsay etc. (1974: 293). Although, as White further says, you might be able to know that Meno is good-looking by hearsay, it does not mean that you can know what properties Meno has before knowing who Meno is. Rather, if you do not know who Meno is at all, what you know would be merely described as there apparently being a person whose name is 'Meno' and he is said to be good-looking, but not literally that Meno is good-looking. Again, Sedley maintains that Socrates' later claim that "even someone who was blindfolded would know from your conversation that you are handsome (76b4-5)" contradicts the Socratic priority of knowing who Meno is over what Meno is like and that "this is one of many subtle ways in which Plato can in the *Meno* be seen critically re-evaluating his own Socratic legacy (2011: xiii)". However, Sedley's interpretation is also controversial, because what you know would be that someone who talks with Socrates must be good-looking, but not that Meno is so. Although you might be able to say later that the person who you thought must be beautiful was in fact Meno, this is, again, not the same as being able to know what 'Meno' is like before knowing who Meno is.

and various, all of them have *one and the same form* which makes them virtues, and it is right to look to this when one is asked to make clear what virtue is (72c6-d1, italics mine)". The form is here also explained by Socrates as that "which is the same in all these (τὸ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τούτοις ταῦτόν) (75a5)". The third thing is that "The answer must not only be true, but in terms admittedly known to the questioner (75d5-7)". These Socratic dialectical requirements are contrasted with those of 'eristic' kinds of arguments. Socrates says that "If the questioner was one of those clever, eristic, and contentious ones (εἰ μὲν γε τῶν σοφῶν τις εἴη καὶ ἐριστικῶν τε καὶ ἀγωνιστικῶν ὁ ἐρόμενος), it would be your job to *take the argument and refute it* (σὸν ἔργον λαμβάνειν λόγον καὶ ἐλέγχειν) (75c8-d2, my italics)",<sup>19</sup> but if interlocutors are friends, like Socrates and Meno, and want to discuss with each other (διαλέγων), they should "reject the kind of answer that tried to answer *in terms still being the subject of inquiry and not yet agreed upon* (τὴν διὰ τῶν ἔτι ζητούμενων καὶ μήπω ὠμολογημένων) (79d3-4)". Dialectic is here sharply contrasted with eristic argument used for refutation in that dialectic proceeds on the basis of agreed terms between interlocutors.

Having accepted these requirements, Meno realizes that he is now speechless, although he before meeting Socrates had made many brilliant speeches about virtue in front of large audiences on thousands of occasions (79e6-80b4). Meno mentions something he has previously heard: Socrates is always in a state of *aporia*, and also brings others to the same state. Meno compares Socrates firstly with a wizard (ὁ γόης), who bewitches (γοητεύω) and beguiles him and leads him into this terrible state,<sup>20</sup> and secondly with a stingray, which makes anyone coming close to it feel numb (80a1-b7). Meno blames the fact that he now feels numb in both his mind and tongue, and cannot even say what virtue is. Socrates replies to Meno that the difference between the stingray and himself is that, while the stingray itself is not numb, Socrates is numb himself. He is also in a state of *aporia* no less than anyone else to whom he is said to bring *aporia*, as he does not know what virtue is, either. Socrates describes Meno as also not knowing what virtue is now, and invites Meno to the joint inquiry

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. note 5.

<sup>20</sup> This simile by Meno, an image of a wizard and 'logos' as an incantation, is possibly borrowed from Gorgias: Cf. *Encomium of Helen* [10-11] "Sacred incantations with words (διὰ λόγων) inject pleasure and reject pain, for in associating with the opinion of the mind, the power of an incantation enchants, persuades, and alters it through bewitchment (γοητεύω). The twin arts of witchcraft (γοητεία) and magic have been discovered, and there are illusions of mind and delusion of judgement. How many men on how many subjects have persuaded and do persuade how many others by shaping a false speech (λόγος)!" (See also *Euthydemus* 293a3). Cf. also Wardy 1996: 78; Scott 2006: 70.

into what virtue is. Finally, Meno asks if Socrates does not know what virtue is at all, how inquiry and discovery is possible for him, as presented in the passage 80d5-e5 above.

Socrates points out that Meno brings up “an eristic argument (ὁ ἐριστικός λόγος)”, and restates the question as a general claim as to the impossibility of inquiring into neither what one does not know nor do know. But rather than impugning the argument itself, Socrates responds to it with the myth of the immortality of the soul and the theory of recollection which he believes true, and introduces the well-known geometrical demonstration with a slave. Socrates says: the soul is immortal and reincarnates many times, so it has already learned everything, and there is nothing that it has not yet learned. And, since the whole of nature is akin, it is not surprising for a man to recollect all things which the soul has known, starting from one thing and proceeding to everything else. Therefore, learning and inquiring are as a whole recollection, and inquiry and discovery are possible by means of recollection (81c5-d5). Socrates maintains that the eristic argument would make them lazy, but what he is committed to encourage them to be energetic and keen on inquiry, and thus suggests to Meno that he believes the latter rather than is persuaded by the eristic argument (81d5-e2). Socrates, having been asked by Meno, demonstrates the immortality of the soul and the recollection by showing that even one of Meno's slaves can ‘recollect’ a correct answer to a geometrical question which the slave has not learned at any time since he was born (82a7-86c3).

My main suggestion of this thesis is that the question presented by Meno in the passage 80d5-e5 (i.e. ‘Meno's paradox’) originates with Gorgias' *On What Is Not* or *On Nature* (Περὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἢ Περὶ φύσεως), which appears in two extant sources: the third part of a peripatetic anonymous author's treatise, *On Melissus, Xenophanes, and Gorgias* (979a11-980b22), and amongst the deniers of the criterion of Truth in Sextus Empiricus' *Against the Logicians* ([65-75]). Each source presents Gorgias' three main theses: (1) there is nothing, (2) even if there is something it cannot be known, (3) even if it is known, it cannot be shown to others. Since there has been no close study discussing the *Meno* 80d5-e5 from this perspective, I will begin with a broad analysis of various interpretations of the passage 80d5-e5 in chapter II: it will be shown that there have been primarily three puzzles and general misunderstandings amongst commentators, which I will attempt to resolve one after another. Firstly, many commentators are prone to misunderstand the reason why Socrates points out that Meno's question as ‘eristic’ and think that it contradicts the assumption that the passage 80d5-e5 embraces a philosophical importance. In chapter III, I will argue that it is possible for the argument to be

eristic and philosophically important at the same time. Secondly, some commentators regard the theory of recollection and the slave's geometrical demonstration as Socrates' main responses to the eristic argument. However, in chapter IV, I will examine how important role the myth plays for the sake of Socrates' commitment to its ontology and epistemology as withstanding the attack of the opposite epistemological position suggested by the eristic argument. Thirdly, although the passage 80d5-e5 is traditionally called 'Meno's paradox', there has been still no consensus amongst commentators on what can be considered to be a 'paradox' whilst it is generally believed that Socrates' reply does not disarm the 'paradox'. These confusions arise, I think, mainly because commentators do not differentiate what is the cause of the 'paradox' *for us* from what is thought as a 'paradox' *by Socrates* as 'paradox' in the *Meno*. Chapter V will show that the paradox is for Socrates concerned with one of the most difficult contradictions which comes from Eleatic metaphysics and epistemology, and the paradox is in fact situated, as Plato presents, between Socrates' response, namely epistemological positive (optimistic) dogmatism and what the eristic argument, on the other hand, suggests, namely Gorgias' epistemological negative (pessimistic) dogmatism.<sup>21</sup> This thesis will demonstrate that the passage 80d5-e5 in the *Meno* embraces an unresolved paradox concerning the impossibility of reaching knowledge of truth by human beings.

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<sup>21</sup> One might wonder what I mean by 'epistemological negative dogmatism', and why I do not use 'scepticism' as many commentators do (e.g., Kerferd 1955 11, n.1, 24; Hay 1990; Porter 1993: 23; Schiappa 1997: 16; Long 1999: 305). I will clarify the difference between epistemological negative dogmatism and other types of scepticism below (see chapter III-4, V, and note 190).

## **II. Three Puzzles over Plato's Meno 80d5-e5**

The first contemporary scholar who calls the argument presented by Meno at 80d5-e5 'Meno's paradox' is Phillips (1948). Phillips, in his *The Significance of Meno's Paradox*, addresses a philosophical paradox which is present in the passage 80d5-e5, by arguing against traditional interpretations that had regarded Meno's question as a mere obstructing digression from the main theme, viz. Socrates' metaphysical inquiry into what virtue is:

Meno's puzzle has generally, and, as I believe, erroneously been taken to represent merely a bit of typical sophistic logic-chopping. Shorey, for example refers to it as 'this eristic and lazy argument'. Taylor's comment on the passage is that, 'At this point Meno again tries to run off on an irrelevant issue. He brings up the sophistic puzzle... etc.' And Ritter asserts in similar vein that Meno 'encumbers the investigation with the proposition advanced by the eristics, that there is no sense in looking for something which one does not already know.' As over against such interpretations of Meno's paradox as irrelevant eristic, I wish to submit the thesis that the objection is perfectly germane in the context of the problem being discussed – namely the nature of ethical knowledge – and that, moreover, the entire passage is one of real philosophical import and is basic for understanding the Theory of Ideas and the related notion of Reminiscence (Phillips 1948: 88).<sup>22</sup>

Phillips thinks that, although Meno has not thought through the implications of his own question, Socrates restates it in more precise terms and reveals it as a paradox which challenges the metaphysical entities which are the objects of Socratic inquiry. Phillips maintains that the paradox is committed to a sophistic theory of knowledge, in his words 'the nominalistic empiricism', which will demolish the entire Socratic enterprise (1948: 88). The paradox is, according to Phillips, concerned with "two opposing conceptions of the nature of knowledge (Ibid. 91)": on the one hand, the knowledge provided by perception and experience, originating from external objects, and, on the other hand, the knowledge provided by reason, originating from internal resources. While the sophistic theory of knowledge, i.e. Meno's argument, is (for Phillips) only concerned with the former kind of empirical knowledge, Phillips argues, Socratic inquiry can provide the latter, alternative kind of

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<sup>22</sup> Those quotations by Phillips are respectively: Shorey 1933: 157; Taylor 1936: 137; and Ritter 1933: 102.



metaphysical knowledge. Thus, Meno's question, Phillips concludes, attacks only the latter, Socratic kind of knowledge by claiming that it is impossible to achieve the sort of knowledge which they are pursuing in this dialogue, i.e. knowledge of what virtue is. Phillips argues that 'Meno's paradox' can be applied only to the "Socratic type of inquiry (Ibid. 89)", but not to any empirical inquiry, and that Meno's question has no quarrel with any question such as: "How many citizens are there in Athens?" because you can count the number of people and it can be answered empirically (Ibid. 88-89).

In spite of Phillips' remarkable insight, there are many controversial features of his interpretation which cannot be overlooked. Phillips fundamentally misses that Meno's question points out Socrates' controversial state as an inquirer, in which he does not know what virtue is at all (see p. 7).<sup>23</sup> Since Meno explicitly adds "at all (τὸ παράπαν) (80d6)" to his question, it is clear that Meno's argument assumes an inquirer who is not only completely blank about any specification of the object, but also even cannot identify it to begin the inquiry.<sup>24</sup> Phillips' example of empirical question is, therefore, irrelevant to what Meno's argument questions. Asked how many citizens there are in Athens, the inquirer must clearly know what he is asked; for example, the inquirer would know that the question asks about the population of Athens, what the word 'citizens' stands for, what place 'Athens' is, and what the question requires him to answer. So, the inquirer must know the object of inquiry well enough to determine how he should inquire into and discover it. This situation is far from the state which Meno's question describes as that of the inquirer, i.e. of not knowing what it is at all.

Secondly, Phillips' interpretation is, I think, relying on an oversimplified dichotomy of sophists as empiricists and Socrates as rationalists, and to read the same sort of metaphysical concern as is thought to appear in other later dialogues also into the *Meno*, without a careful analysis of the *Meno* itself.<sup>25</sup> It would be certainly the case, as Phillips maintains, that metaphysical inquiry into ethical knowledge may presuppose two premises: one is that there is *a real essence* of virtue, and the other is that the human reason is endowed with the capacity to apprehend it (1948: 89). Again, if Meno's paradox is really established on the

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<sup>23</sup> See also chapter III-4 for the detailed analysis.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Scott 2006: 76-77.

<sup>25</sup> In addition, Phillips problematically thinks that sophists share *a certain theory* of knowledge (*epistēmē*) opposed to the Socratic one (cf. also chapter IV-3-4). I will discuss various different views on knowledge amongst sophists in chapter V. Note that Socrates also claims to be in a state of *aporia* over what knowledge is in the *Theaetetus* (145e8-a1 and 161b1-5).

basis of “nominalistic empiricism”, it could deny the former of these two premises, i.e. the existence of a real essence of virtue. However, it is, I think, overhasty to see the ‘paradox’ as presenting the same sort of concern as modern nominalists could have on metaphysical entities (cf. note 11). According to my interpretation, the ‘paradox’ rejects the possibility of both metaphysical and empirical inquiry into whatever one does not know at all.<sup>26</sup> Although Phillips has drawn attention to the point that the passage 80d5-e5 could present a serious philosophical paradox, his argument also left many interpretative questions for the next half century.

Since then, a considerable number of interpretations have been published over the passage 80d5-e5, and three main puzzles are still under discussion amongst commentators:

- [1] Is Socrates’ restatement identical with Meno’s original question?
- [2] Is it really a paradox? If so, in what sense is it a paradox?
- [3] If it is a paradox, does Socrates’ response disarm it?

This thesis will give a clear and integrated answer to these three puzzles by resolving three misunderstandings which I mentioned above.<sup>27</sup> But before commencing my own arguments, I would like to outline the research context, first of all, and briefly sketch my positions as they stand amongst other interpretations.

## **1. Two Versions of an Eristic Argument**

The first question ([1]) addresses the fact that, even though Socrates says that he understands what Meno wants to say (80e1-e2), it seems to many readers that Socrates adds some modifications to Meno’s original question. Meno clearly attacks Socrates’ helpless state of *aporia* as an inquirer, and questions about the possibility to inquire into what he does not know what it is at all. However, Socrates, on the other hand, apparently understands it as a claim about the general impossibility of inquiring into what one does not know, changing the subject from Meno’s second person singular (‘you’) to third person singular (‘a man’). Since

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<sup>26</sup> See chapter III-4, IV-3-4, V-3.

<sup>27</sup> Pp. 12-13.

Socrates does not give any clear explanations of his restatement, an ambiguous impression that something is changed by Socrates leads commentators to following questions: why on earth does Socrates restate Meno's initial question? Should we, believing Socrates' claim, think that they are identical, though they seem to be somehow different? And, which is the paradox, or is neither of them a paradox at all, but merely an 'eristic' argument as Socrates calls it? The more deeply commentators read what is not said into the passage, the more difficult the contradictions tend to be between their interpretations and what Socrates actually claims. Thus it is often concluded that Socrates probably misrepresents Meno's original question or modifies it into a different claim, both of which are one of the things that I will rebut in this thesis.

These days, however, only a minority of commentators thinks that Meno's question and Socrates' restatement can be held to be completely the same.<sup>28</sup> Moline, after Phillips, maintains that Meno does not state any paradoxes, it is rather a parody, but that Socrates is the one who replaces it with a paradox for his own purposes (1969: 154, 156). Moline gives two main reasons for this conclusion: firstly Meno's intention is, Moline argues, obviously a personal challenge focusing on Socrates' position with using the second person singular ('you') and vocative ('Socrates'), but not the first person plural ('we') including Meno himself. Moline says that if it is a paradox it should be *a claim* but should not be expressed in the form of a mere question. Secondly, Meno's aim is, Moline thinks, to embarrass Socrates, who claims that he does not know the object of inquiry, namely what virtue is, at all, because, Meno initially does not believe Socrates' claim of being totally perplexed and ignorant about what virtue is. So, Meno's use of "ποῖον (80d6)" is, according to Moline, just sarcastic.<sup>29</sup> I only (partially) agree with his following claim concerning the first reason: Socrates makes it of "a flat, sceptical claim which has been rendered general in scope by means of the impersonal locution "a man" (Ibid. 159)". But, his second reason does not explain either why Socrates takes it so seriously if it is merely irony, or how Meno's 'irony' is exactly related to

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<sup>28</sup> Amongst those who think that the two are identical, for example, White thinks that Socrates' restatement just clarifies the paradoxical aspect of Meno's original question and that Plato does not intend any difference between them, from the fact that Socrates does not say that he changes it (1974: 290). However, even this line of interpretations does not give a clear account of the exact relation between Meno's question and Socrates restatement, which I will analyse in chapter III.

<sup>29</sup> Moline also points that Aristotle calls it 'τὸ ἐν τῷ Μένωνι ἀπόρημα (the *aporēma* in the *Meno*)' but not 'Meno's *aporēma* (τὸ ἀπόρημα τοῦ Μένωνος)' in the *Posterior Analytics* (17a29) (1969: 156-157). However, he does not discuss closely what '*aporēma*' is for Aristotle and as a result this reason does not strongly support his argument. Cf. note 45, 190.

Socrates' restatement. Moline does not eventually go on further to examine even how Socrates' restatement works as a paradox.

Contrary to Moline, Scott, in one of the most recent monographs on the *Meno*, maintains that Meno's original question is the one which presents the real paradox, but Socrates' is not, while he also, like Moline, confidently distinguishes Socrates' restatement from what Meno originally asks (2006: 78). Along his main point of interpretation which regards Meno's questions as Plato's own challenges to historical Socrates' views,<sup>30</sup> Scott interprets Meno here as challenging the Socratic duty of inquiry, and thinks that the challenge might render the Socratic life of examination pointless. In order to avoid applying the one name 'Meno's paradox' to Meno's question and/or Socrates' restatement, Scott calls the former 'Meno's challenge' and the latter the 'eristic dilemma' (Ibid. 75-76). He translates the passage 80d5-e5 as follows:

(M<sup>1</sup>) And how will you inquire, Socrates, into something when you don't know (ὄ μὴ οἴσθα) at all what it is? Which of the things that you don't know will you propose as the object of your inquiry? (M<sup>2</sup>) Or even if you really stumble upon it, how will you know that this is the thing you didn't know before?<sup>31</sup>

I know what you want to say, Meno. Do you realize what an eristic argument you're bringing up – that it's impossible for someone to inquire into what he knows or doesn't know: he wouldn't inquire into what he knows, since he already knows it and there's no need for such a person to inquire; nor into what he doesn't know, because he doesn't even know what he's going to inquire into (Scott 2006: 76-78).

Scott thinks that Socrates uses 'eristic' only to describe his own restatement, but not to describe what Meno asks, which is, I think, directly connected to his interpretation that regards Socrates' restatement as an eristic dilemma (so it is not a real paradox) and Meno's

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. note 4.

<sup>31</sup> Scott here translates “ὄ μὴ οἴσθα” as “when you don't know”. This way of asking the question particularly focuses on Socrates' problematic state as an inquirer. This is, I think, more applicable than my translation to a context in which Meno intends to attack Socrates' personal position. My translation, on the other hand, by focusing on the *unknown object* (what you do not know), as I will argue in chapter III-4 and V-3, presents Meno's question as closer to the original argument which is concerned with the specific object whose intrinsic nature is unknown. The difference between a not-knowing inquirer and the unknown object is, I think, the problem of two different perspectives, namely that of the inquirer or that of the object in a specific inquiry. When you see the inquiry from the inquirer's perspective, there is an unknown object, while from the object's, there is a not-knowing inquirer. See chapter V for further details.

question as Plato's genuine philosophical challenge. Accordingly, Scott reconstructs what Socrates says as follows:

S<sup>1</sup> If you know the object already you cannot genuinely inquire into it.

S<sup>2</sup> If you do not know it you cannot inquire, because you do not even know what you are inquiring into.

[Implicit premise: S<sup>3</sup> Either you know something or you do not know.]

S<sup>4</sup> Therefore you cannot inquire into any object (Scott 2006: 78).

Scott here changes the subject of Socrates' restatement from the third person singular to the second person so that S<sup>2</sup>, the problem of inquiry, corresponds to M<sup>1</sup> in Meno's question. By doing so, he maintains that, in Socrates' restatement (eristic dilemma), while S<sup>1</sup>, the problem of inquiry into what you know, is added, M<sup>2</sup>, the problem of discovery, is missing. The problem of the impossibility of discovery is, according to Scott, a real philosophical paradox, which Socrates omits from Meno's original question and does not give any responses to (Ibid. 75-91).<sup>32</sup>

Scott thinks that the problem of inquiry M<sup>1</sup> is not worth serious consideration. "The weakness of M<sup>1</sup> is clear (2006: 76)", he says, the impossibility of beginning inquiry is easily solved by means of distinguishing true belief from knowledge, because (as he adds the implicit premise S<sup>3</sup> and as I agree) the dilemma is relying on the false dichotomy of all-or-nothing knowledge (1995: 30; 2006:79).<sup>33</sup> However, I found that Scott's following solution for the problem of inquiry is controversial. He argues that such a state as presented by Meno's question does not fit Socrates' position: i.e. it is obvious that Socrates has plenty of beliefs and ideas about virtue, as we can see from the conversations in which Socrates refutes Meno's three answers: Socrates in fact, according to Scott, does not mean that he has no true beliefs and ideas about what virtue is.<sup>34</sup> A number of beliefs which Socrates has are enough to begin the inquiry into what virtue is, because, Scott generalises, even a partial grasp of something allows anyone to

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<sup>32</sup> Scott thinks that the reason why Meno is not against Socrates' obvious reformulation, missing the problem of discovery originally stated in Meno's question, is that the argument does not come from Meno himself and Meno leaves Socrates recall it in full (2006: 78). Although the arguments, as I agree, had existed the outside of their conversation, it is not clear whether that could be the good reason why Meno does not point out Socrates' dropping what Scott calls a real philosophical matter, and also whether it supports his argument that only the full version recalled by Socrates is eristic, but Meno's is of real importance.

<sup>33</sup> Another interpretation which holds that the distinction between true belief and knowledge disarms Meno's paradox for similar reasons is Irwin (1977: 139).

<sup>34</sup> Scott's solution is indeed the same as Moline's second reason to hold, conversely, that Meno's question is parody, but Socrates' a real paradox.

specify the object of inquiry and enables him to engage in an inquiry towards full knowledge of it. But, even if Scott is right, do Meno's question and Socrates' restatement at 80d5-e5 satisfy with this solution to count mere beliefs same as partial knowledge?

What makes Scott, on the other hand, think that only the possibility of discovery is a serious philosophical problem is that he sees the missing part in Socrates' reformulation ( $M^2$ ) being susceptible of two different readings. One is continuous with the problem of the inquiry of  $M^1$ . Although you cannot make a discovery about the object either by means of inquiry or by accident if you are at a total loss about it, Scott claims that this can be solved in the same way, "distinguishing between grasping a subject sufficiently having a specification of it, and attaining full knowledge through inquiry (2006: 77)". There is, on the other hand, another reading of  $M^2$  that includes the real philosophical problem, which Scott calls "a deeper interpretation (Ibid. 83)": although the fact that you have an initial specification of the object will allow you to start the inquiry into it, the problem is that the initial assumptions included in the specification play "a crucial role in determining the direction and outcome of the inquiry (Ibid. 77)". So, how can you know the initial specification is correct? This is what Scott calls the problem of 'foreknowledge principle (Ibid. 84-85)'. Scott's interpretation about  $M^2$  is based on Socrates' conclusion of his response to Meno's challenge:

As for the other points, I wouldn't absolutely insist on the argument. But I would fight, both in word and deed, for the following point: that we would be better, more manly and less lazy if we believe that we ought to inquire into what we do not know, than if we believed that *we cannot discover what we do not know* and so have no duty to inquire (86b6-c2, emphasis added and trans. by Scott; 2006: 82).

Scott maintains that "on this view inquiry is pointless rather than impossible (Ibid.)", and thinks that this comment by Socrates implies that only the problem of discovery is something which Socrates' response could not disarm.

This is quite confusing, because I cannot see any reasons why the 'foreknowledge principle' cannot be applied to the problem of inquiry when it can be applied to the problem of discovery. Socrates here also mentions the duty to inquire, and it seems to me that Socrates' point concerns both the beginning of inquiry and its conclusion with discovery. Even if you can start the inquiry with your uncertain identification of the object, it does not guarantee, in

the same way that the problem of discovery cannot be resolved, that your inquiry is not pointless (as Scott says), and the pointless inquiry cannot, in any way, be called a genuine inquiry into the object which you indeed intend. Fine is also suspicious about whether Scott's solution will solve the problem of inquiry,<sup>35</sup> and maintains that the problem is how to acquire knowledge if we begin with mere beliefs and do not already have knowledge of the object (2007: 347). Fine points out that if we began inquiring into something which we do not know at all with mere beliefs, "we could never emerge from the circle of beliefs to the light of knowledge (Ibid. 349)".

Scott's argument is, I think, established on twin standards as to what are genuinely regarded as both the inquiry and the discovery of a specific object. According to my interpretation of Scott's arguments, the discovery of what [A] is could be impossible if you begin with mere beliefs about [A], because your initial assumptions, which are merely beliefs, determine the direction of your inquiry into [A], and even if you think that you have finally discovered [A], it does not guarantee that what you have discovered is *really* [A]. Even if you in fact have discovered [B], but which you believe is [A], there is no way for you to find that what you think is [A] is in fact [B] (for instance, even if someone tells you that what you have found is [B], how can you know that he is right and you are wrong if you initially did not know what [A] is at all?). In case that what you have found is [B], I think, Scott will not say that this is the genuine discovery of [A], even if you believe that it is [A].

If this standard is, as Scott discusses, applied to the discovery of [A], it should also be applicable to the inquiry into the specific object [A]. Let us suppose that you start the inquiry into [A] with mere beliefs about what [A] is, but the fact is that you are inquiring into [B] by mistaking [B] for [A] believing that you are inquiring into [A]. Just as the discovery of [B] cannot be said to be that of [A], your inquiry cannot be said to be the inquiry into [A]. Your inquiry is the inquiry into what you believe is [A], but in fact is into [B]. You might be able to say that although you were inquiring into [A] you eventually discovered [B] at the end. It does not mean that you genuinely inquired into [A] (but you inquired into what you thought [A]) if we follow the standard applied to the discovery of [A] above. Conversely, if you want to call the inquiry into what you think [A] a *genuine* inquiry into [A] (even if that is in fact [B]), you have to regard that discovery of what you think is [A] (even if that is in fact [B]) as

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. also McCabe 2009: 234, n.1.

also a *genuine* discovery of [A]. If we have only one standard to determine whether it is a *genuine* inquiry and discovery of a specific object, I think that the problem of inquiry and discovery are after all a single problem.

I think that Meno's question, despite what Scott thinks, has only one standard. And, my interpretation of the two versions of the eristic argument, namely Meno's question and Socrates' restatement, is as follows:

[M] Then, Socrates, how will you inquire into the thing which you do not know at all what it is?  
[M1] Placing what of the things which you do not know will you inquire into it? [M2] Or, even if you happened to meet it, how could you know that this is what you did not know?

I understand what you want to say, Meno. Do you see what an eristic argument you are bringing up, that [S] it is not possible for a man to inquire into either what he knows or what he does not know? For, [S1] he would not inquire into what he knows, since he knows, and there is no need for such a person to inquire, [S2] nor into what he does not know, since he does not even know what he is going to inquire into (80d5-e5, cf. p. 5).

Meno's initial question is: how Socrates will inquire into what he does not know at all what it is ([M]), because he cannot start the inquiry, not being able to identify it as the object of his inquiry ([M1]) and even if he encountered it he cannot realize that this is what he wished to know ([M2]). The problem of Socrates' coming to know what he did not know at all ([M]) is, according to my interpretation, supported by two crucial reasons for the impossibility of inquiry ([M1]) and discovery ([M2]), but this is originally a single problem. Meno's question is as a result identical to the latter half of Socrates' restatement ([S2]), namely the impossibility of inquiry into what one does not know.

My suggestion to the first question ([1]) will be, therefore, that Meno's question originates with one of a set of ready-made arguments, as Socrates restates it, on the impossibility of inquiry into either what one know or does not know ([S]). Socrates' restatement version of the two claims ([S1] and [S2]) is simply the original version of Meno's question ([M]), and Meno uses one of them ([S2]) as a counterargument, attacking Socrates' two claims that Socrates does not know what virtue is at all but that he wishes to inquire into what virtue is which he does not know at all. The original technique of the refutation, I think, appears in the



*Euthydemus*.<sup>36</sup> Despite taking the form of a question, interestingly, Meno's question is not concerned with whether or not Socrates really does not know the object of inquiry at all,<sup>37</sup> or what Socrates means when he says that he does not 'know' what it is *at all*, because its aim is to refute its adversary's argument. So, Socrates' criticism that it is an eristic argument is a faithful account for both of Meno's question and his restatement, as they both purport to refute its interlocutor's argument, which I will closely examine in the chapter III.

