

SOUL AND POLIS: ON ARETE IN PLATO'S *MENO*

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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In “Soul and *Polis*: On *Arete* in Plato's *Meno*,” I interpret *Meno* as a dialogue in which the pursuit of individual *arete* appears intertwined with political *arete*. While the differentiation of these two *arete* is itself noteworthy, my analysis also draws out the dialectical tension between the soul and the *polis*, a tension which is constitutive of the pursuit of the human good. Socrates' philosophical practice emphasizes the power of the individual to subvert and undermine the claim of the *polis* on the soul; and yet, Socrates remains beholden to his interlocutors (and Athens), constantly imploring them to share in the search for *arete*. The mutual dependence of Socrates on his interlocutor and his interlocutors on Socrates bespeaks a surprising interaction between one's self relation and one's relation to others. One can neither become a good person in isolation from others nor because of the honor or “good reputation” of others alone. My interpretation of *Meno* departs from much of the Anglophone scholarship on this text by focusing on the ubiquitous political implicature throughout the dialogue rather than on its epistemological significance. The latter emphasizes Socrates' account of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) as the decisive textual insight. By contrast, my analysis draws on the intertextual resonance of Ancient Greek sources as a way to draw out *Meno*'s significance in an ongoing political discourse.

My interpretation progresses through *Meno* linearly, tracking the development of problems concerning *arete* as they appear in the discussion. Socrates first engages with Meno, inviting him to account for *arete*, but after Meno fails to satisfy Socrates, Socrates takes it upon himself to persuade Meno to search for *arete* with a different dialogical comportment than the one Gorgias had inculcated in him. This task draws others into the dialogue as well—a slave/boy (παῖς) and an Athenian statesman named Anytus. By the end of the dialogue, it seems unlikely that Socrates has

changed Meno in any meaningful way, but my analysis of Socrates' engagement with his interlocutors draws out the urgency of Socrates' concern for *arete* as a political task.

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“No one would consider one who lived in that way to be happy, except when defending a hypothesis.”¹

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Preface

Let us assert our guiding question boldly and broadly so that we may begin our inquiry with a firm albeit tentative sense of what is at stake. Fundamentally, we will examine a very basic problem: What relationship between *arete* and honor (τιμή) makes a good and “happy” person? We frame this problem in Greek terms because we will examine it in *Meno*; however, we could rearticulate it in a more modern way as a question concerning the intertwinement between one’s self relation and one’s relation to others. Is it possible to be a good person without others’ recognition of one’s goodness? And, conversely, is others’ recognition of one’s goodness sufficient for being a good person? Various iterations of similar questions appear frequently throughout the Platonic corpus; and yet, contrary to what we will find in our analysis of *Meno*, much of the recent Anglophone scholarship has not found such questions germane to their analysis of this text. Anglophone scholarship tends not to consider *Meno* a political text. And so, our analysis addresses a twofold problem. On the one hand, we seek to analyze *Meno* as a political text, in which Socrates and his interlocutors reckon with the challenges of exhibiting *arete* while living in a community with others. Our analysis will compel us to rethink the relationship between self and other by highlighting the inextricability of the self and others in a community (a *polis*), and such a reconsideration of this relationship implies consequences for our ordinary conception of the political. This part of our analysis concerns unsettling prevailing assumptions about the text which obscure the pervasive political discussion in *Meno*. On the other hand, our analysis also addresses a concern for reading Plato and *Meno* generally. This concern bespeaks the text as something that has always already been claimed. We read English translations, and the translators have already made subtle decisions about the meaning of the text. Even if we can read the Greek, we still find no greater “textual purity,” if such an absurd idea holds any weight. We may not be able to read Plato unincumbered by two millennia’s worth of textual claims, but we nonetheless venture to heed the *Meno* differently by considering, what we might call, thematic provocations

¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1096a.

which resonate intertextually.² Such an approach, of course, requires great care lest it devolve into dubious speculation and haphazard juxtaposition, but intertextual analysis provides us with a powerful tool to redraw the invisible boundaries of the text.

As preparation for our analysis, we might benefit from a brief consideration of a decisive and well-known textual moment in Plato's *Republic*. In the early stages of this dialogue, Glaucon and Adeimantus implore Socrates to extol justice in the soul by itself, and they implore him to do so by first providing arguments *against* the value of living a just life. Towards the end of Adeimantus' reasoning, he asserts:

For the things said indicate that there is no advantage in being just, if I don't also seem to be, while the labors and penalties involved are evident. But if I'm unjust, but have provided myself with a reputation for justice, a divine life is promised. Therefore, since as the wise make plain to me, "the seeming overpowers even the truth" and is the master of happiness, one must surely turn wholly to it.³

If we translate Adeimantus' conclusion into the terms of our guiding question, then we might hear Adeimantus asserting the absolute value of one's relation to others above one's self relation. To be honored as just (whether one lives justly or not) is sufficient to live a divine and happy life. For humans, the good, divine, and happy name a *worthy* life. In other words, to be honored as good or to appear good to others is the decisive aspect of being a good (just) person. And yet, we know that Socrates will not agree with this naïve overvaluation of the appearance of justice over being just. We cannot go through the entirety of Socrates' response to Glaucon and Adeimantus here, but we should take note of the turning point in Socrates response, which determines the remainder of the *Republic*. Socrates explains that it would be too difficult for him to respond directly to the brothers' request, and so he proposes another way: "So then, perhaps there would be more justice in the bigger and it would be easier to observe closely. If you want, first we'll investigate what justice is like in the *poleis*. Then, we'll also go on to consider it in individuals, considering the likeness of the bigger in the idea of the littler?"⁴ Socrates proposes that they examine the *polis* as an image of the soul. In a sense, the entirety of the *Republic* depends upon this foundational

² "Even if the precise dramatic connection is less than certain, the remarkable thematic overlap remains. Though mediation and discretion will be imperative in spacing the respective discourses, there is a basis—even, one might say, a provocation—to bring certain moves ventured in the *Timaeus* to bear on the *Republic*, especially if there should turn out to be places where the text of the *Republic* itself invites such recourse." Sallis, *The Verge of Philosophy*, 34.

³ Plato, *Republic*, 365b-c.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 368e-369a. Translation modified.

comparison between the soul and the *polis*. This observation about the *Republic* is not controversial, but it is noteworthy *because* of its resonance with *Meno*. In *Meno* too, we will find Socrates reasoning about the soul through recourse to reasoning about the *polis* (and vice versa). And yet, this comparison does not just bring together an aspect of two similar but distinct phenomena. On the contrary, the comparison invites us to reexamine assumptions about our self relation through our relation to others in a community. The likeness of the *polis* to the soul directs us towards the intertwining of the one with the other, and this redirection complicates the relationship between *arete* and honor. After all, in the later image of the cave, the philosopher (whom we might be tempted to see as representative of the ennobled soul) *must* return to the others who still live in the cave. The cave is not simply a worldly burden, which the philosopher must shed, but a necessity to which the philosopher must return. Or, in other words, the soul needs the *polis* as much as the *polis* needs the soul.

We assert these claims about what we will find in *Meno* on a provisional basis. They will only become evident upon reaching the conclusion of our analysis. However, before we set out to accomplish that task, it warrants noting a consequence of our investigation. The reconfiguration of the political in *Meno* would not only affect our engagement with other Platonic texts, but every ancient Greek text could show itself differently through comparative analysis. Our analysis of *Meno* complicates the accusation that Plato's philosophy is "otherworldly." *Arete* will not appear "itself-by-itself," but rather, it will appear as a constitutive part of a soul which shares in a fundamental relation with others in the *polis*. The pursuit of *arete* has no sense without others; and yet, in a remarkable and peculiar way, others nonetheless do not have the absolute power to shape the *arete* of an individual either. If such a deed were possible, then we might expect to find people who teach others how to exhibit *arete*—a point with which Socrates and his interlocutors will contend at length in *Meno*. Deviation is both possible and valuable. In fact, Socratic deviancy precipitates much of the conflict in this dialogue and others. Socrates exercised a unique influence over Athens (and on posterity at large), and this influence is just as political as it is philosophical. Ironically, a Platonistic prejudice is responsible for the belief that the two stand in opposition to one another; and yet precisely in *Meno* (as in the *Republic* too), we find philosophy and politics dependent upon one another in a mutually enriching way.

Introductory Overview

Our inquiry into the *Meno* grows out of two separate but related problems. The first problem concerns Plato. What does *Plato* “say” about this, or what does *Plato* think about that? During the last hundred years, many Anglophone scholars, following the same path as Vlastos, sought Plato’s philosophy in the Platonic dialogues.⁵ And yet, this task poses an obvious challenge. For we may refer to many texts which we justifiably believe Plato authored, but in none of these texts will anyone find “what Plato says.” Plato wrote dialogues, which means that he never speaks for himself. Then who speaks for Plato? Does Socrates speak for Plato? For Vlastos et al, the answer seems to be yes:

And so, as Plato changes, the philosophical persona of his Socrates is made to change, absorbing the writer’s new convictions, arguing for them with the same zest with which the Socrates of the previous dialogues had argued for the views the writer had shared with the original of that figure earlier on.”⁶

According to Vlastos’ account, we can learn Plato’s philosophy from Socrates’ speeches, and we can explain any apparent discrepancies in Socrates’ reasoning through recourse to a developmentalist account of the Platonic corpus, that is, Plato’s philosophy matured, and we can track this maturation chronologically through the dialogues.⁷ If there were some way to date the

⁵ To be clear, this problem is neither unique to Anglophone scholarship nor an original discovery of Anglophone scholarship. Our focus on Anglophone scholarship is ultimately contingent yet necessary. Platonic studies have flourished for thousands of years since Plato wrote the dialogues, and a researcher could likely glean valuable insight from the work done in any region with access to the Platonic texts. In a sense, this problem is a much better one than the problem faced by researchers in subject-matters about which little or nothing has been written, but nonetheless, one must establish the limits of one’s research lest the abundance of research swallow the inquiry. And so, this inquiry into the *Meno* will self-consciously orient itself against a more dominant portion of Anglophone scholarship which has proliferated during the 20th and 21st centuries. On the other hand, our allies in this inquiry will mostly come from a minority group of Anglophone and European scholars of the same time period who give greater priority to each dialogue’s contextual resonance. We will go through more of the details concerning our own interpretive method and its influences in a subsequent section of the introduction.

⁶ Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, 53. Other Anglophone scholars with a similar approach include: Benson, *Socratic Wisdom: The Model of Knowledge in Plato’s Early Dialogues*; Clitophon’s *Challenge: Dialectic in Plato’s Meno, Phaedo, and Republic*. Brickhouse and Smith, *Plato’s Socrates* Nehamas, *Virtues of Authenticity*. Penner, “Socrates and the Early Dialogues,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. Santas, *Socrates: Philosophy in Plato’s Early Dialogues*. Teloh, *Socratic Education in Plato’s Early Dialogues*.

⁷ Vlastos categorizes the dialogues into four chronological groups (from earliest to latest): Elenctic Dialogues, Transitional Dialogues, “Middle Period” dialogues, and “Latest period” dialogues. Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, 46-47. According to Nails, John Cooper’s introduction to *Plato: Complete Works* in 1997 sang the swan song of the developmentalist/Socratic mouth-piece approach. Nails, “Socrates” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. However, as recently as 2014, Silverman still wrote in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*’s entry on “Plato’s Middle Period Metaphysics and Epistemology”: “Since Plato uses Socrates as a mouthpiece in many of his writings, readers are forced to ask when or whether one is reading the doctrines of Socrates, or Plato, or neither. This ‘Socratic question’ is intimately involved with the question of Plato’s development and the chronology of his

composition of the Platonic dialogues reliably, then perhaps this approach could offer useful guidance. However, the obstacles preventing an accurate chronology of the Platonic corpus obstruct this approach so severely that it can do little to justify Vlastos' assumption.⁸ The assumption of the so-called "Socratic mouth-piece" theory creates an array of interpretive challenges as well, since Socrates often contradicts himself (hence recourse to "developmentalism"). Socrates also is not present in every Platonic dialogue nor is he always its most authoritative speaker in every dialogue in which he is a participant.⁹ We might understand the recent shift away from the developmentalist and Socratic mouth-piece approaches as a growing acceptance for their inadequate explanatory power. In harmony with the shift away from these approaches, our inquiry into the *Meno* will not search for what *Plato* thinks about *arete* and the human good. Instead of asking about Plato, we will engage in a focused exploration of the text in all its unruliness. In other words, we will follow the post-modern turn away from the author and towards the text.¹⁰

The second problem, to which our inquiry will respond, concerns the *Meno*. This dense and dynamic text often fulfills a peculiar role within Anglophone Platonic scholarship. Many scholars have privileged Socrates' account of recollection (ἀνάμνησις), taking it as the dialogue's

dialogues. In all likelihood, Plato wrote different dialogues at different times. We typically divide his writings into three periods [namely, early period, middle period, and post-*Republic* phase]." Silverman, "Plato's Middle Period Metaphysics and Epistemology" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. While Nails recognizes that the conclusion of a conflict takes some time to disappear completely (i.e., the "conflict" between the developmentalist/Socratic mouth-piece approach and the contextualist approach), the fact that anyone in the world can pull up the entry on "Plato's Middle Period Metaphysics and Epistemology"—which is backed by the authority of Stanford's reputation—and see its author casually suppose that Socrates is Plato's mouthpiece and that the Platonic texts can be ordered chronologically reflects the vivacity of the position.

⁸ Against the developmental/chronological reading, see Nails, "Problems with Vlastos's Platonic Developmentalism." Howland, "Re-reading Plato: The problem of Platonic Chronology." Thesleff, *Studies in Platonic Chronology*. An intertextual approach to the text, which we will consider below, also makes problems of chronology spurious.

⁹ Between the early 1990s and early 2000s, research into the significance of the dialogical character of the Platonic texts flourished. That is, why did Plato write dialogues? Charles Griswold published extensively on this very question. See for example: Griswold, "Irony in the Platonic Dialogues"; "Plato's Metaphilosophy: Why Plato wrote Dialogues"; "Reading and Writing Plato." Other scholars who research this question include: Frede, "Plato's Arguments and the Dialogue Form." Hyland, "Why Plato Wrote Dialogues." Moors, "Plato's Use of Dialogue." Press, *Who Speaks for Plato? Studies in Platonic Anonymity*. Rowe, *Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing*. Sayre, *Plato's Literary Garden: How to Read a Platonic Dialogue*.

