

1 Introduction

Notwithstanding considerable disagreement over certain details, writers on Plato's theory of recollection are broadly in agreement regarding some of the main features. Setting aside for the moment those who doubt that Plato ever held any considered doctrine so well-developed as to constitute a *theory* of recollection at all, we can find a substantial scholarly consensus in favor of the following account: In the *Phaedo* Plato argues that all human beings recollect the Forms. Such recollection is meant to account for the formation of (at least certain) abstract concepts under which we classify particulars. Since all human beings engage in such conceptual thought to some degree, all human beings recollect; people could not even hold pre-philosophical true opinions concerning such things as the good and the equal if they had not at least dimly recollected the Good or the Equal. Recollection is therefore not the exclusive prerogative of philosophers, although philosophers are the only ones who proceed beyond the initial shadowy recollection of the Forms and fully recover their knowledge.¹

I have specified that this is the consensus about the *Phaedo*, since most scholars find a different doctrine in the *Meno*. Ackrill, Gallop, Gulley, and Bluck, for example, hold that the *Meno* is concerned with the knowledge of propositions and the *Phaedo* with the formation of concepts.² Bostock finds that the *Meno* does not, but the *Phaedo* does, implicate recollection in

¹ On these essential points see J. L. Ackrill, 'Anamnesis in the *Phaedo*: Remarks on 73c-75c' ['Anamnesis'] in *Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1997); R.S. Bluck, *Plato's Phaedo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1955), and *Plato's Meno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1961); D. Bostock, *Plato's Phaedo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1986); F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1935); D. Gallop, *Plato's Phaedo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1975); N. Gulley, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London: Methuen 1962); R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1955), and W. D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1951).

² Ackrill, 'Anamnesis', 13; Gallop, *Plato's Phaedo*, 115 (following Ackrill); Gulley, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, for the *Meno* implicitly at 11-21, for the *Phaedo* explicitly at 31-2; Bluck, *Plato's Meno*, for the *Meno* implicitly at 30-43, for the *Phaedo* explicitly at 48-50. The contrast is perhaps drawn in Cornford's account as well (*Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, 4-6), but the details are sketchy.

ordinary pre-philosophical true opinion.³ And it is generally agreed that recollection in the *Meno* has no clear connection with the theory of Forms, whereas in the *Phaedo* that connection is drawn explicitly and emphatically.

This consensus about the *Phaedo* has recently been seriously challenged by Dominic Scott in *Recollection and Experience*.⁴ I shall argue that Scott's view cannot be sustained, and that the problems he identifies for the traditional view can easily be resolved once we realize that there are for Plato two distinct aspects of recollection. One is what Plato officially *calls* recollection, but there is also another pervasive activity to which Plato does not usually give that name but which clearly requires us to recover our pre-natal knowledge of the Forms. By attending to both aspects we can see how the *Meno* and *Phaedo* in fact teach the same doctrine, which is (roughly) the doctrine commonly found in the *Phaedo*.⁵ Moreover, we can see more clearly than the traditional interpretation generally has done how the theory of recollection fits into broader Platonic reflections about philosophical method.

I shall begin by laying out the competing interpretations as Scott presents them. I shall call the received scholarly consensus 'T' (for 'traditional') and Scott's view 'R' (for 'revisionist').⁶ According to T, 'Human understanding . . . [is] the product of an interaction between the information that our senses give us about particular physical objects and the concepts . . . under which we classify those particulars' (17). So, for example, if I see a man and judge him to be beautiful, it is the senses that tell me what I see; but the concept of beauty that I am employing comes not from the senses, but from my previous knowledge of the Form of Beauty. For

³Bostock, *Plato's Phaedo*, 113.

⁴D. Scott, *Recollection and Experience: Plato's Theory of Learning and Its Successors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995). Citations of this work are given in parentheses in the body of the paper.

⁵Among defenders of the traditional interpretation, only Hackforth (*Plato's Phaedo*, 74-6) argues that the *Meno* and *Phaedo* doctrines are the same. Scott professes (with some hesitation) to find in the *Meno* 'an embryonic version' (47) of the doctrine he finds in the *Phaedo*; and Gail Fine, whose interpretation of the theory of recollection is similar to Scott's, also holds that the two dialogues teach essentially the same doctrine. See G. Fine, *On Ideas: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms [On Ideas]* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993), 315, n. 61.

⁶ Scott uses different letters, for reasons too complicated to canvas here. In quoting from Scott I will silently change his letters to conform to my practice.

ordinary folks, that knowledge will be recollected only dimly; but according to T, it must be recollected to some extent, or there could be no judgment about the beauty of particular objects. The task of the philosopher is to bring those hazy memories into the sharpest possible focus. According to R, by contrast, we can ‘make . . . sense of our ordinary experience without invoking any innate knowledge of forms at all’ (19). Non-philosophers make judgments about beauty without any need for recollection, since we have a concept of beauty derived entirely from sense experience. Recollection of the Form of Beauty comes in only when we start doing philosophy.

Scott notes two important differences between the theories. First, according to T, the theory of recollection is meant to account for at least some of what goes on in ordinary thought. It explains the origin of concepts that nearly everyone uses.⁷ R, on the other hand, is not about ordinary thought at all; it brings in recollection only to explain genuinely philosophical thought.⁸ Ordinary beliefs—which is to say, the sorts of opinions that fall short of being knowledge—have an entirely different origin from philosophical knowledge. Ordinary opinions come from sensation or hearsay; philosophical knowledge comes from recollection. I shall call this issue the question of *provenance*.