## **2. 'Paradoxes'**

The second question surrounding the interpretation of the passage 80d5-e5 ([2]) is in what sense it is a paradox if Meno's question and/or Socrates' restatement present any paradox. 'Paradox' is, in ordinary contexts and roughly speaking, used in two different senses in English; either for an apparently self-contradictory argument or a generally unaccepted view which is in actuality well-founded and true, or for a statement which is indeed self-contradictory. People ordinarily use the term 'paradox' and 'paradoxical' in such loose meanings in daily contexts.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, in philosophical contexts and stricter senses, it is said that there are at least two main types, 'semantic paradoxes' which depend on semantic elements such as meaning and designation (e.g. Liar paradox and Barber paradox) and 'logical paradoxes (or paradoxes of set theory)' which depend on purely logical or mathematical terms (e.g. Russell's paradox). And, there are also other various paradoxes, for example, 'pragmatic paradoxes' which involve a contradiction not in what is said, but between what is said and what is done, Zeno's Paradox, whereby apparently indispensable notions are inconsistent with what is generally perceived, and the Prediction Paradox which appears, for example, in an 'unexpected' examination informed by the examiner in advance (so expected in some ways). 'Paradox' is, moreover, also used as a synonym for an antinomy, which is a pair of propositions, namely a thesis and antithesis, both of which seems to be supported by valid reasoning, but contradict each other.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> As will argued below, McCabe points out the certain connection between the argument in the *Euthydemus* and 'Meno's paradox' (2009), although her interpretation is founded on a different perspective from mine.

<sup>37</sup> This is something which Meno at the outset carefully confirms: he asks Socrates "Do you *really* not know what virtue is? (ἀληθῶς οὐδ' ὅτι ἀρετὴ ἐστὶν οἴσθα;) (71b9-c1)", and Socrates admits it.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Oxford English Dictionary* (1991), XI, 185, Oxford: Clarendon.

<sup>39</sup> I am using the term 'antinomy' in a broader sense than that of Kantian antinomy of pure reason. Cf., for example, Proudfoot, M. and Lacey, A.R. (2010), *The Routledge Dictionary of Philosophy*, New York:

Calvert criticizes Phillips, because he thinks that 'Meno's paradox' is not paradoxical at all, if the paradox is, as Phillips maintains, between sophistic empiricism and Platonic rationalism (1974: 145). If it is a paradox, Calvert claims, it should deny something obvious, namely what is usually thought possible, and he thinks that the paradox must be the impossibility of transition from ignorance to knowing, which is relying on an extreme dichotomy between knowing and not-knowing in the Eleatic doctrine (Ibid.).<sup>40</sup> Since Phillips names the argument 'Meno's paradox', the term has, in any case, been applied to the passage 85d5-e5 for a long time without determining what paradox the passage presents. Besides Phillips', the variety of interpretations on what should be considered as a paradox includes, for example:

- (1) This paradox is self-contradictory (Eckstein: 1968: 29-30).<sup>41</sup>
- (2) This is a paradox between atomistic view and Socratic holistic view of knowledge (Ionescu 2007: 40).
- (3) This is a paradox which is concerned with two different conceptions of learning, namely learning as empirical inquiry and learning as *a priori* inquiry (Moravcsik 1971: 113-115).
- (4) This is a paradox depending on a fallacious dichotomy of all-or-nothing knowledge, which regards the transition from ignorance to knowing as impossible (Calvert 1974: 144; and partly Scott 2006).
- (5) This is a paradox between the identification and the definition of the object of inquiry which is concerned with the problem of 'Socratic priority of definition' (White 1974-5: 153; Welbourne 1986: 236-241; Irwin 1995: 130-132; Charles 2006: 116-122, 2010).

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Routledge; Bunnin, N. and Yu, J. (2004), *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy*, Oxford: Blackwell; Flew, A. and Priest, S. (2002), *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, London: Pan; Audi, R. (ed.) (1999), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Cambridge: CUP.

<sup>40</sup> My arguments basically follow the line of Calvert's position as I discuss below.

<sup>41</sup> Eckstein's argument is as follows; if Socrates, who thinks that he can learn what he does not know, could learn Meno's claim that you cannot learn what you do not know, it is self-defeating because Socrates *could learn* what he did not know from Meno's claim that you *cannot learn* what you do not know, and the claim itself is as a result proved wrong. Conversely, if Socrates *could not learn* Meno's claim that you cannot learn what you do not know, it is again self-defeating, because although the claim that you cannot learn what you do not know is proved right Socrates could not learn what he did not know and still thinks that he can learn what he does not know (1968: 29-30). This, however, cannot be applied to the situation of not knowing the object of learning at all, and also can be solved in the same way as in semantic paradoxes (cf. Olin 2003: 15-16).

- (6) This is the same sort of paradox which appears in the *Euthydemus* (Taylor 1949: 135; Tarrant 2005: 37; McCabe 2009).
- (7) This is a paradox which is concerned with external and internal accounts of knowing that one knows (MacKenzie 1988; McCabe 2009).<sup>42</sup>

It is not my aim to claim that each of these interpretations is totally irrelevant to Plato's concerns in the dialogue, rather I think that all the interpretations certainly are related to the reasons for which *Meno* 80d5-e5 presents *various* paradoxes and also that those paradoxes are, I think, what Plato in actuality had in mind. My point, however, is that none of them actually identifies where the paradox is situated *for Socrates* in the *Meno* and what argument is that which Socrates attempts to disarm in this dialogue. Although it may seem to pre-empt my conclusion at this point, I will propose, as an answer to the second question ([2]), there are two types of paradox, one is what appears on the surface as the pair of the horns of an eristic argument, and the other is what I call 'the underlying paradox of *Meno* 80d5-e5' that provides the foundation upon which other paradoxes are established. Let us first look at the surface paradox, which is situated between two horns in Socrates' restatement version of the eristic argument ([S]):

[S1] A man would not inquire into what he does know.

[S2] A man would not inquire into what he does not know.

These two horns at first glance seem to submit *a* paradox on the impossibility of inquiry for a man into either what he knows or what he does not know ([S]). Nevertheless, this paradox concerning the impossibility of inquiry is, I think, just one version of the original eristic argument. When Meno makes use of one of the pair of the eristic arguments above (i.e. [S2]) for attacking Socrates' position, he presents the impossibility not only of beginning the inquiry but also of recognizing the object even when Socrates happened to meet it by accident:

[M1] You cannot begin to inquiry into it because you do not know anything about where to head.

[M2] Even if you happened to meet it you cannot know that this is what you did not know.

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<sup>42</sup> I discuss related matters to each of these interpretations in following places in this thesis: (1) note 41; (2) chapter V; (3) chapter III; (4) chapter III-4, V; (5) note 17, 177; (6) chapter III; (7) chapter III-1.

Although Scott thinks that [M2] is presenting the impossibility of ‘discovery’,<sup>43</sup> [M2] does not necessarily mean that the encounter must be the outcome of inquiry. If it is, as [M1] claims, impossible to start the inquiry in any way, it is more plausible to understand that [M2] covers any accidental encounters rather limits to the consequence of ‘inquiry’. This follows that [M1] and [M2] as a whole submit a paradox of the impossibility for Socrates to, more generally, *come to ‘know’* what he did not know what it was at all either through inquiry or by accident: i.e. if Socrates does not know what virtue is *at all*, he not only cannot start the inquiry into what it is but also cannot recognize it even if ‘virtue’ is present in front of him, either as a result of ‘inquiry’, by accident, or by being taught by someone else. Therefore, what the impossibility of inquiry implies is, according to my interpretation, in fact the impossibility of *coming to know* for a man something which he was completely blank about.

<sup>44</sup> Conversely, inquiry is thought to be possible only in the way through which one comes to ‘know’ something which he already ‘knows’ *somehow* about it. This is, I think, what [S1] and [S2] are really concerned with.<sup>45</sup> Meno’s argument points out that, if Socrates is not able to identify what the object is, it would be impossible for Socrates to come to ‘know’ what it is. This is indeed challenging the possibility of coming to know what one does not know, rather merely the impossibility of inquiry, which I will clarify in the following section with my interpretation on the deeper, underlying paradox.

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. pp. 18-19.

<sup>44</sup> From this viewpoint inquiry can be thought just as one of many ways that are available for one to come to know what he did not know. When [M2] is understood in this way, it is more plausible that Meno intends to criticize the fact that Socrates won’t be able to recognize it even when Meno provides a right answer about what virtue is. Cf. chapter III-4 for the detailed reconstruction of *Meno* 80d5-e5.

<sup>45</sup> Aristotle in the *Posterior Analytics* (71a29-30) paraphrases the *aporēma* in the *Meno* (τὸ ἐν τῷ Μένωνι ἀπόρημα) as “you will learn either nothing or what you know (ἢ γὰρ οὐδὲν μαθήσεται ἢ ἃ οἶδεν) (71a30)”. Aristotle here, concerning “pre-existent knowledge (προϋπαρχούσα γνώσις: 71a1)”, maintains that since all teaching and learning come from already existing knowledge, before any inquiry, you should probably be said to *know* (ἐπίστασθαι) in a way but *not to know* in another way (cf. 71a1-25). If inquiry is not like this, it has to result in the *aporēma* in the *Meno* (71a29). (Cf. also 71b6-8.) I think what I suggest as *the underlying paradox* in the thesis will be identical to what Aristotle regards as ‘the *aporēma* in the *Meno*’. Aristotle rejects a kind of learning which derives from absolutely *nothing*, rather learning always come from pre-existing knowledge. I interpret this as follows: if ‘learning something *coming from pre-existing knowledge*’ is not counted as ‘learning something *which one does not know*’, and if ‘learning’ only means ‘learning something *which one does not know at all* (i.e. something which one is completely blank about)’, since there is no such learning which derives from complete ignorance, you won’t learn anything or learn only what you already know (this is also argued by Scott 2006: 84). Charles provides an alternative interpretation on the same argument in the *Posterior Analytics*, which regards this as Aristotle’s attempt to resolve the paradox in the *Meno* which is, according to him, caused by Plato’s failing to distinguish two different kinds of question, one is the definition of virtue, and the other is the identification of virtue (2010: 136-149). Although I agree with Charles’ interpretation on both of Aristotle’s and Plato’s texts, I suspect that this is ‘Plato’s’ mistake, because, as I will argue in chapter IV, Socrates’ response exactly provides the same sort of idea which Aristotle presents in the *Posterior Analytics*: i.e. all learning and inquiry are recollection of what soul has already known. See chapter II-3 and IV for the detailed analysis of Socrates’ response in the *Meno*. Cf. note 190.

### **3. Socrates' Response**

The third question ([3]) addresses whether or not Socrates' response completely disarms the paradox, although there is virtually no interpretation which thinks it does.<sup>46</sup> This question is closely related to the matter of which bits each commentator regards as Socrates' serious reply: the myth of the immortality of the soul, the theory of recollection, and the slave's geometrical demonstration. Scott regards the theory of recollection, including the slave's geometrical demonstration, as Socrates' response, but maintains that it is neither necessary nor sufficient to solve the eristic dilemma, because the way to solve the problem of inquiry is, as he analyses it, to differentiate full knowledge of the object from belief (i.e. a partial grasp of it). Scott thinks that the problem of discovery is also not given any response, and that the theory of recollection is merely "a psychological strategy of carrot and stick (2006: 81)" to intrigue Meno into Socratic inquiry (Ibid. 79-82). On the other hand, Fine suggests the alternative solution that Plato replies to it by keeping the continuous transition from true belief to knowledge (2007: 349). Fine thinks that the 'foreknowledge principle' is not necessary for resolving the problem of discovery, because knowledge is, as Socrates says, "true belief tied down by explanatory reasoning (98a4) (Ibid. 349)",<sup>47</sup> and Plato's intention is, according to her, to show that inquiry is possible from true beliefs (Ibid. 344). As Fine points out, when Meno wonders what the difference is between true belief and knowledge, Socrates answers that when true beliefs are tied down by such strong reasoning which brings about the conclusion, they first become knowledge, and then remain. Socrates says this is recollection (98a).<sup>48</sup>

However, the remaining problem is, if Socrates' response is that knowledge is true beliefs which are tied down by strong reasoning, whether it really disarms what the passage 80d5-e5 questions: i.e. whether what Meno question suggests simply admits that knowledge is, in fact,

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<sup>46</sup> Amongst those who think that Plato erroneously thinks that Socrates' response disarms the paradox despite the fact that it does not, for example, White maintains that although both the object and the specification can be recalled simultaneously according to the theory of recollection, it does not answer the puzzle (1974: 53).

<sup>47</sup> See *Gorgias* 508e-509a, 527b. Cf. also Fine (2004: 61) for various other interpretations.

<sup>48</sup> An alternative view is argued by Charles who focuses on the difference between Aristotle and Plato (cf. note 45). Charles thinks that Platonic recollection provides knowledge, i.e. the essences existing independently of this world (2010: 148), which, I believe, cannot be applied especially for the case of the *Meno*. Cf. also Sedley's comment which will support Fine's argument: "knowledge is true belief bound down by reasoning out the cause" has been judged by many to be Plato's most successful account of knowledge. It is one that deeply influenced Aristotle (2010: xxii)".

a kind of beliefs.<sup>49</sup> Meno's initial argument ([M1] and [M2]) (as I argued above) claims that it will be impossible for Socrates to come to know what he did not know at all what it was. If Socrates' response is that he will be able to come to know what he did not know at all what it was by means of tying down his beliefs about what he currently thinks what it is with strong reasoning, it seems to me that this response contradicts the fact that Meno's question clearly assumes an inquirer who is completely blank about the object of inquiry. This is, in fact, (contradictorily) something which even Socrates himself may be hesitant to accept straightforwardly, as he claims the clear difference between knowledge and true belief at 98b.<sup>50</sup> Socrates' view on the relation between knowledge and belief seems to me not determinate than we expect in the *Meno*. Although Fine's interpretation about the connection from true belief to knowledge is convincing in so far as some parts of the dialogue is concerned, if this is the only solution provided by Socrates, it follows that his response does not disarm the problem that it is impossible for one to come to know what he did not know at all what it was.

One might think that it is not a paradox because we can know in any way whatever we potentially know rather than whatever we absolutely have no idea about, and that the theory of recollection exactly provides such a possibility of transition from the state of not-knowing (not-recollecting) to that of knowing (recollecting) about what we have already potentially known. However, the important thing which is often overlooked is that the theory of recollection does not explain anything more than the change between these two intellectual states through recollection. Even if recollection is possible, why it can be said that recollected things are really 'knowledge'? Why can you say that your beliefs will become 'knowledge', rather than remain as (admittedly somehow better) beliefs forever? This problem is in fact given a response by the immortality of the soul, which maintains that the soul, being immortal, has 'knowledge' but not only 'true beliefs'.

My main suggestion of the thesis is, as will be argued, that there is the underlying paradox which does not appear on the surface of *Meno* 80d5-e5. This is what I regard as a conflict between Socrates epistemological positive dogmatism supported by the myth of immortality of the soul and Gorgias' epistemological negative dogmatism which claim that it is

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. Welbourne 1986: 243.

<sup>50</sup> Although Grube translates '*doxa*' as 'opinion', I use 'belief' following Scott and Fine, with regarding both are interchangeable and thinking it harmless for the purpose of my thesis.

impossible for human beings to know the truth of reality:<sup>51</sup> The former regards that everyone 'knows' everything by means of the knowing soul, and the latter that no one knows anything. Each of two epistemologies between the positive side ([P]) and the negative side ([N]) respectively says:

[P] We know everything.

[N] We do not know anything.

And, I will suggest that the eristic argument is, founded upon these two arguments, capable to argue the impossibility of whatever expresses the intellectual transition from not-knowing to knowing, for example, inquiry, discovery, learning, etc:

[S1] A man does not inquire into/discover/learn what he does know.

[S2] A man does not inquire into/discover/learn what he does not know

As I will argue in chapter IV, The immortality of the soul provides the fundamental basis for the possibility of knowledge. On the other hand, I will argue in chapter V that Gorgias' second part of his *On What Is Not* or *On Nature* rejects the possibility of knowledge. Socrates adheres to the possibility of the accessibility of the truth of reality (cf. 86b1; ἡ ἀλήθεια τῶν ὄντων)<sup>52</sup> by the myth of immortality of the soul. On the other hand, Gorgias denies it by holding the truth of reality to be inapprehensible for human beings either through intellects or sense-perceptions. Both sides are equally strong arguments, so both of them cannot refute each other. Thus, the mutual counterarguments together present a serious paradox between two dogmatic epistemological positions. Thus this is what I think the real, underlying paradox of *Meno* 80d5-e5 in the same sense of antinomy. Having briefly clarified three puzzles raised by previous interpretations above, we can now turn to my alternative and new interpretation of *Meno* 80d5-e5 to resolve them.

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. chapter V for the details.

<sup>52</sup> The Greek 'τὸ ὄν' here is again, depending on commentators, translated in various ways; e.g. 'reality (Grube in J.M. Cooper 1997)', 'things (Scott 2006: 93; Sedley 2010: 23)', 'the things (Sharples 1985: 81; Weiss 2001: 120)', 'beings (Ionescu 2007: 88)'. In order to show that Socrates, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus rather employs the Eleatic terminology, I will use the translation 'what-is' for 'τὸ ὄν', and 'reality' or 'things that are' for the plural, with the original Greek words throughout in this thesis.

### **III. Underlying Foundations of the Eristic Argument**

#### **1. All-or-Nothing Knowledge in the Euthydemus**

I would like to begin from the first puzzle which maintains that Socrates' evaluation of Meno's question as an 'eristic argument (ὁ ἐριστικός λόγος 80e2; 81d6)' contradicts the assumption that it has philosophical importance. And, the first question was – Is Socrates' restatement identical with Meno's initial question? My answer is simply yes; Socrates reformulates Meno's question from the form of a mere contentious counterargument which attacks Socrates' claim that he does not know what virtue is at all into that of its original generalized argument on the impossibility of inquiry for a man into either what he knows or what he does not know, but does not change its authentic meaning in terms of preserving its eristic nature. When Meno utters the question, he clearly points out Socrates' personal state of *aporia* with the second person singular, excluding himself. Some commentators think that the reason why Socrates calls it 'eristic' is because Meno's intention is contentious, just wanting to refute Socrates' position.<sup>53</sup> Politis points out that Meno's state of *aporia* at 80a-b is distinct from the slave's, who avoids the self-conceit of claiming to know the answer to the geometrical question asked by Socrates (2006: 95-96). Meno's state is rather, Politis says, an analogy with those who believe that Socrates simply refutes their claims in order to reveal that they do not know what they thought they knew (cf. *Apology* 21b1-23a4). Meno's comparison of Socrates to a wizard and a stingray, as Politis maintains, reveals his disgust, which is caused by his frustration in trying to satisfy Socrates' demand to state the essence of virtue. However, if the argument is eristic merely because Meno's intention is so, why does Socrates need to take it so seriously, and wouldn't it contradict Socrates' generalized applicability of the claim? Does it mean that the person who has a contentious intention is guilty but the argument itself is innocent?<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. chapter II-1.

<sup>54</sup> Aristotle analyses 'eristic' arguments in the *Sophistical Refutations* in details. In this treatise, Aristotle maintains that the same argument will be sophistical or eristic depending on the purpose: it will be eristic insofar as its aim is an apparent victory, while it will be sophistical insofar as its aim is an apparent wisdom (171b25-33). However, since Aristotle's view would not be completely identical to Socrates', I will examine in what sense Socrates uses the term 'eristic' in the *Meno* by seeking for as many hints as possible in Platonic dialogues while referring to Aristotle's arguments.



Meno's question, as many commentators think, obviously comes from outside of the conversation.<sup>55</sup> When Meno advances the argument, he asks Socrates "doesn't this argument (ὁ λόγος οὗτος) appear to you to be good (καλῶς) (81a1)?" Meno is undoubtedly talking about whether 'the argument' is good or not as *an* argument, rather than maintaining any commitment to what the argument claims. It shows that the argument is for Meno merely a tool to refute Socrates' disavowal of knowing what virtue is. As Socrates elsewhere clarifies the difference between eristic arguments and the method of dialectic (75c8-d2), the eristic debater, in fact, would not need to commit himself to the claim which he uses at all, since his job is just to take an adversary's claim and refute it. When Meno asks Socrates to *teach* him what Socrates explains about the myth of the immortality of the soul and that the theory of recollection is really so, Socrates is cautious not to be refuted by Meno's use of eristic argument by answering that he will 'teach' it soon after saying that there is no teaching, but only recollecting. Although Meno here explains that he does not have such an intention, Socrates blames Meno for often attempting to show that Socrates is saying something opposed to his own words (81e3-82a5). Socrates' comment implies what eristic arguments should be like, picking up the words that have slipped from the adversary's mouth, and demonstrate that the adversary contradicts himself.

This adjective 'eristic' is, as McCabe correctly points out (2009: 235), specifically connected to sophistry in Plato's *Euthydemus*, which examines what is called 'eristic' by Socrates. Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in this dialogue appear as "another new kind of sophist (271c1)" according to Crito, and Socrates concedes that they are "so skilled in fighting in arguments and in refuting whatever may be said, no matter whether it is true or false (272a7-b1)".<sup>56</sup> Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, unlike Gorgias, claim to teach virtue (*aretē*) better and more quickly than anyone else (273d8-9). Socrates reveals to Crito his strong wish to get this wisdom, namely the "eristic sort (ἡ ἐριστικός; 272b10)".<sup>57</sup> I agree with Sprague's point that "they [Euthydemus and Dionysodorus] are not really interested in truth but only in verbal battles (1962: 3)". The eristic sort of arguments can be, therefore, thought not to involve any fixed criterion of judging truth or falsehood of statements, but purely purport to refute their interlocutor's claims and win in speech battles.

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<sup>55</sup> E.g. Phillips 1948: 88; Sharples 1985: 142; Scott 2006: 82. Cf. also note 32.

<sup>56</sup> Compare this with Socrates' evaluation of Gorgias' art of rhetoric which enables him to *answer* whatever is asked (but not to refute whatever is said) even about what he does not know (70b5-c3; see p. 7).

<sup>57</sup> The adjective "ἐριστικός" does not appear so often in Platonic dialogues; except for the *Meno* and *Euthydemus*, for example, *Lysis* (211b8), *Philebus* (17a4), *Republic* (454b5, 499a1), and *Sophist* (225d1, e9, 226a2, 231e2).

In the *Euthydemus*, there is, as McCabe maintains (2009: 247 ff.), a parallel argument which includes the same epistemological concern as that in the *Meno*, namely the conception of all-or-nothing knowledge. When Socrates and young Clinias fall into the state of *aporia* in the middle of their inquiry into what knowledge is that which will make them happy, Socrates asks the two sophists to give them assistance to dispose of the difficulty and make progress in the argument. Euthydemus replies to Socrates asking whether Socrates wants to be taught the very knowledge which he is seeking for or to demonstrate that Socrates already possesses it (292e-293b). Socrates answers that he is keen for Euthydemus to show that Socrates himself already has the knowledge, because it will be much easier for him not to need to be bothered to learn it newly from anyone else.<sup>58</sup> Then, Euthydemus' demonstration that Socrates already knows is as follows (293b7-294a3):

- (1) There are some things which Socrates knows.
- (2) It is impossible for any of things that are (τῶν ὄντων) which happens to be not to be itself.
- (3) Socrates knows something.
- (4) Socrates is knowing if he really knows something.
- (5) If Socrates is knowing, he must necessarily know everything.
- (6) Conversely, if there is anything Socrates does not know, then Socrates would be not-knowing, because one cannot be a knower and a not-knower, which are different things, at the same time.

Socrates is upset and claims that there are still many things which he does not know so that he is far from the state of knowing everything. Socrates firstly asks, even if it is proved that he possesses the knowledge in theory, how he can in actuality know what that knowledge he was looking for is. Then, Socrates also wonders whether Euthydemus too should know 'some of things that are (τὰ... τῶν ὄντων)', but there must be others he does not know. However, according to Euthydemus' argument, since it is impossible for any of things that are not to be

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<sup>58</sup> McCabe compares this with 'the lazy argument' in the *Meno* in which Socrates avows that the eristic argument will make one lazy (81d, 86c) (2009: 250, 252). It is certainly the case that this is the reverse of his avowal of the duty of inquiry in the *Meno*: whether you in fact know what you thought you did not know (in the *Euthydemus*) or it is impossible for you to know what you do not know (in the *Meno*), there would be no duty of inquiry. McCabe's point is, however, slightly different from this but focuses on what she calls 'external' account of knowing. The problem is whether you *really* know or not. So, if you merely believe that you know what you in actuality do not know, it makes you lazy (see McCabe's argument below).

what they are (2), if Socrates knows something (3) and he is 'knowing' (4), he cannot be 'not-knowing' (6) because of the premise (2) that Socrates cannot be a knower and a not-knower at the same time (those are mutually exclusive), so he must know everything (5). Euthydemus asserts that one knows everything, if one *really* knows even one thing. Thus, Euthydemus himself also knows all things.

This is surely, as McCabe also points out, a caricature of a holistic account of knowledge (2009: 248, n.33), which maintains that if you *really* know one thing, you must necessarily know everything: since what-is (τὸ ὄν) is *one* so knowledge of it is as a whole *one*, it is impossible for someone to know something but not to know other things. Again, this is also an obvious parallel to the epistemological claim that Socrates himself insists on through the kinship of all things in the theory of recollection in the *Meno* (81c). Quite similarly to the theory of recollection, Euthydemus rejects that there are some who do not know some things, but maintains that everyone knows everything if he *really* knows some things. Then, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus claim that they have known everything since they were born (294e). Ctesippus, thinking that such a thing is inconceivable, asks whatever they are unlikely to know (e.g. how to dance), but these sophists keep maintaining that they know each of the things, even disgraceful ones. Socrates finally asks whether they know that the good men are unjust. Since Dionysodorus is inclined to reject it, Euthydemus warns that Dionysodorus will commit to that the same person can be a knower and a not-knower at the same time.

McCabe thinks that the theory of recollection of the *Meno* rejects the external account of knowledge but holds the internal account of it which is missing in the *Euthydemus*. While in the *Euthydemus* Socrates is given an account of knowing or not-knowing from the external perspective (i.e. Euthydemus), the theory of recollection invites the attention to the internal account given by the inquirer himself (2009: 234). She thinks that, following Scott's analysis, Meno's question misses Socrates' point that we do not inquire into what we know, while Socrates' misses Meno's interest in what happens when we reach what we did not know through inquiry, viz. the problem of discovery (Ibid. 235). Thus, according to her, there are three limbs in two different versions;

1. No inquiry into what we do not know.
2. No inquiry into what we do know.
3. No discovery of what we don't know.

And, she maintains that the theory of recollection may be designed to disarm the fourth limb;

4. No discovery of what we do know (McCabe 2009: 236).<sup>59</sup>

McCabe maintains that, while Meno's challenge is concerned with the external conditions of knowledge, namely how the object of inquiry which we do not know at all comes into our purview, Socrates' restatement, by covering the fourth limb, addresses more particularly how our own cognitive grip on the object of inquiry can figure in the inquiry itself, in other words, how we come to know that we know what we did not know. According to her, thus, the two versions may complete each other, neither being sufficient without the other (2009: 240). I agree that the self-conscious aspect is one of the important features of slave's geometrical examination. Without being repeatedly asked by Socrates, the slave will not be suddenly engaged in the inquiry into the specific geometrical question for his own sake. It is surely dubious to think that the slave starts to inquire into what he does not know at all without any reason, or anyone asking him (as in the case of the problem of inquiry presented by Socrates' restatement). Rather, the object of the slave's inquiry is provided by Socrates and continuously re-asked until Socrates and Meno confirms that the slave reaches a satisfactory correct answer. This clearly provides certain motivation and sufficient reason for the slave to be engaged on the inquiry and to finish it with the discovery, by reflecting on his own belief about his knowledge, and reviewing his own answers many times.

What I do not understand in McCabe's arguments is what she calls internal and external account of knowledge and how it is related to what the passage 80d5-e5 questions. McCabe interprets the paradox as raising the question of both internal and external features of knowledge and that the theory of recollection is designed to explain what it is to know that we know. However, does the theory of recollection really explain about knowing that we know? The theory of recollection will certainly disarm the fourth limb by considering the discovery as the process of recovering what one initially knows through recollection.

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<sup>59</sup> McCabe changes the subject from Meno's second person singular to the generalized first person plural without any explanation, although neither Meno's nor Socrates' version uses this personal pronoun (cf. p. 19 for Scott's reconstruction). However, it is certain, as I will argue, that Plato carefully chooses the specific subject modes for each of Meno's question and Socrates' restatement. In order to be used in eristic ways, Meno's question and Socrates' restatement should respectively employ the second person singular ('you') for attacking its interlocutor's argument and third person singular ('a man') because it is the original version of the eristic argument, rather originally including the speaker himself ('we') who makes use of the argument. See chapter III-4 for the detailed analysis of the various subject modes of the eristic argument.

However, it is not because that can explain self-conscious knowledge, rather it suggests that discovery is possible in the sense that recollection is possible. If what McCabe suggests is the main concern of the paradox, it seems to me that Socrates' response to what he regards as 'the paradox' merely shows the effectiveness of Socratic elenchus to urge the slave to realize that he in actuality does not know what he thought he knew, as Socrates explicitly compares it with Meno's *aporia* (84a3-c9). If my interpretation of McCabe's argument is right, this elimination of self-conceit may be something which Socrates' elenchus can disarm by means of assisting the inquirer to realize there is something to inquire into, and recover true opinions and eliminate false ones.