¹⁰ "For [Mallarmé], for us too, it is language which speaks, not the author..." And later, "We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres [sic] of culture." Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 142-148.

decisive insight.¹¹ But why have scholars given so much attention to Socrates' account of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) when it plays such a limited role within the *Meno*? Might Socrates' account of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) have become a red herring because of its reception in a recently dominant swath of scholarship, and if so, with what consequence? More importantly, what aspects of this dialogue have been neglected because of the presumed importance of recollection (ἀνάμνησις)? We can see evidence of the disproportionate regard for the role of recollection in the saturation of Platonic scholarship with books and articles about recollection (ἀνάμνησις). A part of this development likely stems from Plato's place within the history of western philosophy. In an illustrative remark, Charles Kahn suggests that "Platonic recollection is the ancestor of the theory of innate ideas developed by Descartes and Leibniz in the seventeenth century, both of whom claimed Plato as their predecessor."¹² The identification of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) with "innatism" (pre-natal knowledge) within the history of western philosophy offers one explanation for this scholarly phenomenon; however, it might relate to the assumption about the relationship between Platonic philosophy and the Platonic text as well. If many readers assume that they will

¹¹ "The problem of the *Meno* is primarily the problem of whether knowledge is possible at all, and not the problem of specifying the nature of the objects of knowledge." Gulley, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, 5. Gulley goes on to argue that recollection is *Plato's* tentative response to the problem of the possibility of knowledge. "Plato agreed with [Socrates], but went on to ask how such knowledge, which had managed to elude even Socrates, could ever be acquired. He found his answer in the theory of recollection, one of his most notorious philosophical legacies. What we now call learning, he claimed in the *Meno*, is in fact the recollection of knowledge had in a prenatal existence." Scott, *Recollection and Experience: Plato's Theory of Learning and its Successors*, 3. When Scott returns to the *Meno* nearly a decade later, having revised many of his prior views, he still insists that "perhaps [the *Meno's*] greatest claim to fame is the theory of recollection and its purported means of demonstration, the interview with the slave boy." Scott, *Plato's Meno*, 3. In the most recently published exclusive commentary on the *Meno*, Ionescu writes, "Plato recognizes the seriousness of the issue regarding the justification of the possibility of knowledge and takes up the task of answering this problem. In doing so, however, he has Socrates replace Meno's background assumptions with a holistic view of knowledge. As a result, the theory of recollection not only answers the challenge as voiced by Meno, but also and even more importantly it answers the challenge regarding the possibility of knowledge in general as transposed within the epistemological framework that Plato and Socrates share." Ionescu, *Plato's Meno*, 44. See also, Bedu-Addo, "Recollection and the Argument 'From a Hypothesis' in Plato's *Meno*." Tarrant, *Recollecting Plato's Meno*. Vlastos, "Anamnesis in the *Meno*." For those who consider a development of Platonic/Platonistic epistemology fruitful work, the *Meno* (and Socrates' account of recollection within it) has become a staple Platonic text. Our concern, which these excerpts illustrate, is not that scholars mistakenly glean epistemological insights where none exist (although the "innatism" readings are dubiously anachronistic). On the contrary, we will not dispute that questions about knowledge appear throughout the *Meno*, but we will question whether such questions are the only ones worth asking about this text (as much of the Anglophone Platonic scholarship tacitly appears to assume). Even translators introduce the *Meno* in this way. "In the *Meno*, the issues of epistemic priority, necessity and contingency, are dramatized, and the result is a new theory of knowledge." Allen, *The Dialogues of Plato*, 133. Questions and problems concerning knowledge and knowing clearly appear in the *Meno*, but this overdetermination of the epistemological dimension obscures other persistent themes so thoroughly that they have all but disappeared in recent analyses. It seems strange for a text whose abiding topic of discussion is *arete* to be analyzed primarily for its epistemological insights.

¹² Kahn, "Plato on Recollection" in *A Companion to Plato*, 119.

find a Platonic philosophy within a Platonic text, then it should not surprise us when such readers unpack epistemological insights from a text which includes a very unconventional account of the origin of knowledge.¹³ For those with an epistemological philosophic inclination, *Meno* might provide an ancient, reputable foundation for the history of ideas. The presumption that Socrates' account of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) could be anything other than epistemological is rarely considered in this Anglophone tradition.¹⁴ By contrast, we will not approach the *Meno* foolishly believing ourselves freed from presuppositions (e.g., that the *Meno* is an epistemological text) but instead as self-conscious about our own guiding presuppositions as we can be.¹⁵

Thus far, we have only outlined the scholarship whose assumptions about the text we oppose. But what of the approaches which inform our own? We can separate the influences on our

¹³ "Platonism" and "Platonic philosophy" tend to harmonize with one another despite Vlastos *et al* never claiming to search for Platonism. As Ronna Burger points out in the preface to her interpretation of the *Phaedo*, a text which she cites as a "*locus classicus* of the Platonic teaching," "The doctrines of 'Platonism,' as typically understood throughout the Western philosophical tradition, do not always seem to be substantiated by, and often seem to conflict with the evidence of the Platonic dialogues." This distance from the text is the primary point of continuity between the accounts of Platonism and those who attempt to outline "Plato's philosophy." Burger goes on to conclude, "Plato's address to his readers cannot be assumed to be identical, then, with Socrates' address to his interlocutors. Since Plato speaks nowhere in his own name, no particular position presented in the dialogue can be directly identified as *the* Platonic teaching." Burger, *The Phaedo: A Platonic Labyrinth*, 1-3.

¹⁴ More recent commentators in this tradition acknowledge other dimensions, but they often come across as merely of historical interest. For example, when Scott analyzes the verses which Socrates recites as he introduces recollection (ἀνάμνησις) into the dialogue, he concludes simply that "recollection is necessary for achieving piety" and it "has an important religious dimension." Scott, *Plato's Meno*, 92-94. Despite his musing about the religious dimension of recollection, Scott does little to incorporate this insight into his interpretation, and it disappears as quickly as it was introduced. Ionescu at least draws attention to the intertextual play in this part of the *Meno*, but she seems overly concerned with disambiguating the "Platonic" elements from others (Orphic, Pythagorean, Empedoclean, etc.). Methodologically, her approach shows a commitment to searching for "what Plato says," but she offers no justification for such a search. Ionescu, *Plato's Meno*, 49-64.

¹⁵ The recent lineage of textual commentaries (20th to early 21st century) on the *Meno* also warrants mentioning. Some share degrees of sympathy with Vlastos' approach to reading Plato. For example: Benson, *Clitophon's Challenge: Dialectic in Plato's Meno, Phaedo, and Republic*. Ionescu, *Plato's Meno*. Scott, *Plato's Meno*. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and his Work*. Thomas, *Musings on the Meno*. Ionescu's commentary shows some signs of transition away from Vlastos' approach, but in many cases, her sympathies with some of his assumptions about the text conspicuously inform her reading of passages. It is somewhat anachronistic to categorize Taylor as someone who follows Vlastos' approach, since he published *Plato: The Man and his Work* prior to *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*. Nevertheless, his insistence on a developmentalist approach is unambiguous even if more restrained than Vlastos. Other commentators share more sympathy with the contextual approach. Such commentators include: Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*. Ebert, "'The Theory of Recollection in Plato's Meno': Against a Myth of Platonic Scholarship." Eckstein, *The Platonic Method: An Interpretation of the Dramatic-philosophic Aspects of the Meno*. Sallis, *Being and Logos*. Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's Meno*. Another group of commentators do not exactly fit into either group as their interest in the text seems to fall within the purview of Classical studies. Representative of this approach are: Bluck, *Plato's Meno*. Sharples, *Plato: Meno*. Thompson, *The Meno of Plato*. Of the three, Bluck and Sharples share more assumptions with the Socratic mouth-piece commentators; however, because Thompson's commentary precedes Vlastos' work by a few decades, it does not align with his assumptions perfectly. Overall, Bluck, Sharples, and Thompson concern themselves much more with Attic Greek grammatical and lexicographical issues than other commentators, and they tend to approach philosophical textual matters more tepidly.

interpretive approach into two categories: scholars whose work has become so influential that they are also studied on their own (e.g., Derrida, Gadamer, Heidegger, and Strauss) and more recent scholars who are often still actively researching and whose contributions are widely recognized within Platonic studies. The members of this latter group are too many to name here individually. Nevertheless, these scholars' collective works share a common sensitivity to the contextual resonances of their respective texts under consideration, and such an approach provides the foundation for our own inquiry into the *Meno*. While it would pass well beyond the scope of our inquiry to go through the nuances of each individual contribution, we may better prepare ourselves to analyze the *Meno* if we consider three questions which speak to assumptions about reading this text: 1. Why should we read the *Meno*? 2. How should we read the *Meno*? 3. What obstacles do we know will obstruct our interpretation of the *Meno* during and prior to our reading?

Why Should We Read the *Meno*?

We can hear this question in two ways. It may ask a comparative question: Why should we read the *Meno* rather than some other text—philosophic or otherwise? Or, it may ask a teleological question: What is the purpose of reading the *Meno*? In either case, the question calls upon us to make a judgment about the text. Is it *worthy* of our time? The axiological dimension arises from our experience as temporal beings. Because we only have so much time to live, we must make judgments about what is worthy of our commitment. This existential concern about the worthiness of the way one chooses to spend one's time is not a recent burden. Socrates too expresses his concern about this question throughout the *Meno* (and in other dialogues as well). For example, when Meno agrees to tell Socrates about *arete* after answering Meno's question, Socrates claims, "Well then, one must be for it; for it is worthy (ἄξιον)." ¹⁶ Now, of course, we should not "get ahead of ourselves" and introduce the *Meno* as we consider why it would be worth our time to do so. And yet, this decontextualized and sudden interjection of the text mirrors our own encounter with the Platonic text. Most people who bother to read a Platonic dialogue assume in advance its worthiness. Why? What do we expect to take place between the lines of a Platonic text? While Jacob Klein may not be the first Ancient Greek scholar to make a concerted effort to heed the Platonic text in the way to which our approach aspires, Klein does set himself apart because of his

¹⁶ Plato, *Meno*, 75b.

careful and nuanced approach to reading the *Meno* particularly. Concerning the approach to the Platonic dialogues in general, Klein writes in the introduction to his commentary:

The dialogues not only embody the famous “oracular” and “paradoxical” statements emanating from Socrates...and are, to a large extent, protreptic plays based on these, but they also discuss and state, more or less explicitly, the ultimate foundations on which those statements rest and the far-reaching consequences which flow from them. But never is this done “with complete clarity.” It is still up to us to try to clarify those foundations and consequences, using, if necessary, “another, longer and more involved road,” and then accept, correct, or reject them—it is up to us, in other words, to engage in “philosophy.”¹⁷

For Klein, it seems that we should expect to find both “oracular” and “paradoxical” statements on the one hand *and* philosophical practice on the other. If we reflect on Klein’s insight in relation to the prior excerpt from the *Meno*, then we may see more precisely what he means. We read Socrates’ pithy statement which takes place in a Platonic dialogue: *arete* is *worthy* or to gratify an interlocutor who promises to speak on *arete* is *worthy*. But at the same time, we do not really know why Socrates makes such a claim, nor do we even *really* know what Socrates means here. Our awareness of so-called “Socratic irony” reinforces our uncertainty as well, and this characteristic becomes especially problematic when a citation has been severed from its context. Therein lies our predicament. We hear that the *Meno* is about this strange Greek word *arete*, which allegedly sometimes means “virtue” and sometimes means “excellence,” and this subject matter seems important to us.¹⁸ The hearsay draws us in to the text, but the philosophic engagement forces us to tarry with it. What does this philosophic engagement entail?

As Klein observes, sometimes philosophic engagement with the dialogue requires us to take a “longer and more involved road.” When we read the *Meno*, we are not reading Plato’s treatise on *arete*. We read Socrates’ engagement with a man named Meno, one of his subordinates who is only called “παῖς,” and his “guest-friend” Anytus, who also just so happens to be an up-and-coming Athenian politician.¹⁹ We do not know from whom, if anyone, we will learn more about *arete*. Our expectation to find “philosophy” or “*arete*” in the text lead us to read it, but we

¹⁷ Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, 9.

¹⁸ See, for example, the first sentence of Anastaplo and Berns’ notes: “The subtitle (Or, About Virtue: Testing) and the list of characters (Meno, Socrates, Meno’s [Slave] Boy, Anytus) for this dialogue may be later editorial additions to Plato’s manuscript.” Anastaplo and Berns, “Notes,” 47. The fact that this subtitle may have been added later only illustrates the point further. Even if no “pure” *Meno* exists, we still acknowledge that the margins of this text are quite saturated.

¹⁹ Accurately albeit reductively, we may understand a παῖς as a slave. We will consider the term with greater care in Chapter II. Also, we will consider the term “guest-friend” or ξένοϋς in greater detail in Chapter I and throughout.

do not know in what way “philosophy” or “*arete*” will appear until we read the *Meno*. Furthermore, the dialogical character of the *Meno* intensifies the “length” and “involvement” required of us during our reading. For not only do the characters make declarative claims whose assumptions and implications we can analyze, but they also address one another through multiple discursive registers and within a particular historical purview. They too carry assumptions about the world and about one another which they express with various degrees of explicitness. Moreover, their words “act,” that is, they affect the other person beyond a “transmission of propositional content.” Nevertheless, their historical situation provides the backdrop against which the dialogue takes place. For Gadamer, as one example of an interpreter who heeds this dimension, an attentiveness to the historical situation is *necessary* for anyone who attempts to understand Plato. In his response to a detractor, Gadamer insists that:

When I gave the title *Dialogue and Dialectic* to an English edition of my Plato studies, I wanted to emphasize the dimension of the public give-and-take of dialogue that is absolutely necessary for a correct understanding of Plato. This was the dimension in which Plato himself had experienced the sophistic misuse of the new art of argumentation. He knew about the ἀγήρατον πάρος τῶν λογῶν (“ageless condition of words”) and knew also that the *logoi* (discourses) are the only way to a more knowledgeable knowing. That was the direction Greek life took with Socrates, and it also characterized Plato’s own historical situation as that in which he attempted to give the Socratic question a new validity, and out of which he developed his own new knowledgeable ignorance, the human wisdom of dialectic.²⁰

It would be as difficult as it would be foolish to deny the influence of the “*logoi*” (words/discourses) in a Platonic *dialogue*. And yet, a Platonic dialogue cannot simply be reduced to its “*logoi*” (words/discourses). Sophistic arguments play games with words, relying often on equivocation, but the antidote to this sophistry does not involve simply “sticking to the facts” as we might say in English.²¹ The “give-and-take” of a dialogue may require an interlocutor to

²⁰ Gadamer, “Reply to Nicholas P. White” in *Platonic Writings-Platonic Readings*, 258.

²¹ This idiom more closely addresses what is at stake in Gadamer’s disagreement with White, from which the above citation has been excerpted. White rebrands Gadamer’s understanding of each dialogues’ situational character as a sort of “Platonic fallibilism.” That is, our judgments (and so what we “know”) are always subject to subsequent revision *because of* the gaps that appear within situational/contextual character of what we know. White, “Observations and Questions about Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Interpretation of Plato” in *Platonic Writings-Platonic Readings*, 247-248. And yet Gadamer insists that the issue is not the epistemological one which White makes it out to be. Gadamer does not think that Plato maintains a “conceptualist,” “idealist,” or “realist” position with respect to the “objects” of knowledge. But rather, the Platonic dialogue speaks to the human attempt to secure knowledge with *and* despite the *logos*—a *logos* which provides the possibility for knowing at all and also which tends to confuse, seduce, and mislead. This sense of dialectical understanding also informs our own endeavor to *heed* the text.

respond to the words, but the speaker and listener always navigate through a sea of unspoken implicature as well. The “give-and-take” of a dialogue vacillates between the explicit and the implicit, giving neither a clear priority over the other. Even the most seemingly explicit claim dissembles too. Because what is given can at times not be reduced to any one word or phrase, a sensitivity to contextual resonance becomes a crucial part of understanding a dialogue’s “give” and “take.” For example, when Meno warns Socrates not to leave Athens lest he risk being arrested as a sorcerer (φαρμακεύς), it would be difficult to heed the nuance of his remark or Socrates’ response to it without recourse to the well-known conclusion of Socrates’ life.²² This historical dimension and also the referential web surrounding the accusation of sorcery introduce nuance and complexity into this textual moment. Furthermore, Socratic subversion and irony depend as much on implicature as they do on Socrates’ opposition to conventional suppositions (e.g., about what is good, politics, oratory, etc.). And yet, does this attunement to insinuation and subversion not speak to our next question? For this assumption, too, comes because of a decision on *how* we should read the *Meno*.

How Should We Read the *Meno*?