From this difference follows a second. According to T, philosophical thought is, in an important sense, all of a piece with ordinary thought. Philosophers and non-philosophers alike recall the Forms—non-philosophers dimly, philosophers clearly: ‘If recollection is necessary for conceptual thought, and if everyone engages in conceptual thought to some degree, then everyone recollects to some degree, even if few complete the process through to the end’ (20).⁹ According to R, philosophical thought is completely discontinuous with ordinary thought. Non-philosophers have nothing to do with the Forms; philosophers have nothing to do with the senses. It follows that ‘On R recollection is right from the start a difficult process, on T its first stages are automatic and easy’ (20). I shall call this issue the question of *pervasiveness*.

⁷ Ackrill, ‘Anamnesis’, 13; Bostock, *Plato’s Phaedo*, 66-72; Cornford, *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge*, 108-9.

⁸ Fine, *On Ideas*, 138.

⁹ Ackrill, ‘Anamnesis’, 28-9; Bostock, *Plato’s Phaedo*, 66-72; Cornford, *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge*, 108-9; Gallop, *Plato’s Phaedo*, 120; cf. Bluck, *Plato’s Meno*, 38.

2 Recollection in the *Meno*

The sources of true belief and knowledge

Near the end of the *Meno*, Socrates observes:

For true opinions, so long as they stick around, are a fine thing and do all sorts of good. But they are not willing to stick around for long. Rather, they escape from one's mind, so that they are not worth much until one ties them down by figuring out the cause ("ἄληθῆς ἀληθῆς ἐπέσῃ"). And that, Meno my friend, is recollection, as we agreed earlier. (97e6-98e5)

We should note, first of all, that 'figuring out the cause'—or 'giving an account of the reason why', to adopt a more conventional but less literal translation—is what makes for recollection. Unless we assume that all cases of knowledge are cases of recollection, we cannot conclude from Socrates's words here that 'figuring out the cause' is a necessary condition for knowledge. Now despite Socrates's initial statement of the theory of recollection—'Since the soul . . . has seen *all* things both here and in Hades, there is *nothing* it has not learned' (81c5-7)—no one really supposes that Socrates means us to understand all cases of knowledge as cases of recollection.¹⁰ If I want to know the name of Socrates's wife, I don't try to rummage around in my mind in the hope of recalling that information from what I learned as a disembodied soul; I simply look it up in a reference book. I can surely claim to know that Xanthippe was the wife of Socrates, even though I did not attain that knowledge through recollection.

What, then, of the road to Larissa? Is it the sort of thing one could know only by recollecting? I should say clearly not: one knows it, Socrates suggests, by having gone there, or perhaps even by having been told. Scott (46) argues that hearsay would give one only true opinion, not knowledge, of the road to Larissa; this strikes me as dubious, although I see no way to exclude that interpretation on the basis of the text of the *Meno* alone. In any event, Scott

¹⁰ For a variety of proposed limitations on the scope of recollection, see Bluck, *Plato's Phaedo*, 11-12; Bostock, *Plato's Phaedo*, 13, 111; G. Fine, 'Inquiry in the *Meno*', in Richard Kraut, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992), 221, n. 26, and *On Ideas*, 137; Gallop, *Plato's Phaedo*, 113; A. Nehamas, 'Meno's Paradox and Socrates as a Teacher', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 3 (1985) 10-11, 21-2; and G. Vlastos, 'Anamnesis in the *Meno*', in J. Day, ed. *Plato's Meno in Focus*, (London: Routledge 1994), 88-111 at 105, n. 1.

appeals to this illustration in order to shed light on the formation of the true beliefs that are tethered down by recollection (45-47), arguing that it supports R over T. For according to T, true beliefs arise from partial recollection; according to R, they arise from an entirely different source. Since one forms a true opinion about the road to Larissa on the basis of hearsay but knowledge on the basis of personal experience, the sources of true belief and knowledge are altogether different, he says, and so this illustration gives evidence that the *Meno* teaches ‘an embryonic version’ (47) of R. But if my arguments thus far are correct, this is the wrong lesson to draw. The road to Larissa is not a recollectable item (• <": <OFJ` < 87b8). So even if Scott is right that knowledge of that road is formed differently from true opinion, it does not follow that knowledge of recollectables has an entirely different origin from true opinion concerning recollectables. The only point established by the illustration is that right opinion is as good a guide as knowledge—provided only that it stays put. The Daedalus analogy is then introduced to make the further point that right opinion does not in fact stay put.

So in order to determine whether true opinion about recollectables has a different origin from knowledge of recollectables, and thus to adjudicate between rival interpretations of the theory of recollection, we must look at Socrates’s questioning of Meno’s slave. We must note first what the slave brings with him into the discussion. He already speaks Greek. He already has the concepts necessary to follow Socrates’s questions and respond to them intelligently; for example, he recognizes and can deploy such concepts as ‘square’ and ‘double’, and he can do simple multiplication. Hence, as Scott rightly observes:

what happens after Socrates begins the examination is not relevant to questions about the ordinary learning in which T is interested. Indeed, this brings out why this whole passage can never provide any evidence for T. The purpose of the examination is that Meno should witness recollection actually happening. Thus there is no point Socrates saying anything about cognitive achievements that may have happened *before* the examination because Meno was not standing over the boy to check that such learning was genuine recollection. The only learning that Socrates is going to talk about is that which takes place within the demonstration for Meno to witness; mundane concept formation has taken place before the examination, and thus it cannot be what is at issue during the examination. (37, emphasis Scott’s)

Equally, of course, the passage can provide no evidence *against* T either, since it has nothing to

say about whether the slave's command of these concepts came from recollection (as T would have it) or from sense experience or hearsay (as R suggests).