## **2. Four Features of Eristic Arguments**

1. Whichever answer you choose, you will be refuted.

By examining what exactly 'eristic' arguments are like in the *Euthydemus*, I would like to show that the arguments are useful to explain why both Meno's question and Socrates' restatement are called 'eristic' too – an aspect distinct from what McCabe focuses on. I think that there are at least four features of 'eristic' arguments in the *Euthydemus*. The first feature is, as Dionysodrus at the outset whispers to Socrates, that whichever answer you choose to a dilemmatic question, you will eventually be refuted (275e5-6). Clinias is asked which, either the wise or the ignorant, are the men who learn, and answers that the wise are the learners. However, Euthydemus refutes this: when one is to learn something, he should be ignorant about that, so the ignorant learns. The next question is whether the things the learners learn are those they do not know or those they do know, and Clinias answers that they will learn what they do not know following the consequence of the previous claim that the learner is ignorant. However, again Clinias is refuted, because Clinias knows letters, and will learn what someone dictates with letters, since Clinias knows all letters, he must learn what he knows (i.e. letters), so the learners should be those who know, but not those who do not know (275d-277b).<sup>60</sup> Finally, the third question is whether learning is the acquisition of the

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. *Sophistical Refutations* 166a20.

knowledge of what one learns, and their conversation is interrupted by Socrates in the middle:

Don't be surprised, Clinias... you must now imagine yourself to be hearing the first part of the sophistic mysteries. In the first place, as Prodicus says, you must learn about the correct use of words (*περὶ ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητος*); and our two visitors are pointing out this very thing (277d4-e5).

Socrates attracts Clinias' attention to their different uses of words in their arguments, about which Prodicus is said to have originally taught people. Socrates regards this as a practice whereby Euthydemus and Dionysodorus let Clinias realize their ambiguous usage of the same words by himself:

you did not realize that people use the word "learn" not only in the situation in which a person who has no knowledge of a thing in the beginning acquires it later, but also when he who has this knowledge already uses it to inspect the same thing, whether this is something spoken or something done. (As a matter of fact, people call the latter "understand" rather than "learn", but they do sometimes call it "learn" as well.) ... The same word is applied to opposite sorts of men, to both the man who knows and the man who does not (277e5-278a7).

Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are, as Sprague points out (1962: 4-5), using equivocal terms: 'learner' is firstly used for the ignorant who *does not know* and then for those who *do know*.<sup>61</sup> Socrates says that when Euthydemus uses the word 'learn', he does not clarify which meaning he intends, either acquisition of knowledge or understanding something by using knowledge which one already has. In the first argument (acquisition of knowledge) that the learner is ignorant, Clinias is made confused between the contents of learning and the identification of learning. The identification is about what you do not know and about what you are going to learn, while the contents is what you do not know about the object of your learning and what you are going to learn about it. Concerning that the learner knows what he does not know and is going to learn, he is said to be wise enough to know the object of his learning, but concerning the contents of learning, he does not know yet what he will learn about the object, so he is still ignorant about what he is going to learn about it. The same person, i.e. the learner, can be said to be the wise and the ignorant on the same object at the

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. also *Sophistical Refutations* 165a5 ff.

same time but in different senses. In the second argument that the learners learn what they know, in order to understand something, the learners use knowledge which they already possess, e.g. language, practice, etc. The learners learn ('understand') what they already know, while they learn what they do not know on the same object. The same people, i.e. the learners, again, can be said to learn what they know and what they do not know on the same object at the same time but in different senses. Socrates, therefore, says that 'learn' is by them applied to opposite sorts of men, namely to both the man who knows and the man who does not. Their arguments mix up these distinctions of terms, and depending on how their interlocutor answers, they can refute the interlocutor's claim by employing alternative uses of the same term. Since there are two persons, Euthydemus and Dionysodrus, who are picking up the argument (ἐκδεξάμενος τὸν λόγον; 277b4),<sup>62</sup> they do so quickly enough for their interlocutors not to have the time to carefully figure out the variety of different meanings which their uttered statements are capable of covering. Thus, Socrates characterises the argument as "trapping people and overturning them by means of the distinctions in words (278b6-7)".

## 2. The impossibility of falsehood.

The second feature of their eristic arguments is the claim that there is no lie, no contradiction, no false statement, and no false opinion. These claims are established upon Eleatic epistemology and ontology on what-is (τὸ ὄν) and what-is-not (τὸ μὴ ὄν). The demonstration by Euthydemus begins with the impossibility of speaking falsely (283e7-a8):

- (1) If it is possible to tell lies, it should be when one speaks the thing which one is talking about, but is not when one does not speak it.
- (2) If he speaks this thing, he speaks no other one of things that are (τῶν ὄντων) except the very one he speaks.
- (3) The thing he speaks is one of things that are (τῶν ὄντων), distinct from the rest.
- (4) The person speaking that thing (ἐκεῖνος) speaks what-is (τὸ ὄν).
- (5) The person who speaks what-is (τὸ ὄν) and things that are (τὰ ὄντα), speaks the truth (τῶν ἀληθῶν).

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<sup>62</sup> A Similar account of 'taking up the argument' also appears in the *Meno* (75c8-d2).

- (6) So, if Dionysodorus speaks things that are (τὰ ὄντα), he speaks the truth (τάληθῆ) and tells no lies.

Ctesippus, however, objects: but, a person who speaks these things (ταῦτα) does not always speak the things that are (τὰ ὄντα). Euthydemus continues (284b1-c6):

- (7) But, things that are not (τὰ ... μὴ ὄντα) surely do not exist (οὐκ ἔστιν).  
(8) The things that are not (τὰ ... μὴ ὄντα) are nowhere (οὐδαμοῦ).  
(9) Then, there is no possibility that any person whatsoever could do anything to the things that are not (τὰ μὴ ὄντα) so as to make those things which are nowhere (τὰ μηδαμοῦ ὄντα) be.  
9-2) When the rhetoricians (οἱ ῥήτορες) speak to the people, they do something.  
9-3) If they do something, they also make something.  
(10) Then, nobody speaks things that are not (τὰ ... μὴ ὄντ'), since no one is capable of making what-is-not (τὸ μὴ ὄν). So, nobody speaks falsely.  
(11) If Dionysodorus really does speak, he speaks the truth and things that are (τάληθῆ τε καὶ τὰ ὄντα).

Ctesippus again objects: but he speaks things that are only in a certain way and not as really is the case. While Euthydemus attempts to continue refuting Ctesippus' argument, Dionysodorus claims that Ctesippus is abusing them. Socrates tries to tell them not to quarrel over words (ὀνόματι διαφέρεσθαι; 285a5). Ctesippus replies to Socrates that he is simply contradicting the things Euthydemus is talking about, rather than abusing them. However, Euthydemus, in order to refute Ctesippus' claim again, begins the demonstration on the impossibility of contradiction (τὸ ἀντιλέγειν) (284c7-286b6):

- (12) There are words (*logoi*) to describe each thing of things that are (ἐκάστῳ τῶν ὄντων).  
(13) The words describe it as it is (ὡς ἔστιν), but not as it is not (ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν).  
(14) If we [Euthydemus and Ctesippus] were both to speak the description of the same thing, we would not be contradicting, because we would be saying the same thing.  
(15) But, when neither of us [Euthydemus and Ctesippus] speaks of the thing, it would be the case that neither of us had the thing in mind at all.



- (16) It is impossible for us to contradict, when I [Euthydemus] speak the description of the thing, whereas you [Ctesippus] speak another description of another thing.
- (17) Otherwise, it is the case that I [Eutydemus] speak it but you [Ctesippus] speak nothing at all, and that no person who does not speak can contradict one who does speak.

Euthydemus and Dionysodorus' argument relies on a controversial dichotomy between what-is ( $\tau\acute{o} \delta\acute{\nu}$ ) as speakable, existence and the truth, and what-is-not ( $\tau\acute{o} \mu\grave{\eta} \delta\acute{\nu}$ ) as unspeakable, non-existence and the false.<sup>63</sup> I agree with Sprague who has identified this is the "Eleatic denial of the real existence of what-is-not (1962: 16)" which originates in Parmenidean epistemology and ontology (which I will argue more closely below).<sup>64</sup> Steps (2) and (3) explicitly show that the argument is committed to the dichotomy: since what can be spoken is what-is and what-is-not cannot be spoken, all things that are spoken are what-is. In (5), what-is is defined as synonymous with the truth: if some speaks something, he speaks one of things that are, so he speaks the truth (6). As Ctesippus firstly objects, it could be possible for a person to speak falsely about one of things that are. However, this is refuted by Euthydemus' argument that what is false cannot be spoken (10), because things that are not do not exist (7, 8). Ctesippus again claims that when someone speaks falsely he speaks the things that *are* in a certain way but not as really is the case. This is also refuted by the claim that spoken *logoi* always describe one of the thing that are (12), and words describe the spoken thing as it is but not as it is not (13), if two speakers describe the same thing they would say the same thing (14), and if neither of them describes the thing, it simply means that they do not have the thing in mind at all (15), otherwise, one speaks the thing but the other speak another thing (16), or he speaks *nothing* (17). The possibility that the other is speaking falsely about what-is (i.e. to speak of one of things that are *as that are not*), which is different from speaking what-is-not (i.e. things that are not), is totally ignored and left unexamined. Then, the point raised by Ctesippus, whether or not there are some things amongst things that are that they are only in a certain way, i.e. non-existence or the false, is never taken in account in their argument in the *Euthydemus*.<sup>65</sup> As a whole, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus' argument mixes

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<sup>63</sup> The same interpretation is also found in Sprague 1962: 15.

<sup>64</sup> See chapter V-2, 3. My point here is that although the dichotomy originates with the Eleatics, it would not necessarily be the case that the Eleatics committed themselves to such dichotomy. A close analysis of the Eleatic arguments is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis. Cf. also Notomi 1999: 203: he correctly mentions that "the sharp Eleatic dichotomy between what is and what is not must have provided eristics with a strong weapon of argument".

<sup>65</sup> This matter would be examined more closely in the *Sophist*, as I will argue in chapter V.

up the ontological status (existence or non-existence and speakable or unspeakable) and the alethic status (true or false) of the object by means of regarding on one hand what is spoken as only what-is, true, existence, and on the other hand, what-is-not as false, non-existence and is impossible to be spoken.

Socrates is here surprised with those sophists' techniques of refutation, and points out that the followers of Protagoras and some still earlier made considerable use of this sort of argument, namely that there is no such thing as false speaking (286c6) and false opinion (286d4), and contradiction is impossible.<sup>66</sup> The argument, as Socrates explicitly grasps, relies on the principle that the person speaking (or thinking) must either speak (or think) the truth, or, otherwise, not speak (or not think) at all. Thus, everyone who speaks is speaking the truth, but it is impossible to speak falsely, i.e. speak what-is-not. As a result, no one can make any mistakes either in speaking or in thought. Socrates is then confused and asks "are you making this statement just for the sake of argument, Dionysodorus – to say something startling – or do you honestly believe that there is no such thing as an ignorant man? (286d11-13)" Dionysodorus answers "your business is to refute me (286e1)". McCabe maintains that "their argument suggests an account of truth in which statements are true just if they say the things that are 'about' (2009: 251)". I, however, wonder whether those sophists, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, are in actuality committed to such a specific account of truth, namely "everything is true (Ibid. 249)" for the sake of their arguments. As far as the first feature of their eristic argument is concerned, it is more plausible that they can also argue the opposite, namely everything is false and no one speaks the truth, so it is 'eristic'.<sup>67</sup>

### 3. Various criteria of truth.

The third feature of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus' eristic argument is that each argument is a set of refuting games, but not an argument in a valid sense based on a single and

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<sup>66</sup> Protagoras is said, in the *Theaetetus* (151e-183c), to have been committed to the doctrine that everything is true. Cf. also a parallel argument on falsehood in thought in the *Theaetetus* (187c-200d). Again, Sextus, in the *Against the Logicians*, includes Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in the group of those who deny the criterion of truth: Sextus says that they "assign what is so, and what is true, to the things in relation to something (*M. I.* [64])", which is said by Sextus to be the same as Protagoras' way of denial of the criterion (Ibid. [60-64]).

<sup>67</sup> Cf. *Cratylus* 386d; *Sophistical Refutations* 177b13 ff: In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates also maintains that Protagoras' claim that man is the measure of all things results into the conclusion that human opinions are both true and false (170c). See also chapter V for Gorgias' argument that every thought is what-is-not.

unchanging consistent premise. Every minute, they change not only the topic but also the usage of the terms upon which their arguments are founded. There is no consistency for each argument, and their present conclusions often happen to refute their own previous claims. When Socrates asks what on earth Euthydemus and Dionysodorus have come to teach if it is the case that no one makes any mistakes either in speech or in thought or in action,<sup>68</sup> Dionysodorus criticises Socrates that he now reminds (ἀναμνησκῆ) them of what they said at the beginning, and blames Socrates for the fact that he would even remind (ἀναμνησθήσῃ) them of last-year's argument and *cannot deal with the present argument* (τοῖς δ' ἐν τῷ παρόντι λεγομένοις οὐχ ἔξεις ὅτι χρῆ;) (287b4-5). Dionysodorus' words, *dealing with arguments*, explicitly show that their eristic ways are merely dealing each argument as *an* argument but not examining the truth value of those arguments. They obviously do not care even though each of their arguments contradict or logically disagree with each other. Rather their job is, similar to what Socrates says in the *Meno* (75c8-d2), to pick up the present interlocutor's argument and refute it. They are dealing with each argument expediently, but not examining whether the argument is true or false based upon a fixed criterion, whatever the criterion is.<sup>69</sup>

They each time change various criteria of the meaning of words so that alternatives are set contrary to what their interlocutors expect. As a result, interlocutors end up speaking about things on a different meaning from that the two sophists are about to use. When Ctesippus tells Euthydemus and Dionysodorus to demonstrate that they speak the *truth* (ἐπιδείξασθον ὅτι ἀληθῆ λέγετον), he requires them to set the criterion of truth and falsehood of their argument in the demonstrability of it (294c1-2) (so, what Ctesippus says is 'Show me the evidence'). Ctesippus can be considered here to be standing on a pragmatic foundation of the truth-falsehood criterion.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, Socrates' request is quite different from Ctesippus': when Socrates points out that they may be saying different things on different sides, ignoring the mutual understanding of the questions and answers amongst interlocutors, Socrates is asking them to fix the use of their words before talking and make Socrates understand which meaning they adopt (295c). To fix the use of their words means to determine in what meaning they are going to talk about what they are talking about. What Socrates requires is,

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. Socrates points out that "if it is impossible to speak falsely, or to think falsely, or to be ignorant, then there is no possibility for a man to be mistaken *in his action* (286e-287a)".

<sup>69</sup> I am using the term 'criterion' in my thesis simply to refer to a means of determining the truth and falsehood in the arguments.

<sup>70</sup> Compare with Meno's identical request to demonstrate that what Socrates says is so: "ἀλλ' εἴ πῶς μοι ἔχεις ἐνδείξασθαι ὅτι ἔχει ὡσπερ λέγεις, ἐνδείξαι (*Meno* 82a5-6)". Cf. also chapter IV-4-6.

either they claim that they know everything or not in any sense, to fix their criterion on what sense they use these terms, i.e. 'know', 'learn' etc. so as to enable them to argue the truth and falsehood of their arguments on the fixed criterion. Without doing so, they can argue to either of two opposing conclusions: any claims, statements, and arguments are susceptible of being discussed in opposite ways. Thus, Socrates says that he is not going to answer their question any more, until he learns the question which they are asking (295c8-9).<sup>71</sup>

To summarise what have been examined, we could at least say that the eristic arguments in the *Euthydemus* has four features: they are, (1) not having a fixed criterion to judge whether the argument is true or false, capable of dealing with any claim in any way, and (2) are not concerned with its reliability as reference to the 'reality', (3) or its own consistency between each argument. And, we can probably add that (4) all their arguments are established upon problematic, sharp dichotomies which are derived from Eleatic ontology and epistemology, although the eristic arguments, ironically by using Eleatic terminology,<sup>72</sup> do not give any account or demonstration about the *whole* of 'reality' (providing there is any such thing). Each argument is a piece of the process of refuting the adversary's arguments, which is, therefore, called a *piece of wisdom* by Socrates (293d8).

### **3. Eristic Features of Meno's Question**

Now, let us return to *Meno* 80d5-e5, and think about why Socrates says that Meno brings up "an eristic argument":

M: Then, Socrates, how will you inquire into the thing which you do not know at all what it is? Placing what of the things which you do not know will you inquire into it? Or, even if you happened to meet it, how could you know that this is what you did not know?

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Socrates' avoidance of answering Meno's question at the outset of the dialogue (*Meno* 70a5 ff.) and also *Sophistical Refutations* 176a, 183b7.

<sup>72</sup> See chapter IV-5-10, and V for the detailed argument.

S: I understand what you want to say, Meno. Do you see what an eristic argument you are bringing up (ὁρᾷς τοῦτον ὡς ἐριστικὸν λόγον κατάγεις;), that it is not possible for a man to inquire into either what he knows or what he does not know?...<sup>73</sup>

Meno's question obviously challenges Socrates' controversial claim that he does not know what virtue is *at all* (71b-c). Taking Socrates' disavowal of knowing what virtue is at all literally as Socrates has absolutely no idea about what virtue is, Meno asks how it is possible for Socrates to inquire into what he does not know at all what it is. Meno does not question whether Socrates in actuality does not know anything about virtue, or what Socrates means when he claims not to 'know' *at all*. Thus, the line of readings which hold that Meno's challenge cannot be applied to Socrates who has many ideas and beliefs about virtue for inquiring into it is, I think, pointless. Rather, it points to the apparent contradiction between Socrates' claim that he is completely ignorant about what virtue is and his wish for inquiry and discovery of that which he does not know at all what it is. Meno is picking up Socrates' claims and attempting to overturn them. Socrates is, therefore, pointing out what an eristic argument Meno is bringing up (κατάγεις) and describes Meno as cunning (πανούργος) (81e6). Socrates identifies the original version of the eristic argument which Meno makes use of that it is impossible for a man to inquire into what he knows and what he does not know (see chapter-II-4 below). This eristic argument, as I argued above,<sup>74</sup> can be applied not only to the impossibility of inquiry but also to the impossibility of learning: if you do not know what it is at all, you cannot *learn* it, because you do not how to learn it, and even if someone teaches you the thing which you do not know at all, you cannot know that this is the thing which you did not know. This is in fact inconsistent to Meno's initial question of whether virtue can be learned or not, but Meno is, being eristic, not concerned about his own contradiction. This is, I think, why Socrates calls Meno's argument "eristic".

On the other hand, Socrates here, according to my interpretation, also detects a more serious side to the eristic argument, while he sees in Meno's question the same eristic features found in the *Euthydemus*, insofar as it aims to highlight the contradiction of Socrates' own claims. The verb 'κατάγω' may include a metaphor of Meno's understanding of eristic argument, a term which also has a variety of translations and interpretations. Bluck points out that the verb is used by Plato in the *Sophist* in the meaning of 'spinning' with other verbs which

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. p. 5.

<sup>74</sup> P. 29.

house-servants use, e.g. filtering, straining, winnowing, carding, and weaving (226b), and considers it is a metaphor from spinning (1961: 273). Moline, regarding Bluck's translation as unconvincing, suggests 'recall the argument from exile'; i.e., in this context that Meno 'recalls' from his memory of Gorgias' speeches, following *Menexenus* 242b, *Epistle* III 317e, and the *Critias* 118d (1969: 159). Scott argues that the verb is related to Meno's stingray similes for Socrates, and that Socrates implies that Meno has only fished a half of the argument out of the water, and leaves Socrates to complete the task (2006: 78, n.5). Although every interpretation is suggestive, I would like to add an alternative interpretation following the image of the hunter and fisherman from the *Euthydemus*.<sup>75</sup> Socrates and Clinias, in the inquiry into what knowledge philosophy should aim at, agree that in order to make them happy they need a kind of knowledge which combines, on the one hand, making or acquiring things, and on the other hand, knowing how to use those acquired things. If they know the right use of their possessions, as they agree, they will be able to produce real happiness from them, but if they do not, because of their wrong use of the things, their possession will produce evils (288d ff.).<sup>76</sup> Then, Socrates raises the art of writing speeches (*logoi*) as an example of such knowledge, but Clinias objects by claiming that the knowledge of making speeches is different from that of knowing how to use the speeches and that the latter is more significant. Clinias' argument is as follows:

No art of actual hunting, he [Clinias] said, extends any further than pursuing and capturing: whenever the hunters catch what they are pursuing they are incapable of using it, but they and *the fishermen (οἱ ἀλιῆς) hand over their prey to the cooks*. And, again, geometers and astronomers and calculators (who are hunters too, in a way, for none of these make their diagrams; they simply discover those which already exist (τὰ ὄντα)), since they themselves have no idea of how to use their prey but only how to hunt it, *hand over the task of using their discoveries to the dialecticians (τοῖς διαλεκτικοῖς)* – at least, those of them do so who are not completely senseless (Italics mine, 290b7-c7).

There are analogies of fishermen who hunt prey and cooks who know how to produce beneficial things from the prey, and also dialecticians who know how to use what geometers,

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<sup>75</sup> Bluck's interpretation is, although Moline disagrees, also reasonable, if 'spinning' implies turning over the meaning of 'not-knowing at all' (see *Sophist* 290c, and chapter III-4). Cf. also *Euthydemus* 276d: Socrates compares the two sophists with skilful dancers to twirl (στρέφειν) their interlocutor.

<sup>76</sup> See Sprague (1962: 9) for an alternative but similar summary.

astronomers, and calculators discover.<sup>77</sup> If 'κατάγω' implies this hunting image, Meno has fished the eristic argument, but does not know how to make good use of it except for refuting the counterargument. Since Socrates knows how to use it for a philosophical purpose, Meno hands over it to Socrates to use the eristic argument to reveal the deeper and more serious philosophical problem. This is, I think, the real, underlying paradox of *Meno* 80d5-e5, which I will argue in the following section.

#### **4. A Reconstruction of Meno 80d5-e5 & The Underlying Paradox**

Now, let us closely examine *Meno* 80d5-e5. I will now restate Meno's question as a counterargument which challenges the apparent inconsistency between Socrates' two claims, namely, that Socrates does not know what virtue is at all, but that Socrates also wants to inquire by himself into what virtue is which he does not know at all what it is.<sup>78</sup>

##### 1. Meno's eristic argument:

[M] How will you inquire into the thing which you do not know at all what it is?

→ [M'] You cannot inquire into the thing which you do not know at all what it is.

[M1] Placing what of the things which you do not know will you inquire into it?

→ [M1'] You cannot begin to inquire into it because you do not know anything about  
where to head.

[M2] Even if you happened to meet it, how could you know that this is what you did not  
know?

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<sup>77</sup> One might also think that philosophers cannot be compared with cooks, because cooking is criticised by Socrates as one of the arts of flattering in the *Gorgias* (462d-465e). However, I do not think that Socrates criticises cooking for its art, rather he uses various examples of arts by focusing on their specific features to clarify the point of his present arguments. For example, although dialectic is compared with medicine by the image of a doctor getting rid of false beliefs in the *Sophist* (230c), in the *Phaedrus*, it is what is thought to be the genuine art of rhetoric that is compared with the art of medicine to choose the most appropriate argument depending on the listener's character (270b).

<sup>78</sup> Just to make it clear, this is a logical matter that Socrates' two claims contradict each other.

→ [M2'] Even if you happened to meet it, you cannot know that this is what you did not know.

This eristic argument obviously assumes an inquirer who completely lacks any knowledge or information to identify the object of his inquiry. However, *generally speaking*, a situation in which someone who wants to know what something is is completely blank about it seems to me to be impossible in actuality, or probably I should say in the ordinary sense. Let us assume that one of your friends tells you, "I do not know what [X] is at all", where [X] is also an unfamiliar word for you. You will ask him "what is [X]?" but he repeats "as I said, I do not know what it is *at all* and absolutely have no idea about what it is". This is a quite strange situation if it is an ordinary context, unless he means that he does not know what [X] is 'almost' at all. In the ordinary sense, it is certain that we often use the phrase that "I do not know something at all". For example, you may say "I do not know how to cook at all" in order to explain that you are terribly poor at cooking. Again, you may also say "I do not know that insect at all" in order to mean that you have never seen the unfamiliar insect in the past. But, neither of these statements means that you are completely blank about what you are talking about. You have some ideas, of course, what cooking is like, so you are able to say that you do not know cooking at all by comparing your state with what you think knowing cooking should be like. You may have happened to see the insect in the field while you do not know anything about it, but because you have seen it you can say that you don't know what the insect was at all.<sup>79</sup> Hence, you must feel that your friends' repeatedly replying that he does not know at all what [X] is does not make any sense.<sup>80</sup> You would wonder and ask again "when did you hear about [X], or where does it come from?" He should be able to answer where it comes from, e.g. a book which he has recently read, a stranger he met yesterday, or his dream last night, unless he creates a completely new word by himself. There is no way usually, when there is the object [X] in one's consciousness, for it to have no origins. Therefore, if you can utter that you want to know what [X] is, you should be at least conscious of what you want to know about [X] and have some clues to begin the inquiry into what [X] is or to recognize it when you happen to meet with it. In other words, if you know there is such a thing which you do not know at all, it means that you know at least whence the

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<sup>79</sup> E.g. *Euthydemus* 271c: Crito says that he does not know either Euthydemus or Dionysodorus even after he has seen them and already learned their names from Socrates.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Socrates also repeatedly replies to Meno that he *really* does not know what virtue is at all (*Meno* 71c).



thing came into your awareness. It makes no difference whether the asked matter [X] is either empirical or metaphysical.<sup>81</sup>

On the other hand, Meno brings this as a purely eristic argument to refute either of Socrates' two claims. The argument does not count any beliefs as partial knowledge: either you know or do not know, and suppose a situation in which Socrates is completely blank about what virtue is and has not even the least idea about it, but wants to inquire into what it is. If Socrates takes this argument merely as an eristic attack picking up his words, the similar excuse in the *Euthydemus* would still be effective (p. 33). Socrates could say "no, no, although I said that I do not know what virtue is at all, it does not mean that I am totally blank about what it is. Rather, I know some things about it, and I know what I am talking about, although I do not say that I have 'perfect' knowledge about it".<sup>82</sup> Again, there is also the alternative solution, likely available for Socrates, that is, since Socrates does not know what virtue is, he can now give up an independent inquiry and just learn from Meno or someone else who claims to know what virtue is and simply believe that what they teach is what Socrates was looking for.<sup>83</sup> Whichever Socrates chooses, he could have to abandon either his disavowal of knowledge or his desire for independent inquiry.<sup>84</sup> However, Socrates' answer is neither of these, but Socrates appears to attempt to retain his initial two claims.

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<sup>81</sup> Compare with Phillips' arguments above.

<sup>82</sup> This is what Scott argues, by distinguishing true beliefs (which, according to Scott, is partial knowledge) from full knowledge, the paradox can be disarmed.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. also Welbourne argues that for such a transmission of 'knowledge' you have to believe what the person who gives you it tells you is true (1986: 232). Similar arguments appear, for example, in the *Gorgias* (459a) and *Sophist* (233bc).

<sup>84</sup> The fact is that the theory of recollection might be said to partly reject Socrates' former claim that he does not know what virtue is at all, as McCabe partially argues. According to the theory of recollection, the soul has learnt all things including what virtue is before one was born, so it means that Socrates has known what virtue is since his birth in a sense that his soul knows. On the other hand, if Socrates thinks that the soul can be distinguished from Socrates himself, Socrates claim could remain still consistent, because it can be said that, although the soul knows, Socrates himself has not yet recollected, so in order to 'know' what the soul has learned, Socrates still has to complete the process of recollection. Socrates has not yet known, but already 'known' in terms of being potentially capable to recollect. See chapter IV-4-9 for the detailed analysis on the subject of recollection in the myth of the *Meno*, which is quite different from other myths in other Platonic dialogues.

2. From 'you' (Socrates) to 'we' (Socrates and Meno).

For my purpose, I will now add two other claims by Socrates; the third claim that Meno also does not 'know'<sup>85</sup> what virtue is, and the fourth that Socrates has never met anyone who knows it.<sup>86</sup> Firstly, the subject will be changed from Meno's second person singular to the first person plural:

[M''] We cannot inquire into the thing which we do not know at all what it is.

[M1''] We cannot begin to inquire into it because we do not know anything about where to head.

[M2''] Even if we happened to meet it, we cannot know that this is what we did not know.

Now, the only way to know what virtue is should be to be taught by someone who knows what virtue is. However, not only Meno could not remember what Gorgias really says virtue is, but also according to Socrates, there has been no one who Socrates thinks knows it. Meno's counterargument can now be understood as the most extreme negative (pessimistic) conclusion, namely no one knows what virtue is at all. One might think that Socrates himself has never admitted such a negative possibility as that there should be no one who knows what virtue is. It is the case that, despite the fact that Socrates and Meno reach the conclusion that there are so far no teachers of virtue at the end of the later inquiry into who is the teacher of it, Socrates still attempts to keep looking for some other person who may know it and will be able to teach them (96e).<sup>87</sup> However, what I am talking about is not whether Socrates is committed to such a negative view or not, but that his claims can result into such conclusion.

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<sup>85</sup> In this context, Socrates would say later that Meno has not yet 'recollected' (86b), according to the theory of recollection, if Socrates wishes to maintain the consistency of his own argument. Socrates here precisely expresses Meno's present state as "ὁμοιοῦς εἶ οὐκ εἰδότες (80d3)" in the subjunctive mood.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Socrates also maintains that anyone in Athens will claim that he does not even know what virtue is (71a).

<sup>87</sup> Socrates' negative view can be found in the *Apology*: Socrates says that it is likely the case that the god is in reality wise, but human wisdom is worth little or nothing (23a5-b4). As I will argue below, I do not think that Socrates has any specific and firm commitment on the possibility of 'knowledge (in a metaphysical sense)', and I also think that it is more likely pointless to argue whether or not he does. The *Theaetetus* shows that Socrates' and Theaetetus' inquiry into what knowledge is again falls into *aporia*, and I imagine that through these *aporiai*, Plato attempts to demonstrate rather the everlasting conflicts in epistemology, ontology, and metaphysics amongst earlier philosophers. Cf. for example, *Sophists* 246a ff.