The normative dimension of this question along with that of the prior question should not be overlooked. We must acknowledge a precarity here in the framing of these questions. On the one hand, every interpretation which is carried out earnestly makes a normative claim whether the interpreter recognizes it or not. In the case of our own inquiry, we can ask this simple question: Why would we interpret the *Meno* in this way unless we thought that it was the way that someone *should* interpret it? Our approach, which we have already positioned in opposition to that of the dominant Anglophone one, does not oppose the dominant position simply to be contrarian. We approach the text according to the interpretative guidelines which we lay out presently because of a conviction that it allows new dimensions of the dialogue to flourish which are profound and obscured by the other approach. That is, our approach reveals a different truth of the *Meno*. But, on the other hand, normative claims carry the risk of radicalization. The suggestion that our approach reveals a certain truth does not imply that it alone reveals *the* truth of the dialogue. The very suggestion that one may find *the* truth of the *Meno* implies already a confused understanding of the Platonic text and what takes place within it. We cannot expect our interpretation to abide by

²² Plato, *Meno*, 80b.

the same norms as the methods of, for example, the empirical sciences, which may suppose its objects of inquiry to reveal their “objective truth” (i.e., a materialist, mechanistic account). Gadamer’s objection to White included a problematization of the Platonic dialogues’ subjection to modern epistemological interpretations, interpretations which begin from the assumption of the empirical sciences. Thus, when we ask “how should we read the *Meno*?,” we ask the question so that we make ourselves aware of the position from which we begin our inquiry. We admit that this question does imply a greater propriety of our approach, but we suppose this propriety with qualification. We approach this ancient text humbly and with an awareness of the assumptions which we bring with our interpretation. In this way, we again follow Gadamer, who invites his readers similarly:

I ask that the reader take what follows as an attempt to read the classic Greek thinkers the other way round as it were—that is, not from the perspective of the assumed superiority of modernity, which believes itself beyond the ancient philosophers because it possesses an infinitely refined logic, but instead with the conviction that philosophy is a human experience that remains the same and that characterizes the human being as such, and that there is no progress in it, but only participation.²³

It is not because of our desire to revel in the distance between the past and the present nor because of a misguided confidence in our sophistication, which would allow us to critique the Platonic text, that we turn to the *Meno*. On the contrary, we approach this text with a hope that it will reveal to us an abiding human experience of uncertainty about the difficulty of human life. Despite the many advancements which we enjoy in the present (technological and otherwise), our identification with the human (all too human) difficulties which Socrates confronts in the *Meno* emphasizes the genuinely problematic character of these questions (e.g., how to become a good person). It is not the case that the ancient Greeks were ancient and so naïve, but rather, in our encounter with this ancient Greek text, we encounter an approach to a profound problem which still troubles us today.

Thus, when we set out to read the *Meno*, we do so humbly and without the pretense of thinking we know what the texts says in advance. One consequence of this humility demands for us to leave *arete* in its (relatively) unfamiliar Greek form rather than translating it into an English “equivalent.” For not only must we assume that there is an English word whose sense sufficiently equates to that of the Greek word, but we also must assume that we even know what *arete* means

²³ Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, 6.

in the first place in order to translate it.²⁴ However, a part of the reason that we read the *Meno* is because we want to know what this strange word means, and we have heard hearsay that this text says something about it. This reason moved us to read the *Meno*. It gave us a reason to do so. The questions concerning why we should read the *Meno* and how we should read the *Meno* intertwine with one another such that they mutually reinforce one another. That is, a concern for why we should read the *Meno* leads us to question how we should read it (assuming that we *can* do so) and vice versa. The dialogical form of the *Meno* bears upon both our “why” and “how” questions. Why read the text of a philosopher who refuses to speak for himself? Why does Plato not just say what he wanted to say? And in a similar spirit, how can *we* read such a text? What becomes important in a text which both calls upon us to heed it and at the same time refuses to communicate “openly” or “directly”?

In a certain way, Strauss’ interest in the Platonic text seems obvious because of his propensity to pay attention to what takes place between the margins of a text. His so-called “esoteric” readings speak to a dimension of the Platonic dialogue which has stood out to its readers for thousands of years.²⁵ Even so, his political readings of Plato partially inform our attention to the crucial, yet often understated, importance of the political and the *polis* in the *Meno*. In *The City and Man*, Strauss remarks:

One must postpone one’s concern with the most serious questions (the philosophic questions) in order to become engrossed in the study of a merely literary question [i.e., of form over substance]. Still, there is a connection between the literary question and the philosophic question. The literary question, the question of presentation, is concerned with a kind of communication. Communication may be a means for living together; in its highest form, communication is living together....The study of the literary question is therefore an

²⁴ A part of our response to this problem of *arete* will develop out of our presumptions about language. As the heirs of both Derrida’s and Gadamer’s philosophic lineage, we occupy a fraught position with respect to language. For, on the one hand, we must try to understand what language says to us lest our entire inquiry fall apart. But on the other hand, we cannot ignore language’s slippage, obfuscation, and impenetrability before our interpretive gaze. Let this admission serve as a preliminary recognition of a basic tension against which our approach to interpretation must struggle.

²⁵ Not to be confused with the esoteric tradition which was the interest of the Tübingen School whose members sought to reconstruct Plato’s unwritten teachings. Our inquiry will not engage with this tradition, although Gadamer does address a brief history of the approach in Germany and a more moderate defense of its contributions in “Plato’s Unwritten Dialectic.” It seems difficult to justify an attempt to reconstruct an unwritten philosophic system, when we do not even have a firm grasp of the *written* Platonic texts. For a representative work from this tradition (which has been translated into English), see Kramer, *Plato and the Foundations of Metaphysics*. See Gadamer’s previously mentioned essay for the names of many other scholars in this tradition whose works remain in German.

important part of the study of what philosophy is. The literary question properly understood is the question of the relation between society and philosophy.²⁶

Strauss reasons from the “literary question,” that is, the question of the dialogue’s presentation, to the question of the relationship between society and philosophy through a concern for communication.²⁷ Despite preparing for an inquiry into the *Republic*, Strauss could just as well justify a close reading of the *Meno* in this way. Our own inquiry into the *Meno* will track the pursuit of *arete* and the human good in the (Athenian) *polis*.²⁸ If we were to turn momentarily to the beginning of the dialogue, a dialogue which we read in part because of its treatment of *arete*, we will find Socrates speaking about the *polis* and the people who inhabit it from the beginning.²⁹ But what does the relationship between Strauss’ questions concerning presentation, communication, and “society” (the *polis*) tell us about how we should read the dialogue?

We have positioned our inquiry in opposition to other approaches to the Platonic text. One way that our approach deviates from the other approaches is through our assumptions about the significance of Socrates speaking. While we may also disagree about the meaning of Socrates’ *speeches*, the fact that we do not consider Socrates as Plato’s mouthpiece implies that we must hear Socrates speaking *in* dialogue with his interlocutors (rather than read the dialogue as an essay with some artistic flourish). The relational character of dialogue—that a speaker speaks to, listens to, heeds, or even ignores another person—leads us both to different philosophical conclusions and also interpretative conclusions. No authority tells us what this or that means or what is or is not important. Consequently, we must approach each textual moment as if it were the decisive one. For we do not know what to expect nor when to expect it. We must read the dialogue vigilantly so that the emergent meaning, which cannot be reduced simply to what Socrates or Meno “means,” may show itself *to* and *for* us.³⁰ Furthermore, our attention to the emergent meaning that arises

²⁶ Strauss, *The City and Man*, 52.

²⁷ Strauss assumes that communication is possible, and indeed, the writing of dialogues does seem to affirm its possibility implicitly. And yet, we must also remember that Socrates will be executed because of how *and* what he communicated. And so, it seems that we must take the possibility of communication as an open question in the Platonic text because, on the one hand, the dialogical form implies the necessity of being in communication with others but, on the other hand, Socrates’ inability to communicate with his fellow Athenians raises doubts about its efficacy.

²⁸ The *polis*, not “society,” will be at stake in the *Meno*, although the terms overlap in many ways.

²⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 70a-b. Socrates recounts the reputation of Thessaly, the region in which Meno is born, and Larissa in his opening speech.

³⁰ Our ability to read the Platonic text at all attests to the purposive relation (“for us”). We ought not take for granted that our inquiry attempts to read a text written thousands of years ago and from a land thousands of miles away from our own, and yet, we nevertheless do read it.

from Socrates' interaction with Meno, the παῖς, and Anytus better prepares us to hear the dialogue between philosophy and the *polis*. We cannot ignore *this* dialogue because we know as well of the Platonic texts' responsibility for our presumption of the antagonism between philosophy and the *polis*. For us, Socrates' death at the hands of the Athenian *polis* marks a lineage of hostility between philosophy and life in the *polis*, and so we might expect to see the early symptoms of this hostility. And yet, we must be on guard here too. Contrary to whatever indignance one might feel about Socrates' demise, the relational character of the dialogical form points to the necessity of a reciprocity between philosophy and the *polis*. The practice of philosophy, as we will see, is never an isolated activity. For example, could we legitimately conclude that the only way to live a good, philosophical life is through a departure from the *polis* when we read a Platonic text that is fundamentally relational, that is, dialogical? It seems doubtful, and this conclusion even precedes our consideration of the *Meno*'s content. Nevertheless, our sensitivity to the dialogical character of the text comes with obstacles as well. For even when two people actively try to communicate "in good will" with one another, communication is never guaranteed. In the *Meno*, often the speakers do not speak "clearly," and our desire to understand the Platonic text leads us to confront these ambiguities frequently.

What Obstacles Must We Overcome When Reading the *Meno*?

We noted how the dialogical form implied a fundamental relationality—a relation between speakers in dialogue, between philosophy and the *polis*, and even between the text and the reader. Although this formal determination may imply an assumed priority of communication, understanding, and unity, we acknowledge simultaneously the presence of impenetrability, discontinuity, and difference in the Platonic text as well (despite, or better, *because of*, its dialogical character). It would be too reductive simply to call these symptoms of alterity "différance." On the contrary, in the *Meno*, we find a distinctly Socratic, dialogical phenomenon, a part of which we now call "Socratic irony." How do we understand the words of a speaker who hides himself, that is, a speaker who is *known* for his tendency to hide himself? Aristotle mentions habitual irony in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, and following Aristotle's lead, Strauss describes it in a more germane way to the *Meno*:

Yet irony is a kind of dissimulation, or of untruthfulness. Aristotle therefore treats the habit of irony primarily as a vice. Yet irony is the dissembling, not of evil actions or of vices, but rather of good actions or of virtues; the ironic man, in opposition to the boaster,

understates his worth....Irony is then the noble dissimulation of one's worth, of one's superiority.³¹

Strauss' account of irony brings together three decisive dimensions of ironic speech: the word, the deed, and what is "worthy." The ironist performs a sort of speech that obfuscates its axiological weight. Despite Aristotle's chronological proximity to the dialogues, we do not mention him here as if his invocation would be meaningfully less anachronistic. The retrospective application of Aristotelian insight seems to be one of the more prominent features of Platonistic readings. Nevertheless, we note Strauss' Aristotelian account for two reasons. First, it manifestly draws our attention to the persistent danger which Aristotle poses as our most proximate authority. We must remain vigilant against his sneaky influence, an influence which has such a powerful pull that it often completely evades our notice. Second, it points backwards to our anticipatory look forwards. When we considered why we should read the *Meno*, we observed the intertwinement between the axiological question and the temporal question. Because we only live for so long, we must make determinations about what is worthy of our time. On the basis of this observation, we cited Socrates' assessment of the worthiness of the endeavor which he pursued with Meno. This citation served as a preliminary indication of an axiological thematic in the *Meno*. We now face a different sort of obstacle. How do we interpret a dialogue with at least one speaker who dissimulates the weight of his claims?

We can consider this question along multiple facets. If Socrates dissimulates in his speech, does he know what he means but says otherwise? In that scenario, does our task involve deciphering Socratic intention? That is, determining when he speaks genuinely versus disingenuously and also what he "really means" when he speaks disingenuously? We would embark on a precarious endeavor if we proceeded in this way. Our doubts about the self-transparency of Socratic speech would be a superficial concern compared to the doubts which would arise in relation to our own ability to determine Socratic intention in such cases. Furthermore, Socratic irony also raises questions about the value of a certain kind of truth and what constitutes that truth. The dialogical phenomenon which we call Socratic irony warrants attention because it deviates from the norm. Unreflectively, we tend to approach dialogue under the assumption that people "say what they mean," and in some indeterminate way, this assumption

³¹ Strauss, *The City and Man*, 51.

underlies the dialogical practice of “speaking truth.” However, Socrates stands out because of his tendency not to “say what he means” in *this* way. He does not exactly “play by the same rules” of self-transparency as others. Furthermore, when we read a Platonic dialogue, Socrates’s interlocutors tend to find themselves unable to “say what they mean,” and they often find such impotence remarkable. We will see Meno express such a sentiment before comparing Socrates to a torpedo-fish.³² We point out this dialogical phenomenon because of our sensitivity to Derrida’s account of language and textuality. The play of Socratic dissimulation in the dialogical register, in one way, signals the necessity of deconstruction for our interpretation. Consequently, our interpretation will likely exhibit a bipolar character, taking guidance from Gadamer’s hermeneutics and Derrida’s deconstruction. As if Socratic irony did not pose a considerable enough challenge, we also must reckon with another one: translation. Derrida’s insight into the play of language bears especially strongly in relation to this question.

Derrida displays a habitual sensitivity and vigilance towards language, but we ought to consider his remarks in *Khora* particularly because he reflects on challenges of working with a Platonic *and* Greek text which we also face:

A translation, admittedly, seems to be always at work, both *in* the Greek language and from the Greek language into some other. Let us not regard any of them as sure. Thinking and translating here traverse the same experience. If it must be attempted, such an experience or experiment [expérience] is not only but of concern for a word or an atom of meaning but also for a whole tropological texture, let us not yet call it a system, and for ways of approaching, in order to *name* them, the elements of this “tropology.” Whether they concern the word *khora* itself (“place,” “location,” “region,” “country”) or what tradition calls the figures—comparisons, images, and metaphors—proposed by Timaeus (“mother,” “nurse,” “receptacle,” “imprint-bearer”), the translations remain caught in networks of interpretation. They are led astray by retrospective projections, which can always be suspected of being anachronistic. This anachronism is not necessarily, not always, and not only a weakness from which a vigilant and rigorous interpretation would be able to escape entirely. We shall try to show that no-one escapes from it.³³

We have assumed with Gadamer, Klein, and Strauss that we can understand this text. We have taken for granted that it will still speak to us today. Derrida, however, reminds us soberly of the

³² Plato, *Meno*, 80a-b. “For truly, both in soul (ψυχήν) and in mouth (στόμα), I am paralyzed (ναρκῶ) and have nothing with which I can answer you. And yet thousands of times I have made a great many speeches (λόγους) about *arete*, and before many people, and done very well, in my own opinion (ἐδόκουν) anyway; yet now I’m altogether unable to say what it is.”

³³ Derrida, “Khora” in *On the Name*, 93.

distance between ourselves and this text (and every text)—a distance which the *différance* of signification prevents us from escaping. We have not positioned ourselves naively in relation to the *Meno*. Our preservation of “ἀρετή” as *arete* (and not as “virtue,” “excellence,” or “goodness”) signals a partial admission of its impenetrability.³⁴ This decision to retain the Greek marks the necessity of our failure to pin *arete* down either to some originary phenomenon or even more modestly to a network of signification freed from the influence of the Platonistic legacy on itself. Even in our effort to read the text vigilantly, we will extend ourselves over a gap which we have no guarantee to overcome—a gap which we likely will not overcome. Even leaving *arete* as *arete* does not extricate our interpretation from the “networks of interpretation” as Derrida keenly points out. This gesture of abstention as a refusal to “play the game” staked out by interpreters who choose “virtue” or “excellence” remains nevertheless a way of “playing the game.” The problem of translation and interpretation does not amount to adequate diligence. The problem arises out of the play of the text with and against itself. The remark, e.g., dialogical or interpretative, does not merely mark out meaning. As Frank observes, “Derrida speaks of the ‘re-mark,’ that is, of the constant possibility for the speaker/author/reader/hearer/interpreter to place a new emphasis on the meaning of a word, a sentence, a text, or a culture.”³⁵ Does our admission of this Derridean insight undermine our other hermeneutic sympathies? Do our guides disagree about the consequences of our relationship to language so fundamentally that our attempt to heed their respective insights will leave our interpretation incoherent at best? Let us take a moment to consider some insights from Derrida’s deconstruction and Gadamer’s hermeneutics so that we will have a firmer grasp of their implications for our encounter with the *Meno*.