So we are still left with our original question. Does true belief about recollectables have a different source from knowledge about recollectables? (Hereafter I shall simply speak of 'true belief' and 'knowledge' and leave the qualification 'about recollectables' understood.) Here the text gives an unmistakable 'no'. Recollection is said to be responsible for the slave's true opinion that his first answer was wrong (84a3-b1) and for the true opinion he has at the end of Socrates's questioning (85b8-c7). Recollection is also said to be responsible for the knowledge he *would* eventually come to have if he were to be questioned about the same matters 'many times and in many ways' (85c9-d7).¹¹

For it seems clear to me from what Socrates says here that he does not take the boy to have knowledge yet. His true opinions 'have been stirred up in him as in a dream', and further questioning will be needed before he 'will know these things as accurately as anyone'. It is true that at 85d9-10 Socrates speaks of 'the knowledge that he now has'. But careful attention to Plato's usage of ἴσχυς : ὀ ἴσχυς : ἴ and ἐπιστήμη : ἴ shows that until 86a7-8, where we are first told how true opinion differs from knowledge properly so called, ἴσχυς : ὀ is used somewhat loosely: it covers both true opinion and (genuine) knowledge. At 85d4 and again at 85d6 Socrates speaks of gathering up (ἐπιλαμβάνειν : ἴσχυς , ἴ) knowledge from within oneself. But one can only gather what is already there, so the 'knowledge' must already be present within one who recollects.¹² It is not that one already *knows* before one recollects; Plato is consistent in this passage about applying ἐπιστήμη : ἴ only to a certain class of *occurrent* beliefs.¹³ But one *has the*

¹¹ See Vlastos, 'Anamnesis in the *Meno*', 95; and Bluck, *Plato's Meno*, 33-8.

¹² Terence Irwin (*Plato's Ethics* [New York: Oxford University Press 1995], 372, n. 15) is right to insist that ἐπιλαμβάνειν : ἴσχυς , ἴ by itself need not imply the retrieval of something one already possesses; it can simply mean 'to take up', whether this refers to a literal picking up of an object or to a metaphorical entertaining of an object of thought. But it does imply that the object being taken up already exists (as it does in all the passages he cites to illustrate his point). Here that object is ἴσχυς : ὀ and it is said to exist *within the person who takes it up*. Combined with ἴσχυς : ἴ (85d4) or ἴσχυς : ἴ (85d6), then, ἐπιλαμβάνειν : ἴσχυς , ἴ does clearly imply the retrieval of something one already possesses.

¹³Note the appearances of ἐπιστήμη : ἴ both before the official distinction is first made between knowledge and true opinion (82e5, 8; 84b11; 84c5-6; 85c2, 6-7) and afterwards (e.g., 86b8, and 97a9).

knowledge before one recollects, much as one is also said to have true opinion before one recollects—indeed, before one has any occurrent beliefs about the matter at all.¹⁴ (In a similar fashion, when expounding the theory of recollection in English it is perfectly natural for us to say ‘We have the knowledge within us; we simply need to recover it’.)

In fact, even the sentence in which Socrates uses the expression ‘the knowledge that he now has’ attests to this ‘loose’ sense of **ἴσθαι**: **Ο**. Socrates asks, ‘So this **ἴσθαι**: **Ο** that he now has: is it not the case that he either acquired it at some point or has always had it?’ Even to envision the possibility that the slave always had this **ἴσθαι**: **Ο** is to countenance an extended sense of the word, since he clearly did not always have a true and justified occurrent belief about how to double a square. As further evidence, note that at 85d12-13 Socrates talks about the slave’s **ἴσθαι**: **Ο** since he now has knowledge, he either always had it or at some time acquired it. Just a few lines down, however, he says exactly the same thing using the word **ᾤοντο**: since the slave now has these opinions, and he didn’t acquire them in this life, he must have had them in a previous life. Clearly, then, **ἴσθαι**: **Ο** here has a broader sense, and when Socrates at 85d9 speaks of ‘the knowledge that [the slave] now has’, he should not be understood to mean that the slave has knowledge in the full-blown sense first articulated at 86a7-8.¹⁵

So although the slave’s geometrical belief is anchored in a chain of reasoning, it is not fully tied down. It is like a statue of Daedalus that is tethered at only one corner of the base. Its natural tendency to ‘run away and escape’ is held in check only for a moment, until it gains enough momentum to pull itself loose and go wandering about again—hence the need for the slave to be questioned ‘many times and in many ways’ before his belief can truly be said to be

¹⁴Such is the implication of 85b8-c11. The slave’s opinion ‘were in him’ and ‘have just now been awakened in him’; that is, the opinions were already present in him and simply needed to be ‘stirred up’ or brought into his conscious awareness. Socrates also says that ‘one who does not know . . . has true opinions within him concerning those things that he does not know’. That these true opinions need not be occurrent beliefs is clear from the context.

¹⁵Thus we can save the conclusion that the slave does not yet have knowledge without resorting to the strategy of Irwin and Fine, who read the ‘now’ as meaning ‘at the time I’m envisioning’, i.e., after the slave has been questioned repeatedly. Like Scott, I find this reading too great a stretch.

tied down. Only then will he have knowledge.