3. From 'we' (Socrates and Meno) to 'no one' (generalized).

[M<sup>'''</sup>] No one can inquire into the thing which no one knows at all what it is.

[M1<sup>'''</sup>] No one can begin to inquire into it because no one knows anything about where to head.

[M2<sup>'''</sup>] Even if someone should happen to meet it, no one can know that this is what no one knew.

Concerning [M2<sup>'''</sup>], an identical argument is found in Xenophanes, cited by Sextus in *Against the Logicians*. Xenophanes, according to Sextus, maintains that "there is no criterion of truth, on account of there being nothing apprehensible in *the nature* of the things being investigated (*I. [51]*)", and Sextus interprets the claim with the following example of people looking for gold in an entirely dark room, which is an analogy for philosophers:<sup>88</sup>

For if we were to imagine some people looking for gold in a dark room containing many valuables, it will happen that each of them, upon seizing one of the objects lying in the room, will believe that he has taken hold of gold, yet none of them will be sure that he has encountered the gold – even if it turns out that he absolutely has encountered it. And so, too, into this universe, as into a large house, a crowd of philosophers has passed on the search for the truth, and the person who seizes it probably does not trust that he was on target (*M. I. [52]*).

Sextus' example is straightforward concerning its epistemology. It suggests that it is possible for the people to search for the gold, which is an analogy of 'the truth' for philosophers, because they 'think' that there is 'the gold' in the room. But, it is not possible for the people to see whether they have discovered it or not, because it is eternally dark and they are blind. So, the example does not deny the existence of the gold, i.e. 'the truth', which is exactly in the house, but mixed up with other similar things. And, the reason why the people cannot find what they are looking for is because they cannot see it properly. This focuses on an epistemological matter, but not on an ontological matter, concerning the object of the inquiry. It is not for the moment concerned with the possibility either that there is in fact no gold in the room or that the gold exists outside of the house, somewhere inaccessible for people.

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<sup>88</sup> Sextus Empiricus there argues over many of those who deny a criterion of the truth in different ways; those people include Xenophanes, Xenias, Protagoras, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, Gorgias, and are considered by Sextus to be the counterparts of those dogmatic philosophers who are adherents of a criterion of the truth, such as Plato, Parmenides, and the Pythagoreans. (Since Sextus relies on various resources, Xenophanes is included in both groups.) Cf. also Scott 2006: 84.

Therefore, Xenophanes says “everything is inapprehensible (Ibid. [49])”, although there is certainly ‘everything’.<sup>89</sup> This argument is, as I argued, not merely the impossibility of inquiry or discovery, but more generally it implies the impossibility of coming to know what is not known by anyone. If philosophers are inquiring into what no one knows what it is at all, the argument points out, it would be impossible for anyone to come to know what it is, because even if someone thinks that he has found it either through inquiry or by accident, no one including the person who thinks he has found it cannot recognize whether that is really what no one knew. This is what I suggest in this thesis as the half of the underlying paradox of *Meno* 80d5-e5, but before arguing how this interpretation of the passage 80d5-e5 is exactly possible in chapter IV and V, let us compare our reformulated version of Meno’s question with Socrates’ restatement to uncover the other half of the real paradox.

#### 4. Socrates’ restatement.

Socrates restatement, as I argued, is the original version of Meno’s eristic argument, one of whose two horns ([S2]) Meno attempts to use for refuting Socrates’ position. Meno’s question [M] (‘How will you inquire into the thing which you do not know at all what it is?’) is simply what is created from [S2] by changing the subject to the second singular, adding ‘at all’ to clarify the point that the argument relies on the dichotomy between knowing and not-knowing, and using the mode of a question rather than an argument.

[S] It is not possible for a man (ἄνθρωπον) to inquire into either what he knows or what he does not know.

[S1] He will not inquire into what he knows, since he knows and there is no need for such a person to inquire.

[S2] He will not inquire into what he does not know, since he does not even know what he is going to inquire into.

The point to see the underlying paradox here is how to understand ‘ἄνθρωπον’ in the argument: which of the following does the term refer to, either a personal state of someone

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<sup>89</sup> Compare this with Xenocrates, who may possibly deny even the existence of the truth: “everything is false, and that every appearance and opinion lies, and all that comes to be comes to be out of what is not... the ultimate criterion of all things is the sense, and they are shown to be false; therefore all things are false. (*M. I.* [53-54])”.

specific who does not know what the object of his inquiry at all, or more generally a man which means 'human beings'?<sup>90</sup> If the term is interpreted as referring to a merely personal state, [S2] is identical with [M1], and Socrates' restatement is simply understood as merely a pair of the eristic argument. However, my suggestion is to interpret the word "ἄνθρωπος" in the broader sense beyond a personal concern. My point is that Socrates' restatement is capable of being understood as two opposite philosophical positions on the possibility and the impossibility for human beings of knowledge (and as I will argue below, Socrates also see this paradox which I here suggest in the *Meno*). The reconstruction into the generalized argument is as follows:

[S'] It is not possible for anyone to inquire into either what everyone knows or what no one knows.

[S1'] No one will inquire into what everyone knows, since everyone knows it and there is no need for anyone to inquire.

[S2'] No one will inquire into what no one knows, since no one even knows what they are going to inquire into.

In short, if 'a man' is understood in the general sense of 'human beings', there is, I believe, no significant or controversial difference between [M'''] and [S2'].<sup>91</sup> There are, I think, two interpretations that may be considered to be available for [S2']: Firstly, let us assume that everyone thinks that there is [Y] in our world, but no one knows what [Y] is at all. No one would know either in which direction they should proceed or in what way it might be discovered. This would be an improbable situation in 'reality' if the question of where [Y] came to our awareness is considered, but it would be logically possible. Otherwise, secondly, there may or may not be [Z] somewhere, but no one knows even that such a thing may exist, no one has ever seen, ever heard, and even imagined it, it has not yet had a name. (So, we cannot call it [Z] and should delete it from the bracket like [ ].) For its inaccessibility for human beings, no one will be able to access [ ] for all eternity. Who can or will begin the inquiry into [ ] if no one has assumed or will assume even its existence? If the latter is the

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<sup>90</sup> Such usage of 'ἄνθρωποι' is also found in the *Meno* 73c1. Cf. also Sextus understands "man (ἄνθρωπος)" in the fragment of Xenophanes as "human being (ἄνθρωπος)" (*M. I.* [50]).

<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, one may think that neither way, the personal interpretation nor the generalized interpretation, after all makes a significant difference, because the inquirer would not be able to know whether or not there is in actuality anyone else who knows what he does not know at all in any case. The important difference is, however, that the generalized version makes the negative claim over all other people. See chapter IV and V.

case, [S2'] might be identical to the extremely negative position of Metrodorus': "We know nothing; we do not even know this very fact, that we know nothing (*M. I.* [88])". Although McCabe understands that the paradox is the psychological state of inquirer, namely, how you can know that you really know what you did not know (2007), I would like to suggest that the underlying matter could be more seriously desperate.

The unknown object may become a problem for us, only when it is known there is such unknown object and especially when it comes to philosophical or important matters for us, e.g. truth, virtue, the good etc.: if the existence of the unknown object is unknown, not important, and not relevant to us at all, we can leave it unknown. [Y] is an epistemological matter of the unknown object, while [Z] is an ontological matter of it. My suggestion is, then, that *Meno* 80d5-e5 is concerned with the problem of the [Y] version, and the object is the truth of things, i.e. the object of genuine 'knowing' and that of Socratic inquiry. In other words, the paradox is, I think, concerned with the possibility of knowledge of the truth of things, namely 'epistemological negative dogmatism', which holds both of the following two claims: (1) there *is* the object of genuine *knowing* which has not yet been known by anyone, but (2) it is impossible for anyone to come to know it.

One might think that such an extreme negative perspective on knowledge is just too ridiculous, unacceptable, and the validity of the argument is not worth discussing, and Socrates does not imply such a paradox at all in the *Meno*. However, there are two sources which, I think, reveal Socrates' seriousness in resolving the challenge raised by epistemological negative dogmatism. Firstly, Socrates clearly attempts to avoid the same consequence in the *Euthydemus*, and that it is Socrates who restates Meno's question into a general argument and takes it seriously by replying to it with the myth of the immortality of the soul, the theory of recollection, and the slave's geometrical question. If not needed, why does he proceed establishing that which apparently presents an epistemological paradox? The reason can be found again at the end of the argument on the impossibility of falsehood in the *Euthydemus*. Euthydemus and Dionysodorus' arguments are there revealed not to concern the consistency between each of their own arguments, and they also force Socrates to answer their given questions in specific order, in specific ways, even when Socrates cannot understand what exactly their question means, and wants to get rid of the ambiguity of the words they use. Socrates finally criticizes their style of argument for not making *any progress*, but just continues to knock down their interlocutors' claims, and for the fact that

their arguments prevent them from knowing how to stop themselves from disputing with each other in spite of their skillful and precise use of words (288a). This is just before Socrates begins his second inquiry with Clinias into what knowledge philosophy should aim for, and there is, thus, a clear contrast between Socratic dialectic and eristic sorts of argumentation. However, it is wrong to think that Socrates simply criticizes their eristic style. When Ctesippus makes a sarcastic remark about the two sophists, approving Socrates' criticism, Socrates, on the contrary, warns that Ctesippus should not miss the serious aspect of their argument:<sup>92</sup>

[Y]ou fail to recognize how remarkable the stranger's wisdom is. It's just that the two of them are unwilling to give us a serious demonstration, but are putting on conjuring tricks in imitation of that Egyptian sophist, Proteus.<sup>93</sup> So let us imitate Menelaus and refuse to release the pair until they have shown us their serious side (288b6-c2).

I would like to suggest that what is called 'their serious side' is the deprivation of the criterion of truth from the argument. As we have seen in this chapter, their argument is not concerned with any reality, but just keeps refuting their interlocutor's arguments. This is, I think, understandable if we consider that they accept a kind of doctrine which denies the possibility for any human beings to access the truth of reality and abandon their argument as valid reference to it. I will argue this closely in chapter V below.

Secondly, the immortality of the soul is, as I will argue in chapter IV, committed to [S1'], i.e. no one can inquire into what everyone knows, since everyone knows it and there is no need for anyone to inquire. Socrates says that the souls, being immortal, has already known everything and there is nothing that the soul has not yet known (81c). And the theory of recollection, as Socrates presents it, creates room for inquiry into what everyone 'knows'. It follows that Socrates' response involves the claim that everyone 'knows' everything in the sense that the soul knows everything, while everyone 'do not know' in the sense that no one has yet accomplished recollection. If Meno's argument does not imply for Socrates an extreme form of epistemological negative dogmatism, Socrates' response certainly does not

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<sup>92</sup> Sprague thinks that Socrates' attitude here is merely a pretence, and not worth being taken seriously (1962: 3). I am arguing against this line of interpretation.

<sup>93</sup> Cf *Odyssey* iv. 382 ff.: Proteus is a sea deity which transforms himself into every shape, e.g. a lion, a dragon, a panther, an enormous boar, even water and a tree to escape. This would be a simile of their non-committal arguments to any criteria of determining truth and falsehood.

make any point. Therefore, the most natural interpretation of what Socrates attempts to disarm in the *Meno* is, according to my interpretation, the extreme negative counterargument which holds that it is impossible for anyone to come to know what is not known. Furthermore, my suggestion is that this epistemological negative dogmatism originated with Gorgias. However, before looking closely into Gorgias' arguments, let us first examine what exactly Socrates replies to the passage 80d5-e5. The next chapter will show that Socrates' response focuses on epistemological positive dogmatism and that there is an epistemological conflict amongst Presocratic philosophers which lies in the background of Socrates' concern.



#### **IV. Epistemology of Meno's Myth**

##### **1. Myths as *Logoi***

In order to clarify the second misunderstanding over *Meno* 80d5-e5 (cf. p. 12-13), it would be worth underlining how the myth of the immortality of the soul is indispensable as Socrates' serious response to what the passage suggests, and how, despite this, it has been treated lightly as a mere tale that is of no use for genuine philosophy.<sup>94</sup> Scott (and also Fine in her discussion with him)<sup>95</sup> totally skips the myth when he examines whether or not Socrates' response disarms the problem of discovery. Scott thinks that only the slave's geometrical demonstration concerning the theory of recollection could be worth being investigated, but that the myth is not relevant to Socrates' solution. Having argued that neither the theory of recollection nor the demonstration give any relevant reply to the paradox, Scott begins to talk about the myth as the religious background of it (2006: 92-97), and concludes that "[Socrates] hopes that the exotic details associated with the theory will intrigue his wayward interlocutor and lure him back into inquiry (Ibid. 94)". Tarrant also slightly undervalues it, and summarises it as follows: "the religious background has not been entirely necessary or entirely pertinent... So when we get to the end of the discussion of recollection we should be asking why it is that Plato has been remythologising Socratic philosophy at the start of the passage (2005: 43)". Even Ionescu, despite her detailed and impressive analyses of the myth, says that "it was necessary to subject the literal meaning of the myth to a philosophical interpretation because the myth is intended primarily to appeal to our emotions and induce us to action rather than as a theoretical and dogmatic account of Plato's view on knowledge (2007: 63)". Few commentators regard the myth as a part of Socrates' serious response, and needless to say, much less as genuine Platonic philosophy. There are also other myths which are relevant to the immortality of the soul appearing in, for example, the *Gorgias* (523ff.),

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<sup>94</sup> I discussed the slave's geometrical demonstration in detail by comparing Piaget's identical psychological experiments with children in my Taught MA dissertation. Since the detailed process of the slave's demonstration is, despite general opinions, not directly related to what I think 'the underlying paradox' of the *Meno*, I do not repeat the detailed analysis in this thesis.

<sup>95</sup> Their main interest is in the state, whether latent or unconscious, in which Plato thinks our knowledge is within us, e.g. latent innatism, content innatism and dispositional innatism, as Fine argues (2007: 355). While I do not deny that could be one of Plato's concerns in the *Meno*, I do not see any evidence that Plato did 'psychology' in the same sense as that of modern psychologies. Cf. also Scott 1995: 24-52.

*Phaedo* (107c-115a), *Phaedrus* (245c-257a), and *Republic* (614b-621d). Interpretative questions that always accompany such Platonic myths are how seriously we should take those stories, what the underlying philosophical concerns are, and what the implications of the metaphors must be.

However, those lines of questions on Platonic myths are often the results of anachronistic prejudices. When McCabe concludes that the theory of recollection does not answer the paradox of the internal and external account of knowledge, she also ignores the significant role of the myth. The myth of the immortality of the soul, if I am right, provides 'the *external* criterion' of knowledge, as a self-explanatory criterion of remembering, that McCabe is seeking for in the theory of recollection.<sup>96</sup> Some recent analyses of psychological elements in the theory of recollection and the slave's geometrical demonstration, as I agree, reveal important and interesting aspects of innate knowledge that Plato might have been aware of in some ways, and throw light on some questions that Plato might have had in mind. However, what I would like to emphasize is that the demonstration itself is not the *direct* response to what the passage 80d5-e5 questions. Commentators are prone to think that the theory of recollection is the only response, which is, I think, one of the greatest mistakes that distort the interpretation of what the paradox is really concerned with. Insofar as one believes that Plato is attempting to disarm the paradox with the theory of recollection and the demonstration, one cannot see how it could answer the paradox, because it obviously does not. I therefore tidy up briefly my interpretation on the correspondences between questions and responses which are discussed from the passage 80d5-e5 to the end of the slave's geometrical demonstration (80a-86c):

(1) There are two claims in the passage 80d5-e5:

- 1) Epistemological negative dogmatism, namely the impossibility of knowledge ([M'' (= M1'' + M2'')] and [S2']).
- 2) Epistemological positive dogmatism, namely the possibility of knowledge ([S1']).
- 3) Each of the two dogmatisms is committed to the impossibility of *coming to know* (either through inquiry, learning or by accident) both what is already known and what is not yet known ([S']).

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<sup>96</sup> I here mean that, unlike the conception of 'knowing' at stake, 'recollecting' can be less controversially explained as self-recognizable, internal phenomenon (provided that it is so although I do not claim that it is the only true way to explain 'recollecting') in the sense that you may be able to recognize that you recollect something which you had forgotten on your own.

- (2) The myth of the immortality of the soul rejects epistemological negative dogmatism ([M''] and [S2']) by supporting the opposite positive possibility ([S1']).
- (3) The theory of recollection, by creating the possibility of inquiry (and discovery) into what is already known, rejects the impossibility of *coming to know* it (i.e. the transition from ignorance to knowing in the sense that from not-recollecting to recollecting) ([S']).
- (4) The slave's geometrical demonstration is introduced to show the validity of the immortality of the soul and the theory of recollection.<sup>97</sup>
  - 1) (The slave's *aporia* is the response to Meno's criticism of his own intellectual numbness and Socrates' *aporia*.)
  - 2) (The slave's gradual progress to the correct answer proves the effectiveness of Socratic elenchus.)
  - 3) That the slave finally reaches the answer supports the immortality of the soul, i.e. the soul already knows everything, being immortal.
  - 4) That the slave previously does not know any geometry supports the possibility of recollection, i.e. anyone can recollect what he currently does not know.

There are at first glance two paradoxes: one is the paradox between the possibility and impossibility of knowledge (1-1, 2), and the other is the paradox between the possibility and impossibility of inquiry (and discovery) (1-3) which is traditionally thought to be the paradox of the *Meno* by many commentators. However, the latter paradox is merely dependent upon the former, viz. the underlying paradox between the negative dogmatism and positive dogmatism on the possibility of knowledge so far as the *Meno* is concerned. As I will argue in this chapter, when Socrates' responses are carefully examined, we will see how much Socrates focuses on the possibility of knowledge (2) rather than the possibility of intellectual transition from ignorance to knowing (3) in the *Meno*. Again, other common puzzles are, I think, caused by focusing on other elements which accompany the slave's geometrical demonstration (e.g. 4-1, 2). If the slave's psychological aspects are the main points which Socrates intends to emphasize, 'the paradox' would certainly be concerned with, for example, as Moravcsik argues, different conceptions of learning between empirical or *a priori* matters (1971). I do not think that, because they are supplemental, the paradox on the possibility of inquiry and those questions implied in the demonstration are not important, or that Plato did

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<sup>97</sup> One commentator who most explicitly distinguishes the relation between the theory and the demonstration is Calvert who says "Plato attempts to demonstrate the truth of the theory by the experiment with the slave boy (1974: 145)".

not have such issues in mind. Rather, it is more likely that Plato is aware of these emerging problems when the first, fundamental paradox between epistemological negative and positive dogmatism is solved by the immortality of the soul and the theory of recollection. What I would like to emphasize is just that such biased distinctions between myth as a speculation and the slave's 'psychological' demonstration in geometry as a serious philosophical argument (or even a pre-scientific experiment) are certainly misleading for the correct understanding of the genuine paradox in the passage 80d5-e5.

Annas, in her *Plato's myths of judgement* concerning Platonic myths in other dialogues, e.g. the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo* and *Republic*, points out that many modern philosophers often ignore and downgrade those myths, thinking that Plato himself takes all myths including his own to be mere *mythoi*, which should be surely despised by contrast with *logoi* or rational discourse (1982: 120). "He [Plato] in fact clearly believes that", Annas maintains, "some *mythoi*, stories, do have rational depth (Ibid. 121)", for example, the *Timaeus*' cosmology is called a 'likely *mythos* (29d2; 59c6; 68d2)', and the *Republic*'s account of the growth of the state is also 'a *mythos* (501e4)'. As Annas argues (Ibid.), it would be too simple to think that Plato is always hostile towards any myths, and I think that the same evaluation can also be applied to the myth of the immortality of the soul in the *Meno*. Socrates obviously responds to passage 80d5-e5 with the myth of the immortality of the soul, including 'the myth' of recollection.<sup>98</sup> The slave's geometrical demonstration is, as both Socrates and Meno explicitly says (82a-b), a demonstration for proving the truth of the myths and the theory of recollection, i.e. that the soul is immortal and it can recollect what it has learned. The demonstration, with its scientific character, in fact distracts Meno, who tends to accept 'scientific' explanation (e.g. Empedoclean doctrine on sense-perception: 76c-e), from the genuine philosophical problem implied by his question,<sup>99</sup> which is contrary to the general view to regard the myth as intending to entertain Meno's curiosity. In order to see the clear relation of the myth, the theory of recollection, and the demonstration, Socrates' response should be now carefully read again. My aim in this chapter is to examine Socrates' response as he gives it in the *Meno*. Although there are some myths in other dialogues (especially, recollection in the *Phaedo*

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<sup>98</sup> Although I keep using the term 'the myth' for the immortality of the soul and 'the theory' for recollection, as generally used by commentators, if the 'knowledge' comes from the immortal soul for recollection, it probably should also be called 'Socratic myth of recollection'. Although some consider 'recollection' Plato's original contribution while the myth originated from some other sources, since 'recollection' can be, as will be argued, considered as a part of the myth, the border between myth and Socratic philosophy in the *Meno* may be more obscure than generally thought. Cf. also Ionescu (2005: 50).

<sup>99</sup> See chapter IV-4-6 for more detailed discussion.

72e3-77a5) which could be related to the *Meno's* myth, since I think that each myth in each dialogue responds to different questions, I attempt an interpretation without supplementing the obscurities of *Meno's* myth with any others from myths in other dialogues.

## **2. The Immortality of the Soul.**

### 1. Introduction of the myth (81a1-9).

The myth of the immortality of the soul and the theory of recollection are introduced by Socrates just after Meno's question and Socrates' restatement at the passage 80d5-e5. Meno asks Socrates whether this argument (ὁ λόγος οὗτος) which Meno presents does not seem to be sound (καλῶς) (81a1). Socrates replies that it does not to him. Meno asks Socrates to explain why not. Socrates responds that it is because he has previously heard wise men and women talking about divine matters, which seemed to him to be true and good (Ἀληθῆ, ἔμοιγε δοκεῖν, καὶ καλόν). Socrates explicitly means that the story that he has heard seems to be more reliable compared with the argument by Meno.

### 2. Reincarnation of the soul (81a10-b6).

Socrates reveals that the story originated with priests and priestesses who took especial care to give an account (*logos*) of their practices, as well as with Pindar and other divine poets (81a10-b2). According to them, the human soul is immortal: even though the body perishes, which is usually called 'death' by people, the soul is eternally reborn. Socrates words are as follows:

[S]ee whether you think they speak the truth (σκόπει εἴ σοι δοκοῦσιν ἀληθῆ λέγειν): They say that the human soul is immortal; at times it comes to an end, which they call dying; at times it is reborn, but it is never destroyed, and one must live one's life as piously as possible (81b3-6).

Although it is known that there had been many different versions of transmigration in antiquity, firstly, it can be at least said that this myth provided by Socrates says that what is immortal and reincarnates is nothing but the human soul. Plato's metaphysics is, as Schofield points, generally considered to be deeply influenced by Pythagorean doctrines (Kirk, Raven & Schofield 2007: 215). Schofield conjectures that it is likely that Pythagoras was the first who expressed the doctrine of immortality in terms of the human soul (*psychē*), although the belief in reincarnation itself may have been brought into Greece from abroad, e.g. India, Central Asia or Southern Russia (Ibid. 220). Diogenes Laertius writes that Xenophanes ridiculed Pythagoras because he stopped some people from beating a puppy, saying that he recognized from its yelping that the puppy contained the soul of one of his friends (KRS [260]). Herodotus also testifies that there were some Greeks, possibly Pythagoras or Empedocles, who maintained that the human soul is immortal and that when the body perishes, it enters other creatures such as animals on the land, those in the sea and those in the sky, and returns again into a human body after a three-thousand-year's cycle.<sup>100</sup> That Socrates later introduces a geometrical demonstration could be counted as evidence that the myth is closely connected to Pythagorean doctrine. However, as Sharples points out, Socrates does not allude to any closely organized group (such as Pythagoreans) but more likely refers to Orphics or doctrines generally emphasizing associated ritual practices (1991: 144-145). It seems to me that Sharples' view of multiple sources is more convincing than to suppose that Socrates here relies on only one resource for the myth.

Although it is not easy to specify a single origin of the myth, it is for Socrates' purpose probably not necessarily an important issue who exactly first told the story. Socrates tells Meno to consider whether the story is true or not by himself.<sup>101</sup> I agree with Scott who thinks that even though the ideas were originally derived from other sources, it is something that Socrates intends to make his own (2006: 95).<sup>102</sup> Rather, Socrates applauds those people for being capable, or at least caring to give a clear account of their own practices. In other words, they can explain the reasons for what they are doing. Why is the priests' and priestesses' account of their religious practices related to the context of the dialogue? It is possibly

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<sup>100</sup> Although Herodotus attributes this to Egyptian doctrine (KRS [261]), Schofield points out that there is no evidence found that the Egyptians thought human souls were reborn as other creatures (Ibid. 220).

<sup>101</sup> For a similar example, in the *Phaedrus*, when Phaedrus teases Socrates for being good at creating any story, such as the Egyptian tale of Theuth, Socrates asks whether it makes any difference to him who tells it or where it comes from so long as the words are telling the truth, and tells Phaedrus to consider whether the story is true or false by himself (275b-d).

<sup>102</sup> Cf. also Weiss 2001: 64, n.37.

because without such divine reasons, none of their practices can be explained.<sup>103</sup> It, therefore, would be more natural to regard this as a parallel to Socrates himself, who also attempts to give a clear account of his own practice, namely inquiry into what he does not know. The myth will provide an indispensable reason for the Socratic duty of inquiry. Then, the last sentence telling us to live as pious a life as possible would be supported by the following poem.

### 3. Inquiry as purification (81b8-c3).

The next lines are a quotation from a poem, probably by Pindar, about Persephone's retribution. Persephone, the daughter of Zeus, spends two-thirds of a year in the upper world with her mother, Demeter, and one-third with her consort, Pluto, the king of Hades.<sup>104</sup> The poem says that souls are returned to the place with the sun (so, probably, this world)<sup>105</sup> by Persephone after nine-year punishment and expiation in Hades, and amongst them most blessed people are reborn:

*Persephone will return to the sun above in the ninth year  
the soul of those from whom  
she will exact punishment for old miseries,  
and from these come noble kings,  
mighty in strength and greatest in wisdom,  
and for the rest of time men will call them sacred heroes.*(81b8-c3)

This poem could be cited for its connection with the origin of human beings in Orphic theogony: the banished gods, the Titans, captured Dionysus, who is the son of Persephone, slashed and tore him to pieces, boiled, roasted, and ate him, although Athena preserved the heart of Dionysus, which gives Dionysus new life. Zeus, being angry with the Titans, immediately burned them up with his thunderbolt, and from the smoke of their remains Zeus created a new race of mortals, including human beings, animals, etc. Although their bodies are mortal, their souls are immortal. They pass through a series of incarnations as humans and other animals. Human beings, then, inherit evil tendencies from the Titans and a tiny divine

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<sup>103</sup> Socrates here emphasizes the agreement between one's account (*logos*) and practice. Especially in the *Meno*, the relation between *logos* and actions is also one of the main issues for Plato. Cf. also 79b-c, 96e-97d.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Frazer 1990: 394.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Ionescu 2007: 51-52.

portion from Dionysus. Purgation is required for the souls to be released from the cycle of this misery.<sup>106</sup> A noticeable feature of this poem is the process of purification of the soul through its reincarnation. Sharples thinks the poem's recommendation that we live as piously as possible actually to be a digression from Plato's main theme in the *Meno* (1991: 145). Ionescu, on the other hand, thinks, as the verses begin with “<οἴσιν> γὰρ ἄν (81b7)”, interprets “*gar*” as providing the reason and explanation for the immortality of the soul (2007: 95). But, the purification through reincarnation, according to my interpretation, could have a more important meaning for the Socratic duty of inquiry. Although Orphics and Pythagoreans are said to have avoided meat and blood for their purification,<sup>107</sup> Socrates obviously does not talk about any such traditional ritual purification or religious taboos in this context. What would be implied is that the soul (or human beings) can be perfected by completing our duty of inquiry, i.e. recollection. Socrates has combined the purification with his own faith in philosophical labours.<sup>108</sup>

Another philosopher who is explicitly committed to the immortality of the soul and the duty of purification is Empedocles, who is said to have been one of the zealous followers of Parmenides and the Pythagoreans,<sup>109</sup> and the teacher of Gorgias as an excellent rhetorician.<sup>110</sup> Empedocles attributes to Pythagoras a great wisdom gathered in ten or twenty human lives through reincarnation.<sup>111</sup> He also thinks that souls can be incarnated in irrational animals and plants, as well as in human bodies,<sup>112</sup> and maintains that he himself has previously been a boy, a girl, a bush, a bird, and a leaping, journeying fish.<sup>113</sup> In the Empedoclean version of reincarnation, we can see similar views which are also found in the poem quoted by Socrates in the *Meno*. It says that the soul rises up to a higher social status through purification, e.g. prophets, bards, doctors and princes, until it reaches the gods.<sup>114</sup>

But at the end they come among men on earth as prophets, bards, doctors and princes; and thence they arise as gods highest in honour, sharing with the other immortals their hearth and

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<sup>106</sup> For more details regarding the Persephone and Titan's stories, see Dodds 1951: 155; West 1983: 74-75, 98-100, 164-166, Ionescu 2007: 49-52.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Dodds 1951: 149; KRS: 230-231.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. also Scott 2006 93-94 for a partially similar interpretation.