The Textual Play of Deconstruction and Hermeneutics: Derrida and Gadamer

Can our approach possibly succeed, following in the footsteps of two influential yet purportedly divergent approaches to the text? Do Gadamer’s hermeneutics and Derrida’s deconstruction share any common ground, and if so, what? Moreover, to what extent does their

³⁴ Sean Kirkland writes of a “hermeneutic of estrangement” and names three reading practices in service to it: Non-translation, Non-clarification, and Non-resolution. Kirkland claims that the purpose of these practices is to “allow the early Plato’s Socrates to present us with his ancient strangeness and, precisely thereby, to challenge and perhaps push us beyond our own still persistent modern presuppositions about our world, ourselves, and proper philosophical thinking.” Kirkland, *The Ontology of Socratic Questioning in Plato’s Early Dialogues*, xix-xx. Our own approach shares in this same spirit.

³⁵ Frank, “Limits of the Human Control of Language: Dialogue as the Place of Difference,” 159.

disagreement affect our ability to interpret the *Meno* in a way which attends to their respective insights? Many Scholars do not question that Derrida and Gadamer share some common ground. For example, Risser, in his reflection on Gadamer and Derrida's 1981 encounter, notes several commonalities, "Both hermeneutics and deconstruction can be described as post-Hegelian attempts at freeing language from itself. Both hermeneutics and deconstruction take seriously the playfulness of language, and with it the possibility of liberation from the solidification of meaning in words."³⁶ This shared sense of language's playfulness serves as the starting point from which our inquiry will begin *and* from which our recourse to both hermeneutics and deconstruction begins.

Despite both concerning themselves with play in the text, Derrida and Gadamer approach this play in different ways. The respective frameworks from within which they practice their philosophy stands out as one blatant difference. Derrida considers the text within a semiotic framework, whereas Gadamer considers it within a hermeneutic one. Let us turn to Derrida's introduction to "Plato's Pharmacy" for some useful guidance on his approach, and then we will consider Gadamer's analysis in *Truth and Method*. Concerning the text, Derrida writes, "A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game."³⁷ The text does not by itself disclose its meaning, but its inaccessibility does not imply that it has some hidden meaning which the reader/interpreter/writer must uncover. Meaning—from the level of the "whole" text all the way down to the level of the individual sign—is deferred.³⁸ Meaning is never simply "present" in relation to itself, to the other signs, or even to the structure of the text. Consequently, Derrida insists instead that reading *is* writing, since the

³⁶ Risser, "The Two Faces of Socrates: Gadamer/Derrida," 176. See also: Forget, "Argument(s)," 132. "...For both deconstruction and hermeneutics (in its reflection on tradition), self-consciousness does not constitute the ground on which either one sets itself up or takes its position [*se pose ou se poste*]." Frank, "Limits of the Human Control of Language: Dialogue as the Place of Difference," 151. "Both are dealing with philosophy after Hegel, after Nietzsche, and after Heidegger; for neither of them does absolute consciousness offer any possibility of escape from the fact of finitude and the fact of history; in neither of them does one see a transcendental value invoked to justify life: rather, the counter of value-assignment are delineated in the process of an 'infinitely perspectival interpretation'; the epistemological subject is no longer the lord of his being but acquires his "self-understanding" in the semiotic context of a world into whose structure a certain interpretation of the meaning of being has entered. Finally, neostructuralism and hermeneutics are both essentially philosophies of language, which guides the 'consciousness' of man by virtue of what Jacques Lacan has called the 'defile du significant' ['the marching past of the signifier']."

³⁷ Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 63.

³⁸ "To mean, in other words, is automatically *not* to be. As soon as there is meaning, there is difference. Derrida's word for this lag inherent in any signifying act is *différance*, from the French verb *différer*, which means both "to differ" and "to defer." Johnson, "Translator's Introduction," ix.

“rules of the game” demand the reader/writer to play the text’s game for its rules to emerge. One “writes” the text as one “reads” the text. The meaning of the text is neither “given” in advance (by the author, tradition, or the text itself) nor is it an augmentation added to the text by the “reader.” Even philosophical attempts to hold meaning in place slip away as Derrida’s deconstruction of the *pharmakon* exemplifies. The relationship between reading and writing is a paradoxical relation designating neither “undifferentiated (con)fusion nor identity at perfect rest.”³⁹ Since the text is pervaded by differential play at every level, it must be heeded *as* a game—a point which is echoed in the *Phaedrus* according to Derrida. Derrida concludes that “the reading or writing supplement must be rigorously prescribed, but by the necessities of a game, by the logic of play, signs to which the system of all textual powers must be accorded and attuned.”⁴⁰ The rules of the game/play in the reading/writing of the text gestures towards its emergent and ambivalent character, or in other words, its undecidability. Do the signs of the text fuse or confuse? This homophonic play highlights one dimension of the textual game. Textual play does not “play itself out” (i.e., exhaust itself but also move autonomously) because of its coherence but rather because of the slippage of meaning even in the repetition of the “same” signifier, e.g., the *pharmakon*.⁴¹ The text “speaks” the language of difference.

For Derrida, textual play arises from the irreconcilable discontinuity of signifier(s) and signified(s)—a textual play of difference with and against itself, which we can trace through the *différance* of only nominally “self-same” signifiers. If an insurmountable chasm separates signifier from signified, and language is the medium through which understanding occurs, then we can see a part of Derrida’s doubt about the possibility of understanding. In his analysis of the meeting between Derrida and Gadamer, Madison picks out the possibility of understanding as the site of considerable division between them:

³⁹ Ibid., 63-64.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 64.

⁴¹ We can hear echoes of Derrida’s understanding of the text throughout his critique of structuralism in “Structure, Sign and Play.” He remarks, “Henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus by a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse—provided we can agree on this word—that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.” Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 353-354.

And yet, [Gadamer and Derrida] seem to inhabit uncommunicating worlds. For while Gadamer insists that language is a “bridge” allowing for communication, Derrida has sought assiduously to convince his readers (and listeners) that language is precisely that which renders forever impossible (indefinitely defers) meaningful self-understanding as well as, to use Gadamer’s words, “a genuine mutual understanding [*Verständigung*].”⁴²

It would be difficult to understate the importance of understanding in Gadamer’s hermeneutics, and so Derrida’s rejection of it poses a considerable challenge—a challenge which they respectively performed in their 1981 encounter/non-encounter with one another. In the conclusion of Derrida’s response to Gadamer’s essay “Text and Interpretation,” Derrida insists, “Furthermore, I am not convinced that we ever really do have this experience that Professor Gadamer describes, of knowing in a dialogue that one has been perfectly understood or experiencing the success of confirmation.”⁴³ Predictably, Derrida cannot claim to have understood Gadamer’s account of/in “Text and Interpretation,” doubting that anyone experiences such understanding. And yet, Gadamer responds predictably too, admitting, “I am finding it difficult to understand these question that have been addressed to me. But I will make an effort, as anyone would do who wants to understand another person or be understood by the other.”⁴⁴ These responses to one another, which are themselves so characteristic of their respective speakers, also give a voice to the spirit of our own inquiry. As the recipients of two equally profound lineages, we are obliged to heed them both. It may be that we never experience perfect understanding in our inquiry into the *Meno*, and yet we must nevertheless *try* to understand it. For now, let us cover a few of Gadamer’s insights into the play of language and its relation to hermeneutic understanding.

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer initially analyzes the concept of play in order to glean insight into the hermeneutic significance of the work of art. Although this analysis plays a pivotal role in his interrogation of truth in the experience of art, his analysis of the concept of play culminates in his section on language as the medium of hermeneutic experience. This hermeneutic experience involves the attempt to understand the text, that is, to interpret it. Yet this process of understanding/interpretation is not intentional *a la* the sovereign subject(ivity). The interpreter does not simply decide what he or she “wants” the text to say. Rather, Gadamer explains the interpreter’s attempt to understand the text through his prior analysis of play. He claims, “The

⁴² Madison, “Gadamer/Derrida: The Hermeneutics of Irony and Power,” 192-193.

⁴³ Derrida, “Three Questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer,” 54.

⁴⁴ Gadamer, “Reply to Derrida,” 55.

analogue [between the nature of play and understanding] in the present case is neither playing with language nor with the contents of the experience of the world or of tradition that speak to us, but the play of language itself, which addresses us proposes and withdraws, asks and fulfills itself in the answer.”⁴⁵ The text absorbs the interpreter into it through the enticement of language’s playfulness. It beckons us to heed it, and it only reveals its answer to us once we are in the midst of the “game.” We must “play hard,” that is, take the playfulness of language in the text seriously (as one must do to play at all) so that we can find ourselves absorbed into the event. As Gadamer continues:

Someone who understands is always already drawn into an event through which meaning asserts itself. So it is well founded for us to use the same concept of play for the hermeneutical phenomenon as for the experience of the beautiful. When we understand a text, what is meaningful in it captivates us just as the beautiful captivates us.⁴⁶

It is not that the text means something which we must discover or that the text means nothing and we must imbue it with our own meaning. The meaning of the text rather emerges through its fusion with interpretative understanding *a la* the emergence of play. Participation in this event is fundamentally what is at stake in the hermeneutic approach. But what happens after? Does one simply “reach an understanding” and then move on to the next text that draws the interpreter into its game?

During his 1981 presentation, Gadamer wrote about this specific problem in one’s attempt to understand the literary text. For Gadamer, the process of understanding never comes to an end:

The text with its charge of meaning [*Sinnbezug*] constitutes the only present. When we utter or read literary texts, we are thrown back on the meaning and sound relations that articulate the framework of the whole, not just once but each time. We leaf back through the text, begin anew, read anew, discover new dimensions of meaning. What stands at the end is not the secure consciousness of having understood the matter so that now one can leave the text behind, but rather just the opposite. One goes even deeper into the text the more the charges of meaning and sound in it enter into consciousness. We do not leave the text behind us but allow ourselves to enter into it.⁴⁷

That interpretative understanding never reaches conclusive understanding is a strength not a flaw of the hermeneutic approach. Even our participation in the tradition of textual commentary on the

⁴⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 484.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Gadamer, “Text and Interpretation,” 48.

Meno depends upon this feature of our encounter with the text. For if an interpretation could exhaust the meaning of the text, then only one commentary would ever be required for any given text. This pre-determined character, against which Gadamer opposes his hermeneutics, is a part of what our own approach to the text opposes. Many interpreters who follow the dominant Anglophone approach interpret the *Meno* as though they already know “what Plato says”: knowledge is recollection (ἀνάμνησις), which is to say, humans have pre-natal knowledge. They do not let the text speak in any other way, and in this precisely curated determination of the limits of the text, their interpretations become myopic and one dimensional. Gadamer speaks of the importance of “tarrying” as a part of interpretation:

It is the temporal structure of this movement [*die Zeitstruktur der Bewegtheit*], which we call “whiling” [*Verweilen*, tarrying, lingering], that occupies this presence and into which all mediatory discourse of interpretation must enter. Without the readiness of the person receiving and assimilating [*des Aufnehmenden*] to be “all ears” [*ganz Ohr zu sein*], no poetical text will speak.⁴⁸

Whereas Gadamer speaks of “being all ears,” we instead speak of heeding the text, although they share a familial resemblance with one another. Because of the need for patience in this process, we may, at times, linger for “too long” on some details. And yet this heedful lingering serves a critical function in our interpretative approach. For one does not miss the contextual resonance of a dialogue by paying way too much attention to seemingly unimportant details. On the contrary, these details speak too.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the difference between our approach and the approach of many Anglophone, Platonic scholars does not amount to a question of diligence. That is, it does not relate to spending an adequate/inadequate amount of time on some part of the text. But rather, the difference between the approaches concerns the *way* that our respective interpretations spend their time. We tarry with certain parts of the *Meno* through the lens of a guiding problematic that many Anglophone scholars do not consider.

Even though both Derrida and Gadamer attend to language’s playfulness, their respective conclusions about its function in our relationship to language differs. For Derrida, one way to engage the playfulness of language arises out of the process through which reading the text and

⁴⁸ Ibid., 49.

⁴⁹ For example, on the very first page, Socrates mentions the Thessalian reputation for equestrianism in response to Meno’s questions. Every scholar of Ancient Greece knows the fact of their reputation, but why does Socrates begin his response to the question of *arete* in *this* way? What is the implication for *arete* and for Socratic philosophic practice?

writing it fuse and confuse. This paradoxical logic illustrates the text's game in which networks of signifiers defer their meaning. Never singular and never self-same, the unruliness of signifiers forces the reader to write the text as it is read. The reader "follows the threads" which are neither augmentation nor given in advance. The ambivalence and undecidability of signification follow a logic of play, which is to say that their "coherence" emerges out of "incoherence." The signs of the text are always double, looping back into one another and into themselves. Consequently, the reader/writer "ties them together" contingently like the binding of the rules of a game, which is "serious" but never governed by necessity. Through this process, the meaning of the text emerges fleetingly. The reader/writer has no more power to create meaning out of the text than the text has to hide/harbor a meaning within it. This consequence shows one way in which Derrida calls into question the sovereignty of the subject, a common concern which he also shares with Gadamer. For Gadamer, the playfulness of language draws the reader into the text, beckoning the reader to respond. Meaning shows itself in this event, and in this way, the hermeneutic experience shares a likeness with play. The reader finds him or herself in the midst of understanding the meaning of the text in the same way that a player finds him or herself in the midst of play. A player might prepare to play a game, but the play itself cannot be "willed" or "forced." An event occurs in which the subject becomes absorbed. The same holds in the process of hermeneutic understanding in which meaning shows itself. Furthermore, this meaning is never conclusive. An interpreter does not simply understand the text and then move on to the next one. Hermeneutic understanding revises itself with each new encounter. Every encounter is a new one, revealing new dimensions of meaning which could not have been conceived prior to the present understanding. Even so, Derrida doubts the possibility of such understanding, and this doubt necessarily precludes any reconciliation between their approaches. However, the irreconcilability of Derridean deconstruction with Gadamerian hermeneutics does not pose a problem for our approach to the *Meno*. We will not make the audacious gesture of presuming ourselves wiser than Gadamer, Derrida, or the generations of scholars subsequent to them who also could not reconcile their views on language. Instead, we would be much better off to heed the play of their words with and against one another. Derrida tells us that perhaps we will never experience this understanding which Gadamer describes, and Gadamer responds that he does not understand but he will make an effort nonetheless. If such a conclusion sufficed for Derrida and Gadamer, then it seems adequate for us

as well. Let us turn now to intertextuality, a textual phenomenon which is so fundamental to an encounter with the Platonic texts that commentators tend not to account for it at all.

Intertextuality

In Platonic studies, the ubiquity of reading the content of one Platonic dialogue into another, e.g., in the *Meno*, an analysis of Anytus in light of his subsequent participation in Socrates' prosecution of the *Apology*, seems to rest primarily on a conventional basis. Commentators have taken for granted its permissibility for so long that no one seems to question the justification for this practice. Of all the English language commentaries on the *Meno* in the 20th and 21st century, no single commentator has addressed the basis for this practice in their commentary despite unanimously participating in it. Klein, for example, takes an even more "radical" approach, reading non-Platonic, Attic Greek texts into his interpretation of the *Meno* as well. Our own interpretation also will abide by this practice, following Klein's willingness to incorporate non-Platonic, Attic Greek texts; however, whereas other commentators offer no justification for this practice, we will, at least, consider the basis for our perpetuation of this norm.⁵⁰ Towards this end, Kristeva's understanding of intertextuality accounts semiotically for the textual mechanisms which justify this practice.