The continuity of philosophical thought with ordinary thought

Thus far I have argued that the *Meno* treats true opinion and knowledge as having the same origin: both come from recollection. On the question of provenance, then, the *Meno* supports T over R. On the question of pervasiveness, I suggest that the dialogue offers us too little evidence. We are shown only one example of recollection, and the sort of knowledge recollected is not the stuff of everyday thought. At best we would be entitled to conclude that all geometers have recollected; we learn nothing about anyone outside that small and elite group.

But I cannot rest content with that observation. For although the questioning of the slave provides us with our only example of recollection at work, it is of course meant to illustrate a larger point: that the knowledge of virtue itself is recollectable. Someone who genuinely knows virtue—we are left with the depressing suspicion that this is a merely hypothetical character—has recollected virtue. What about those who merely have true beliefs about virtue? If T is correct, they have recollected virtue, only rather dimly, and without anchoring that recollection by means of an "A" H8@ 4: ` H But if R is correct, they have not recollected anything at all.

Moreover, this problem threatens to unsettle my answer to the question of provenance. I have argued that true opinion and knowledge have the same origin, since the slave is said to acquire his true opinions through recollection, just as he can go on to acquire knowledge through recollection. But as Scott notes,

The slave boy's true opinions are aroused in very special circumstances, those of careful dialectical supervision which proceeds sequentially (82e12). This does not exclude the possibility of there being other true opinions not so produced, and it is thoroughly implausible to suppose that the true opinions of the great men of Athens have been subjected to the elenctic process. Their true opinions should therefore be placed in a different category from the slave boy's. (42-43)

There is a both a simple-minded and a nuanced way to defend my answer to the

question of provenance against the challenge posed by Scott's point. The simple-minded defense involves pointing out that it is possible for recollection to operate through hearsay as well as through elenchus. It is at least arguable that hearsay arouses belief only when it strikes a familiar chord in the mind of the hearer; people don't believe absolutely everything they're told, and dim recollections might account for this fact.¹⁶ So all true opinion would still be recollected, whether it was hearsay or elenchus that stimulated the recollection.

This simple-minded defense establishes the bare possibility that both the slave boy and the Athenian democrats acquired their true opinions through recollection. In order to establish any stronger claim, I must offer a more nuanced defense. Our best starting-point is the complaint every teacher of the *Meno* has heard: 'This proves nothing; the whole discussion is rigged. Socrates knows the answers from the outset, so he can just lead the slave into giving the answers. He may not flat-out *tell* the slave anything, but that's a mere technicality'. Certainly the discussion could not have gone as it did had Socrates not been on hand; we have no reason to suppose that the slave would ever have asked himself the question, and little reason to suppose that if he had, he would ever have come up with the answer on his own. Socrates moves too quickly, then, when he concludes that we should take heart and enter hopefully into inquiry about virtue. For when it comes to discussions about virtue we are all slaves; there is, apparently, no Socrates, no one well-informed enough to rig the discussion. What hope is there, then, that we will ever come to know virtue?

The question seems damning until we recall that once upon a time no one knew the answer to the question Socrates asked the slave. Then someone found the answer for the first time: not, obviously, by being taught, but by recollecting. Plato forces us to this disheartening conclusion: the one who first grasps the nature of virtue will be as great a giant as the first

¹⁶As evidence for this possibility, consider the different 'feel' associated with hearsay concerning recollected and hearsay concerning what is not recollected. If someone tells me that Xanthippe was the wife of Socrates, I believe or disbelieve him on grounds of his general credibility. But if someone tells me that moral responsibility is compatible with the truth of determinism, I believe or disbelieve him on the basis of whether what he says resonates with my own understanding of the issues. For a version of the theory of recollection that exploits this distinction, see Augustine's *De magistro*. Scholars have not given adequate attention to the affinities between Augustine's theory of illumination and Plato's theory of recollection, and our understanding of both theories is the poorer for this failure.

geometer. Knowledge of virtue is possible after all, just as knowledge of geometry is possible; but without anyone to guide our inquiry into virtue, we await someone who will be like the only sighted person among the blind. Socratic elenchus on the topic of virtue is a case of the blind leading the blind—or at least of the fantastically myopic leading the blind.

Recollection, then, must account for at least two different sorts of belief: the insight of the first geometer (or the first true moral philosopher), which comes entirely from within; and the beliefs of someone like Meno's slave, which come about from some external stimulus that uncovers the 'knowledge' hidden within the learner. We know that the Athenian leaders' opinions about virtue are not of the first sort, but are they perhaps of the second sort?

A full defense of an affirmative answer to this question must await my discussion of the theory as it appears in the *Phaedo*. But even here we can see the outlines of the answer. The slave needed Socrates to stir up his lost knowledge of geometry because no other stimulus was likely to emerge. His experiences were not likely to raise those sorts of questions, so Socrates had to give him a push. Most people can get by quite comfortably without thinking about geometry; questions about diagonals and double-sized squares do not arise unbidden in most minds. But hardly anyone can get by without thinking about the good, since we cannot act intelligibly without aiming at something we think good. It would be a dull mind indeed that could pass a lifetime without occasionally wondering whether what is chosen is worth having, i.e., good—and from wondering about the good it is but a short step to wondering about the Good, the source of all that is worth choosing and the only object of choice that will satisfy all our desires. If Larissa were everyone's dimly remembered true home, as well as the only destination worth aiming for, it would hardly be surprising if most folks had some opinion about how to get there.