<sup>109</sup> KRS [335]: Simplicius *in Phys.* 25, 19, quoting Theophrastus (DK31A7).

<sup>110</sup> KRS [336]: Diogenes Laertius VIII, 58 (DK31A1).

<sup>111</sup> KRS [259]: Empedocles: Fr. 129, Porphyrius *Life of Pythagoras* 30.

<sup>112</sup> KRS [415]: Sextus *M.* IX, 129.

<sup>113</sup> KRS [417]: Empedocles: Fr. 117, Diogenes Laertius VIII, 77.

<sup>114</sup> Empedocles also says that he is one of who is exiled from the gods in KRS [401]: Fr. 115, Hippolytus *Ref.* VII, 29, 14 (II. 1-2, 4-14) and Plutarch *de exilio* 17, 607c. Cf. also Ionescu 2007: 99.



their table, without part in human sorrows or weariness (KRS [409]: Empedocles: Fr. 146 and 147, Clement *Strom.* IV, 150, I and V, 122, 3).

Ionescu maintains that there could be two reasons why the poem is appealing to Meno, both of which are convincing for me. The first reason is that the poem has a certain characteristic with which Meno is already familiar, namely Empedoclean doctrine, through Gorgias. Ionescu says that “Socrates already witnessed Meno’s sympathy for Empedocles’ naturalism (76c7-e). He can thus plausibly expect that Meno would have some acquaintance also with the other, religious or mythical... part of Empedocles’ thought (2007: 53)”. It is plausible that Meno who may be somehow accustomed to Empedoclean doctrines of reincarnation is apt to accept the idea that the same souls are reborn amongst various creatures, even though he is unlikely to be dedicated to any philosophical schools. The second reason is that both of these poems by Pindar (quoted by Socrates) and by Empedocles combine the labour of purification with heroic promotion in society. Ionescu says “the mythical content of the verses (81d8-c4) proposes an attractive ideal, since it recommends a way of achieving the designation of a hero in the persona of a king, an athlete, or a wise person (Ibid. 53)”.

Impressively, the poem presents the re-arrival to *this* world of the soul as the rewards after Persephone’s punishment in Hades. This is in fact something clearly different from the myth in the *Phaedo* which regards the body as a prison to the soul, and death as the liberation from the contamination of the body (64c-69d).<sup>115</sup> Dodds maintains that before Plato the *psyche* is spoken of as the seat of the emotional features of the self, including courage, passion, pity, anxiety, and animal appetite, seldom, if ever, as the seat of reason, and that the “soul” was not a reluctant prisoner of the body, but it was the life or spirit of the body, and perfectly at home there (1951: 138-139).<sup>116</sup> However, this view cannot be straightforwardly applied to at least the myth in the *Meno*, which regards the return to *this* world as the reward of purification. And, it is plausible that the view of the human excellence as a divine reward for purification attracts Meno, who desires a successful career in society and repeatedly asks Socrates how virtue is acquired (70a1-4; 86c7-d2).

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<sup>115</sup> It is, however, certain that Socrates in other dialogues does not simply believe that the reward of philosophical purification is mere social promotion in society (e.g. *Republic* 248d, 619a-620d; *Theaetetus* 172c-177c). Cf. note 144.

<sup>116</sup> Concerning the doctrine regarding body as a prisoner of soul, there has not yet been any consensus amongst scholars. Dodds maintains that “It was only when rebirth was attributed to *all* human souls that it became a burden instead of a privilege (1951: 151)”. Schofield, on the other hand, says that the doctrine that “the body is a sort of prison in which the soul is preserved” was Orphic and early Pythagorean (KRS: 221-222).

On the other hand, there is a controversial problem that the myth is inevitably committed to, which is the matter of Determinism. The poem already implies the answer to Meno's initial question, that is, virtue is brought by Persephones' forgiveness, namely as a divine gift (*Meno* 99e7).<sup>117</sup> According to the poem, although the efforts of purification in the present time will credit the honourable life in the next reincarnation, conversely, present wickedness, laziness, and wrongdoings are in the end the results of previous guilt. "Should then the quality of our present life no longer matter?" Ionescu asks; "The only way it makes punishment and rewards relevant for the way we live our present life, given that a next life cannot be readily assumed, is to regard them as metaphoric images for the punishment and rewards that our soul experiences *during this life*. – no true sense of freedom and responsibility would be left for our race (2007: 56; 95)".

Annas argues that throughout the dialogues from the *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus* to *Republic*, the Platonic myth of the immortality of the soul eventually results into the problem of Fate and Necessity (1982: 133). She maintains that in the *Republic* Plato is clearly aware of the problem correlated with his own myth of the immortality of the soul, "for in the middle of the pageant of necessity [in the myth of Er], he suddenly insists that the souls do have a free choice of lives (Ibid.)". The same sort of epistemological issue would be also examined through later dialogues, e.g. in the *Phaedrus* 248a-b; *Republic* 621a-b, and finally in the *Theaetetus* 151b, while in the *Meno* even a slave is shown to be capable of recollection by Socrates, only some blessed youths are, in the *Theaetetus*, potentially intellectually pregnant in order to be engaged in philosophical inquiry, in which the immortality of the soul and the theory of recollection no longer appear. As Ionescu criticises that "moral imperatives are meaningful only on the assumption that there is an afterlife and/or a future incarnation (2007: 56)", the poem certainly embraces another philosophical problem concerning Fate, Necessity, free will, and human responsibility. The question which arises is: if the poem is true, isn't the duty of inquiry rather no longer a matter?<sup>118</sup> My suggestion is that both the problem of free will and the impossibility of transition from ignorance to knowing (i.e. that of inquiry) are not yet the main concern at the *Meno*, although it may sound a too rough solution. Both are certainly raised by Plato as philosophical matters which require further investigations, but left

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<sup>117</sup> Cf. also Sharples 1991: 145.

<sup>118</sup> The relevant problem might be implied by Socrates elsewhere in the *Meno* as a self-contradiction of the poet Theognis. In his poem, Theognis speaks as if virtue is taught, and in other places, as if it is impossible to change a bad man to a good one by persuading him with wise words (95d-96a).

without being given any clear solution in this dialogue, which I will keep examining more closely below.

### **3. 'Knowledge' in the Myth**

#### 4. The object of recollection (81c5-d5).

The lines which follow the poem present an image of knowledge provided by recollection. Socrates says that our soul has learned all things, and there is nothing which it had not learned, so we may be capable to recollect what the soul has already known. He maintains that this process is exactly what is ordinarily called 'inquiring and learning' by people:

Ἄτε οὖν ἡ ψυχὴ ἀθάνατός τε οὖσα καὶ πολλάκις γεγонуῖα, καὶ ἑώρακυῖα καὶ τὰ ἐνθάδε καὶ τὰ ἐν Ἄιδου καὶ πάντα χρήματα, οὐκ ἔστιν ὅτι οὐ μεμάθηκεν· ὥστε οὐδὲν θαυμαστὸν καὶ περὶ ἀρετῆς καὶ περὶ ἄλλων οἷόν τ' εἶναι αὐτὴν ἀναμνησθῆναι, ἃ γε καὶ πρότερον ἠπίστατο. ἄτε γὰρ τῆς φύσεως ἀπάσης συγγενοῦς οὖσης, καὶ μεμαθηκυῖας τῆς ψυχῆς ἅπαντα, οὐδὲν κωλύει ἐν μόνον ἀναμνησθέντα – ὃ δὴ μάθησιν καλοῦσιν ἄνθρωποι – τᾶλλα πάντα αὐτὸν ἀνευρεῖν, ἐάν τις ἀνδρεῖος ᾗ καὶ μὴ ἀποκάμνη ζητῶν· τὸ γὰρ ζητεῖν ἄρα καὶ τὸ μαθάνειν ἀνάμνησις ὅλον ἐστίν.

As the soul, being immortal, has been born many times, and has seen all things here and in Hades, there is nothing that it has not learned; so it is not surprising that it is able to recollect what it previously knew, both about virtue and other things. For, as the whole of nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, nothing prevents anyone, after recalling one thing only – what men call learning – discovering everything else for himself, if the man is brave and does not tire of inquiry; for inquiry and learning are, as a whole, recollection (81c5-d5; my translation).

The passage above does not mention anything about particular personality or unique memories of previous lives (e.g. specific events or personal experience). It is likely that Socrates' point is not to defend the notion that personal consciousness survives through reincarnation,<sup>119</sup> which the Pythagoreans and Empedocles, on the other hand, could have

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<sup>119</sup> Cf. Ionescu 2007: 55 for the similar point.

been committed to, although this looks to contradict the view of the poem that the reward and the penalty are attributed to each individual soul. There are instead some new points that we are told about the objects and the subject of recollection:

- (1) The soul has seen all things here and in Hades.<sup>120</sup>
- (2) There is *nothing* that the soul has not learned.
- (3) So, it is not surprising that *the soul* can recollect what it previously knew including virtue and other things.
- (4) The whole nature is akin.
- (5) The soul has learned everything.
- (6) So, nothing prevents *anyone* from recollecting everything else if he could recollect even one thing.<sup>121</sup>
- (7) It will happen, if the man is brave and determined enough to inquire into what the soul knows.

This part, firstly, gives us some clear information about the objects of recollection.<sup>122</sup> The main interpretative question is, I think, how to understand the fact that Socrates mentions the distinction of the two realms of here and Hades in (1). As some commentators argue, the objects of recollection in the *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus* are Platonic forms which are experienced by the immortal soul without the intermediary of the bodily organs. Especially in the *Phaedo*, they belong to the realm of Hades.<sup>123</sup> Granting that is also applicable to the *Meno*, it would be, at first sight, possible to regard 'things here' as sensible objects and 'things in Hades' as intelligible. However, it is rather unclear whether Plato thinks Hades as the realm of Platonic forms at this moment. 'Hades', in the *Meno*, appears twice firstly in the consequence of Persephone's poem and later again in its Homeric sense (100a5), both of which are presented as the region of the gods and of the souls before and after embodiment. Although Ionescu still thinks that those objects in Hades must, in any case, share the main characteristics of Platonic

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<sup>120</sup> Although a thorough analysis of Platonic usage of empirical terms in his dialogues could be useful, I here simply understand the term 'seeing' as a synonym for 'learning', because Socrates rephrases (1) to (2) and (5) only by changing the verb from 'seen' to 'learned'. Cf. also Ionescu who interprets 'seeing' as 'purely intellectual knowing' (2007: 58). I, however, think that it is still controversial to determine how Plato distinguishes 'intellectual' knowing from other kinds, if she is granting that there is such a distinction in the *Meno*.

<sup>121</sup> Socrates changes the subject of recollection from 'the soul (3)' to 'anyone (6)' and 'the man (7)'. See chapter IV-4-9 for the detailed analysis on the subject of recollection in the *Meno*.

<sup>122</sup> See chapter IV-4-9 for the detailed analysis on the subject of recollection.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Sharples 1991: 147; Ionescu 2007: 58-59.

forms such as eternity, immutability, perfection, and universality (2007: 60), I do not see any evidence that Socrates thinks 'things Hades' are more real or important than 'things here' as the objects of recollection. It seems to me more plausible to think that Socrates simply regards Hades as a region in which the soul has learned something else which it did not learn through the earthly lives during its countless rebirths.<sup>124</sup> As Ionescu herself realizes (Ibid. 59), without understanding so, the interpretation of 'the whole of nature is akin (4)', which obviously includes both the regions, is difficult to understand, because, if there is such a clear distinction between the objects here and those in Hades, it would not be possible to say so easily those are the same kinds and not two different kinds which belong to two different worlds.

It is convincing that Tigner analyses the kinship of all nature as implying that all recollectable things belong to the same ontological family (1970: 4), because it perfectly fits the indispensable assumption concerning the immortal soul as the source of knowledge. However, his argument is as a whole confusing. Tigner firstly addresses Klein's interpretation that "everything, every bit the soul recollects, can be understood as a 'part' of a 'whole' and can be traced back to a common origin... This assumption makes the world a 'whole' (Ibid. 2)". He, on the other hand, while following Klein, maintains that, since Socrates says that nothing prevents the soul from recollecting everything else, if there are such things which can prevent the soul from recollecting, those things are simply not the same kind of thing that the recollectable things are (Ibid. 3), and says "All he [Plato] needs is for "recollectables" to be sufficiently alike that they can all be approached by using the same (dialectical) method (Ibid. 4)". I, however, found it problematic to assume that there are also some things outside of the soul's epistemological realm. In (2), Socrates explicitly affirms that there is '*nothing*' which the soul did not learn, and it seems to me to reject any other existences beyond its epistemological realm. I cannot see any evidence in the *Meno* that Socrates supposes that there is more than one ontological family in the way which Tigner thinks Socrates does.

In addition, Tigner's distinction between what is recollectable and what is not is, I think, quite controversial for the case of the *Meno*. Tigner gives an example of a theorem and rats as

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<sup>124</sup> The fact is that the myth of the soul's learning here again involves the same paradox, namely the impossibility of learning what the soul did not know. However, my point in this chapter is, as I mentioned, that Socrates' main concern in the *Meno* is not the intellectual transition from not-knowing to knowing but the possibility of knowledge. See chapter IV-4-9, and 5-10, 11.

things which belong to two distinct ontological families. He maintains that since the methods for discovering theorems are different from the methods for discovering rats, rats do not belong to the same ontological family to which theorems belong (1970: 3).<sup>125</sup> However, as I argued against Phillips, such a simple dichotomy between empirical objects and theoretical or rational objects are, I think, misleading for understanding what Socrates attempts to resolve in the *Meno*. Tigner's interpretation certainly does not explain why Socrates mentions not only things in Hades but also 'things here' as the objects of recollection, which obviously designates the different things not in Hades, but covers those which the soul has learned in *this* world while embodied. My point is, for the theory of recollection in the *Meno*, not only that rat and theorems in this context would belong to the same ontological family, but also that the ontological family is the only one which is the object of knowledge.

There are also other three items of evidence that recollection will provide both kinds of knowledge, and no reason can be found that it excludes those objects which can be acquired through sense perception and experience. So far as the *Meno* is concerned, Socrates does not undervalue empirical knowledge compared with theoretical or rational knowledge as objects of inquiry. Rather, he often emphasizes the significance of empirical investigations, and these two kinds of inquiry complete each other. Firstly, when Anytus, without having seen them, evaluates those who were called sophists, such as Protagoras, as those who ruin and corrupt their followers, Socrates wonders that Anytus is a prophet (μάντις) and how he knows these things without any experience (ἄπειρος) of those sophists (91b-92c). Although Anytus claims that "Easily, for I know who they are, whether I have experience of them or not (92c4-5)", Socrates himself withholds from judging whether they really are such people.<sup>126</sup> The second piece of evidence is the example of the way to Larissa. Socrates compares those who *know* with the ones who have been there by themselves and are able to lead people correctly, while those who just have true beliefs with the ones are able to do so without having any experience but because of his judgement proved right (97a9-b3).<sup>127</sup> Although one might think that the example is just a metaphor for theoretical inquiries, these provide clear evidence that,

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<sup>125</sup> A quite similar idea on the distinction between zebras and the nature of virtue is also found in Fine 2007: 344.

<sup>126</sup> One might think that Socrates would agree with Anytus' view and that this implies that Anytus has a true opinion by divine gift. However, even if this is so, Socrates would say that it is a true opinion but not knowledge because Anytus' guess merely happens to hit the mark (97b ff.), and also I think that Socrates' view looks similar but not identical to Anytus'.

<sup>127</sup> Comparing it with the immortality of the soul and the theory of recollection also proved by the slave's geometrical demonstration, it is plausible that Socrates implies his own stories are also still true opinions. See also 98b1: Socrates says "I too speak as one who does not have knowledge but is guessing".

whether empirical or theoretical, the experience of doing it independently by oneself is an important factor for knowing something.<sup>128</sup>

The third piece of evidence is, I think, more convincing. When Socrates examines whether virtue is teachable or not with the method of hypothesis in the latter half of the dialogue (86c ff.), the argument goes back and forth in two directions, from theoretical to experimental and experimental to theoretical. One is from 'virtue is knowledge', then 'it can be taught'. Then, the other way around, the arguments go back from the perceptible fact that 'there is no teacher of virtue', so 'virtue cannot be taught', in which the experimental fact denies the first conclusion.<sup>129</sup> This movement is, in fact, the parallel between Socrates response and the slave's geometrical demonstration, namely whether the myth of the immortality of the soul and the theory of recollection as a logically convincing certainly fit the *reality* that the slave can recollect, which can be thought to be confirmed by the experiment. So, the theoretical argument is verified by the experimental facts.<sup>130</sup> The difference between these two inquiries is simply that, on one hand, the myth apparently explains reality and is supported by what in actuality happens in the slave's geometrical demonstration. On the other hand, the theoretical inquiry on the teachability of virtue contradicts the experimental fact that there are no teachers of it, which eventually requires a modification of the theoretical inference to distinguish knowledge from true beliefs. In other words, virtuous behaviours may be led not only by knowledge but also by true beliefs (96e). Socrates' inquiries in the *Meno* alternate between its theoretical and experimental examinations. If we compare these movements with the final conclusion in *Republic IX*, the difference in the methods between the two dialogues is obvious. To Glaucon, who mentions that the Republic which Socrates presents exists in theory but nowhere on earth (τῆ ἐν λόγοις κειμένη, ἐπεὶ γῆς γε οὐδαμοῦ οἶμαι αὐτὴν εἶναι) (529a11-b1), Socrates responds that it is perhaps in heaven as a model and that it makes no

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<sup>128</sup> It is sometimes thought that Socrates' use of empirical terms (e.g. 'seeing', 'looking at', 'touching') and empirical examples to argue for forms are merely metaphors (cf., for example Mason 2010: 65), but I do not think that Platonic forms constitute the entirety of his philosophy.

<sup>129</sup> Some commentators think that only the former argument is a serious inquiry for Socrates which regards virtue as knowledge as thus teachable (e.g. Bedu-Addo 1984), however, this line of interpretation contradicts the fact that Socrates claims that virtue is knowledge but not teachable in the *Protagoras* (361a-b). Again, I wonder whether Socrates, who examines what knowledge is in *Theaetetus* which is considered to have been written rather later, persists in this specific conclusion. It is more likely that to reach any fixed claim is not important in the *Meno*, rather the method is the issue there. Although one might still think that the method with hypothesis (86e-87d) is problematic, and the conclusion led by the method cannot be reliable (cf. Bluck 1964: 23), the method (but not the proposition) is something said to have been employed by Socrates in the *Phaedo* (99d-100a) and recommended by Parmenides in the *Parmenides* (135e-136c). Thus, I do not think that the method itself involves a serious problem, although Socrates obviously thinks that it is an issue to inquire into whether virtue is teachable or not before knowing what virtue is (*Meno* 86e, 100b4-6).

<sup>130</sup> Compare this with Ctesippus' request to Euthydemus' argument (p. 41).

difference whether it is or ever will be somewhere (διαφέρει δὲ οὐδὲν εἴτε που ἔστιν εἴτε ἔσται) (592b2-4). While in the *Republic*, it is not an immediate issue whether the theories (*logoi*) can be applied to what can be accomplished in 'reality', in the *Meno*, it is exactly an issue.

In addition, in the geometrical demonstration, Socrates and the slave also use the same method in which Socrates each time encourages the slave to compare his answer and what actually happens in the diagram drawn in front of him. To compare his own answer with the diagram makes the slave realize that his answer does not fit the drawn diagrams. For example, when the slave boy saw the square with twice the length of the sides, i.e. four feet, he notices that it makes the original square four times as big, not twice. It is probably less clear than usually supposed whether Plato thinks that geometry is a purely theoretical inquiry in the *Meno*. The same sort of example on the relation between geometry and reality appears in Sextus' *Against the Logicians* in which he examines the Pythagorean criterion of truth:

The Rhodians, anyway (so they say), inquired of Chares the architect how much money it would cost to build the colossus. And when he made a determination, they asked him again how much it would be if they wanted to build it twice the size. And when he demanded twice as much, they gave it, but he, after spending the amount given to him on the starting-points and designs, did away with himself. But when he had died, the craftsmen realized that he should have demanded not twice but eight times as much; for he needed to increase not only the length but every dimension of the work... Therefore – *Everything is like number* – that is, like reason, which judges and is similar in kind to the numbers that constitute everything (*M. I.* [107-109], italics mine).

The architect is said to have made the same sort of mistake which the slave does in Socrates' demonstration. When it is said that *everything is like number*, 'everything' means what actually happens and *exists* in the world. When number explains 'reality' well and correctly, numbers do not insist that they are more real than anything else, rather they explain well 'the reality of the world' which can be experienced and perceived, although both thoughts and sense perception may often make mistakes. Similarly, at least in the *Meno*, the recollectable objects do not exclude perceptible objects. Rather, they must be the half part of what is recollectable, so knowable. Annas also maintains that, as Platonic myths show, "Heaven and hell are no longer places outside our world, rather, they are parts of our world... What we call



the world, we are told, is only one lowly part of a vast universe (1982: 126)". Her point is, I think, entirely applicable also to the *Meno*, and I would like to suggest that both intelligible and sensible in the *Meno* belong to the same ontological family, in that they originate from the single intellectual resource, namely the immortal soul, and together are parts of the whole.<sup>131</sup>

5. Socrates' belief (81d5-e2).

Socrates then maintains that they should not believe the eristic argument, which clearly designates the passage 80d5-e5, but should believe the arguments which the immortality of the soul and theory of recollection suggest. If you believe the former, you will become lazy, but if the latter, you will be strenuous for inquiry:

We must, therefore, not believe that eristic argument (οὐκ οὖν δεῖ πείθεσθαι τούτῳ τῷ ἐριστικῷ λόγῳ), for it would make us lazy, and cowardly men like to hear it, whereas my argument makes them hard-working and keen on the inquiry. I believe that this is true, and I want to inquire along with you into what virtue is (ἃ ἐγὼ πιστεύων ἀληθεῖ εἶναι ἐθέλω μετὰ σοῦ ζητεῖν ἀρετὴ ὅτι ἐστίν (81d5-e2, my translation).

The striking thing is how Socrates speaks of the possibility of inquiry as a matter of his personal belief. Socrates maintains that they should believe (πείθεσθαι) the myth, rather than be persuaded by the eristic argument, and that he himself believes (πιστεύων) that it is true. Many commentators ignore why braveness (ἀνδρείος) in the previous line (p. 66, (7)) is involved with inquiry. Although one might think that is because courage is simply a sort of virtue, it is not clear, if it is the case, why Socrates mentions only courage but not justice, moderation, or munificence (*Meno* 74a4-6, 78d7-e2), which are apparently required, if courage is, for inquiry. The requirement of courage, according to my interpretation, implies the courage of 'believing' the *indefinite* possibility of knowledge and inquiry. What Socrates says is: without the immortality of the soul and the theory of recollection, we cannot be sure yet whether knowledge of and inquiry into what we do not know is really possible, but let us

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<sup>131</sup> It may at a first glance seem strange that sensible things belong to the immortal soul. However, since sense organs belongs to *us* rather than to the external objects, I think that it is not very surprising that Socrates in the *Meno* thinks that perceived things derive from our internal resources rather than from the external world. Cf. chapter V-3 for Gorgias' argument on sense perception.

believe that our soul has already known everything and try to recollect what we do not yet know. Socrates' response is indeed full of his personal commitment to the possibility.

#### **4. The Demonstration of Socrates' Two Stories**

6. Meno's suspicion (81e3-82a4).

How far were Socrates' stories persuasive for Meno? The answer seems to be: not completely. Meno asks Socrates what exactly it means that we *do not* 'learn' but what is usually called learning by people is in fact recollection, and to *teach* him that it is really so. Socrates is careful not to contradict himself by saying that he will *teach* it just after claiming that there is no teaching or learning, but only recollection.<sup>132</sup> So, Meno rephrases by asking Socrates to *show (demonstrate)* it if it is possible for him.

M: Yes, Socrates, but how do you mean that we do not learn (ὅτι οὐ μανθάνομεν), but that what we call learning is recollection (ἦν καλοῦμεν μάθησιν ἀνάμνησις ἐστίν)? Can you teach me that this is so?

S: 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 up at once as contradicting my own words.

M: 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 (ἀλλ' εἴ πῶς μοι ἔχεις ἐνδείξασθαι ὅτι ἔχει ὡςπερ λέγεις, ἐνδειξαι).

S: It is not easy, but I am nevertheless willing to do my best for your sake (81e3-82a4).

Although some commentators believe that the slave's geometrical demonstration is the main part of Socrates' response, it is clear that Meno recognizes what Socrates already replied to his question, namely that we do not 'learn', nor 'teach', but only recollect. Meno is asking here to show (ἐνδείκνυμι) – but not teach (διδάσκω), as Socrates makes him change the word – that what Socrates told him is really so. What does it mean 'to show that is so'? The most

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<sup>132</sup> Cf. chapter III.

plausible answer is, I think, to show that what is said in the myth of the immortality of the soul and the theory of recollection will certainly happen in 'reality' or, more precisely speaking, to let Meno 'see' that the soul is really immortal and that it can recollect what it has already known. Meno's request is to show him that Socrates' stories are not merely a tale, but 'real'. Before and after beginning the demonstration with the slave, Socrates three times directs Meno's attention. Firstly he says "Pay attention then whether you think he is recollecting or learning from me (82b6-7)" and Meno answers "I will pay attention (Ἀλλὰ προσέξω; 82b8)". Secondly, Socrates says "Watch (Θεῶν) him now recollecting things in order, as one must recollect (82e12)", and then again, "Look (or Keep watching) (Φύλαττε) (84d1)". The issue of the demonstration is whether Meno can 'see' that the slave really *recollects* or is merely given the answers from outside in the sense that Socrates *teaches* the slave and the slave *learns* from Socrates. This is why the passage 80d5-e5 is often taken to originally suggest the problem between innatism and empiricism, namely whether the slave reclaims 'knowledge' back from his own inner resources or 'knowledge' is completely put into him by Socrates, i.e. like stamps on a wax tablet or piecemeal.<sup>133</sup> This problem is, however, not what Socrates in the *Meno* is primarily concerned with.<sup>134</sup> Rather what Socrates is asked for by Meno here is the verification of his own beliefs that the soul *knows* everything. How can anyone prove it? This must certainly be a difficult request, and Socrates' choice is to prove it by the slave's geometrical demonstration.

#### 7. The state of *aporia* as a condition of inquiry (84a3-d2).

Since the process of the demonstration is not directly related to what I regard as the main paradox of the *Meno*, I just would like to point out an important word by Socrates for the purpose of this thesis, that is, Socrates clearly regards the state of *aporia* as a condition of inquiry opposing Meno's view which considers it the consequence of Socrates' elenchus and dialectic requirements.<sup>135</sup> The context is as follows: Socrates at the beginning of the demonstration asks Meno to choose one of his attendants, and calls a slave who has never learned geometry since he was born. Socrates confirms that the slave can communicate in

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<sup>133</sup> Cf. *Theaetetus* 191c.

<sup>134</sup> As I repeatedly mention above, I do not deny that is also one of Plato's main concerns in the *Meno*, and all these interpretations are related to each other. But, my point is simply that it is not the *direct* response to what I suggest the underlying paradox and Socrates attempts to disarm in the *Meno*.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. pp. 10-11. I will argue about the significance of *aporia* in the *Meno* more closely in chapter V-5-2.

Greek and knows what a square is like by drawing it in the sand in front of him (82b-c). Socrates asks the slave how long each side will be in a square that is twice as big as the original square whose side is two feet (82d-e). The slave confidently answers that the length of the side must be twice as long (i.e. four feet), and Socrates points out to Meno that the slave thinks he knows what he in fact does not know (82e). However, the slave, as his two answers having been proved to be wrong, falls into the state of *aporia*, and realizes that he does not know the answer. The slave responds, "By Zeus, Socrates, I do not know (84a1-2)", and Socrates points out the slave's improvement:

Do you realize, Meno, to what point he has proceeded in his recollection? [...] even now he does not yet know, but then he thought he knew, and answered confidently as if he did know, and he did not think himself being in *aporia*, but now he does think himself being in *aporia*, and as he does not know, neither does he think he knows (84a3-b1).

The slave's state of *aporia* here is obviously compared with the numbness of Meno (80a-b), and Socrates maintains that the numbness is beneficial for removing intellectual self-conceit. While Meno thinks that his numbness is the consequence of Socrates' demanding requirements, Socrates points out to Meno that is a necessary condition of inquiry (i.e. recollection):

Do you think that he would have tried to inquire into or to learn what he thought he knew, though he did not, before he fell into *aporia* and realized he did not know and longed to know? [...] Keep watching how he will come out of that state of *aporia* and discover while inquiring along with me (84c4-d2).<sup>136</sup>

The state of *aporia* is important, because it is a realization that there is something which you do not know and need to know. The point is that it is a condition of inquiry, but not everything. Even if you realize there is something which you do not know, it does not guarantee that you are capable to know it. We need two conditions to sustain the possibility of inquiry, one is that you know that there is something for you to inquire into, and the other is that you are capable to discover that which you did not know, namely *the possibility of knowledge*. Socrates' stories provide the evidence: the soul has already known what you have not yet recollected, so inquiry and discovery are possible by means of recollection. The slave

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<sup>136</sup> I have added 'and discover (καὶ ἀνευρήσει)' which Grube omits. Compare with Scott's interpretation which considers that Socrates ignores the problem of discovery.

at the end reaches the right answer that the length of the diagonal of the original square will make a square twice the size (85b5).