In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva explains intertextuality ("inter-textuality") in terms of transposition. This sense, she insists, helps to avoid what is also a common practice in commentaries on the *Meno*, namely, noting in the *Meno* another dialogue or text as the textual "source" of a character's, word's, phrase's, or claim's significance in the *Meno*. In contrast, Kristeva thinks inter-textuality/ transposition in the following way:

The term *inter-textuality* denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another; but since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of "study of sources," we prefer the term *transposition* because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of the thetic—of enunciative and denotative positionality. If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an inter-textuality), one then understands that

⁵⁰ It may sound like there is another option, namely, to try to read a dialogue "on its own," i.e., without recourse to any other text (Platonic dialogue or otherwise). However, to do so would be either entirely impossible or very naïve. What would a "pure" reading entail? Would one read it in English (or some other non-Attic Greek language) or Greek? Even these "superficial," practical issues pose considerable obstacles, which even by themselves preclude a "pure" reading. The point is not that there is another option besides reading intertextually, but rather, to strengthen our approach by accounting for one of its foundational assumptions.

its “place” of enunciation and its denoted “object” are never single, complete, and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated. In this way polysemy can also be seen as the result of a semiotic polyvalence—an adherence to different sign systems.⁵¹

Platonic studies suffer from this banal sense of intertextuality despite the creative possibilities implied by transposition, but the creative possibilities alone do not justify recourse to transposition. This process also better explains the very impulse to see the texts in relation to one another. Taking each Platonic text as a “sign system,” most commentators matter-of-factly connect the signs (characters, words, phrases, or abstracted claims) with one another, and this impetus often goes hand in hand with the attempt to date the dialogues chronologically.⁵² However, the observation of these similarities does very little. Indeed Anytus’ participation in this dialogue takes on a greater

⁵¹ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 59-60.

⁵² Despite its exhaustivity, Thompson’s *The Meno of Plato* is representative of this custom. For example, he writes in the very first entry of his commentary: “1. ἄρα διδασκτὸν ἢ ἀρετή: ...it has already been made the main subject of the dialogue *Protagoras*, at the end of which (361 a b) it appears that Socrates, in arguing that Virtue is ἐπιστήμη, has been implicitly arguing that Virtue may be taught, though explicitly this is the position he has denied. The converse paradox turns out to be the position of Protagoras. He, as his profession demanded, asserted that Virtue was teachable; but by denying that Virtue was knowledge, he has implicitly contradicted himself. In the *Euthydemus* (282 bc) the question occurs again, though here σοφία is substituted for ἀρετή...” Thompson, *The Meno of Plato*, 57. Thompson continues at length, expanding outside of the Platonic corpus to cite some instances of this question’s treatment in Aristotle, Antisthenes, and Isocrates. As reference material, Thompson’s contribution is invaluable, but his insensitivity to the consequences of the play between the various iterations of this question concerning “the teachability of *arete*” leaves a lot to be desired philosophically. Of course, Thompson’s 1901 commentary is broadly lexical rather than philosophical, but even as recently as 2015, Benson still follows a similar practice. Leaning heavily into the innatist reading of *anamnesis*/recollection, he writes, “Plato thinks, then, that prenatal knowledge...is fundamental for resolving Meno’s paradox...Prenatal knowledge allows for the possibility of intentionally setting out to systematically come to know on one’s own what virtue is, for examples.” In his footnote, he implores the reader to “see the first sentence of Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*: ‘All teaching and all learning of an intellectual kind proceed from pre-existent knowledge’ (Πᾶσα διδασκαλία καὶ πᾶσα μάθησις διανοητικὴ ἐκ προῦ παρχούσης γίνεται γνώσεως) (*Posterior Analytics* 1.1.71a1; Barnes trans.)” Benson, *Clitophon’s Challenge: Dialectic in Plato’s Meno, Phaedo, and Republic*, 83 FN 99. In a bizarre move, Benson anachronistically reads the epistemological problem of innatism into Aristotle and then Aristotle into Plato; and yet, the more troubling issue with respect to our current consideration relates to Benson’s indifference to the transposition of the modern epistemological tradition, Aristotle’s text, and Plato’s text. Benson justifies his reading of Plato through a citation of Aristotle saying “the same thing,” but the ostensive “similitude” lies on a quite superficial basis, namely, a liberal translation of the Aristotelian fragment. Even if we set aside the dubious translation, what would our consultation of this sentence in Aristotle show us? Is the implication of Benson’s footnote that Aristotle subsequently corroborates his innatist reading of the *Meno* thereby justifying it? While we, of course, recognize that the process of transposition does justify this reading insofar as any systems of signs may intermingle with one another to create new signification, Benson does not justify his reading in this way. Instead he insists that *Plato* is concerned about showing the reader Benson’s prenatalist reading. *Plato designed* it this way. “Rather, what Plato is concerned to highlight is that the knowledge the slave has within himself (whether at one time in the past or tacitly at present) enables the slave to first truly believe and then potentially come to know, without being taught but by learning on his own, the length of the side of the double square. This is the key feature that the conversation with the slave was designed to show. This is the key feature of the theory of recollection, which accounts for its ability to resolve *Meno*’s paradox. Plato evidently takes the pre-existence of such knowledge to resolve *Meno*’s paradox.” *Ibid.*, 84.

weight because of our awareness of his subsequent participation in Socrates' trial, but, for example, the continuity between Socrates and Anytus' antagonistic encounter in the *Meno* and the antagonism of Anytus' indictment of Socrates does very little work towards developing the polysemy of their encounters. None of Socrates' encounters in the dialogues have a singular significance because they always play within a constantly evolving field of "signifying systems."

The transposition of signification produces a perpetually evolving "Platonic cosmos," that is, the nebulous "site" of the Platonic texts which together appear to constitute a "whole." While we could superficially demarcate the boundary of this "whole" through recourse to the "Platonic corpus," the interplay of the texts with and against one another (to say nothing of the play of other "non-Platonic" texts) entails a constant ebb-and-flow of the "Platonic cosmos." Even the most sustained and sensitive reading of a dialogue never settles it. Each dialogue "represents" to us a new field of signification, which itself plays within a broader field. The effect of this play, however, is not strictly cumulative. Kristeva continues:

We shall call *transposition* the signifying process' ability to pass from one sign system to another, to exchange and permutate them, and *representability* the specific articulation of the semiotic and thethetic for a sign system. Transposition plays an essential role here inasmuch as it implies the abandonment of a former sign system the passage to a second via an instinctual intermediary common to the two systems, and the articulation of the new system of its new representability.⁵³

The Platonic texts as fields of signification transform one another. One could not, for example, "scrape off" one layer of signification to find an ancient system of signification hidden beneath it as the search for "Plato's philosophy" presumes. The play of signifying systems with and against one another changes their "representability." Even as the texts interact and exchange with one another, the "originary" texts from which the subsequent permutations developed are not even themselves stable systems. The process of transposition is both productive and plural, producing a "new text" as the other texts themselves undergo a transformation through their relation to the new one. Kristeva calls this relationship of the text to language "redistributive" in her earlier essay "The Bounded Text":

The text is therefore a *productivity*, and this means: first, that its relationship to the language in which it is situated is redistributive (deconstructive-constructive), and hence can be better approached through logical categories rather than linguistic ones; and second,

⁵³ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 60.

that it is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another.⁵⁴

The intersection and neutralization of one text by another (and vice versa) could, at least in principle, unfold chronologically. Even if Kristeva does not say so entirely explicitly, her analysis of the utterance as ideologeme tracks the replacement of the symbol with the sign in the cultures of 13th-15th century Europe. However, because of the inadequate means of reliably dating the Platonic texts, which informs our rejection of Vlastos' developmentalist approach, we have no method nor justification for analyzing the intersection and neutralization of the Platonic texts along a linear, chronological path. But rather, the Platonic texts intersect with and neutralize one another circularly. The circular transposition of the Platonic texts (and all texts) with and against one another could be one reason why they retain such seductive power.

In summary, Kristeva's understanding of intertextuality as transposition or "the signifying process' ability to pass from one sign system to another" offers a useful justification for a practice pervasive throughout Platonic scholarship, namely, the cross-referencing of other dialogues in one's study of a particular dialogue. We do not mention this practice because we disagree with it, but rather, it is because we also want to participate in the practice that we made the extra effort to find a basis for it. Our high esteem for Klein's *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* stems from his frequent and liberal incorporation of other texts into his reading. Even if, at times, his explication of textual permutations does not tend to their polyvalent registers in a wholly satisfying way, his approach still established a valuable precedent for commentaries like our own to follow. A commentary can never exhaust a Platonic text because of their circular transposition into one another, but we will nonetheless attempt, as diligently and thoroughly as possible, to consider the singular representability of the *Meno*'s signs (its characters, words, phrases, and claims) as a product of their transposition from other texts. For that reason, we must deviate from some translational norms because of their restrictive effect on our interpretation. Let us consider the most decisive term for our inquiry in the following section.

***Arete* and "the Good" Person (ἀγαθός)**

So far, we have considered preparatory problems, that is, problems which precede our reading of the *Meno* and concern interpretive issues about the way to approach the text. In doing

⁵⁴ Kristeva, "The Bounded Text," 36.

so, we have avoided, as much as possible, delving into the text besides briefly noting textual moments as illustrative examples. However, we must now begin our slow descent into the text. This process will begin first through a preliminary analysis of *arete*, which both carries considerable baggage and figures prominently in the *Meno* as well. Because of these qualities, we must analyze it in all its unruliness and difficulty. We will not define this term but rather review some dimensions of its significance within Platonic/Greek texts, with which our inquiry in the *Meno* must struggle.

Arete names that with which our entire inquiry and the *Meno* itself is concerned. It is one word which we will never replace with an English “translation.” According to convention, it means sometimes “virtue” and sometimes “excellence,” but both options present obstacles which would impede our inquiry. For example, Anastaplo and Berns comment on the first appearance of *arete* in the text with the following note:

“Virtue” translates *arete*. *Arete* is a very broad word in classical Greek. For example, Thucydides, in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, writes of “the virtue of the soul” of certain parts of Greece. (I, ii, 4) Plato early in the extensive discussion of human virtue in his *Republic*, writes of the virtue of a dog (the first mention of “virtue” in that dialogue), of a horse, and of a pruning-knife. (335B, 352D-353E, especially 353B) Whenever anything, natural being or artifact, excels at the work it is constituted by nature or by art to do, it is said to possess its proper virtue, its specific excellence.⁵⁵

Their examples sufficiently illustrate that *arete* need not always concern the human good, and this reasoning often seems to undergird scholarly preference for “excellence” over “virtue.”⁵⁶ It *may* be the case that excellence “cleanses” *arete* of its moral valence appropriately in the cases of the *arete* of a dog or a pruning-knife, but do we already know that the *Meno* will not concern *arete* in the broad sense of any being’s specific excellence? How could we know such a conclusion in advance? In fact, insofar as we know that *Meno* concerns *arete*, we might rather suppose that the

⁵⁵ Anastaplo and Berns, “Notes,” 47.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Bluck, *Commentary on the Meno*. Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, 4. Waterfield, *Meno and Other Dialogues*, vii. Sachs provides a very characteristic explanation in a footnote of his translation of *Nicomachean Ethics*. “Virtue (*arete*) means the excellence that makes anything an outstanding specimen of its kind, especially well fitted to its ends. In itself it has no moral implications. It carries them conventionally when it is applied to human beings, and this is its primary use, but the word by no means excludes amoral or immoral conceptions of human superiority.” Sachs, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, FN 5. His distinction between a word’s meaning “in itself” versus “conventionally” carries a heavy load in his argument, but it conveys a strange understanding of language, which, at the very least, does not harmonize well with our own. Both Klein and Weiss tend to use both human excellence and virtue according to context, which is another way to address this issue.

text could, at least in principle, address such a question. And so, the seemingly innocent translation of *arete* as “excellence” already begs the question about the nature of *arete* with which the dialogue purportedly deals. The translation “excellence” can also function meaningfully in relation to the question of the human good, but this possibility raises an important question about the merit of this translation: if the primary benefit of the “excellence” translation is its lack of moral implicature (which may be a dubious assumption by itself), then is the implication that the Greeks did not think moral considerations matter for the pursuit of the human good? That is, when someone becomes a good person, has that person become an amoral being? Or has such a person become rather an immoral being?⁵⁷ Not only would it be difficult to find textual justification for such conclusions, but it is not even clear why such conclusions would draw posterity into the study of Ancient Greek thought. Thus, at least regarding the *Meno*, the “excellence” translation either begs the question a part of which is at stake in the text, or it implies an amoral/immoral character of the human good, a conclusion which does not beg the question any less but also has dubious value and textual basis. What about “virtue”?

Having analyzed the consequences of the “amoral/immoral” translation of *arete*, should we then defer to the recognizably moral one? Insofar as we assume that the *Meno* concerns the human good, then “virtue” might translate *arete* better than “excellence.”⁵⁸ However, “virtue” presents its own set of challenges too. We may wonder how much *justice* we do to Greek *arete* with a translation of it using an English derivative of the Latin “*virtus*,” whose patriarchal

⁵⁷ Adkins makes a relevant observation about this point in the Homeric texts. He notes, “In neither case [i.e., when Penelope’s suitors chose twenty *aristoi* or later when the battle began and several of the men were called *esthloi*], nor at any other time when the suitors are termed *agathoi* or *esthloi* in Homer, is Homer expressing ‘moral’ approval for their acts, for which indeed there should be strong social disapproval. There is a proper way to go wooing, and this is not it; but the suitors remain *agathoi* none the less, for they have irrefutable claims to the title.” Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility*, 32. Reflecting on his analysis of the Homeric text/Homeric society, Adkins concludes, “If we examine the culture revealed by these terms of value, we discover a society whose highest commendation is bestowed upon men who must successfully exhibit the qualities of a warrior, but must also be men of wealth and social position; men, too, who must display their valour both in war and in peace to protect their dependents: a function in which they must succeed, for the most powerful words in the language are used to denigrate those who fail.” Ibid., 34. It could be that Platonic scholars/translators who prefer the amoral/immoral implication of “excellence” think about *arete* in these Homeric terms. However, no one attempts to justify connecting the usage of *arete* in the Homeric text together with its usage in the Platonic text because everyone seems to agree that the sense of *arete* in the Platonic text differs from its sense in the Homeric text. Consequently, the Homeric basis of the amoral/immoral implicature of *arete* offers very little, if anything at all, to an inquiry into a text which asks: What is *arete*? What is the human good? And what can this Platonic text tell us about how to become good/exhibit *arete* in the *polis*?

⁵⁸ It may seem that our “question begging” argument against excellence works against us here, when we claim that the *Meno* concerns the human good, but our subsequent commentary on the *Meno* will analyze the *Meno* as a dialogue concerned with the human good. Rather than awkwardly discuss the matter as being in question, we will instead take for granted this assumption for now and allow the entirety of our analysis to serve as justification for it.

resonance (i.e., its common root with man (*vir*)) is well known.⁵⁹ Does the text concern the human good or the good of man? And does it even make sense for us to assume that Roman “virtue” approximates Greek *arete*? Furthermore, Plato’s text suffers from the wide influence of Aristotle, whose so-called “virtue ethics” tends to impose itself on any examination of Greek “virtue.” The point of this observation is not to attempt naively to “protect” the *Meno* from Aristotle, but rather, to point out that we cannot escape the influence of his *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. Do these Aristotelian texts merely refine what the Platonic texts began to explore dialogically about the relationship between *arete* and the human good? We will not assume such a reductive approach to the Platonic text. However, it may be useful for us to consider some passages from these Aristotelian texts in anticipation of our inquiry into the *Meno*. Towards that end, we will analyze the relationship between *arete*, the human good, and the *polis* in the *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* as preparation for our analysis of this relationship in the *Meno*.