The necessary features of human action and the varying aptitudes of human minds are therefore enough to explain why the Athenian leaders formed their opinions about virtue quite differently from how the slave formed his opinion about geometry. So we need not follow Scott in supposing that the difference requires us to attribute one set of opinions to an entirely different source from the other. I say we *need* not—but I have not yet shown that we *must* not.

In order for me to show this, and thus to settle both the question of provenance and the question of pervasiveness, we must examine the *Phaedo*.

3 Recollection in the *Phaedo*

What recollection enables us to do

It is best to begin looking at the *Phaedo* where Scott also begins, with the agreement of Socrates and Simmias that we know what the Equal is (74a9-b3).

SOCRATES: We say, do we not, that there is something equal? I don't mean a stick to a stick, or a stone to a stone, or anything else of that sort, but beyond all these some other thing, the Equal itself. Are we to say that there is something [fitting this description] or nothing?

SIMMIAS: Indeed, by Zeus, we are; emphatically so!

SOCRATES: And do we know what this [Equal] is?

SIMMIAS: Certainly.






Our two interpretations of recollection will read this passage in very different ways. On T, Socrates is talking about the Equal as a concept that enables everyone (not just the philosopher) to recognize equality in particular things. On R, by contrast, he is not interested in our ordinary grasp of equality, but rather in 'the philosophical understanding of an entity very remote from most people's thoughts' (56). To put it another way, on T, everyone is included in the 'we' who are said to know the Equal (74b3), and our knowing the Equal explains how we recognize particular things as (roughly) equal; on R, only philosophers are among the 'we' who know the Equal, and ordinary people do not need to know the Equal in order to make judgments about equality.

Scott offers two pieces of textual evidence in favor of R and a logical argument against T. I begin with the textual arguments. The first draws attention to the wording of Simmias's first response. Scott writes,

An important clue as to which interpretation is correct can be found in 74b1, in the way in which Simmias reacts to Socrates' claim that we say 'there is something *equal*'.

Simmias uses the adverb 'remarkably' or 'amazingly' (*thaumastōs*). This is a phrase very often watered down by translators into 'emphatically'. But this is simply a mistranslation. Whatever Socrates is talking about, it is an object of wonder (*thauma*),

and this is hardly an appropriate way to refer to the fact that sticks or stones are equal.
(56)

In fact, the ‘watered-down’ translation is the right one. Consider these four appearances of the word elsewhere in the dialogue: (1) 88d3-4: Echecrates says of the view that the soul is some kind of harmony, ‘This statement has a remarkable hold (*thaumast*  . . . *antilambanetai*) on me, both now and always’. (2) 92a2-3: Cebes says of Socrates’s argument for the pre-existence of the soul, ‘I was wonderfully (*thaumast* ) convinced by him then, and I stand by it now, more than by any other argument’. (3) 96a6-8: Socrates explains that as a young man he was ‘terribly (*thaumast* ) enthusiastic’ about natural science. (4) 102a3-5: Echecrates comments that Socrates has made the method of hypothesis ‘wonderfully (*thaumast* ) clear even to someone of modest intelligence’. In the last of these there is perhaps a hint of astonishment—although Echecrates seems more impressed than amazed—but in (1)-(3) there is no connotation of amazement at all. The adverb is a mere intensifier, like our ‘tremendously’. So although *thaumast*  can sometimes mean ‘amazingly’ (as it does at 95a8, for instance), it need not. And while many people might be amazed by the assertion that there is a Form of the Equal, Plato surely does not mean for us to think that *Simmi*as is amazed by it.¹⁷


The second textual argument draws our attention to the speech in which Socrates specifies the object of his discussion. Socrates says he’s not talking about a stick that is equal to a stick, or anything else of that sort, but about some further thing over and above any pair of equal particulars. His ‘expression is elliptical’, Scott points out,

and, if filled out, would run: ‘I don’t mean that we say that a stick is equal to a stick . . .’. This is the kind of statement that Socrates dismisses as irrelevant to his argument, and yet it is precisely in such statements that our humdrum grasp of the concepts and meanings is manifested. That Socrates is prepared to dismiss such statements so early in the argument is a good indication that recollection is not to be invoked to explain our ordinary grasp of ‘equal’. (56-57)

¹⁷Scott himself notes, ‘In the course of the earlier discussion (64d4-8), he swiftly gets *Simmi*as to agree to the existence of forms—entities that are not to be grasped by sense-perception but by the soul on its own. Hence, at 74a9-c5, Socrates is not trying to convince an initiate of the existence of forms, but can assume *Simmi*as’ ready acceptance of it’ (59, emphasis Scott’s). I do not see how this observation, which is entirely correct, can be reconciled with an insistence that *Simmi*as is expressing amazement at 74b1.

Scott is reading more into this dismissal than the text warrants, however. Having asked whether we say that 'there is something equal', Socrates must make it clear that he is not merely asking whether something or other is equal to something else; for as originally formulated, his question would be appropriately answered by the observation, 'Of course there's something equal: a stick is equal to a stick, a stone is equal to a stone, and so on.' By forestalling this answer he can make his meaning unmistakable: he is talking about the Form of Equal rather than about any particular. I see no reason to think this speech aims at anything other than disambiguating his original question. He is not saying 'I'm not interested in how we come to say that a stick is equal to a stick'; he is simply saying 'The Equal I have in mind now is not a stick or any other particular'.