8. The result of the demonstration (85b8-e3).

Socrates asks Meno what he thinks about the achievement of the slave. Socrates points out that, although the slave first did not know the answer to the geometrical question, he only has expressed his own opinions and finally achieved the right answer. This means that true opinions about what one does not know are always within him, and the slave also would recollect anything else that the soul has already known in the same way as he does about geometry. Thus, Socrates and Meno agree that the result of the demonstration supports the assumptions that the soul initially has true opinions and we would know all things that the soul has already known.

So the man who does not know has within himself true opinions (ἀληθεῖς δόξαι) about the things that he does not know? [...] These opinions have now just been stirred up like a dream, but if he [the slave] were repeatedly asked these same questions in various ways, you know that in the end he will know about these things as accurately as anyone. [...] For he will perform in the same way about all geometry, and all other objects of learning (τῶν ἄλλων μαθημάτων ἀπάντων) (85c8-e3, my translation).

The remarkable point is, as many commentators argue, that Socrates thinks that the slave's last answer is still a true opinion, but not knowledge,<sup>137</sup> but that by means of being asked repeatedly, he will 'know' these things as accurately as anyone else. Thus, Socrates says, if it is the case that a man takes back 'knowledge' from himself, it can be called 'recollection' (85d). Socrates' terminology here is quite ambiguous, and there have been various interpretations on the demonstrative pronouns to specify the meanings.<sup>138</sup> However, in any event, this account of knowledge completely corresponds to the distinction between true opinions and knowledge in the latter half of the dialogue. Socrates compares true opinion with an untied work of Daedalus and a runaway slave. What makes knowledge different from

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<sup>137</sup> Although the slave apparently also recollects false opinions or fails to recollect when he gives false answers through the process that is left untouched in the *Meno*. Probably, we have to wait until the *Theaetetus*, in which the reasons of false opinions are examined by Socrates as the issue of his own *aporia* (187c-200d). Cf. also Scott 1995: 38.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Suzuki 2010: 35-38 for the various interpretations.

opinions is that, according to Socrates, it is tied down strongly with reasoning (97e-98a). In the *Gorgias*, Socrates claims that the art of rhetoric should firstly be used to accuse themselves and, foremost (480c), the repetition of questioning here may imply that true beliefs will, by passing through many and any strong refutations, become stable 'knowledge'.

9. The subject of recollection & the possibility of inquiry (85e9-86a10).

Socrates then distinguished the slave as the subject of recollection from his soul. Since the slave himself has not learned geometry in his present life, he must have learned it before he was born as a human being:

If he has not acquired them [true opinions] in his present life, is it not clear that he had them and had learned them at some other time? [...] Then that was the time when he was not a human being? [...] If then, during the time he exists and is not a human being he will have true opinions which, when stirred by questioning, become knowledge, will not his soul have learned during all time? For it is clear that during all time he exists, either as a man or not (85e9-86a10).

Socrates' argument is as follows: since the slave could recollect what he has not learned in his present life, it means that he has already learned it in some other previous life, whether he was a man or not.<sup>139</sup> But, if something which was learned in some other life remains within the slave, it follows that the soul should be immortal, if his body not. Thus, his soul is that which has already learned everything. I agree with Ionescu who thinks that this part shows that the soul by its very nature is "everlastingly in possession of knowledge (2007: 91)".<sup>140</sup> Socrates, as she points out, uses the perfect tense to express the soul's permanent state throughout all time as "having always already learnt (ἐμμεμάθηκη: 86a1, μεμάθηκα: 86a9)", and it is plausible to imply that "this learning is not in fact assignable to a determinable moment in the slave's life, but is rather a state that characterizes the stable condition (Ibid. 89)". Compare this with the analysis in p. 66, you will realize Socrates' ambiguous phrase about the subject of recollection at 81c5-d5. In (3), the subject of recollection is said to be 'the soul' by Socrates, but, he restates it into 'anyone' and 'he' in (6), and 'the man' in (7), in

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<sup>139</sup> This could imply that 'things here' at 81c6 includes the things which the soul has learned while embodied in other creatures such as animals, plants, or anything else (see p. 64). If this is the case, its epistemological realm goes beyond even that of human being's perceptible things.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. also Sharples 1985: 156 for an alternative interpretation.

which it is said that 'the man' should be brave and determined to complete the recollection. This is a fallacious reformulation when it comes to the problem of inquiry: if all souls have already learned everything, why do *we* have to recollect what our soul must have already known? This is what [S1'] in Socrates' restatement questions (see p. 51). Why does the fact that all souls know not mean that all of us also know?

The fact which tends to be overlooked by commentators is, concerning the epistemological side of various myths of the immortality of the soul in Platonic dialogues, one of the biggest differences between the myth in the *Meno* and those in other dialogues such as the *Phaedrus* and *Republic* is that the *Meno*'s does not explain anything about the forgetfulness of the soul or the intellectual difference amongst each soul, instead stresses that all souls equally know everything, and obscurely distinguishes the soul (as the intermediary of the objects of recollection) from a man (as the subject of recollecting) to preserve the space for recollection for us.<sup>141</sup> In other dialogues, however, the subject of recollection is clearly illustrated as the soul itself. In the *Phaedrus*, for example, it is said that although the soul of every human being has somehow seen the reality following gods' chariots, only a few remain whose memory is good enough to remember what it has seen: some get only a brief glance at the reality, and some forget when they involve with bad company after they were born in this world (249e). In the *Republic*, on the other hand, the souls drink the water from the River of Unheeding after travelling the Plain of Forgetfulness, and forget everything that they have seen in Hades before returning to this world. Since some drink more than a certain amount, such souls remember less what they have seen (620e-621a). The forgetfulness of the soul is something which is completely missing in the *Meno*. This is one of the reasons why I think that Plato's main concern in the *Meno* is not the problem of inquiry, i.e. the transition from the state of not-knowing (i.e. oblivion) to that of knowing (i.e. recollection), and Socrates response strongly focuses on the knowing state of the soul.

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<sup>141</sup> Cf. *Euthydemus* 295e: In the second argument that everyone knows everything, Socrates begins to add "by means of the soul" to "I know" to avoid any contradictions, which makes Euthydemus upset.

## **5. Socrates' Epistemological Positive Dogmatism**

10. The truth of reality (ἡ ἀλήθεια τῶν ὄντων) (86b1-4).

My interpretation, I think, fits well Socrates' conclusion at the end of the slave's geometrical demonstration. Socrates maintains:

Then if the truth of reality (ἡ ἀλήθεια τῶν ὄντων) is always in our soul, the soul would be immortal so that you should always confidently try to inquire and recollect what you do not know at present – that is, what you do not recollect (86b1-4)?

What Socrates lastly emphasizes is that the truth of reality (or of the things, 'ἡ ἀλήθεια τῶν ὄντων') can be thought to be always in our soul, and it follows the soul immortal, so that we can confidently inquire into what we do not know. Socrates' point is not because the transition from not-knowing to knowing is possible, rather 'knowing (as recollection)' would be possible, because the soul always has the truth of reality as which is waiting for our recollection. Socrates here uses 'ἡ ἀλήθεια τῶν ὄντων' to indicate our objects of recollection, and we are finally told by Socrates what were those things which the soul has learned here and in Hades, the thing which were called 'everything', whose nature is as a whole akin, and what the soul would be able to recollect, which will eventually become 'knowledge'. This is, as Socrates now says, 'the truth of reality', and 'the truth of reality' is the possession of our soul. This is striking, because this implies a holistic report on what knowledge is. Returning the analysis at p. 66, Socrates first says that the soul knows everything in (1) and then that there is nothing that the soul does not know in (2). So, he says, nothing prevents anyone from recollecting everything else *if he could recollect even one thing* in (6). The object of recollection, namely the truth of reality, is as a whole akin by nature, so if you can really recollect even only one thing, all other things will be also recollected one by another. Socrates here also provides a controversial unity between epistemology and ontology by means of the immortal soul as the intermediary, that is, the things which we can recollect and the soul has already known are 'everything' which exist.

This holistic view of knowledge can be considered to have come from the Eleatics including Parmenides, who maintains that what-is is the only thing which can be known to us. His



poem, the *Way of Truth*, begins with the argument on what-is as the only object of inquiry, which is the path of Persuasion to Truth, while what-is-not is unknowable, which is the delusion of the way of inquiry:

Come now, and I will tell you..., the only ways of enquiry that are to be thought of. The one, that [it] is and that it is impossible for [it] not to be, in the path of Persuasion (πειθοῦς) (for she attends upon Truth); the other, that [it] is not and that it is needful that [it] not be, that I declare to you is an altogether indiscernible track: for you could not know what is not (τό γε μὴ ἐόν) – that cannot be done – nor indicate it (KRS [291]: Fr.2, Proclus *in Tim.* 1, 345, 18; Simplicius *in Phys.* 116, 28 (lines 3-8)).

‘What-is’ is for Parmenides the only real thing uncreated, imperishable, whole and single, unshaken and perfect.<sup>142</sup> Quite similar to that Socrates’ expresses the object of recollection as ‘the whole of nature is akin’, Parmenides maintains that what-is is continuous and close to each of its other parts:

Nor is it divided, since it all exists alike (πᾶν ἔστιν ὁμοῖον); nor is it more here and less there, which would prevent it from holding together, but it is all full of being (ἐόντος). So it is all continuous: for what is draws near to what is (ἐὸν γὰρ ἐόντι πελάζει) (KRS [297]: Fr. 8, 22-5, Simplicius *in Phys.* 144, 29).

As Schofield points out (KRS: 251), Parmenidean fragments contains a controversial ambiguity in its epistemology and ontology, because this continuity of what-is can be read in two ways, either it is continuous, because any object of inquiry are characterised as a single, or all thinkable things ‘exist’ and one of things that are, which is the central issue of the next chapter. Before looking into the problem closely, let us summarize the whole argument of Socrates’ response in the *Meno*.

## 11. Socrates’ optimism

To conclude, Socrates declares his view on his own arguments: he himself does not insist that his argument is right in all aspects, but would fight for the point that to think they must

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<sup>142</sup> Cf. KRS [295]: Fr. 8, 1-4, Simplicius *in Phys.* 78, 5: 145.

inquire into what they do not know makes them better, braver and less idle than to think it impossible for them to discover it and so that they must not inquire into it:

I do not insist that my argument is right in all other respects, but I would contend at all costs both in word and deed (καὶ λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ) as far as I could that we will be better men, braver and less idle, if we think (οἰόμενοι) that one must inquire into the things one does not know, rather than if we think (οἰοίμεθα) that it is not possible to discover what we do not know and that we must not inquire into it (ἂ μὴ ἐπιστάμεθα μηδὲ δυνατόν εἶναι εὔρεῖν μηδὲ δεῖν ζητεῖν) (86b6-c3).

I cannot find any dogmatic assumption in these words. Socrates obviously accepts that his argument might eventually turn out to be false, but even if it does and the result is exactly the same as that of someone who thought it impossible and has not even tried to inquire into what they did not know, it will be better for Socrates.

The immortality of the soul itself was probably, as we have seen, not something that could easily be believed even at Socrates' time. In the *Phaedo*, when Cebes raises further doubts that the soul is immortal at all and suggests it eventually perishes, Phaedo tells Echecrates, those in attendance were, as facing Socrates' death, all depressed without knowing which to believe. A minute earlier, Phaedo says, they were convinced by Socrates' arguments on the immortality of the soul, but soon they again fell into confusion, no longer being able to believe that the previous argument was true (88c ff.). Phaedo reveals that it drives them to doubt "not only what had already been said but also what was going to be said, lest we be worthless as critics or the subject itself admitted of no certainty (88c5-7)". This clearly expresses something which likely happened when they could not see any divine element in their own intellectual activities. The most important feature of the slave's geometrical demonstration is that it seems to provide the certainty (if it can be thought to be sure that what the slave can recollect is finally all true opinions from his soul, which will become knowledge about the truth of reality) to convince them of the possibility of knowledge and inquiry. If you think that is true, you will be confident that your inquiry will be fruitful. But, if you doubt that the truth of reality is within us, you would not be sure whether you can inquire into and discover anything which you do not know, because your inquiry immediately loses certainty and you might not be able to eternally escape from the pile of your mere silly beliefs.

Although Annas does not mention the myth in the *Meno*, her argument on Platonic myths clearly discerns the crucial role of the myth in the *Gorgias*, which is, I think, also the most adequate for the case in the *Meno*. In the *Gorgias*, against Socrates who regards rhetoric as a part of flattery (466a), Callicles criticises Socrates' arguments, regarding doing what is unjust to others being worse than suffering it at the hands of others as *really* flattery catering to the weak and the majority of the public. Callicles calls Socrates "a true crowd pleaser (ἀληθῶς δημηγόρος) (482c5)" and attacks by insisting that although Socrates always claims to be pursuing the truth, he is in fact the very one who brings the discussion around to the sort of crowd-pleasing vulgarities that is admirable only for unreflective people (482e3-6). He asks Socrates whether he certainly thinks that the man who is in such a position in the city of being unable to protect not only himself but also his friends and family is really good (522c4-6). Socrates here introduces the myth of judgement after death, according to which if a man has lived a just and pious life, when his life comes to an end, he goes to the Isles of the Blessed to enjoy complete happiness, while if a man has lived unjustly and impiously, he goes to Tartarus, the prison of payment and retribution. Socrates tells Callicles that Zeus decided that the judgement should take place after their death only observing their immortal souls separated from their body when they are still fully dressed with appearance, parentage and wealth to deceive the judges' eyes so that the people are given deserved judgements (523a-524a). Socrates introduces this story as a "very good *logos* (μάλα καλὸς λόγος)" and believes that it is true, although, he wonders, Callicles may feel that it is merely "a myth (μῦθος)" (523a).

Socrates' concern about how he will be able to show his soul to be as good as possible in front of the judges after death, rather than in front of the public while alive, is totally supported by his strong *belief* in the myth.<sup>143</sup> He says that the myth leads him to conclude that death is actually nothing but the separation of the soul from the body, and the soul as well as the body stays in the condition it was in when the person was alive as evidence of how he has lived. Annas maintains that the myth of the final judgement provides a consequentialist reason to be just, rewards are given to the just and punishment to the wicked, which she calls "moral optimism (1982: 125)":

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<sup>143</sup> Socrates also maintains, "that is what I have heard and believe that it true (πιστεύω ἀληθῆ εἶναι) (*Gorgias* 524a8-b1)" and "I am convinced by these *logoi* (ὕπο τε τούτων τῶν λόγων πέπεισμαι) (526d3-4)".

[B]eing good will benefit you, if not now then “in the end”. And this is the moral message that Socrates has been defending throughout the *Gorgias* – justice is really the best bet, though worldly wisdom fails to see this. [...] If we accept this morally optimistic claim, then we can see that we do have reason to be just... the wicked person is simply short-sighted, failing to perceive the massive mistake. [...] we don't seem to have any very convincing basis for the moral optimism... without such belief the myth will indeed strike someone like Callicles as being just an old wives' tale, something that would be morally significant, if it were true, but dependent on a hypothesis that we have no good reason to believe (Annas 1982: 125).

Concerning the details, although there are some differences between *Meno's* myth and *Gorgias'*,<sup>144</sup> *Gorgias's* myth provides the foundation for moral optimism, I think, *Meno's* myth for intellectual optimism (i.e. epistemological positive dogmatism) in the same way. Without such commitment, there are no convincing reasons, as Annas points out, for us to be persuaded by Socrates' optimistic position compared with the opposite. At the end of the *Gorgias*, Socrates suggests that Callicles believe the *logos*, rather than what he currently believes. If it is a matter of which side to believe, the myth of the *Meno* too will suggest us to believe the positive view about the possibility of knowledge, rather than the pessimistic counter-position. Socrates elsewhere in the *Meno* mentions the Eleusinian mysteries, which are attributed to Persephone and Demeter, her mother. After defining what colour is following Gorgias' and Empedocles' manner, Socrates says to Meno that this way is not better at all, and that Meno will also agree with Socrates if he stays to be initiated to the mysteries (76e6-9). It is plausible that Socrates' words here allude to the myth of the immortality of the soul.

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<sup>144</sup> Although comparison of the details between two myths would be very useful in order to see the transition in Platonic philosophy, it is beyond the scope of this thesis. I would just like to point out two main differences: firstly, in the *Gorgias* Socrates would reject higher social status, such as tyrants, kings, potentates enjoy as divine rewards (cf. p. 63). He maintains that they tend to commit the most grievous and impious wrongs, being in a position in which it is difficult to stop doing such things (525d). Secondly, the Isles of the Blessed (523b-c), the place of complete happiness, is also something that does not appear in the *Meno*, which only regards 'this world' as the upper world, and Hades as the underworld.

## **V. Gorgias' Epistemological Negative Dogmatism**

### **1. Gorgias' On What Is Not or On Nature**

My main suggestion in this thesis is that one of the two horns of the passage 80d5-e5, [M''] and [S2'] (the impossibility of coming to know what is not known: see chapter III-4), originates with Gorgias' three theses in his *On What is Not or On Nature* (Περὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἢ Περὶ φύσεως): [G1] there is nothing, [G2] even if there is something it cannot be known, [G3] even if it is knowable, it cannot be shown to others. They at first glance appear to express three impossibilities of existence ([G1]), knowledge ([G2]), and communication ([G3]), respectively concerned with ontology ([G1]), epistemology ([G2]), and philosophy of language ([G3]). However, Gorgias' arguments are not understood so simply, partly because of his way of putting the arguments as a response to Eleatic doctrines. The two sources of evidence, a peripatetic anonymous author's *On Melissus, Xenophanes, and Gorgias* (979a11-980b22)<sup>145</sup> and Sextus' *Against the Logicians* ([65-75]), respectively presents the beginning of Gorgias' argument as follows:

ΠΕΡΙ ΓΟΡΓΙΟΥ. Οὐκ εἶναι φησιν οὐδέν· εἰ δ' ἔστιν, ἄγνωστον εἶναι· εἰ δὲ καὶ ἔστι καὶ γνωστόν, ἀλλ' οὐ δηλωτὸν ἄλλοις.

Gorgias says that there is nothing; and if there is (something) it is unknowable; and if there is (something) and it is knowable, yet it cannot be shown to others (*MXG*. 979a11-13, my translation).

Γοργίας δὲ ὁ Λεοντῖνος ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ μὲν τάγματος ὑπῆρχε τοῖς ἀνηρηκόσι τὸ κριτήριον, οὐ κατὰ τὴν ὁμοίαν δὲ ἐπιβολὴν τοῖς περὶ τὸν Πρωταγόραν. ἐν γὰρ τῷ ἐπιγραφομένῳ Περὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἢ Περὶ φύσεως τρία κατὰ τὸ ἐξῆς κεφάλαια κατασκευάζει, ἐν μὲν καὶ πρῶτον ὅτι οὐδὲν ἔστιν, δεύτερον ὅτι εἰ καὶ ἔστιν, ἀκατάληπτον ἀνθρώπῳ, τρίτον ὅτι εἰ καὶ καταληπτόν, ἀλλὰ τοῖ γε ἀνέξοιστον καὶ ἀνερμήνευτον τῷ πέλας.

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<sup>145</sup> Although it is difficult to determine the date of this work, according to Kerferd, it is generally thought to have been written between the third century B.C. to the first century A.D., and possibly has some relation to Aristotle's *Πρὸς τὰ Μελίσσου ἄ*, *Πρὸς τὰ Ξενοφάνους ἄ*, and *Πρὸς τὰ Γοργίου ἄ*, which are mentioned in the catalogue of Aristotle's works in Diogenes Laertius v. 25 (1955: 4). Schiappa, on the other hand, supposes that it was written in the first two centuries from the appearance of certain Stoic technical terms (1997: 15).

Gorgias of Leontini belonged to the same troop as those who did away with the criterion, but not by way of the same approach as Protagoras. For in the work entitled *On What Is Not* or *On Nature* he sets up three main points one after the other: first that there is nothing; second, that even if there is [something], it is not apprehensible by human being; third, that even if it is apprehensible, it is not expressible or explainable to the next person (*M. I.* [65]).

As Guthrie points out “the title ‘*On Nature* (περί φύσεως)’ was given indiscriminately to the writings of the Presocratics (1962: 73)”, we can find many treatises with this same title by those who are generally called ‘natural’ philosophers: for example, Anaximander’s, Xenophanes’ and Heraclitus’ *On Nature*, Empedocles’ *On the Nature of What Is*, and Melissus’ *On Nature* or *What is*.<sup>146</sup> Also, there is a certain agreement amongst many commentators that Gorgias replies to the Eleatic doctrine, including Parmenides’ and Melissus’, in *On What is Not* or *On Nature*,<sup>147</sup> though there have been many different evaluations of the intrinsic value of it. Guthrie says that “One cannot doubt that the deliberately provocative title was chosen by Gorgias himself, nor that it was intended as a parody of titles already extant (*Ibid.* 73)”. Robinson regards Gorgias as pictured in Plato’s *Gorgias* not as a serious thinker, and believes that his argument is merely a parody of real philosophy, which is criticized as neither “the *real thing*, nor is it even very much like the real thing (1973, 60)”.<sup>148</sup> On the other hand, some commentators on Plato’s *Meno* dimly notice the likely connection between “Meno’s paradox” and Gorgias’ argument. Ionescu mentions that Meno’s paradox may be ‘scepticism’ (2007: 44). Weiss and Scott point out the possibility that Meno relies on the memory on the ‘sceptical’ argument by Gorgias (Weiss 2001: 52; Scott 2006: 78). However, none of them has explored the exact relation between them, and Plato’s view on Gorgias’ arguments has not yet received very much attention.<sup>149</sup>

This chapter will show that Gorgias’ first argument overturns Eleatic doctrines by using the same ontological terminology without any commitment to the ontological claim with which it concludes, and then that his second argument, as a response to the Eleatic epistemology, is

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<sup>146</sup> Cf. KRS [95], 166, [192], [338], [521].

<sup>147</sup> E.g. Kerferd 1955: 23; Hay 1990: 330; Porter 1993: 291; Wardy 1996: 9; Gagarin 1997: 38; Gaine 1997: 11; Schiappa 1997: 16; Notomi 1999: 203.

<sup>148</sup> See also Schiappa 1997: 16-17, for a variety of evaluations.

<sup>149</sup> Schiappa points out that even the authenticity of the ascription of the work to Gorgias has been doubted, because neither of Plato nor Aristotle explicitly mentions it anywhere (1997: 15). However, as I will argue, *Meno* 80d5-e5 can be thought the evidence that Plato not only knew at least a very similar argument which is attributed to Gorgias but also dealt with the argument seriously in the *Meno*.

concerned with the impossibility for human beings of acquiring knowledge of reality either by intellect or sense perception. Thirdly, Gorgias' third argument can be read as the denial of teaching as a transmission of 'knowledge', and we will see that three arguments are, as a whole, addressing epistemological problems. As a result, it will be finally shown that his arguments provide a paradoxical counterargument to what can be drawn from the Eleatic doctrine and upon which one of two horns ([M''] and [S2']) of *Meno* 80d5-e5 is developed.

In so far as Gorgias' underlying assumption on the relation amongst intellect, sense perception, the truth of reality, and language are concerned, as Kerferd also maintains (1955: 5), no essential difference can be found between the two sources. The main difference is that while Sextus apparently focuses on simply reporting Gorgias' sayings (Schiappa 1997: 15), the anonymous author of *MXG* analyzes and criticizes Gorgias' arguments, and also points out the significance of Gorgias' arguments insofar as they are concerned with the difficulties (*aporiai*) raised by earlier philosophers.<sup>150</sup> Sextus, again, mentions Gorgias' underlying assumptions on sense perception and intellect in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism II* ([57-59]), which is also useful for narrowing down the interpretative possibilities. It has been thought that Gorgias himself never published and that the original arguments were probably an oral discipline.<sup>151</sup> For this reason, neither of two sources may be completely reliable, and there are many obscure points for interpretation. In order to examine Gorgias' arguments, I will first attempt to understand the arguments by Sextus and then refer to the criticisms by the anonymous author.

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<sup>150</sup> The author says "This and all his [Gorgias'] other arguments are concerned with difficulties (*aporiai*) raised by earlier philosophers, so that in examining their view these questions have to be discussed (*MXG* 980b20-22)".

<sup>151</sup> E.g. Gagarin 1997: 38; Schiappa 1997: 15. Since Gorgias' argument, as Schiappa points out (Ibid. 24), uses the similar move in the well-known Eleatic argument, it must be easily transmitted and remembered. Gagarin on the other hand suggests the possibility that it was originally a written work (Ibid. 40, n.1). See also note 7.

## **2. What-Is and What-Is-Not in Gorgias' Challenge to the Eleatics**

### 1. There is nothing.

Gorgias' first argument that there is nothing, according to Sextus, consists of three demonstrations. If there is anything, Gorgias says, either there is what-is ( $\tau\acute{o} \delta\acute{\nu}$ ) or what-is-not ( $\tau\acute{o} \mu\grave{\eta} \delta\acute{\nu}$ ), or are both. But it will be demonstrated that there is neither what-is ( $\tau\acute{o} \delta\acute{\nu}$ ), nor what-is-not ( $\tau\acute{o} \mu\grave{\eta} \delta\acute{\nu}$ ), therefore there is not anything ([66]). The first demonstration is that 'there is not what-is-not'. In so far as what-is-not is considered as not-being ( $\sigma\upsilon\kappa \delta\acute{\nu}$ ) it will not be ( $\sigma\upsilon\kappa \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\alpha\iota$ ). On the other hand, so far as what-is-not is considered being, it will on the other hand be ( $\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\alpha\iota$ ). But it is absurd that something should both be and not be at the same time. Again, if there is what-is-not, there will not be what-is, because what-is and what-is-not would have the opposite attributes of being and not-being. However, it is not the case that there is not what-is, and neither will there be what-is-not ([67]). Therefore there is not what-is-not.

Gorgias, as Kerferd points out (1981: 94), here apparently uses 'being ( $\delta\acute{\nu}$ )' and 'not-being ( $\sigma\upsilon\kappa \delta\acute{\nu}$ )' as corresponding to 'to be ( $\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\iota$ )' and 'not to be ( $\sigma\upsilon\kappa \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\iota$ )'. Thus, his demonstration concludes that since what-is-not is not-being, it at the same time not to be ( $\sigma\upsilon\kappa \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\alpha\iota$ ). Gorgias clearly relies on the same ontological foundation on which Parmenides established his argument.<sup>152</sup> But, Gorgias, the anonymous author points out, uses Parmenides' and Zeno's argument in order to object to them (979a23). For the second demonstration is that there is not what-is either. Gorgias reaches the completely opposite conclusion from the same premises for the argument for what-is used by the Eleatics:

[I]f there is what is, it is either eternal or generated or eternal and at the same time generated. [...] [I]f what is is eternal, it does not have any beginning. [69] For everything that undergoes generation has some beginning, but the eternal, being ungenerated, did not have a beginning. But not having a beginning, it is unlimited. But if it is unlimited it is nowhere. For if it is anywhere, that in which it is is distinct from itself, and thus what-is will no longer be unlimited since it is enclosed by something. For what encloses is bigger than what is enclosed, but there is nothing bigger than the unlimited, so that the unlimited is not anywhere. [70] Then again, nor is it

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<sup>152</sup> Cf. chapter IV-5-10.



enclosed within itself. For the thing in which it is and the thing in that thing will be the same, and what is will become double, both place and body (for the thing in which it is is place, and the thing in that thing is body). But this is absurd; therefore what is is not within itself. So that *if what is is eternal, it is unlimited, and if it is unlimited, it is nowhere, and if it is nowhere, it is not. Therefore if what it is eternal, it is not a being in the first place.* [71] Then again, nor can what is be generated. For if it has been generated, it has been generated either out of a being or out of a non being. But it has not been generated out of what is; for if it is a being, it has not been generated but already is. But neither has it been generated out of what is not; for what is not cannot generate anything, *on account of the fact that what is capable of generating something is bound necessarily to share in reality.* Therefore, what is is not generated either. [72] In the same way, neither is it the combination, both eternal and generated. For they are destructive of one another... (italics mine).

Gorgias' conclusion is problematic, because even if what-is is eternal and unlimited, it does not follow that it is nowhere, rather it is more plausible that what-is is everywhere.<sup>153</sup> As the first demonstration shows, Gorgias explicitly says "it is not the case that there is not what-is ([67])". The fact is, I think, that Gorgias uses 'nowhere' as the synonym of 'everywhere'. How is this possible? It seems to me that the only possible way to understand this is that expressions of location, either everywhere or nowhere, for what-is make no difference any more, if it is infinite ([69]). If it is everywhere, it must not require any word to specify its location, because it is identical with space itself, i.e. it is the very thing which locates its 'parts' in it. The controversial point is that 'everywhere' usually means that there *is* what-is, while 'nowhere' means that there *is not* what-is, namely it does not *exist*. However, the question raised by Gorgias is that if what-is is the only thing that *exists* in reality, the term expressing where what-is is located does no longer matter, and only all generated things are embraced in the same reality, which is what-is ([71]). Gorgias totally overturns the ordinary meaning of the words, and also denies, by using the same technique, number, continuity, magnitude, and the body of what-is:

[73] Besides, if it is, it is either one or many. But it is neither one nor many, as will be shown; therefore there is not what-is. For *if it is one, it is either of a certain quantity or continuous or a magnitude or a body.* But whichever of these it is, it is not one. If it is of a certain magnitude it will be divided, while if it is continuous it will be cut. Similarly, if it is thought of as a

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<sup>153</sup> Another fallacious point is that Gorgias here changes its temporal eternity to spatial infinity. It is logically unacceptable unless we generously understand that Gorgias tries to cover both aspects, although if so it should be 'always' and 'everywhere'.

magnitude it will not be invisible, and if it turns out to be a body it will be triple; for it will have length and breadth and depth. But *it is absurd to say that what is is none of these; therefore what is is not one*. [74] Then again, neither is it many. For if it is not one, it is not many; for the many is a combination of things taken individually, which means that if the one is done away with, the many are also done away with at the same time.