As a part of his investigation of human life in the *polis*, Aristotle examines the relationship between the *arete* of the “good man” (ἀγαθός ἀνὴρ) and that of the “excellent citizen” (σπουδαῖος πολίτης). Eventually, Aristotle reasons to the conclusion that the *arete* of these respective individuals differs. He maintains:

Similarly therefore with the citizens (πολιτῶν), although they are dissimilar from one another, their task (ἔργον) is the security of their community (ἡ σωτηρία τῆς κοινωνίας), and this community (κοινωνία) is the regime (πολιτεία), so that the *arete* of a citizen (πολίτου) must necessarily (ἀναγκαῖον) be relative to the regime (πολιτείαν). If therefore there are various forms of regime (πολιτείας), it is clear that there cannot be a single (μίαν) *arete* which is the complete (τελείαν) *arete* of the excellent citizen (σπουδαίου πολίτου); but when we speak of a good man (ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα) we mean that he possesses a single (μίαν) *arete*, complete (τελείαν) *arete*. Hence it is manifestly possible to be an excellent

⁵⁹ There is also the influence of the Christian tradition, which we will not consider in our inquiry but which seems partially responsible for scholarly aversion to “virtue.” For example, St. Ambrose writes of the “cardinal virtues” (*virtus cardinalis*) in his *On the Death of Satyrus*, which refer to the four *arete* that often appear grouped together in the Platonic texts. St. Ambrose, *On the Death of Satyrus*, 57. Retroactively, these four *arete* become the “cardinal virtues” despite themselves being the “origin” of the phrase. Tacitly, the preference for “excellence” over “virtue” seems to act against this process; however, the partially anti-Christian basis (i.e., *arete* does not carry the Christian, moralizing sense of “virtue”) of this translation creates an even *more* familiar text. Just as we might find the *Meno*’s answers to modern epistemological problems wanting so too would we find “anti-Christian” sentiment wanting as well. Of course Christianity bears upon the Platonic text *for us*, and it would be naïve to think that we can protect the text by replacing “virtue” with “excellence,” even if “virtue” *is* problematic. The fact that “*arete*” still sounds a bit foreign to us does not resolve any of these concerns, but it is, at least, an attempt to let the text speak differently.

citizen (πολίτην σπουδαῖον) without possessing the *arete* that constitutes an excellent man (σπουδαῖος ἀνὴρ).⁶⁰

Because of the existence of multiple regimes (e.g., aristocracy, oligarchy, democracy), Aristotle infers that the *arete* of an excellent citizen (σπουδαῖος πολίτης) must depend upon the kind of regime under which that person lives. Consequently, being an excellent citizen is not a sufficient condition for being a good person (ἀγαθός) even though they both exhibit *arete*. The *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός) and the excellent citizen (σπουδαῖος πολίτης) are not the same. According to Aristotle, the task (ἔργον) of the citizen is “the preservation of the community (ἡ σωτηρία τῆς κοινωνίας),” and so the *arete* of the citizen will depend upon the needs of the community. However, as Aristotle concludes in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, the “task” of the good person is the “being-at-work (ἐνέργεια) of the soul (ψυχή) in accordance with *arete*” for the sake of “happiness” (εὐδαιμόνια).⁶¹ This difference between the “task” of the excellent citizen and the “task” of the good person creates a tension for the person who wishes to pursue *arete*. If one strives to become an excellent citizen, then this pursuit might lead one away from the *arete* of the good person. A part of this tension arises in response to incommensurate measures—one which serves the preservation of the regime and the other which serves something else. A person may be born into a community under the rule of a bad or corrupt regime and so be denied what is best in human life. In fact, it seems to be a political necessity that *some* part of the community be denied the human good for the sake of other parts of the community. In such conditions, one may wonder how anyone can become a good person.⁶²

Life in the *polis* seems to create a difficulty for the pursuit of the human good. One must live in a community with others and yet the good of the community may not facilitate the fulfillment of the human good. In his commentary on the *Politics*, Michael Davis lays out the terms of the problem as he sees them play out in Book Three of Aristotle’s *Politics*:

However, once we admit that there is some measure of political life according to which certain regimes are good and others not, the best regime will be the one in which the best rule... The rule of the best for the common good always threatens to become despotic rather than political. The principle of the former is the good of the ruler and of the latter the common good.... The common good is not simply what is commonly desired. It is rather a

⁶⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1276b 25-35. Translation modified.

⁶¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a 15-20.

⁶² Even the rulers, who have the authority to act in the name of the community, have no special guarantee to become good, since their position in the community only gives them an advantage in the political good not the human good.

maximizing of the possibility for excellence or virtue. When the virtue is understood to be rule, the common good will have to be the good of the rulers. In a regime taking as the standard of its goodness the good men it produces, the common good will end up meaning what is good for the best. Rule of the best will be for the best (1279a35-37). This “community” of rulers and ruled will depend on not too scrupulously analyzing what is meant when we say “it’s all for the best.”...Political rule thus requires that the ruled be simultaneously aware and unaware. Its principles are at once democratic and aristocratic. This *aporia* at the heart of Book 3 is at the heart of politics altogether.⁶³

If the exhibition of *arete* is a necessary condition for the human good (becoming a good person), then the axiological and teleological suppositions about *arete* become a site of intense conflict within the *polis*. What is “for the best” or “for the common good” appear to speak to a concern for what is “universally” good (*a la* the human good), but if we hear them instead as partial concerns of particular humans, then an examination of *arete* and the human good has sweeping consequences for the entire *polis*. A person’s understanding of *arete* impacts everyone with whom one lives, and the direst consequence amounts to the outright denial of the possibility of the human good for certain members of the community. Having gleaned the outline of this problematic in the Aristotelian text, we have now positioned our approach to the *Meno* in a rather unconventional way. Before we turn to the *Meno*, let us consider one final part of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* which, again, concerns “what Plato says.”

During his investigation of the human good, Aristotle spends a part of his inquiry examining the “universal good,” the form of which, he notes, was introduced by his friends. “No doubt the better thing to do is to examine the universal good and go through the difficulties in the way it is spoken of, and yet such an inquiry becomes like trudging uphill because the men who introduced the forms were my friends.”⁶⁴ Whether Aristotle refers to Plato himself or “Platonists” does not seem to make a difference, since many of the assumptions about Plato’s philosophy are Platonistic. Because of Aristotle’s temporal proximity to Plato (and so authoritative perspective on him), we might expect the *Meno*, which is a text authored by one of Aristotle’s friends, to concern the “universal good.” This expectation would be complicated by Aristotle’s critique of the Platonic/Platonistic account of the “universal good” (i.e., the good itself) through his analysis of those who use technical know-how (τέχνη). He observes:

⁶³ Davis, *The Politics of Philosophy: A Commentary on Aristotle’s Politics*, 51-52.

⁶⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1096a 10-15.

And surely it is not reasonable that all those skilled in technical know-how should be ignorant of, and not even look for, something of such great assistance [namely, the good itself]. And it is impossible to say in what respect a weaver or a carpenter will be benefitted in relation to his art by knowing this good itself, or how one who has beheld the form itself will be a better doctor or general. For it appears that the doctor does not consider health in that way, but the health of a human being, or perhaps rather that of this particular person, since he heals them each by each.⁶⁵

Aristotle criticizes the use of the good itself (or the “universal good”) through an examination of its practical consequences (or lack thereof) for practitioners of technical know-how. According to Aristotle’s reasoning, if the good itself were necessary for artisans to be good at their work, then those who practice technical know-how (τέχνη) would want to know that which would so greatly enhance their practice. Since, as it seems to Aristotle, the practitioners of technical know-how (τέχνη) aim at, what we might call, a “regional good” (e.g., the doctor “produces” health in a human and not the good itself), the good itself (the “universal good”) is not necessary to be a “good artisan.” It does not matter whether or not we agree with Aristotle on this point. But rather, we consider Aristotle’s commentary because it illustrates a common assumption about what to expect in a Platonic text. If we trust Aristotle’s authority, then we might also assume that the *Meno* will only tell us about “the good itself,” the “form” of which the good person must know. Based upon such an assumption, we might find ourselves again interested in “Plato’s epistemology,” which allegedly explains the phenomenon of learning as “recollecting” things known prior to birth. Might we call the objects of “pre-natal knowledge” the “intelligible forms?”⁶⁶ It is not difficult to imagine how Aristotle’s assumptions about “his friends” provide justification for an array of textual prejudices. However, our project, insofar as it reacts against the dominant Anglophone approach, attempts to avoid this prejudice about the subject of the *Meno*. If we let this text “speak for itself”—a text which comes to us with the subtitle “περί ἀρετῆς”—might it also teach us something about the attempt to be a good person in Athens? Or should we simply trust Aristotle?

Our inclusion of Aristotle’s criticism of “the good itself” in relation to the practice of technical know-how (τέχνη) provides us anticipatory insight into what we might expect to find in

⁶⁵ Ibid., 1097a 5-15.

⁶⁶ Cherniss, “The Philosophical Economy of the Theory of Ideas,” 445-456 esp. 448-449. Gulley, *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge*, 19. Although many decades have passed now since Cherniss and Gulley published their respective research, we can still find more recent research into the relationship between the so-called “Doctrine of Recollection” and the “Theory of Forms” albeit with more open acknowledgment of its conjectural basis in the *Meno*. Dancy, *Plato’s Introduction of Forms*, 240-241.

the *Meno*, and Aristotle's criticism is useful too, since Socrates will explore the possibility that technical know-how could assist with the pursuit of *arete* and the human good with Meno and Anytus as well. Our reading of the excerpt from the *Politics* also facilitates our analysis insofar as it attunes us to a tension which we might miss, if we were not prepared to see it. We might even recognize a connection between Aristotle's commentary on the relationship between technical know-how and "the good itself" and the distinction between the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός) and the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης). While the artisan may not benefit from knowing "the good itself," the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) could benefit from a technical know-how about the activity of politics, which *might* make someone a good person (ἀγαθός). Or, at least, this reasoning could partially explain the practice of the sophists who taught about such matters. Adkins observes a linguistic transformation in the specification of those who are good ("agathos"). He writes:

To take first the man himself: it has been shown that the *arete* of the *agathos polites* of the late fifth century is a skill, a *techne*. In view of the emphasis on success, this has always been true in a sense; but the codification of the knowledge required, so far as the sophists had succeeded in doing this, forces this aspect into the foreground. It is only to be expected that some more particularizing adjective than *agathos* will be current to commend those who display such skill. This adjective is *phronimos*: a word which, though not now coined for the first time, is, from the time of the composition of the earlier dialogues of Plato, or rather that of the first appearance of the thought which these dialogues reflect, used as a term to define the *agathos*. Since all men prize political skill, it is not surprising to find that all men prize the adjective *phronimos*, which may be rendered "intelligent in practical matters", and define such virtues as they approve in terms of the noun *phronēsis*, the intelligent handling of one's own interests, however conceived.⁶⁷

Adkins' synoptic provides a useful backdrop for our consideration of the *Meno*. On the one hand, there is the good citizen (or as Adkins puts it "*agathos polites*"), whose *arete* is a "skill" (a "*techne*") that the sophists purportedly teach. This *arete* is overtly political, and according to Adkins, those who exhibit this "skill" are the "*phronimos*" who have "*phronesis*." Adkins asserts that this term ("*phronimos*") is used to define the good ("*agathos*"). But which sort of "good" does Adkins mean? From our consideration of Aristotle's account in the *Politics*, we have a partial sense of the tension between the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός) and the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης)—specifically as two sorts of *arete* that cannot be reduced to one or the other.

⁶⁷ Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values*, 244-245.

Even though Adkins boldly asserts a certain relation between *arete*, the good (“*agathos*”), the good citizen (“*agathos polites*”), technical know-how (or “skill” (“*techne*”)), and “*phronesis*,” we need not take Adkins’ claim for granted. His observations are useful to us insofar as he identifies several key terms, which will also play a decisive role in the *Meno*. However, we will not presume to know the relation of these words with one another prior to our analysis. In particular, the relationship between “*phronesis*” and the good will figure prominently in Socrates’ discussion of *arete* in the *Meno*. In fact, we will exert considerable effort to an attempt to heed the implications of the relationship between “*phronesis*” and “the good” for the pursuit of *arete* in the *Meno*. Within the discussion of *arete* in the *Meno*, the relationship between “*phronesis*” and “the good” will prove more complicated (though no less important) than Adkins maintains.

Socrates

Before we commence with our analysis, we must complete one final preparatory task. Whenever a character enters the dialogue, we will examine testimony about the person so that we will be more sensitive to potential implications of their inclusion. Not even Socrates himself will avoid undergoing this procedure, but we will consider him in the introduction because of his unique role in the *Meno* (and other Platonic texts). Who is this man called Socrates? What is the significance of his participation in *this* dialogue?

Plato, Xenophon, and Aristophanes provide us with three primary sources of testimony about Socrates. A character called Socrates participates in several dialogues of Plato and Xenophon respectively, and he also is a character in Aristophanes’ comedy the *Clouds*. While we will not intentionally privilege any of these testimony over one another, we must admit to a tacit primacy of the Platonic text insofar as our investigation concerns the *Meno* and not Socrates broadly.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, these respective testimonia share three commonalities which will serve as

⁶⁸ Some scholars have taken an interest in the so-called “Socrates problem,” which stems from an interest in the “historical” Socrates. This problem has nothing to do with our inquiry. While we may incorporate the findings of historical research into our inquiry at times in order to attune ourselves to the stakes of a problematic, our inquiry as a whole does not rely on “historical facts” about Socrates in such a way which would make the “Socrates problem” of any interest to us. For that reason, our equal consideration of Plato, Xenophon, and Aristophanes poses no considerable challenges. Our present objective involves the cultivation of a sensitivity to the polyvalent play of Socrates’ inclusion in the *Meno* and not an attempt to establish “what Socrates *really* thought.”

our point of departure: Socratic ugliness, Socratic “cynicism,” and Socratic resolve for the pursuit of *arete*.⁶⁹

It may seem strange to take Socrates’ appearance as a point of departure for our inquiry, but Socrates’ reputation for his ugliness is as renowned as his self-professed ignorance.⁷⁰ Even Meno will compare Socrates to a torpedo fish “in looks and in other respects (τό τε εἶδος καὶ τᾶλλα),” a comparison which seems to emphasize their unflattering appearance as much as their respective power to paralyze.⁷¹ Some might be tempted to dismiss Socratic ugliness as just a strange and contingent quirk, but let us briefly consider whether such an assumption would be justified. Socrates will point out Meno’s beautiful appearance multiple times during the early stages of their discussion. Moreover, Anytus and Socrates will examine the so-called “noble and good men” (καλοὶ ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες) as potential teachers of *arete*.⁷² Translators translate the word “κάλος” as either “noble” or “beautiful” depending on the context. With an awareness of the possibility for this translational decision in mind, we might anticipate a preliminary intertwining of the beautiful (κάλος) and the good (ἀγαθός) in the *Meno*. And so, superficially, we might question whether the ugly Socrates would have been omitted categorically from being considered a “good person” in the eyes of some Greeks. We will defer any further consideration of this problem in the *Meno* until we begin our analysis of the text. In the meantime, we will consider Alcibiades’ speech in the *Symposium* as a preparatory analysis of the philosophically disruptive effect of Socrates’ ugliness on Athenian sensibilities.⁷³ Alcibiades claims:

Now, that you are like [the satyrs] at least in looks, Socrates, surely not even you would dispute... For he has wrapped this around himself on the outside, just as the carved Silenus; but once he is opened up, do you suspect, fellow drinking men, how full he is of moderation (σωφροσύνης)? Know that he’s not at all concerned if someone is beautiful (καλός)—and he holds this in such great contempt that no one would believe it—any more than if someone is rich (πλούσιος) or has any other honor (τιμὴν) of those deemed blessed (μακαριζομένων) by the multitude. But he believes that all these possessions are worth (ἄξια) nothing and that we are nothing, I tell you, and all his life he keeps on being ironical

⁶⁹ For an overview of the life of Socrates and an exhaustive list of sources from which we have learned about it, see Nails, “Socrates of Alopece” in *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics*, 263-269.

⁷⁰ Plato, *Symposium*, 215a-c, 221c-d, 221d-e, *Theaetetus*, 143e. Xenophon, *Symposium*, 4.19, 5.5-7. Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 362.

⁷¹ Plato, *Meno*, 80a.

⁷² On Meno’s beautiful appearance, *ibid.*, 71b, 76b-c, 80c. Socrates mentions beauty (κάλλος) as a good at 87e. The “noble and good men” (καλοὶ ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες) are first introduced at 92e in his conversation with Anytus, and Socrates continues to consider them with Meno through the remainder of the dialogue.