If the textual evidence does little to support R, the logical argument certainly seems to identify a problem in T. According to T, we form the concept of, say, beauty by recollecting Beauty itself. But if that is the case, Scott argues, beautiful things cannot spur recollection of Beauty; for to recognize particulars *as beautiful* involves deploying the concept of beauty, which we cannot do unless we have already recollected Beauty itself. So recollection is logically prior to our possession of the concept, and our possession of the concept is logically prior to the recognition that is supposed to stimulate recollection. In other words, if we take T seriously, Plato must say that recollection is logically prior to itself—a view that is obviously nonsensical.

The force of Scott's argument becomes clear if we reflect on the analogy that Socrates introduces when he explains what he means by 'reminding': 'So you know what happens to lovers, whenever they see a lyre or a garment or anything else that their beloved is accustomed to use: they recognize the lyre, and they seize in their understanding the appearance (, ) of the boy whose lyre it is. This is recollection' (73d5-8). As Scott understands it, T commits its proponents to understanding the analogy as having the following sequence: (1) I recollect my beloved, (2) I form an idea of my beloved, (3) I see his lyre, (4) I associate the lyre with him. And that sequence obviously will not work, since as Socrates explains the matter, (3) is supposed to cause (1). Applying the analogy to the Forms, we find that T suggests the following sequence: (1) I recollect Beauty, (2) I form the concept of beauty, (3) I see the beautiful

object, (4) I apply the concept. Once again, this sequence will obviously not work, since recollection as described in the *Phaedo* can only be the result of stage (3) and thus cannot come in at stage (1).

Scott's argument thus seems to saddle the proponents of T with an absurdity, but only because he collapses the analogy into too few steps. For the analogy offers two distinct cognitive acts that count as recollection: one is that 'they recognize the lyre', and the other is that 'they seize in their understanding the appearance of the boy whose lyre it is'. Now clearly the lyre represents the particular that somehow shares in or is associated with the Form, while the appearance of its owner represents the Form itself. Recognizing the lyre must mean, in this context, recognizing the lyre as being somehow connected with the beloved (not merely recognizing that it is a lyre, for then Plato's point would be lost); and such recognition represents the ordinary and pervasive activity of seeing beautiful things *as beautiful*, equal things *as equal*, and so forth. Seizing the *Form* of the beloved represents the philosophical and therefore far less pervasive activity of directing thought consciously at the Form itself.

Scott's argument makes difficulties for T only if we conflate these two activities. Once we see that they are separate, the apparent contradiction is dissolved: the recollection that is involved in forming the concept of beauty is one activity, which I shall call 'the recognition of the particular', whereas the recollection that brings the Form of Beauty into the forefront of our mind is a distinct activity, which I shall call 'the seizing of the Form'. And there is no absurdity in saying that recognizing the particular is prior to seizing the Form, since Plato gives us no reason at all to think that seizing the Form is in turn prior to recognizing the particular.

Moreover, since the recognition of particulars is common to all human beings, we are entitled to conclude that all human beings engage in recollection of some sort, and thus T is (to this extent) vindicated. What is Plato's evidence for the belief that all human beings engage in recognition of particulars? He hints at the argument in the passage from the *Phaedo* that began this section. The content even of our pre-philosophical concepts of such things as beauty and equality cannot be accounted for solely by appeal to sense experience. For example, the concept of beauty — not just the philosopher's concept of beauty, but that of any ordinary person —

allows its possessor to make comparative judgments that imply some acquaintance with an absolute standard of beauty that (Plato insists) is never given in sense experience. If I say, for example, 'X is beautiful, but not perfectly so',¹⁸ or 'Y is more beautiful than Z', I must have in mind an absolute standard of Beauty that X fails to exemplify fully, and that Y exemplifies to a greater degree than Z. The concepts I form in connection with sense experience point to a non-sensible reality; they enable me to form judgments that I could not make if the content of those concepts were determined entirely by what is present to the senses.

Why not everyone does it

I say that these concepts *enable* me to form such judgments. Nothing in my sense experience forces me to do so, however, and few people turn out to be reflective enough to exploit the resources of their concepts. Scott asks, 'Platonists may go around saying that sticks and stones fall short of being like the form of equality but who else does?' (59-60). The observation embodied in Scott's question is true, but it is utterly beside the point. Philosophers may be the only ones who realize the implications of our workaday concept of equality, but those implications are there to be noticed—as one can easily see by putting the right sorts of questions to any randomly selected group of undergraduates. They may never have thought about the perfect equality or perfect beauty to which their mundane concepts point, and they may never have thought through the comparative judgments those concepts allow them to make; but the cognitive resources are already there, needing only the right sort of encouragement to be brought into full consciousness. What accounts for this quite generally shared, albeit seldom realized, capacity, if not a prior acquaintance with the Forms that has shaped even their mundane concept-formation?