Gorgias, in this part, maintains that, if what-is is either of a certain quantity, continuous, or a magnitude or a body, it follows that what-is possesses some qualities which it should not possess in its nature. So, what-is cannot be, Gorgias rejects, qualified with any of those terms. It is, therefore, not even 'one' ([73]). Melissus would be the first to call what-is 'The One (τὸ ἓν)' rather than Parmenides. It is said that Melissus maintains "For if it were <infinite>, it would be one; for if it were two, the two could not be infinite, but would be limited by one another (KRS [531]: Melissus; Fr. 6, Simplicius *de caelo* 557, 16)". There is also other evidence that 'the One (τὸ ἓν)' is introduced by Melissus in the second part of the *XMG* (974a9-22). Although it is, as Schofield points out (2007: 395), natural to consider Parmenides to be committed to the idea that if there is something there can be only one thing, Parmenides does not clearly name it 'One' anywhere.<sup>154</sup>

It is certain that many Presocratic natural philosophers name the same thing by different terms, for example, what-is, being, everything, the One, and God,<sup>155</sup> and, being a rhetorician, Gorgias could have noticed and pointed out the controversial usage of the terms. Although Gorgias' way of argument can also be regarded as a parody of such natural philosophies, I cannot see any comical or joking aspect to the point raised by Gorgias. Even if it is a parody, it does not mean that Gorgias' point is not worth consideration. Rather it seems to me that Gorgias attracts attention to the problems by means of using his art of rhetoric.<sup>156</sup> In the

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<sup>154</sup> Schofield, as I agree, mentions that "[W]hen Plato and Aristotle represent monism as the principal thesis of the Eleatics..., they must be reading Parmenides through Melissan spectacles (KRS 2007: 395)". However, it also might be an interpretative issue to regard that as Plato's misunderstanding, as Socrates explicitly mentions Melissus in the *Theaetetus*: "I am afraid our criticism might be a very cheap affair. And if I feel like this before the many who have made the universe one and unmoved, Melissus and the rest of them, I feel it still more in the face of the One – Parmenides (183e)".

<sup>155</sup> Cf. *MXG* 977a14-36: the anonymous author tells us that Xenophanes calls it 'God'.

<sup>156</sup> The identical concern of how to call 'everything' is also found in Plato's *Sophist*: The Eleatic stranger attempts to clarify the meaning of 'everything', asks Theaetetus "What do you mean, *everything*? (233e)" and himself maintains "I mean everything to include you and me and also the other animals and plants... the sea and earth and heaven and gods and everything else (234a)". The Eleatic stranger also clearly mentions the same problem that "our Eleatic tribe, starting from Xenophanes and even people before him, tell us their myth on the assumption that what they call "all things" are just one (242d)", and later examine whether everything and one is the same as what-is (τὸ ὄν) (244b). It is likely that this is a response to Gorgias' arguments on namelessness of what-is.

*Parmenides*, we can see a similar but more careful examination by Parmenides following his pupil, Zeno's ways (136a). Parmenides' examination of ontology is composed of nine hypotheses beginning with the following two: (1) if it is one (137c4; εἰ ἓν ἔστιν); (2) if there is one (142b5; ἓν εἰ ἔστιν). Although a close analysis of all of *Parmenides*' arguments on various antinomies is beyond the scope of this thesis, I would like to point out that Parmenides there does not suppose that *there must be the one* at all, rather examines what is called 'one' according to all hypotheses in various directions and with regard to all aspects, i.e. one or many; part and whole; beginning, middle and end; eternal or limited; its shape, such as straight or curved; everywhere or nowhere; at rest or in motion; generation and destruction; similar or dissimilar; bigger or smaller, younger or older, and so on.

Parmenides' first argument from the hypothesis 'if it is one', is in fact identical with Gorgias' second demonstration which hypothesizes 'if there is what-is and it is one ([73])'. In it Parmenides examines all the negative predications of the one; he says that it is not many, neither a part nor a whole, does not have any beginning, end or middle but is unlimited, without shape, neither straight nor curved, nowhere, neither at rest nor in motion, does not come to be, neither the same nor different from anything nor itself, neither bigger or smaller, neither younger or older, and finally concludes that it *even is not one*. Parmenides leads the conclusion that it *is not* one from the hypothesis that what is called 'what-is' *is* one, and says that it, therefore is not named, told, thought, understood nor perceived (Οὐδ' ὀνομάζεται ἄρα οὐδὲ λέγεται οὐδὲ δοξάζεται οὐδὲ γινώσκειται, οὐδέ τι τῶν ὄντων αὐτοῦ αἰσθάνεται: 142a4-6). But, this is just the beginning of Parmenides' examination. Parmenides next begins with the opposite hypothesis that the one *is* and in an opposite way, namely examining all positive predications of it, and the completely opposite conclusion is reached that it has a name and an account, and is named and said; and all such things which pertain to the other things also pertain to the one (Καὶ ὄνομα δὴ καὶ λόγος ἔστιν αὐτῷ, καὶ ὀνομάζεται καὶ λέγεται καὶ ὅσαπερ καὶ περὶ τὰ ἄλλα τῶν τοιούτων τυγχάνει ὄντα, καὶ περὶ τὸ ἓν ἔστιν: 155d8-e2). At the end of the dialogue, Parmenides eventually concludes that "whether one is or is not, it and the others both are and are not, and both appear and do not appear all things in all ways, both in relation to themselves and in relation to each other (166c2-5)".<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Note how similar this comment is to the claim on which eristic argument is established (cf. chapter III).

This is rather a surprising conclusion in the context of Plato's *Parmenides*, because, except for this dialogue, there is no evidence to show that Parmenides argues in such a way. According to another fragment, Parmenides explicitly maintains that names and thought were only applicable to what-is because it is the only thing that there is and that is the reason why only what-is is thought (KRS [299]: Fr. 8, 32-49, Simplicius *in Phys.* 146, 5).<sup>158</sup> On the other hand, what-is-not should not be either called or thought. Parmenides pulls us back from what-is-not as it is not the genuine way of inquiry:<sup>159</sup>

It [what-is-not] never was nor will be, since it [what-is] is now, all together, one, continuous. For what birth will you seek for it? How and whence did it grow? *I shall not allow you to say nor to think from not being (ἐκ μὴ ἐόντος), for it is not to be said nor thought that it is not; [...]* But it has in fact decided, as is necessary, to *leave the one way unthought and nameless (for it is no true way) (οὐ γὰρ ἀληθῆς ἔστιν ὁδός)*, but that the other is and is genuine. And how could what is (τὸ ἐόν) be in the future? How could it come to be? For if it came into being, it is not: nor is it if it is ever going to be in the future. Thus coming to be is extinguished and perishing unheard of (KRS [296]: Fr. 8, 5-21, Simplicius *in Phys.* 78, 5; 145, 5) (italics mine).

Plato's *Parmenides* may explain how Gorgias' argument was born through those examinations of Zeno's antinomies,<sup>160</sup> and also that Plato takes the problem raised by Gorgias seriously (cf. chapter V-5). Gorgias, in his third demonstration that there is not both what is *and* what is not either, and concludes that there is nothing ([75-76]). Gorgias maintains that if there are both what-is and what-is-not, then, both are the same so far as being (or not-being) is concerned. But, since it is already proved that there is not what-is-not, and what-is has been shown to be the same as this. Again, Gorgias says, if there are both what-is and what-is-not, since they are not the same thing, it is not the case that there are both. If what-is is the same as what-is-not, since it follows that they are the same thing, it is not the case that there are both. Gorgias therefore maintains that it follows there is nothing (οὐδὲν ἔστιν) from his three demonstrations. Gorgias' conclusion here is very confusing. It seems to me that if there are not both, there should be one of them, namely what-is, otherwise, there are both what-is and what-is-not in different ways, rather than there is nothing.

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<sup>158</sup> “Therefore it is right that what-is (τὸ ἐόν) should not be imperfect; [...] The same thing is there to be thought and is why there is thought. For you will not find thinking without what-is (ἄνευ τοῦ ἐόντος), in all that has been said (\*or in which thinking is expressed). For there neither is nor will be anything else besides what-is (τοῦ ἐόντος)”.

<sup>159</sup> Cf. also KRS [293].

<sup>160</sup> Cf. KRS: 279; and Socrates' comment on Zeno in the *Phaedrus* 261d: “his [Zeno's] listeners will perceive the same things to be both similar and dissimilar, both one and many, both at rest and also in motion”.

Schiappa summarises three possible, traditional interpretations on Gorgias' first argument that 'there is nothing (οὐδὲν ἔστιν) in the existential sense, which he respectively calls the interpretation of (1) the radical nihilist, (2) the "pure being", and (3) the object-of-inquiry (1997: 23). First, as Schiappa points out, when Gorgias' argument is regarded as a parody, 'there is nothing' tends to be understood as "a nihilistic denial of reality (Ibid. 24)", namely there are absolutely no existing things anywhere (1). Second, Schiappa maintains that 'there is nothing' can also be read as nothing exists 'metaphysically'. He provides an example that "I exist (Ibid. 24)", and if something which *really* exists, i.e. what-is, should be unchangeable, perfect, and eternal as Parmenides claims, he could not make such a claim "I exist", because he was born and will pass away. Therefore 'there is nothing' is capable of being interpreted as the denial of metaphysical existences, i.e. nothing metaphysically exists (2). Third, Schiappa suggests that 'there is nothing' can imply that there is nothing which is true or which is the case, and that it could mean that nothing exists *unconditionally*. The difference between (2) and (3) is that while the former rejects any non-metaphysical existences (such as 'I'), the latter accepts that everything *exists* conditionally (3). Lastly, Schiappa adds Kerferd's "predicative" reading which regards that Gorgias means that there is no way in which the ontological verbs (e.g. be, exist) can be applied to any subjects without contradictions (Kerferd 1981: 96). Although Schiappa himself does not draw any conclusion thinking that "it is impossible to translate or describe Gorgias's arguments without imposing a particular interpretation (1997: 27)", I am inclined to accept the fourth line of reading which he last suggests.

The paradox is, according to my interpretation, created by Gorgias to be capable of being argued both ways. The anonymous author criticizes Gorgias' conclusion for two reasons by claiming that it does not follow at all that nothing exists (μηδὲν εἶναι) (979a34 –b19).<sup>161</sup> Firstly, even if there is not what-is-not, it does not mean that what-is-not *is not* in the same way as what-is *is*. The former could mean something *that is not*, while the latter *actually is* as well. So, it is possible that what-is-not is in the different way from that of what-is.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> White notes that the Greek word for "nothing," *mēden*, literally means something like "not even one" (*mēde hen*) in Cooper (1997: 258, n.9).

<sup>162</sup> This is an identical position to that which Ctesippus tries to defend in the *Euthydemus* (cf. chapter III-2-2). Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* points out that this confusion is made use of in eristic arguments comparing them with dialectical arguments: "In dialectic, for instance, it may be argued that what-is-not *is*, on the ground that what-is-not *is* what-is-not; or that the unknown can be known, on the ground that it can be known to *be* unknown... in

Secondly, even if Gorgias' way of argument is valid, the anonymous author maintains, a completely opposite consequence is equally available, namely that *there is everything*. He says that, although it is strange to say that there is what-is-not, if there is both what-is and what-is-not, it does not necessarily follow that there is nothing. Rather, that there is everything *no less than* that there is nothing. I think that the latter is what Gorgias intends. As the anonymous author claims, Gorgias' method certainly provides an alternative possible way of arguing the same object of knowledge against that of Parmenides'.<sup>163</sup> I agree with Kerferd who points out that Gorgias is surely not concerned to deny the existence of what-is and what-is-not at all, but the consequence must be rather that "things exist in any case, whether they are τὸ μὴ ὄν or τὸ ὄν" (1955: 11). This follows that Gorgias' first argument is not concerned with the ontology of what-is at all, but with the function of names as references to 'what-is' (in Parmenidean terms) and the controversial usage of any predications for it. Whatever name and whatever predication you give *it*, there is no difference for the object so called. Gorgias points out the absurdity that different people name and predicate it in different ways however one likes. So for him, I think, it is equally reasonable not to name and not to predicate it at all: any expression or description can be abandoned, and just nothing remains instead, which can be said that there is '*nothing*'.

### **3. Denial of the Possibility of 'Knowledge**

2. Even if there is something, it cannot be known.

In the second argument, Gorgias maintains that, since what is thought is what-is-not, even if there is something, this is inapprehensible for human beings (ἀνθρώπων). If this claim is compared with Parmenides' claim which holds that what-is-not cannot be thought and only what-is is thought, it is clear that Gorgias turns upside-down Parmenidean argument. Gorgias says that because 'a human flying', 'chariots speeding over the ocean', and 'Scylla and

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eristic, the imposture comes from not adding any clause specifying relationship or reference or manner; so here it arises because the probability in question is not general but specific (1402a4-17)". Cf. also *Sophist* 240c3-5.

<sup>163</sup> My point here is not to claim that what Gorgias targets can be regarded as Parmenides' own philosophical position, rather Parmenides was, I think, struggling with the same problem that his epistemological arguments embrace. The nature of Parmenidean epistemology requires further investigation, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Chimaera', which are obviously what-is-not, are thought of, it would be the case that what is thought is what-is-not; it is, Gorgias maintains, more reasonable than accepting that what is thought is what-is. Gorgias' arguments result in the negative conclusion of the impossibility of true-thinking, namely all thoughts are of what-is-not, i.e. false:

[77] Next it has to be shown that even if there is something, this is unknowable and inconceivable by human beings. For, says Gorgias, if things that are thought are not beings, what is is not thought. And reasonably so. For just as, if things that are thought had as an attribute that they are white, white things would also have as an attribute that they are thought, so if things that are thought have as an attribute that they are not beings, then necessarily beings will have as an attribute that they are not thought. [78] So the statement "if things that are thought are not beings, what is is not thought" is sound and preserves consistency. But (to anticipate) things that are thought are *not* beings... [79] For if things that are thought are beings, all things that are thought are, however anyone thinks them – which does not seem right. For it is not the case that if someone thinks of a human flying or chariots speeding over the ocean, a human *is* right away flying or chariots *are* speeding over the ocean. So it is not the case that things that are thought are beings. [80] In addition, if things that are thought are beings, non-beings will not be thought. For *opposite things have opposite attribute, and what is not is opposite to what is*; and for this reason, if being thought is an attribute of what is, not being thought will definitely be an attribute of what is not. But this is absurd; for Scylla and Chimaera and many non-beings are thought. Therefore it is not the case that what-is is thought.

Plato's *Sophist* is, I think, concerned with the same problem that is investigated by Gorgias, namely, what what-is-not should be, and attempts to solve it in a way similar to that used by the anonymous author of *MXG*.<sup>164</sup> The Eleatic stranger with Theaetetus supposes a keen listener to their argument who wonders what the name 'what-is-not (τὸ μὴ ὄν)' should be applied to.<sup>165</sup> The Eleatic stranger says that that which is called 'what-is-not' by sophists cannot in fact be called either 'something (τὶ)' or 'it (αὐτὸ)', maintains that it is unthinkable, unsayable, and unutterable (237c), and criticises sophists for regarding what-is-not as thinkable and sayable and having ended into *aporia* (εἰς ἄπορον) (239c6).<sup>166</sup> The Eleatic

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<sup>164</sup> Matthews points out, as I agree, that "in the *Sophist*, perplexities become a target of inquiry (1999: 103)".

<sup>165</sup> Cf. *Sophist* 237b-c: "But suppose one of our listeners weren't debating or playing a game but had to think seriously and answer the following question: What should the name *what is not* (τὸ μὴ ὄν), be applied to?" The Eleatic stranger here could mean that this question should be answered if the questioner is not merely playing a game, which probably implies eristic sort of arguments using various antinomies to refute counterarguments (see also *Sophist* 234a).

<sup>166</sup> One might wonder whether Gorgias can be thought same as whom the Eleatic stranger here regards as sophists, because Gorgias is clearly distinguished from them in the *Gorgias* as a rhetorician (465c, 482c6, d6),

stranger and Theaetetus agree that what-is-not is in fact one amongst many things that are (i.e. what-is) (258c2-3). Supposing that speaking and thinking are in some ways similar, the *Sophist* is also concerned with one of the eristic arguments, namely that every speaking is true and false-speaking is impossible,<sup>167</sup> which is the opposite to Gorgias' second argument. The Eleatic stranger addresses the question of false speaking, namely what it is to speak what-is-not. He presents two statements about Theaetetus, one is "Theaetetus sits" and the other "Theaetetus flies", and maintains that, although both statements speak about what-is, viz. Theaetetus, the former is as he is but the latter not as he is (262e).<sup>168</sup>

This confusion between what-is and what-is-not repeatedly appears in various ancient sources, and the origin of the confusion could have derived from Parmenides' terminology.<sup>169</sup> Parmenides' fragments are, as Schofield (KRS: 251) and Schiappa (1997: 21) point out,<sup>170</sup> capable of both the ontological reading and the epistemological reading, and I agree with Schiappa who thinks that Parmenides' central interest is more probably epistemological. But, the problem is that Parmenides appears to mix up epistemology and ontology in his terminology: his argument in a sense seems to be committed to the contradictory claims that everything which is thought is of what-is and what-is-not cannot be thought and false, but some thoughts are false while some are true. It is as a result capable of being understood (even if Parmenides himself does not intend) as accepting that what does not 'actually' exist or something false, e.g. a flying chariot or flying Theaetetus, also belong to what-is, and inevitably commits itself to the claim that all which are thought are of what-is, namely truth.<sup>171</sup> On the contrary, Gorgias argues that, even if there is something, viz. what-is, it is outside of thought and speech, and a running horse for example belongs to what-is-not as well as a flying chariot does. Both Parmenides and Gorgias use those terms, what-is and what-is-not, as respectively equivalent to being and not-being, and also truth and falsehood.

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and I too certainly think that Plato distinguishes Gorgias from other sophists. I think that, although Gorgias argues in the similar way in which other sophists do on what-is-not, Gorgias possibly never commits himself to any specific argument as true or false. It is more likely that Gorgias is just capable to argue in both ways as a rhetorician for persuading people. Cf. also Notomi 1999: 45, n. 6.

<sup>167</sup> In the *Euthydemus*, that false speaking is impossible is attributed to Protagoras and his followers (286c). Cf. chapter III-2-2.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. also Owen 1999: 423-431 for a close analysis on the argument in the *Sophist*.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. Notomi calls it "the self-contradictory nature of Parmenides' position (1999: 177)".

<sup>170</sup> See p. 79.

<sup>171</sup> Cf. *MXG* 980a9-12 for the same criticism by the anonymous author. One might still think that Gorgias is simply wrong, because imaging Chimera is different from believing that there is really a Chimera. However, the problem is, if there is only what-is, and what-is is the only thing which we can think of (as Eleatics may maintain), how can we say it more reasonable to think that there is what-is than to think there is a Chimera, if both what-is and Chimera belong to the same epistemic realm which we can think of.



Thus, the Eleatic stranger in the *Sophist* suggests the alternative solution of admitting that *it*, whatever it is, embraces both truth (what-is) and falsehood (what-is-not) in it, claiming that “in order to defend ourselves we’re going to have to subject father Parmenides’ saying to further examination, and insists by brute force both that *what is not* somehow is, and then again that *what is* somehow is not (241d5-7)”.<sup>172</sup>

However, more importantly, this is not merely an issue over terminology. The genuine problem is that if there is both what-is and what-is-not in our epistemological realm as the Eleatic stranger suggests, what is the criterion to judge the truth and falsehood for human beings? Intellect, sense perception, both of them, or neither of them? Parmenides is said to have committed himself to a doctrine of what-is as accessible and known only through human intellect, but not through perception: he maintains that if you inquire through your sense perceptions, habits and experiences you will be brought to the false way of inquiry into what-is-not.<sup>173</sup> But, even if one relies on either or both of them, isn’t there still a possibility that one may make mistakes in thinking or in his inquiry into what-is? How can we distinguish only what-is accurately from what-is-not, if they both *are* in some ways? The first thinker who realized the seriousness of the problem in Parmenidean epistemology is probably Empedocles. He, unlike Parmenides, clearly pays attention to the limitation and uncertainty of human intellect. Empedocles reflected, according to Sextus, “on the fact that the truth is not completely ungraspable, but is graspable as far as human reason reaches (*M. I.* [124])”. Schofield also maintain that although Empedocles bewails the limited understanding of the things that most men achieve, “he promises that an intelligent use of all the sensory evidence available to mortals, aided by his own instruction, will (contrary to Parmenides’ claim) make each thing clear to us” (KRS: 285).<sup>174</sup> It is likely that Gorgias is also concerned with this same epistemological problem.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> The Eleatic stranger is, however, still committed to a ‘holistic’ view of knowledge while attempting to solve the problem by distinguishing the ontological and epistemological terminology. Cf. *Sophist* 257c: He says “Knowledge is a single thing, too, I suppose. But each part of it that has to do with something is marked off and has a name peculiar to itself. That’s why there are said to be many expertises and many kinds of knowledge”.

<sup>173</sup> KRS [294]: Parmenides: Fr. 7, Plato *Sophist* 242a (lines 1-2); Sextus *M.* VII, 114 (lines 2-6).

<sup>174</sup> Cf. also KRS [342]: Empedocles: Fr. 2, Sextus *M.* VII, 123: “... who, then, boasts that he has found the whole? Not so are these things to be seen or heard by men, or grasped by the understanding. You then, since you have turned aside to this place, shall learn: no further can mortal with reach”. However, in another fragment, Empedocles also maintains that it will be revealed if you use intellect to understand what is perceived (cf. KRS [343]: Empedocles: Fr. 3, line 9, Sextus *M.* VII, 125.), and Empedocles’ epistemology eventually embraces some ambiguities and contradictions. Cf. also KRS [396].

<sup>175</sup> Fundamentally, this epistemological paradox is derived from the metaphysical problem that derived from the Eleatics, although I do not expand the argument further on that aspect in this thesis.

Gorgias' intellect is said by Sextus to deny both the senses and the intellect (*PH. II.* [64]). Gorgias indeed rejects not only intellect but also sense perception as the criterion of truth with a unique theory.<sup>176</sup> He maintains that because we see visible things by sight, and hear audible things by hearing, it is the same for thinking; thinkable things are grasped by thinking. But, it is certain, according to Gorgias, that what is perceptible is not what-is, so what-is is not apprehensible through sense perception either.

[81] ...things that are seen are called visible for this reason – because they are seen – and audible things are called audible for this reason – because they are heard. We do not reject visible things because they are not heard, or put aside audible things because they are not seen; *each one ought to be judged by its own sense, not by another.* In just the same way, things that are thought will be, even if they are not seen by sight or heard by hearing, because they are grasped *by means of their own criterion.* [82] So if someone thinks of chariots speeding over the ocean, even if he does not see them, he ought to believe that there *are* chariots speeding over the ocean. But this is absurd; therefore it is not the case that what-is is thought and apprehended (my italics).

This part at the same time reveals the views of sense perception as criteria for each. There are respectively different criteria, Gorgias says, by which to judge each object. So, the visible is judged by sight, and sound by hearing.<sup>177</sup> However, if what is thought is not what-is, how is it

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<sup>176</sup> An alternative view is found in Kerferd (1981: 71-72): “Parmenides himself however had no followers among the sophists when he wished to deny the reality of the phenomenal world”, but this view is probably too narrow to think that all sophists are committed to the doctrine which regards sense perception as the criterion of the truth.

<sup>177</sup> In the practice of stating what shape and colour respectively are in the *Meno* (75a-76e), Socrates asks whether Meno says that there are effluvia of things following Empedocles' and Gorgias' manner, and whether there are also channels through which the effluvia make their way. After Meno strongly agrees, Socrates states that colour is an effluvium from shapes which fits sight and is perceived (76d4-5). It is likely that Gorgias uses the Empedoclean theory of sense perception for his argument (see KRS [391]: Empedocles; Theophrastus *de sensu* 7 (DK31A86)), and Socrates there alludes to Gorgias' argument on sense perception as well as that on the impossibility of knowledge. Before stating what colour is, Socrates says that he will gratify Meno by following Gorgias (76c2-5) (see *Gorgias* 462d, for Socrates' view on 'rhetoric' as one of arts of 'flattery'). Although Charles thinks that this is the very answer which Socrates attempts to give of the essence of colour (2010: 126), rather, I think, this answer can be committed to Gorgias' epistemological negative dogmatism (cf. also Sedley 2011: xiv). The second example that shape is the limit of solid (στερεοῦ πέρας σχῆμα εἶναι. 76a7) also embraces the problem which is found in the Parmenidean cosmology. Socrates firstly confirms that Meno calls something 'end (τελευτή)' as 'a thing as a limit (πέρας) or boundary (ἔσχατος)', and that there is something which is called 'finished' or 'completed'. Socrates then states that shape is the limit of solid. However, Socrates is apprehensive about the correct usage of words considering the fact that Prodicus would disagree with them (75e). There is a Parmenidean fragment which explains why this second answer is problematic: “But since there is a furthest limit (περαῖς πύματον), it is perfected (τετελεσμένον), like the bulk of a ball well-rounded on every side, equally balanced in every direction from the centre. [...] for being equal to itself on every side, it lies uniformly within its limits (περαῖσι) (KRS [299]: Fr. 8, 32-49, Simplicius *in Phys.* 146, 5) (cf. also KRS [298]). Limit and centre are something which are denied by Gorgias (*M. I.* [69]; *MXG* 979b22), and also the Eleatic stranger discusses

possible that what is seen and what is heard are what-is? The anonymous author analyses this as follows: “if just as what we see is not the more because we see it, so also what we think is not the more for that... so that even things are, they would be unknowable by us (980a15-19)”. In other words, there are perceived and thought things because they are perceivable and thinkable by us. One might think this an identical view to Plato's Protagoras' relativistic philosophy which regards those perceived things as true for the perceiving person (cf. *Theaetetus* 151e ff.).<sup>178</sup> However, Gorgias does not regard such perceived things as *true* for anyone, and despite the fact that it is based upon a similar theory of sense perception, Gorgias rejects its credibility as the criterion of truth. Therefore, for Gorgias, neither sense perception nor intellect is the criterion of truth, but merely the criteria for each respective kind of cognizable thing.<sup>179</sup>

Gorgias, therefore, denies intellect as that which judges perceived things as well as sense perception as that which judges thoughts.<sup>180</sup> One might think that Gorgias entirely undermines both perceptible and intelligible things. However, this is probably wrong, because Gorgias does accept each correspondence between visible things and seen things, audible things and heard things, thinkable things and thought things. Thus, the more plausible interpretation is, I think, that Gorgias merely accepts that the external objects are not completely identical with either perceived or thought things, and for this reason, it is impossible for human beings to apprehend the truth of the objects (i.e. reality) by either thought or perceptions *as they are*, but they can be understood only as they are seen, heard and thought. The senses and intellect could somehow be related to the truth of reality. But, since this exists outside of both human intellect and sense perception, there is an unfilled gap between one belonging to the external world (external to both intellect and sense) and human intellect and sense which attempt to apprehend it.

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this same fragment in the *Sophist* against Parmenides. He maintains that if what-is (τὸ ὄν) has, as Parmenides says, a middle and extremities, it would also have parts, and this is not reasonable (244d-245a). Thus, I am inclined to think that the practice exemplified in the *Meno* is, contrary to traditional interpretations which regard it as the practice of ‘definition’, rather related to problems taken over from Presocratics.

<sup>178</sup> Cf. Robinson 1973: 50.

<sup>179</sup> An alternative interpretation is Kerferd (1955: 16): “What he [Gorgias] was concerned with was the status of phenomena”. However, it seems to me that Gorgias, unlike Heraclitus, does not say anything about the object of perception as ‘phenomena’, rather clearly focuses on the mechanism of perception.

<sup>180</sup> This might be something which Socrates rejects in the *Theaetetus*. Socrates says “it would be very strange thing, I must say, if there were a number of perceptions sitting inside us as if we were Wooden Horses, and there were not some single form, soul or whatever one ought to call it, to which all these converge – something *with* which, *through* those things, as if they were instruments, we perceive all that is perceptible (184d1-5)”.

#### **4. The Impossibility of Making Someone Know**

3. Even if it is knowable, it cannot be shown to others.

Gorgias' third argument maintains that even if there is something, and it is apprehensible, it is not communicable to other people. It outwardly sounds as if he is arguing for the impossibility of communication between people.<sup>181</sup> But the reasons given by Gorgias are not so simple:

[83] And even if it were apprehensible, it is not expressible to someone else. For if beings are visible and audible and generally perceptible things, *which exist externally* (ἄπερ ἐκτός ὑπόκειται) and the visible ones are apprehended by sight and the audible ones by hearing and not vice versa, then how is it possible for these things to be communicated to someone else? [84] For what we communicate with is speech (*logos*), but speech is not the existing beings (τὰ ὑποκείμενα καὶ ὄντα); therefore it is not the beings that we communicate to our neighbours, but speech, which is different from the existing things. Just as the visible, then, could not become audible, and conversely, so what is, since it exists, *externally* (ἐπεὶ ὑπόκειται τὸ ὄν ἐκτός), could not become our speech. [85] And if it is not speech it cannot be disclosed to someone else. Again, speech, he says, is constituted from *the external objects* (ἀπὸ τῶν ἔξωθεν προσπιπτόντων) that strike us – that is, from perceptible things. For from the occurrence of flavour there is born in us the speech uttered concerning this quality, and from the impact of color that concerning color. And if this is so, *it is not that speech is indicative of the external thing; rather, the external thing becomes revelatory of speech* (italics mine).