⁷³ Alcibiades is another notably beautiful (καλός) prospective ruler of the *polis*.

and playful to human beings. And when he is in earnest and opened up, I do not know if anyone has seen the images within; but I once saw them, and it was my opinion that they were so divine (θεῖα), golden (χρυσᾶ), altogether beautiful (πάγκαλα), and amazing that one had to do just about whatever Socrates commanded.⁷⁴

We can infer a surprising tension from Alcibiades' drunken praise/lamentation about the challenge Socrates posed to the Athenian *polis*. If being beautiful is necessary for a person to be good, then it should be impossible for Socrates to be a good person. Of course, we acknowledge that there is no explicit mention of *arete* or the "good person," but nevertheless, Alcibiades' speech is littered with axiological judgments. He mentions someone being beautiful or rich as examples of honor for which the multitude esteem people highly (deeming them "blessed"). And yet, according to Alcibiades, Socrates dismisses all of these sorts of honors as worthless. An ugly man who rejects the values of his *polis* is not so remarkable by itself, but the conclusion of Alcibiades' speech emphasizes to us why Socrates is so uncanny. Socrates keeps his beauty "within," and Alcibiades insists that what Socrates keeps inside himself is so divine, golden, and beautiful that he felt himself compelled to do whatever Socrates commanded. If Alcibiades were just any ordinary person, then, again, Socrates' captivation of him might be amusing but mostly uninteresting. However, Alcibiades became an extraordinarily influential Athenian politician. He is a powerful leader and commander of Athens—which is to say that he is not someone who *should* be susceptible to Socrates. Nevertheless, Alcibiades expresses the torment he feels because of Socrates throughout his speech. Everyone else praises Alcibiades, but Socrates alone is unmoved by Alcibiades. And further, Alcibiades feels beholden to Socrates! How is it possible that Socrates, who meets none of the conventional criteria for "goodness" in the Athenian *polis* (and even scorns them), exerts so much power over one of the most powerful men in Athens? In Alcibiades speech, we can see the vague outlines of a struggle between Socrates and the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης). Socrates' existence seemed to complicate foundational Athenian assumptions about the human good.

Furthermore, Socrates problematized Athenian assumptions with unconventional yet persuasive deeds and words. Socrates is a cynic—not in the contemporary sense of a pessimist or a contrarian skeptic. But rather, he is a sort of precursor to the cynical lineage of Diogenes of

⁷⁴ Plato, *Symposium*, 215b-216e.

Sinope, whom Plato allegedly called “Socrates gone mad.”⁷⁵ This form of cynicism relentlessly transgresses the limits of convention. Cynicism often draws attention to what is strange in the otherwise ordinary affairs of the *polis*, affairs which stem from sometimes justified and sometimes unjustified assumptions. For example, Socrates walked around barefoot, and this seemingly minor act of non-conformity disturbed many people.⁷⁶ There are obvious benefits of wearing shoes, but when we couple Socrates’ decision not to wear them with his other unconventional behaviors, we can start to notice the broader consequences of a seemingly inconsequential act of non-conformity. If we infer from the testimony in the *Clouds* and the *Symposium*, Socrates’ peers seemed to consider this behavior arrogant, as if it somehow made Socrates better than them. Whence come such a reaction? Upon what basis might Socrates or any other Athenian make a judgment about the relative “goodness” of a person? Socrates’ ugly appearance or his non-conforming behavior might vaguely gesture towards axiological judgments, but the connection becomes more contextualized once we add his speeches into our consideration. One of Socrates’ most salient, unconventional claims, is that the good person (ἀγαθός) must be beneficial to others.⁷⁷ We can see evidence of the controversial character of this claim through his conversations with interlocutors who disagree, e.g., Callicles, Meno, Thrasymachus.⁷⁸ Each of these characters present conventional lines of reasoning about the measure of the “good person,” which often equivocally implies also a measure of a “good leader.” Meno, Thrasymachus, and Callicles present various iterations of reasoning that justifies selfish political action. Against this myopic and dangerous political aim (e.g., benefit one’s friends, procure wealth for oneself, do whatever one wants), Socrates proposes another measure of the good person, which also carries political consequences. This assertion challenges the conventional measure of the human good, which justifies both the self-interested actions of those who rule *and* the admiration of the ruled, who admire the rulers

⁷⁵ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 55.

⁷⁶ Bare footedness is but one Socratic idiosyncrasy mentioned on a short list of characteristics in the *Clouds*; however, it is noteworthy *because* of its appearance in a comedy. To heed the mockery in this comedic depiction simultaneously requires one to admit the deviancy of his behavior. “...you, too, high priest of subtlest nonsense, / tell us what you want... / while you go swaggering along the street, / in bare feet, shifting both eyes back and forth. / You keep moving on through many troubles, / looking proud of your relationship with us.” Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 357-367. We find this same quirk mentioned in another part of Alcibiades’ speech in the *Symposium*, and once again, Alcibiades notes the disturbance that Socrates’ behavior caused in others. “...and without shoes he marched through the ice more easily than the others did shod; and the soldiers looked askance at him as if he were despising them.” Plato, *Symposium*, 220b.

⁷⁷ The first overt assertion of this claim in the *Meno* appears at Plato, *Meno*, 87e.

⁷⁸ Plato, *Gorgias*, 483c, 489c, 490a, 492a-c; *Meno*, 71e, 73c, 77b; *Republic*, 338c, 341a, 342d, 343b-344c.

because of their ability to act self-interestedly. Although Socrates frames his discourse in terms of the pursuit of *arete*, his reasoning nevertheless challenges the everyday assumptions which pervade life in the *polis*. In this sense, Socratic philosophical practice is surprisingly political.

But for what reason did Socrates cause such a disruption in the Athenian status quo? Socrates' relentless pursuit of *arete* forced him into a confrontation with the *polis*. The disruption is rooted in the intertwinement between the pursuit of the human good and life in the *polis*. Especially in a purportedly "good *polis*," it seems reasonable to think that the constituency of such a *polis* would know about *arete* and the human good. And yet, therein lies the problem. Socrates finds himself amidst a drought of wisdom in Athens.⁷⁹ No one seems to know what *arete* is. Nevertheless, Socrates is one of a very small number of Athenians (if not the only one) who saw a threat to the Athenian claim on the good. It will be our contention that this issue is a major part of what is at stake in the *Meno*; however, let us briefly reflect on a relevant excerpt from Socrates' speech in the *Apology*. In his counterfactual response to the possibility of his acquittal, Socrates imagines how he would go about his life after his trial. He maintains:

...I shall not cease to practice philosophy, to exhort you and in my usual way to point out to any one of you whom I happen to meet: Good sir (ὦ ἄριστε ἀνδρῶν), you are an Athenian, of the greatest (μεγίστης) *polis* with the greatest reputation (εὐδοκιμωτάτης) for both wisdom and strength (σοφίαν καὶ ἰσχύν); are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation, and honors (πλεῖστα καὶ δόξης καὶ τιμῆς) as possible, while you do not care for nor give thought (οὐκ ἐπιμελῆ οὐδὲ φροντίζεις) to intelligence (φρονήσεως) or truth (ἀληθείας), or the best possible state (βελτίστη) of your soul (ψυχῆς)?⁸⁰

In Socrates' response, he speaks rather overtly about the confrontation between his philosophical practice and some pervasive axiological assumptions in Athens. Socrates *first* points out to his hypothetical interlocutor that he is an Athenian—a man from the greatest *polis* with the greatest reputation for wisdom and strength! Because of the greatness of Athens, Socrates reproaches this hypothetical interlocutor for not caring enough about the well-being of his soul. The things for which Socrates shames this interlocutor (wealth, reputation, and honor) are indeed goods, but Socrates reproaches this man for caring about them *too* much. Whence come this judgment?

⁷⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 71a.

⁸⁰ Plato, *Apology*, 29d-e. Translation modified. Note that "intelligence" translates "φρόνησις" here. We will develop a more contextually sensitive interpretation once the term appears in our analysis of the *Meno*, but for now, we defer to a conventional translation.

Implicitly, we can identify a disagreement, a tension, or a disruption at the heart of Socrates' rebuke. Most Athenians must consider wealth, reputation, and honor worthy pursuits without qualification, but Socrates clearly disagrees. There is a limit to their worth, a limit which Socrates accuses his interlocutor of transgressing. We recently pointed out that Socrates's measure of the good person differs from conventional assumptions. With this claim in mind, we might ask: Who benefits from *arete*, when it is measured by the acquisition of wealth, reputation, and/or honor? Are those who acquire wealth, reputation, and honor benefited by their limitless acquisition, or do those who have these "goods" use them to benefit others? The former seems unlikely given Socrates' reproach, and the latter is only possible insofar as these goods can be "used." That is, it is not the wealth, reputation, or honor that are good (and so beneficial). In this excerpt from Socrates speech, we already find faint outlines of his confrontation with the Athenian pursuit of the human good.

An analysis of Xenophon's account of Socrates will help to draw our attention to another dimension of the conflict which we tracked preliminarily in the *Apology*.⁸¹ According to Xenophon, Socrates improved many people despite never promising to teach anyone:

Instead, [Socrates] rid many individuals of these things [namely, impious, lawbreaking, gluttonous, incontinent with regard to sex, and soft with regard to labor], after making (ποιήσας) them desire (ἐπιθυμῆϊν) *arete* and providing them with hopes (ἐλπίδας) that if they attended to themselves (ἑαυτῶν ἐπιμελῶνται) they would be noble and good (καλοὺς κἀγαθοὺς). And yet, he never promised at any time to be a teacher of this. But by visibly being so himself, he made those who spent time with him hope that by imitating him they would come to be of the same sort.⁸²

Whereas the Socrates of the *Apology* speaks in a more openly political register, the Socrates of the *Memorabilia* does so much more subtly. Xenophon employs the nebulous term "noble and good"

⁸¹ We consider two of the three sources of testimony about Socrates here. In Aristophanes' *Clouds*, however, Socrates appears crude, irreverent, and not particularly concerned with the human good. Insofar as the depiction of Socrates in the *Clouds* is satirical, it is not surprising that we find no explicit support for our claim that Socratic philosophical practice confronts the Athenian pursuit of the human good. If Socrates subverted the *polis*' axiological and teleological suppositions about the good (especially in its ambivalence between the good person and the good citizen), then we can read the *Clouds* as a subversion of Socratic subversion. That is, this depiction of Socrates calls into question *his* axiological suppositions by depicting him as a ridiculous person who, for example, thinks the clouds are deities and walks around barefoot insulting people. The ultimate confirmation of the threat posed by Socrates' subversive practice will always be his execution, but we can also read the satirical presentation of his practice in the *Clouds* as a tacit and unsympathetic testament to his politically subversive force. Surely other Athenians criticized Athens in this or that way, but not every critic of Athens became a character in a Greek play performed at the Dionysia.

⁸² Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, I.II.2-4. Translation modified.

(καλοὶ καὶγαθοί) as the end towards which a desire for *arete* aims, and this equivocal phrase will play a crucial role in the *Meno* as well. Does the noble and good person exhibit the *arete* of the good citizen or the *arete* of the good person? Could the noble and good person exhibit both, if it is possible to do so? In Xenophon's account, we encounter the tension between these two senses of *arete* more subtly. Even so, if we reflect on the vices which Socrates allegedly helped some people to overcome, we might notice that they would prevent someone from being a good citizen *or* a good person. In other words, we can see that it is difficult to demarcate clean boundaries between the measure of a good citizen and that of a good person. It is a genuine problem and not *just* a consequence of a haphazard or unreflective concern for the human good. Despite the differences between these two testimony, Xenophon's account supports our contention that we ought not expect an "abstract" or "universal" account of the good. Being a noble and good person is a worldly, political endeavor. With this claim, let our anticipatory consideration of the testimony about Socrates come to a close.

Conclusion

Our examination of *arete* in the *Meno* will progress linearly, and we will broadly follow the textual divisions of other commentators.⁸³ In Chapter I, we will analyze lines 70a-79e, in which Socrates and Meno discuss Meno's three attempts to account for what *arete* is. We will consider lines 80a-86c in Chapter II. This part of our inquiry will address Socrates' story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις), the exhibition with the παῖς, and Socrates' and Meno's subsequent discussion about it. In Chapter III, we will examine lines 86c-90b, and in our analysis, we will follow Socrates through a line of reasoning about how *arete* comes to be based upon a foundational supposition that *arete* is teachable. Our analysis in Chapter IV will cover lines 90b-95a, and we will examine Socrates' and Anytus' search for the teachers of *arete* through a discussion of sophists and "noble and good" Athenians. Finally, we will conclude with Chapter V in which we will interpret lines 95a-100c. In this concluding chapter, we will unpack Socrates' continuation of the search for teachers of *arete* with Meno, a search which will lead Socrates to revise their prior conclusion and contend instead that *arete* comes to be from divine allotment.

⁸³ There is no "standard" division of the *Meno*, although most commentators choose to divide the text at similar points. Our divisions abide by this norm.

Thus far, we have already posited a pair of claims: We will not look for a “Platonic philosophy” in the *Meno* because Plato does not “speak” in his dialogues. We also will deviate from a well-established tradition which assumes the *Meno* is foundational for the assertion of pre-natal knowledge (and other Platonistic, epistemological claims). While these claims are not meager, they also have a reactive character. They *respond* to other ways of reading the text. But in what way will we analyze the *Meno* differently? We will analyze the *Meno* as a political text, but not one which concerns so-called “political theory.” Our analysis of the *Meno* as “political” will heed the text as one in which Socrates and his interlocutors search for what *arete* is and how *arete* comes to be in Athens. We will draw out political themes within the *Meno* according to the question that guides Socrates’ and his interlocutors’ discussion. In Chapters I and II, our inquiry will focus more on the question about “what *arete* is,” and so we will examine Socrates’ and Meno’s effort to account for *arete*, an effort which we will interpret as the search for a sufficient measure of the good person. Our analyses in these chapters will emphasize various problems with ordinary measures of *arete* which emerge in the *polis* from unexamined assumptions about the human good, and we will also draw out the tacit significance of cooperative discourse for this pursuit. After Meno hears Socrates’ entire discourse on recollection, he will implore Socrates to shift the priority of their discussion to the question concerning “how *arete* comes to be.” In Chapters III, IV, and V, we will concentrate our inquiry on the consequences of Socrates’ reasoning about this other question, a question which is just as political as the first one. Our exploration of Chapter III will lead us to notice Socrates’ reliance on an analogical relation between the soul and the *polis*, and because of this analogy, we will interpret Socrates’ discourse in these chapters through its dual applicability. Initially, Socrates’ discourse will overtly concern the soul, and how “φρόνησις” seems to lead it when it is the soul of a good person (someone who exhibits *arete*); however, this reasoning carries political consequences too insofar as those who lead the *polis* are also considered good. Must these leaders also have “φρόνησις” then? Our sense of an equivocation between these two sorts of “good people” will force us to confront an ambiguity which becomes increasingly pervasive once Anytus enters the dialogue. Not only will Anytus not appear to exhibit the *arete* for which we search, but he will also draw attention to the precarious state of Athens in relation to *arete*, when he insists that noble and good Athenians are the teachers of it. The noble and good Athenians, who also just so happen to be Athenian politicians, will appear unlikely to be the teachers of *arete*, which also troubles their claim on the human good.

Nevertheless, once Meno returns to the discussion in the part of the text that we will analyze in Chapter V, we will develop a way of understanding divine allotment as an explanation for the mindless leadership of the politicians, and we will also explore Socrates' own role as a different sort of "political" leader in Athens. Let us begin our inquiry.