At this point I must deal with a crucial objection. Scott argues (61-64) that the argument at 74e9-75c6 depends on 'the assumption that the *same* perception that put us in mind of the form would *also* put us in mind of the comparison' between the form and the particulars that imitate it (62-63, emphasis Scott's). In other words, 'there could not be one perception that first

¹⁸For judgments of this sort that involve equality rather than beauty, see *Phaedo* 74d-75a.

put us in mind of the form and another later one that first put us in mind of the comparison' (63). If he is right, my reading—according to which *every* perception in some sense puts us in mind of the Forms, but few people are ever put in mind of the comparison—is of course excluded. But I can find no inference in the passage that requires any such assumption. For Scott, this assumption is what justifies the inference from the claim (a) that our sense perceptions prompt the recognition that sensible particulars fall short of the Equal (74a11-75b2) to the claim (b) that we must have possessed knowledge of the Equal before the onset of sensation (75b4-8). If (b) is really to be inferred from (a), though, Plato is committed to what Scott rightly calls the 'extraordinary' and 'doubly weird' claim that 'everyone has been comparing equal particulars with the form since birth' (63). For without that claim, (a) would entitle him to conclude only that our knowledge of the Forms precedes *certain* of our sensations—the ones that are efficacious as reminders of the Forms—not that such knowledge precedes *all* our sensations. It is both more charitable to Plato and more in keeping with the argument as a whole to say that (b) is not inferred from (a) at all. Rather, (b) depends on the point agreed upon at 65d-66a, that the Forms are not sensible objects; (a) therefore plays no direct role in the argument for the pre-existence of the soul.

The irrelevance of (a) to the argument for pre-existence allows us to escape a difficulty upon which Scott's reading founders. On my view, as on Scott's, few people ever compare particulars to Forms. If that comparison is the basis upon which Plato infers the pre-existence of the soul, he is at best entitled to conclude that some souls, those of the people who turn out to be philosophers, pre-exist the body. But Plato wants to conclude that *all* human souls pre-exist the body, a conclusion to which he would obviously not be entitled.

Scott argues that defenders of T face exactly the same problem:

the moment advocates of T bow to the inevitable and concede that the number of those who compare forms and particulars is very restricted, they have to accept that the strict conclusion of the argument [for pre-existence] is similarly restricted. For, as we have seen, the claim that people compare forms and particulars is vital to the argument for recollection and pre-existence (74e9-75c5) and, if the number of people making this comparison is limited, so must the number involved in any conclusion validly inferred from the argument. (70)

If, however, we reject the view that Plato infers pre-existence from the making of such comparisons, we can accept either T or R without having to impute so obvious a fallacy to Plato.¹⁹ On my view, the evidence for pre-existence is not the actual comparison of particulars to Forms, but the *capacity* for such comparisons. All human beings have that capacity, even if not many act upon it. Now since the capacity for such comparisons implies prior knowledge of the Forms, and all have this capacity, it follows that all have prior knowledge of the Forms; and since such knowledge cannot have been gained in our embodied state, it must have been gained in our disembodied state. Plato is therefore perfectly justified, given these premises, in concluding that all human souls pre-existed their bodies.

I have argued that the conceptual apparatus necessary to embark on philosophical inquiry into the Forms is the common property of all; the epistemic restlessness that actually provokes the inquiry, however, is much rarer. The best generator of restlessness is *erōs*. It is no accident that Socrates uses an erotic analogy in the *Phaedo* to explain the notion of reminding. The lyre of Demos reminds me of Demos because I love him; others with no particular attraction to the young man can behold the lyre unmoved. Only those who are in love with the Forms will be reminded of their true love by the sensible particulars that ‘try to be like’ the Forms.

The allegory presented in *Phaedrus* 246a-257b supports this reading. Every human being has prior acquaintance with the Forms: ‘a soul that never saw the truth will not take this [human] shape’ (249b5-6), and ‘by nature, every human soul has seen reality, for otherwise it would not have entered into this sort of living thing’ (249e4-250a1). As a result, Plato does not deny the capacity for recollection to any human soul; he simply points out that ‘it is not *easy* for every [soul] to recollect’ (250a1-2). And just as the *Phaedo* had implied, it is love that sets apart the few who recollect from the many who do not. The non-lover looks at beautiful things and sees nothing more than meets the eyes; he is not put in mind of the Form, and so he treats

¹⁹ One of Scott’s arguments here seems to be that there just *is* an obvious fallacy in the argument, but that we shouldn’t be bothered by it if Plato wasn’t: ‘The objection only has force if it can show that Plato would have shared these worries’ (70). This gambit strikes me as desperate; it is a merit of my account that the objection does not arise in the first place.

sensible things with no reverence. But the lover looks at beautiful things and breaks into a cold sweat, because he sees perfect Beauty captured so well in sensible things (250e-1b).

The elenchus of the *Meno* is intended as another way to generate the sort of restlessness that provokes further inquiry. The slave boy may have had no native taste for geometry, but the right kind of questioning can generate at least a temporary interest. What Plato is beginning to see by the time of the *Phaedo*, however, is that elenchus is too often practiced on those who have no love for things that lie beyond the world of sense. Elenchus without *eros* simply irritates without inspiring; and that is where the real failure of Socratic method lies.

4 Summary and conclusion

I argued in connection with the *Meno* that recollection is responsible for both true opinion and knowledge concerning *anamnēsta*. Now that I have discussed the two activities of recollection as laid out in the *Phaedo*, I can flesh out that claim properly. The democratic leaders who are said to have true opinion but not knowledge have engaged only in recognition of particulars; they have not seized the Form. Without recognition of the particulars they could not even have true opinion about the good, or indeed any opinion at all about the good; after all, to believe that something is good *just is* to believe that it has a certain property with which (on Plato's view) we are acquainted only through supra-sensible experience. So the kind of recollection that I have called recognition of the particulars is implicated in any belief to the effect that something or other is good.