Here, Gorgias firstly regards beings (τὰ ὄντα) as existing *externally* ([83]), secondly differentiates '*logos*' from those existing things ([84]), and then claims that '*logos*' communicated to someone else does not produce the same thing in his mind as that which the speaker knows (if it is known by the speaker).<sup>182</sup> Gaines maintains that "in the third argument, Gorgias does not talk about the impossibility of communication but is concerned with the question of "whether representations derived from discourse are identical to perception of external existents (1997: 9)", because "discourse does not provide immediate perception (Ibid. 7)". The reason why Gaines thinks that the third part is concerned with the relation between

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<sup>181</sup> Cf. Wardy 1996: 14.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. also MXG 980b16-17.

perception and discourse is that he gives more weight to the argument of *XMG*, judging that the source for the anonymous author is more reliable on the basis of the terminology (Ibid. 3).<sup>183</sup> The passage runs as follows:

But even if they are knowable by us, how, he [Gorgias] asks, could any one indicate them to another? For, how, he says, could any one communicate by word of mouth that which he has seen? And how could that which has been seen be indicated to a listener if he has not seen it? For just as the sight does not recognize sounds, so the hearing does not hear colours but sounds; and he who speaks, speaks, but does not speak a colour or a thing. When, therefore one has not a thing in mind, how will he get it there from another person by word or any other token of the thing except by seeing it, if it is a colour, or hearing it, if it is a noise? For he who speaks does not speak a noise at all, or a colour, but word; and so it is not possible to think a colour, but only to see it, nor a noise, but only to hear it. But even if it is possible to know things, and to express whatever one knows in words, yet how can the hearer have in his mind the same thing as the speaker? For the same thing cannot be present simultaneously in several separate people; for in that case the *one would be two*.

But if, he argues, the same thing *could* be present in several persons, there is no reason why it should not appear dissimilar to them, if they are not themselves entirely similar and are not in the same place; for if they were in the same place they would be one and not two. But it appears that the objects which even one and the same man perceives at the same moment are not all similar, but he perceives different things by hearing and by sight, and differently now and on some former occasion; and so a man can scarcely perceive the same thing as someone else (980a20-b17).

Gaines thinks that Gorgias here focuses on the gap between the speaker's perception and what the hearer understands from his discourse. However, this interpretation is, I think, slightly controversial, because firstly it does not fit even the second paragraph above as he thinks that it talks about perception. The first argument is identical to the argument in *M.*: even if it is possible to know things, and *to express* whatever one knows in words, Gorgias says, it is *not* possible for the hearer to have the same thing in his mind as the speaker. So, Gorgias obviously presupposes such a situation in which the speaker expresses precisely

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<sup>183</sup> Gaines mainly points out that while the anonymous author uses 'δηλώω' which is consonant with the vocabulary of Gorgias's day, Sextus uses the adjective ἀνέξοιστος whose earliest use is found in the second century A.D. (cf. pp. 81-82), and I accept the reasons which lead him to think that *MXG* is more reliable. However, even if this is the case, it is not certain that the third part is concerned with the relation between discourse and perception.

whatever he knew through his perception. Now the perceived thing is *for the hearer* the words (*logos*) from the speaker, rather than the original objects perceived by the speaker, and the hearer hears the words but does not see a colour or a thing. What is said impossible by Gorgias here is, more precisely, for the hearer to acquire the same thing (even if it is possible for the speaker to express the object *as it is* in words), because if such a thing were possible, surely the speaker and the hearer must be *one but not two*. Thus, the part explains the difference between the words (as spoken by the speaker and apprehended by the hearer) and the thing which the hearer has in his mind.<sup>184</sup> It, I think, means that if they are different persons, it will hardly be possible that the hearer has the same thing as the speaker. The sentence which can be read to mention the relation between the perception of the speaker and his words seems to me only the second sentence which certainly maintains that it is impossible for anyone to communicate what he has seen by word of mouth. The second paragraph certainly says a different thing. However, the point is, I think, the same. Even if the same thing could be present in a different person, how would it appear to one as it appears to the other? Any perceived thing appears to different persons (or even to the same person) in different ways, even when they are together and experience the same thing at the same time. So, Gorgias concludes that it is scarcely possible that the expressed words are present in entirely the same way in the hearer even if it is possible for the speaker to *know* and *express* the external objects.

Moreover, Gaines' interpretation contradicts the last sentence in the Sextus' passage ([85]) in which Gorgias is said to reject the general view which holds that '*logos*' is the representation of the objects, but conversely claims that the *logos* is generated from the external object and the spoken *logos* again produces something different from what is apprehended by the speaker, and then the hearer will receive something different from what the *logos* expresses. Gorgias points out the difference between the *logos* (even if it is expressed by the knowing speaker) and what it can put in another person's mind. That means, as Gaines himself also maintains (1997: 4), that even if the speaker knows something he cannot put the same knowledge into someone else by means of words. In other words, the hearer cannot know what is known by the speaker. Indeed, the most impressive element in [85] is how much

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<sup>184</sup> Hay points out the interesting connection between Gorgias' argument and a parody of Euripides asking Mnesilochus whether he has *heard* everything which you will presently *see* in person (1990: 333), which is concerned with the same question of how you can know whom you will see by hearing about him when sight is a different thing from sounds.

Gorgias emphasizes that the things *externally* exist from each other and the gaps between one and other's truth.<sup>185</sup> Thus, Gorgias, according to Sextus, concludes:

[86] ... For, he says, even if speech exists, it differs, however, from the rest of the things that exist, and visible bodies differ the most from words; for the visible is graspable through one organ and speech through another. Therefore speech does not indicate the majority of existing things, just as they do not disclose *each other's nature*.

To summarise my interpretation of Gorgias' three arguments, I suggest that those three arguments are concerned with epistemology. He firstly maintains that if something (e.g. what-is) is, it follows that there is nothing, because if what-is is the only thing which exists and is real, it make no difference to argue in the opposite way, namely there is nothing. Secondly even if there is something, it is not known by human beings, because it is, as existing externally, not graspable *as it is* either through the intellect or through the senses. Thirdly, even if it is knowable, you cannot simply make someone else know it. As words *logoi* is not the thing, even if the *logoi* could precisely express it, it could scarcely produce the same thing in the hearer as that which the speaker has in his mind. And, even if the hearer could have the same thing, it cannot appear to him as it appears to the speaker. Therefore, one cannot simply learn what is known by the speaker through words. One might feel how pessimistic Gorgias is about the relation between what-is, intellect, sense perception, and language. It is in fact not entirely clear whether Gorgias himself considers that the gaps are so huge as to prevent understanding between people, and whether for this reason Gorgias and his followers fell into desperation and used arguments in merely eristic ways. However, whether Gorgias commits himself to these arguments or not, it can be imagined that such people (including Gorgias) abandon their arguments as tools to refer to the truth of 'reality', and think that they are in any case speaking only for apparent persuasions. Certainly such arguments, standing independently and losing any relation with intellect, perception, and reality, may have been used merely for the purpose of refuting other arguments.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Although these terms expressing 'external' existences might be closely connected to Sextus' own interpretation, I do not think there is any serious problem especially in Sextus' text, because the anonymous author's interpretation also focuses on the acquisition of the external objects through perception.

<sup>186</sup> Gorgias' genuine aim of his art of rhetoric requires further investigations also with carefully looking into his other fragments, which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

## **5. The Paradox Again**

1. The passage 80d5-e5 again.

At the end, let us again return to the passage 81d5-e5 in the *Meno* and see how it exactly related to Socrates' positive dogmatism ([P]) and Gorgias' negative dogmatism ([N]) on the possibility of knowledge. Each position respectively claims:

[P] Everyone can know the truth of reality because it is the possession of our immortal souls.

[N] No one can know the truth of reality either through intellect or through sense perception because it exists externally to us.

Both of them are concerned with the possibility or impossibility for human beings to know the truth of reality, and in fact with the question of where the objects of knowledge are situated: in the former case inside ourselves, in the latter outside of our intellectual realm. Assuming that there are such 'the truth of reality', two equally valid positions create an antinomy. Then, these two sides of the argument bring about an eristic argument about the impossibility of *coming to know* it either by inquiry, by learning or by accident:

[P'] Everyone knows the truth of reality.

[N'] No one knows the truth of reality.

Socrates' epistemological positive dogmatism is initially committed to the claim that everyone already possesses the truth of reality within us and that there is no need for anyone to inquire into/learn it. On the other hand, the epistemological negative dogmatism is committed to the claim that no one knows what the truth of reality is at all, because it originally is not within us, so no one knows how to begin the inquiry into it and, even when it is present in front of us, no one can recognize it. Anyway, whichever you choose, there is no possibility for you to transit from the state of ignorance to knowing. If you already know, you are always knowing, while if you do not know, you were and will never knowing. Thus, the eristic argument says:



[E] It is impossible for anyone to *coming to* know (inquire into/learn) either what everyone knows or what no one knows.

I think that Socrates' epistemological positive dogmatism and Gorgias' epistemological negative dogmatism well fit the two horns of our reformulated version of Socrates' restatement (cf. chapter III-4):

[S'] It is not possible for anyone to inquire into either what everyone knows or what no one knows.

[S1'] No one will inquire into what everyone knows, since everyone knows it and there is no need for anyone to inquire.

[S2'] No one will inquire into what no one knows, since no one even knows what they are going to inquire into.

This view which [S2'] suggests is, as we have seen, identical to Gorgias' view on the truth of reality, and is certainly the [Y] version of epistemological negative dogmatism (cf. 51): there is the thing which people call 'what-is' or 'reality', but no one knows what it is. Therefore, it is hardly ever possible for anyone to inquire into and discover it. This is, I think, different from the [Z] version, an ontological question in which we even do not know even the existence of the objects of knowledge.<sup>187</sup> On the other hand, Socrates responds to it that the truth of reality is in the scope of what is intelligible and perceptible, namely in our soul's epistemological realm.<sup>188</sup> So it must be possible for us to inquire into it and discover it.

Although there is still a concern that there could be something which we cannot reach, existing beyond our intellectual capacity, Socrates tells us not to worry, because our soul is immortal, and it has already learned everything about the truth of reality, and there is nothing outside of that realm. The immortality of the soul presented by Socrates guarantees the possibility of knowledge. But, the next problem emerges: if the soul has already known the

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<sup>187</sup> There might be a possibility that the [Z] version also can be applied to Gorgias' first argument. However, it is not clear whether Gorgias is also concerned with the ontological status of the objects of knowledge in the first argument. On the other hand, in the second argument, Gorgias explicitly hypothesizes that there *is* something, I think that we can see more clearly that Gorgias there has the [Y] version of epistemology in mind.

<sup>188</sup> One might still think that Plato does not think that there is any truth in perceptible things. However, as I argued above, there is no evidence that Plato regards the truth in this way in the *Meno*. Although I do not deny that some dialogues hold such a position, I suspect that it is all of Platonic philosophy. Again, although Sextus also regards Plato as having considered that only intelligible things are true (*M. II.* [4]), he at the same time accepts that Plato is both dogmatic and *aporetic* (*PH. I.* [221]). Cf. also *PH. I.* [7].

truth of reality, how is it possible for us to inquire into what has been already known? Socrates again replies that inquiry and learning are in fact recollection of what the soul has already known. So, since we have not yet recollected, we have to recollect what the soul knows, thus inquiry and discovery are possible through recollection.

2. The paradox: a cause of the state of *aporia* or a condition of inquiry.

One might think that the problem is after all not resolved at all. Calvert may be one of those who would think so. He points out that both Meno's argument and Socrates' response are committed to a same problematic 'logical error' which goes back to Parmenides (1979: 144).<sup>189</sup> Two senses of knowing presented in Socrates' response, as opposite to that in Gorgias' epistemological negative dogmatism, eventually fall on the knowing side of the dichotomy, namely not-yet-recollecting and recollecting, and neither Socrates' nor Gorgias' position allows in any case the movement from ignorance to knowing, which is generally considered to be the very process of 'knowing'. Why won't we still question; "if it is the case, doesn't it mean that it is, anyway, impossible for us to newly know something which the soul has not yet known, and to move from the state of ignorance to knowing about the new things rather than what the soul has already known?" or, "what is the evidence that there won't be anything else which the soul has not yet learned throughout the whole future, if learning is merely recollection?" Both the only way to answer the paradox, i.e. by exposing the sharp dichotomy between knowing and not-knowing, and the original cause of the paradox that both Socrates' and Gorgias' arguments assume, namely, the Eleatic 'truth of reality' are left untouched by Plato in the *Meno*.

What I am hesitant to give a conclusive answer in this thesis is whether Plato considers the underlying paradox which I have suggested a specific issue which causes the state of *aporia*.<sup>190</sup> Since there are, as we have seen at chapter IV-5-11, no dogmatic assumptions in

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<sup>189</sup> An alternative interpretation is offered by Ionescu, who thinks that the paradox is concerned with the conflict between the Sophistic atomistic view of knowledge and the Socratic holistic view of knowledge (2007: 40).

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Aristotle clarifies '*aporēma*' as such an issue as is the cause of the state of '*aporia*' in the *Topics*. He defines *aporēma* as "a deduction that reasons dialectically to a contradiction (συλλογισμὸς διαλεκτικὸς ἀντιφάσεως) (162a17-18)", and also maintains that "it is when we reflect on both sides of a question and find everything alike to be in keeping with either course that we are perplexed (*aporia*) which of the two we are to do (145b16-20)". The underlying paradox which I have suggested in the thesis may be something which Sextus might maintain as one of the difficulties which indicate that we should suspend judgement. He maintains that "if they say that we will judge the senses and the intellect with intellect and the senses, so that things are judged

Socrates' conclusion about his own epistemological positive suggestion, it is certain that the *Meno* is not completely dogmatic. However, we can also see that Socrates regards the state of *aporia* as the beginning of inquiry, rather than the consequence (chapter IV-4-7), and when Socrates suggests that he and Meno find what virtue is together since they are of one mind (ὁμονοοῦμεν) that they should inquire into what they do not know (86b-c), Socrates appears to be committed to the positive dogmatism on the possibility of knowledge. While it is, as we have seen, likely that Socrates sees the underlying paradox on the possibility of knowledge, he chooses to commit himself to the positive view. The genuine question is, I think, rather than whether Socrates sees the underlying paradox or not; “Why does Plato here let his Socrates take a positive position on the possibility of knowledge?” and “what does Plato think about the real cause of the paradox?”

There have been some discussions over Socrates' *aporiai*. Politis, for example, argues that Plato already in the early dialogues uses ‘*aporia*’ not only in the meaning of a state but also of ‘a matter of perplexity’ (2006). Politis maintains there are two kinds of *aporia*: e.g. in the *Laches* and *Euthyphro*, ‘*aporia*’ expresses the interlocutors’ state of speechlessness faced with the Socratic demand for ‘definitions’, and the interlocutors think that Socrates is the one who is responsible for their victimized state (Ibid. 96). On the other hand, we can also see some puzzles which leave Socrates himself at a loss. For example, in the *Apology*, Socrates says that the oracle declaring that Socrates is the wisest puts him into perplexity (21b7-9), and in the *Protagoras*, Socrates explicitly says that the question of whether virtue can be taught is something which gives him ‘*aporia*’ (320b4-c1). Moreover, in the *Charmides*, Socrates even tells Critias how he is in *aporia* over the puzzle of whether it is possible to know that one knows and does not know what he knows and does not know (167b6-8). Politis, though he does not mention the paradox which I suggest, thinks that the *Meno* is the dialogue which includes both of these two kinds of *aporia*. Socrates says that he is indeed no less perplexed than Meno about what virtue is, and claims that the state of *aporia*, as

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with some of those and not with others they take for granted *what is under investigation* (τὸ ζητούμενον συναρπάζουσιν); for we are still investigating whether anyone can judge through these (*PH. II.* [65], italics mine)”. According to Sextus, we cannot yet determine anything about the criterion of truth (*PH. II.* [79]: Cf. also *PH. I.* [140]). For him, Gorgias’ negative claim on the possibility of knowledge about the truth of the external existing things cannot be considered the same as scepticism, but rather in a negative way. Thus, Sextus suspends the judgement because “we cannot say anything about *the nature of external existing objects* (*PH. I.* [128], italics mine)”. Sextus, therefore, says that “I determine nothing” meaning “I now feel in such a way as neither to posit dogmatically nor to reject any of the things falling *under this investigation* (ὕπὸ τὴν ζήτησιν) (*PH. I.* [197], italics mine). Cf. also *Meno* 79d3: Socrates forbids a sort of answers “*under investigation* (τὴν διὰ τῶν ἔτι ζητούμενων) (79d3)”, and note how Sextus’ terminology is Socratic.

demonstrated in the slave's geometrical demonstration, is the start of inquiry. Also in the *Theaetetus*, *aporia* is, as presented in Socratic midwifery, an active and productive intellectual state (148e).

Matthews objects to the view that regards the paradox in the passage 80d5-e5 as a paradox for Socrates: in so far as the paradox of inquiry in the *Meno* is concerned, Socrates obviously assumes that inquiry is possible and calls the denial an 'eristic argument' (1999: 100-101).<sup>191</sup> He argues that the state of Socrates in the *Meno* is obviously distinct from that in the *Theaetetus* in which Socrates reveals his self-consciousness of always falling into *aporia* over the question in what way false judgement is possible.<sup>192</sup> Socrates there explains the matter as something which has often bothered him and which gets him into great *aporia* (187d). The point is that Socrates, in the *Meno* at least, does not accept that the argument at the passage 80d5-e5 causes in him a state of *aporia*. Although Matthews' argument is convincing, I wonder whether calling the argument 'eristic' and not saying that he is in *aporia* over the matter is a sufficient reason to decide that Socrates thinks that the argument does not hold any problems.

I myself see an interesting correspondence with Plato's *Parmenides*. I agree with Hay that Plato makes Parmenides mention Gorgias' argument with his own mouth (1990: 335-336).<sup>193</sup> Since Socrates claims that forms of what-is exist separate from human beings, and belong in God's realm, Parmenides says that if forms are such, there must be many difficulties and the main one is as follows (133a-e):

“[S]uppose someone were to say that if the forms are such as we claim they must be, they cannot even be known. If anyone should raise that objection, you wouldn't be able to show him that he is wrong, unless the objector happened to be widely experienced and not ungifted, and consented to pay attention while in your effort to show him you dealt with many distant considerations.

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<sup>191</sup> Matthews also regards the paradox as the impossibility of inquiry. Cf. also Matthews 1999: 30.

<sup>192</sup> Socrates says that, since everything is either a thing we know or a thing we don't know, there appears to him to be no space for false judgement (*Theaetetus* 188c).

<sup>193</sup> Hay however does not notice that amongst two arguments raised by Parmenides only the latter could be Gorgianic: Parmenides says “[T]he forms inevitably involve these objections and a host of others besides – if there are those characters for things, and a person is to mark off each form as ‘something itself.’ As a result, whoever hears about them is doubtful and objects that they do not exist, and that, even if they *do*, they must by strict necessity be unknowable to human nature; and in saying this he seems to have a point; and, as we said, he is extraordinarily hard to win over (135a)”. Cf. also Kerferd 1955: 3; Matthews 1999: 84.

Otherwise, the person who insists that they are necessarily unknowable would remain unconvinced (133b-c)".

Socrates is hesitant to decide what the forms are and where they exist, i.e. whether they are a thought (νόημα) in our mind (ψυχή), or things outside our intellectual realm (132b ff.). Parmenides warns Socrates that if the forms exist separately from us when someone says that they are unknowable it will be difficult to convince him. In other words, if the forms are not our possession, it is likely that someone will object to the possibility of human beings knowing them, and it will be immensely difficult to convince him.

Parmenides here also points out, that if the person who realizes these difficulties accompanying the forms, completely denies their existence, and does not allow that the forms appear anywhere, he would be again at a loss without knowing which way to head. Moreover, such a person would also destroy the power of dialectic.<sup>194</sup> Socrates accepts these problems as something which he has already been aware of (134e-c2). Parmenides here implies that if one completely rejects the notion that there are forms, in any perceiving, thinking, or speaking, it would at the same time destroy any intellectual discourse and understanding of each of human beings, i.e. the power of dialectic. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates tells Callicles, one of the most stubborn interlocutors in Platonic dialogues, "if human beings didn't share common experiences (πάθος), some sharing one, other shared by others, it would not be easy for him to communicate what he experiences to the other. I say this because I realize that you and I are both now actually sharing a common experience (481c5-d2)", which is, I think, exactly a response to Gorgias' third argument on the impossibility of people's having the same thing in their mind through words.<sup>195</sup> Socrates' words seem to mean that if one admits that there are not such things as, e.g. what the truth is, what reality is, and what virtue is shared by all of us, and all together abandon them, we will never reach solid agreement

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<sup>194</sup> It is likely that Gorgias inquired into contradictions and paradoxes (antinomies), in such a way that his art of rhetoric was capable of arguing either sides of the same matter with equally valid consequences. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates talks about those people who investigate contradictions (90b-c). Socrates says that such people, as a result of spending time in the study of contradictions, come to hate any argument and are deprived of truth and knowledge of reality. So, Socrates suggests, conversely, that they try to believe that it is they who are not sound, but not the arguments, and take courage and be eager to attain soundness, rather than criticizing the fact that no argument is ultimately sound (90d-e). What happens in the *Phaedo* is that Socrates overturns the perspectives from maintaining that there is a problem in *logoi* as solid references of the truth, to regarding it as their lack of knowing what is true. So, the issue is not in *logoi*, but in them, who do not know how to use the arguments. Cf. also *Sophist* 259e: "To dissociate each thing from everything else is to destroy totally everything there is to say. The weaving together of forms is what makes speech possible for us".

<sup>195</sup> Socrates here also maintains that "our [Socrates and Callicles'] mutual agreement will really lay hold of truth in the end (487e)".

*The Underlying Paradox of Plato's Meno 80d5-e5*

through discourse or any consistency in our practices, and consequently 'dialectic' is pointless. The point is that the Socratic method of dialectic *is* the very response to Gorgias' art of rhetoric: in the *Meno*, there is an underlying concern over *logos* as a means of philosophical inquiry, namely the difference between Gorgias' rhetoric and Socratic dialectic, and Plato's project should be examined in a broader perspective beyond any individual dialogue.

## **VI. Conclusion**

To summarise my three main suggestions over the interpretation of the passage 80d5-e5 in the *Meno*, firstly, Socrates' evaluation of Meno's question as 'an eristic argument' has a two-fold meaning. (1) it is eristic because Meno makes use of the horn of the ready-made eristic argument that one cannot inquire into either what he knows or what he does not know in order to attack Socrates' two controversial claims that he does not know what virtue is at all and wants to inquire into it. Meno uses the counterargument by picking up Socrates' words literally without taking into account whether Socrates *really* does not 'know' at all or what Socrates means when he claims not to 'know' what it is *at all*. On the other hand, (2) Meno's question is eristic also in a deeper sense, because the argument originates with Gorgias' epistemological negative dogmatism which is committed to the claim that it is impossible for human beings to come to know the truth of reality. Socrates detects this deeper counterargument against the possibility of knowledge, and attempts to disarm it. So, secondly, my suggestion was that Socrates' main response in the *Meno* is the myth of the immortality of the soul which holds the possibility of knowledge by means of the knowing soul. Thirdly, I suggested that the horn of the underlying paradox originates with Gorgias' rhetorical arguments in his *On What Is Not* or *On Nature* which demonstrate that it is impossible for human beings to know the truth of externally existing things either through intellect or sense perception. As a result, Gorgias' negative position and Socrates' positive position together form the real paradox on the possibility of knowledge on the truth of reality, and this is what I regard the underlying paradox of *Meno* 80d5-e5. Although the impossibility of inquiry, namely transition from not-knowing to knowing, is one of the paradoxes which accompany the fundamental paradox, I have shown that many other paradoxes are derived from the underlying paradox between intellectual optimism and pessimism.

Although it is likely that Plato attempts to investigate the difference between Gorgias' rhetoric and Socrates' dialectic in the *Meno*, as Schiappa objects to the simple dichotomy between rhetoric and philosophy (1997: 17), the difference between them is in fact not

entirely clear in the *Meno*.<sup>196</sup> Socrates is later disappointed that he and Meno are not well educated by their teachers: he says “as if you and I are not very good, and you were not adequately trained by Gorgias, nor I by Prodicus (96d5)”. This implies, I think, that Socrates is aware that many contradictions of their arguments are attributable to their undisciplined usage of words. Although Kerferd says that Prodicus is interested in the proper meaning of words, whereas Socrates is interested in the real thing (1981: 74), it seems to me that these two perspectives are just two sides of the same coin, as are the two methods, Socratic dialectic and Gorgias’ rhetoric. What I can imagine at this moment is that Plato’s aim is rather to show these *aporiai* through the *Meno*. The *Meno* is full of interesting contradictions by means of using various meanings of terms such as virtue, learning, teaching, knowing etc. Without fixing the meaning of terms, Socrates often contradicts his own arguments, whether intentionally or not. For this reason, this dialogue has accepted various interpretations. That could be, I would like to suggest, what Plato *intentionally* shows through Socrates in the *Meno*.

In the case of the *Meno*, as we have seen, Socrates aligns the first premise with the myth of the immortality of the soul, objecting to Gorgias’ epistemological negative dogmatism. By committing to the positive view, Socrates says that they can inquire into what they do not know, namely what virtue is. Although this at first glance looks merely dogmatic, this premise on the possibility of knowledge surely enables them to proceed further. Without this premise, their argument would not start, otherwise, endlessly involve circular contradictions and end up with *aporiai* again and again.<sup>197</sup> But, is it really a problem, and what is wrong with opinions and beliefs, if there is not yet anyone who knows the truth of reality? Opinion/belief (*doxa*) is a keyword of this dialogue. Not only Anytus speaks of teaching as a matter of believing.<sup>198</sup> At the end of the dialogue, Socrates himself asks Meno “convince your guest friend Anytus here of these very things of which you have yourself been convinced, in order that he may be more amenable. If you would persuade him, you will also confer a

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<sup>196</sup> Remember Meno’s first statement on what virtues is (71e1-72a4) which might reject Socratic unitarian assumption. Cf. also the first sentence in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* begins “Rhetoric is the “counterpart” of Dialectic (1354a)”. Cf., also *M I*. [6-7]: “For Aristotle says that Empedocles got rhetoric started, of which dialectic is a “counterpart” [*antistrophon*] – that is, correlated with it [*isostrophon*], because of being related to the same material... And Parmenides would seem to be not inexperienced in dialectic, since again Aristotle took his companion Zenon to be the originator of dialectic. Cf. also KRS [328].

<sup>197</sup> One might think that the *Meno* at any event ends up as *aporia*, but it is on a different matter, not over what virtue is, but over whether virtue is teachable. Meno’s own question of whether what Meno regards as virtue is teachable or not has already been answered: it comes from a divine inspiration (99b-100b).

<sup>198</sup> Anytus says “any Athenian gentleman he may meet, if he is willing to be persuaded (ἐάνπερ ἐθέλη πείθεσθαι), will make him a better man than the sophists would (92e3-6)”.



benefit upon the Athenians. (σὺ δὲ ταῦτα ταῦτα ἄπερ αὐτὸς πέπεισαι πεῖθε καὶ τὸν ξένον τόνδε Ἄνυτον, ἵνα πρῶτος ἦ· ὡς ἐὰν πείσης τοῦτον, ἔστιν ὅτι καὶ Ἀθηναίους ὀνήσεις) (100b7-c2)". Indeed, the better you understand the art of rhetoric, the better you understand what fundamental opinions/beliefs the argument relies on. In other words, you would better see upon what underlying premises the speaking person establishes his arguments. The real issue for Socrates might be how to use the art for philosophical purposes. Although Socrates' commitment to the positive dogmatism would allow them to proceed further by escaping from the present *aporia*, the next *aporia* might be that any agreement can really be regarded as truth, or at least what is closer to truth, which appear in the *Clitophon* (409e).<sup>199</sup>

In the circulate *aporiai* in his dialogues, I wonder, what Plato was really looking for the answer to Socratic question of what virtue is. In the slave's geometrical question, the answer to Socrates' question is an incommensurable number, and it certainly won't be able to be answered by a specific number, without presenting the technical term for the line which crosses from one point to the opposite in a square, namely 'diagonal (διάμετρον; 85b4)'. However, what the slave finally 'discovers' was not a specific number or such a name as the answer, instead he identifies and indicates the line which makes the square twice as big in the drawn diagram. Without any number, he simply points out the length with his finger (85b). This is indeed a remarkable way of solving the problem which cannot be answered with a specific number, and it is said to be 'true opinion' by Socrates. Although it will require further investigation, as Plato chose this special demonstration as the demonstration of the possibility of knowledge and inquiry into what virtue is, it would not surprising even if Plato wonders that the question of what virtue is can be answered with a specific statement but can be given a *solution*.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Clitophon criticizes Socratic inquiry into virtue saying that "the argument always goes around in a circle back to where it began (410a2)".

<sup>200</sup> Cf. Politis 2006: 105.

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