The only alternative to affirming that the democratic leaders have recollected, then, is to insist that they do not have any opinions at all about what is good. This is the position to which Scott's view would drive him. On his interpretation, 'the concepts by which we classify our sense experience are empirically gained, while our grasp of the forms is recollected well after we have accumulated sense experience' (68). From this it follows that a non-philosopher picks out a different proposition from a philosopher when both say of some particular thing that it is good. Now there are several good reasons that we should find this result disquieting. First, it is inconsistent with the 'tethering' analogy of the *Meno*. For the beliefs that, if tethered by an

"Æ" H8@ 4: ` I, constitute knowledge are obviously the same as the beliefs that, when untethered, constitute mere true opinion. The propositional content of the slave's belief about how to double a square will be exactly the same when he attains knowledge as it is when he has merely true opinion.²⁰ Second, it suggests that the Athenian leaders do not actually disagree with Socrates about anything. Socrates believes that his philosophical work is good, while Anytus believes that it is bad. But what Socrates affirms of his work is not the same as what Anytus denies of his work; astonishingly enough, there is no genuine disagreement between them.

Finally, and most important, Scott's account makes it impossible to see how our experience of particulars could ever lead us to seize the Forms. On my account, our pre-philosophical judgments about beauty and equality already involve recollection. To recognize beautiful particulars as beautiful or equal particulars as equal is already to have drawn on the resources provided by our pre-natal acquaintance with the Forms. Hence, we will have concepts of beauty and equality that go beyond anything in sensible experience. The discrepancy between our concepts and the particulars that we classify under those concepts is therefore a standing invitation to turn our attention to the Forms, to work towards the full-blown philosophical recollection that I have called 'seizing the Forms'.

By contrast, on Scott's view our pre-philosophical use of the word 'beautiful' reflects our command of a concept of *beauty* derived entirely from particulars, and in deploying that concept and using that word we are identifying a property of beauty to which we have cognitive access independently of any knowledge of Forms. It follows that what beautiful particulars derive from Beauty itself is not the property that in our pre-philosophical language we call 'beauty', but instead some other property. And until we start doing philosophy, we apparently have no beliefs about that property; we do not even notice it. Our pre-philosophical

²⁰ Or in terms of the Larissa analogy: the one with true opinion and the one with knowledge both have beliefs *about the same thing*, namely, the road to Larissa. If the one with true opinion were to have beliefs only about something that was reminiscent of Larissa but not in fact the same place at all, he could not be said even to have true opinion about the road to Larissa.

beliefs are perfectly coherent and adequate on their own terms without any reference to Forms; ordinary beliefs in no way implicate the Forms. So what would ever prompt us to make the immense cognitive leap to the Forms? There would be nothing in our ordinary beliefs that even hints at their philosophical inadequacy, nothing to tip us off to any supra-sensible reality. And even if—mysteriously— someone did manage to engage in philosophical thought about the Forms, his hard-won knowledge would systematically defy translation into ordinary language. He would be powerless to attempt to convince anyone of his views, powerless to effect any correction of ordinary beliefs, powerless even to convince anyone that there is something more to the world than meets the eye. Even so modest an enterprise as Socratic elenchus would face insuperable difficulties, since Socratic questioning presupposes a shared conceptual framework that, on Scott's view, could never obtain between a philosopher and an ordinary person.

The discussion of recollection in the *Meno* presupposes this shared conceptual framework and shows how it makes it enables one to seize the Forms. The discussion in the *Phaedo* shows how that framework comes to be in place. The pervasive activity that I have called recognition of particulars ensures that everyone has concepts that, however vaguely, implicate our pre-natal knowledge of Forms. Those concepts enable us to make judgments such as 'X is beautiful, but not perfectly so' or 'Y is more beautiful than Z'. In souls with the right sort of epistemic restlessness—those who have been stirred by elenchus or, better yet, those with that marvelous affective disposition Plato identifies as *erōs*—the experiences that occasion such judgments will prompt further inquiry.

Such philosophical inquiry is what makes the difference between true opinion concerning recollectables and full-blown knowledge of recollectables; it is a process of 'figuring out the cause' ("Αἰτία", *Phaedo* 100c9-d6), as the *Phaedo* puts it. And of course the only cause worthy of the name is the Form:

I no longer understand or can recognize those other sophisticated causes; instead, if anyone tells me that a thing is beautiful because it has an appealing color or shape or anything else of that sort, I ignore those reasons—for they all confuse me—and I simply and artlessly and perhaps simple-mindedly cling to this: nothing else makes it beautiful other than the presence of, or sharing in, or its being somehow related to, the Beautiful itself. (*Phaedo* 100c9-d6)

Thus, when we see the word **ἰδέσθαι** again in the *Phaedrus*, applied to this same process of philosophical inquiry (249c1), we are not surprised to find the object of the **ἰδέσθαι** identified explicitly as a Form.

Plato's further reflections on method are designed to refine his account of this **ἰδέσθαι**, that is, to explain more accurately how one proceeds from the true opinions obtained by recollection to genuine knowledge of recollectables. There is, therefore, no justification for the common view that the theory of recollection is somehow 'abandoned' in the later works; the later views about philosophical method are meant to explain something *different* from what the theory of recollection was meant to explain. That the *Phaedrus* itself moves from recollection to the method of divisions is no sign of confusion on Plato's part. The theory of recollection was never meant as an account of the **ἰδέσθαι**; it merely explains how human beings can make the sorts of judgments that cry out for a **ἰδέσθαι**.

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