CHAPTER II: MENO ACCOUNTS FOR *ARETE* IN THREE WAYS: EMERGENT MEASURES OF *ARETE* IN THE *POLIS*

Introduction

We approach the dialogue ambivalently. We know that *Meno* concerns *arete*, and we are aware of some approaches to reading it. And yet, we begin our own approach to the *Meno* with a genuinely inquisitive spirit to see if it might tell us an unfamiliar story. Consequently, we set ourselves apart from the dominant Anglophone approach to the *Meno*. This departure from the conventional is not merely a contrarian gesture, but it is vital to the dialectical movement of philosophic engagement. Or, at least, this presupposition informs our approach to this text. We assumed it during our analysis of Socrates' participation in the dialogue: Socrates the cynic—not the contrarian—but an unconventional thinker, an anti-conventional thinker. Can it help us now as we begin our inquiry? Might we already orient our reading in an unfamiliar way by focusing on the conflict between the customary opinions of/in the *polis* and a resistance to them which *also* emerges out of/in the *polis*? Let us heed the opening of the dialogue with an attentiveness to this tension.

Meno's Preliminary Questioning (70a)

The *Meno* begins abruptly and without introduction. Meno asks Socrates three questions with several potential answers:

Can you tell me, Socrates, whether *arete* is something teachable (διδασκτὸν)? Or is it not teachable, but something that comes from practice (ἀσκητὸν)? Or is it something neither from practice nor from learning (μαθητὸν), but something that comes to human beings by nature (φύσει), or some other way?⁸⁴

We could condense Meno's questions into the following form: In what way does *arete* come to be in humans? Superficially, Meno signals to us that we should expect to hear a discourse on *arete*, but he has also already begun to refine the scope of the inquiry. This dialogue will not concern the full spectrum of *arete*. Meno does not ask about the *arete* of the pruning-knife, the soil, or the dog. He asks about the *arete* particular to human beings. This question has general appeal insofar as the *arete* particular to humans concerns every human, but when the man called Meno asks this question, it takes on additional implicature *because* he is the one asking this question. What do we

⁸⁴ Plato, *Meno*, 70a. It is unclear why Meno distinguishes something teachable from something learnable.

know about Meno? And how does his articulation of the question affect the contextual resonance of it within the dialogical movement of the text?

This abrupt and formulaic beginning sets the tone for the rest of the conversation in three ways: (1) Meno's interest in this question is noteworthy to us because of our awareness of the character and deeds of Xenophon's Meno in the *Anabasis*. Without such an awareness, some of the irony and playfulness of Meno's exchange with Socrates disappears. (2) Meno also frames his opening questions in the terms set by conventional discourse at the time, i.e., the coming to be of *arete* from instruction (teaching/learning), practice, or nature. This conventional framing becomes all the more conspicuous because we have made it a point to see Socratic philosophical practice as quintessentially unconventional. Moreover, because of the conventional character, Meno's questions come across more combative than genuine. He does not seem to ask these questions because he has no idea about an answer, but he would rather like to hear Socrates speak on it in these familiar terms. This point leads to the third feature which is that (3) Meno will subsequently reveal that he does believe that he knows about *arete*.⁸⁵ In that case, why bother to ask Socrates these questions at all? What other purpose(s) might his questions serve? We will consider these three features in turn as a way of attuning ourselves to some of the undercurrents flowing beneath Meno's engagement with Socrates.

In addition to Plato's *Meno*, Xenophon's *Anabasis* provides us the most detailed glimpse into the Thessalian man named Meno.⁸⁶ There is not consensus among critical scholars about how to date the manuscripts of the *Meno* and the *Anabasis* precisely, and contemporary studies of the intertextuality of Platonic texts with Xenophonic texts highlight a fruitful and lively site of investigation.⁸⁷ Even so, their common reference to Meno's "comrade" (ἑταῖρος) and "lover" (ἑραστής) Aristippus, who is otherwise not mentioned in any other Attic Greek text, tempts us to consider other valences of Meno's inclusion in this dialogue.⁸⁸ In particular, Xenophon's harsh

⁸⁵ Cf. his subsequent readiness to answer what *arete* is at 71e and onward, as well as his remark at 80b that he has given speeches many times on *arete*.

⁸⁶ Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 1.2.6-3.1.47. For other ancient accounts of the historical Meno, see also Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History*, 14.19.8-9, 14.27.2-3. Ctesias in Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker*, 688, 27-28.

⁸⁷ *Plato and Xenophon: Comparative Studies*, 5-8, 101.

⁸⁸ Nails, *The People of Plato*, 50. Schleiermacher agrees with this assumption. Schleiermacher, *Schleiermacher's Introduction to the Dialogues of Plato*, 210, 219.

judgment of Meno's character in the *Anabasis* shifts the tenor of Meno's concern for human *arete* in the *Meno*. Concerning the character of Meno, Xenophon writes the following:

Menon the Thessalian was *manifestly eager for enormous wealth*—eager for command in order to get more wealth and eager for honor in order to increase his gains; and *he desired to be a friend to the men who possessed greatest power in order that he might commit unjust deeds without suffering the penalty*. Again, for the accomplishment of the objects upon which his heart was set, he imagined that the shortest route was by way of perjury and falsehood and deception, while he counted straightforwardness and truth the same thing as folly. Affection he clearly felt for nobody, and if he said that he was a friend to anyone, it would become plain that this man was the one he was plotting against. He would never ridicule an enemy, but he always gave the impression in conversation of ridiculing all his associates.... Again, all whom he found to be perjurers and wrongdoers he would fear, regarding them as well armed, *while those who were pious and practiced truth, he would try to make use of, regarding them as weaklings*. And just as a man prides himself upon piety, truthfulness, and justice, so *Menon prided himself upon ability to deceive, the fabrication of lies, and the mocking of friends*; but the man who was not a rascal he always thought of as belonging to the uneducated.⁸⁹

Xenophon's judgment of Meno gives us key insight into his character. Without Xenophon, what do we *really* know about Meno? Depending on one's familiarity with the Greek, one might recognize that the name "Meno" (Μένων) is homonymic with the verb "μένω" which we often translate as "to stay, remain, or wait."⁹⁰ This insight into the semantic play of Meno's name might allow us to anticipate a certain disposition or recurring trait throughout the dialogue (in a vague and preliminary way), but it tells us little about the implicature of their respective speeches or about the unspoken, yet persistent, dynamic between Socrates and Meno. When we hear Meno's speeches now—even just these initial few questions—his words take on a completely different resonance. We no longer hear Meno's questions as an expression of a concern in which any human whatsoever might take an interest, but rather, we hear these questions as an expression of an exploitative and vicious man. Does Plato's Meno come to Socrates out of concern for the direction of his life, or more darkly, does he do so in order to learn new ways to exploit those whom he considers weaker than himself? Perhaps neither explanation accounts for Meno's interest in their meeting, but in any case, it is evident that a sensitivity to Meno's character affects the significance of the dialogical exchange beyond the homonymic play.

⁸⁹ Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 169-171. All emphasis mine

⁹⁰ Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 43-44. Sallis, *Being and Logos*, 68.

Not only does the inclusion of Xenophon's speech transform our perception of Meno's participation in the dialogue as a whole, but it also affects the interpersonal dynamic of the opening questions as questions which Meno addresses to *Socrates*. If Meno's persona in this dialogue bears any resemblance to the Meno of Xenophon's account, then we would have a difficult time believing that he cares about the answers to these questions (or he would only care insofar as knowing answers to these questions might give him more power to take advantage of others). He would care no more about how *arete* comes into being than he would about what *arete* is. And yet, Meno presents his question in terms that demonstrate a familiarity with contemporary, conventional discourse.⁹¹ We cannot yet determine whether this Meno is a vicious man, but he does seem to be an educated one. Someone has taught him *something* about *arete*. So then why does he now come to Socrates? Does he intend to deceive Socrates? If so, then for what purpose? If we take cues from Xenophon's account, then we can posit two ends which motivated him: wealth and power. Clearly Socrates cannot offer Meno wealth since Socrates' poverty was well known. Power, on the other hand, is something which Socrates does possess. Meno will later reveal that he had heard about Socrates before they met, but if he wants power from Socrates, does he even understand the nature of Socratic power?⁹² While we cannot answer this question immediately, we will simply note it now and return to it if it reappears later.

According to Xenophon's account, Meno has a desire for the power to commit unjust deeds and suffer no consequences, and he considers those who practice piety and truth weak. If we accept this account, then we could reasonably assume that Meno would view Socrates as one of those weak men. Upon such an assumption, we could read this initial encounter as the confrontation of a conventionally powerful man (Meno) attempting to take advantage of a weak and helpless adversary (Socrates) in an eristic dialogical battle of wits. Of course, we need not dramatize the encounter so fantastically; however, doing so does help us to feel the tension that precedes Socrates' first response. This tension is worth noting also because of its importance for the establishment of a pretext which Socratic philosophical practice will subvert. For example, in such a dynamic, Meno's overall arrogant comportment would stem from his confidence in his superiority to Socrates, which is to say, he considers himself better in every way. Consequently,

⁹¹ For a selection of excerpts that indicate the conventional framing of Meno's questions, see Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle*, 88-92.

⁹² For Meno's admission of his vague and indirect familiarity with Socrates, see Plato, *Meno*, 80a.

every Socratic subversive gesture would echo back to this belief, calling into question the basis of Meno's superiority and thus his "power." Such a confrontation will appear ironic too. Meno's desire for power and personal advantage will lead him to confront a "foe" whose strange and uncanny power will completely paralyze him.⁹³ Meno's desire for power will force him to confront the basis upon which he esteems his highest values! This desire for power will make him powerless according to his own understanding of a powerful man. We only consider these matters in a preparatory way for now. Let us turn to Socrates' response. While it may seem strange and tangential on the surface, Socrates' response to Meno's questions will layout the terms of the problematic for the remainder of the dialogue.

Socrates' Response (70b-71b)

If we read the text with the same expectations of explicitness that we have when we read an essay, then the text would present us with a considerable obstacle from the beginning: Why does Socrates respond with an apparent non-sequitur?⁹⁴ However, our attention to the dynamic between Meno and Socrates (at least from Meno's perspective) helps us to see why Socrates must respond in this way. Socrates likely does not see himself as either weak or inferior to Meno. However, more importantly, Socrates' unwillingness to conform to Meno's terms of discussion may reveal insight into the question concerning the *arete* particular to human beings. Let us heed Socrates' response—both his manner of speaking and its content:

Meno, it used to be (πρὸ τοῦ μὲν) that Thessalians were well-reputed (εὐδόκιμοι) among the Greeks and were admired (ἐθαυμάζοντο) both for horsemanship (ἐφ' ἰπικῆ) and for wealth (πλούτῳ), but now (νῦν δέ), it seems to me, they are to be admired for wisdom (σοφία) also; and not least of them the fellow citizens (πολιταί) of your comrade (ἐταίρου), Aristippus, the Larissians. And the one responsible (αἰτιός) for this happening to you is Gorgias. For when he came to the *polis*, he captivated the foremost men among the Aleudai as lovers of wisdom (ἐραστὰς ἐπὶ σοφία), of whom your lover (ἐραστής) Aristippus is one, and the foremost of the other Thessalians too. And in particular this is the habit (ἔθος) to which he has habituated (εἴθικεν) you, namely, of answering both fearlessly and magnificently (ἀφόβως τε καὶ μεγαλοπρεπῶς) whenever anyone asks you anything, as is fitting for those who know (ὥσπερ εἰκὸς τοὺς εἰδότας); inasmuch, indeed, as he makes himself available to any Greek who wants to question him about whatever one might wish to ask, and there is no one whom he does not answer. But hereabouts, dear Meno, the opposite condition prevails: it's as if some sort of drought of wisdom (ἀρχμός τις τῆς

⁹³ Ibid., 80a-80b.

⁹⁴ Of course, Socrates' ultimate claim not to know "what *arete* is" does respond to Meno's questions, but it is the circumlocutious way in which he reaches this conclusion that would seem almost nonsensical.

σοφίας) has come about, and there seems to be a danger that wisdom (σοφία) has left these parts for yours. And so, if you are willing to ask anyone hereabouts such a question, there is no one who will not laugh and say, “Stranger (ξένε), I seem to be in danger of your thinking me to be someone who is blessed (μακάριός)—to know about *arete*, whether it is something teachable or in what way it comes about. But I am so far from knowing about *arete*, whether it is something teachable or not teachable, that I happen not to know at all what that thing *arete* itself is.”

And I myself, Meno, am in this condition, too. I share the poverty of my fellow citizens (πολίταις) in this matter and blame myself for not knowing about *arete* at all. And how could I know what sort of thing something is, if I do not know what it is? Or does it seem possible to you that someone who has no cognizance (γινώσκει) of Meno at all, who he is, could know (ειδέναι) whether he is handsome (καλός) or rich (πλούσιος) or well-born (γενναῖός), or the opposite of these? Does it seem possible to you?⁹⁵

Socrates responds to Meno’s questions in a conspicuously verbose manner, and at no point does he address Meno’s questions explicitly. While Socrates, or one of his interlocutors, frequently respond with lengthy speeches, this particular instance stands out because of the quantity of seemingly irrelevant details. Why does Socrates mention the reputation of the Thessalians? Why mention horsemanship? Why does Socrates pick out Aristippus by name out of the Aleudai? Why mention Gorgias? Our analysis of some possible assumptions which Meno may bring to the dialogue about his own superiority and desire for power led us to anticipate the importance of understanding Socrates’ own “power.” While Socrates’ response does not help us in that regard, his speech does insinuate a profoundly subversive response to Meno’s conventional framing of the question concerning the genesis of *arete*. In order to see the depth and cunning of the Socratic response, we must work slowly through his speech. In doing so, we will begin to see for ourselves the urgency of the problem of *arete*—an urgency which Meno does not seem to acknowledge through his acceptance of the conventional framing of the problem. Meno challenged Socrates to speak about *arete*, but there was nothing challenging about the challenge. It was just a game. Socrates rejects *this* challenge and pulls Meno into a much greater one.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Plato, *Meno*, 70b-71b. Translation modified. *Polis* will remain untranslated throughout, referring nebulously to the so-called “city-state.” While a precise definition of a *polis* is not necessary for our inquiry, we can note several key features of it. It names a site of community in which constituents live with one another, enjoying a share of human goods and abiding by common customs, laws, and ways of thinking. While we will examine the nature of its relationship with *arete* in our inquiry, we can infer preliminarily from Socrates’ response that the *polis* does have *some* relationship with *arete*.

⁹⁶ Cf. Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, 40. “Socrates does not take up the Thessalian’s challenge: he does not answer the question at all.”

Socrates begins his response with a temporal comparison between the present reputation of Thessaly and its reputation among the Greeks in some indeterminate past. Anastaplo and Berns translate “πρὸ τοῦ μὲν” as “it used to be.” They are, of course, justified in such a translation, since it is more idiomatic for most English speakers than simply “before this [now/time],” which is how this sequence of particles would translate “literally.” In any case, although the semantic difference may be small, we must note this temporal comparison (to which the μὲν/δέ construction draws attention) because of its implications in Socrates’ response. Texts contemporary with and prior to the *Meno* attest to Thessaly’s reputation for opulence—so much so that Thessalian wealth became a sort of literary trope.⁹⁷ Thessaly was a region renowned for its abundance of material resources, especially pastoral goods, and this reputation manifest through the frequent use of “...the epithet ‘Thessalian’ next to a horse [to] serve as a guarantee of quality” in proverbs and poetry.⁹⁸ In this vein, we can see signs of the fusion of the mythological and historical. While ancient testimonies and archaeological findings might reassure us of the material grounds for Thessaly’s reputation, such a reputation also flourished because of poets and tragedians, whose work served various functions including the distribution of glory (and shame) for individuals and peoples.⁹⁹

Thus, we might understand Socrates’ point here in two ways: First, “the Greeks” know well about Thessalian “greatness,” since they have had this reputation for a long time.¹⁰⁰ Consequently, we should note the sense in which Socrates subtly attends to *and* subverts Meno’s questions. If Socrates attributes so much greatness to the Thessalians, then it behooves Meno to agree. And yet, Meno’s agreement would lead us to wonder again why he asks his initial questions about the genesis of human *arete*. Most notably, whence come this recent Thessalian wisdom

⁹⁷ Aston, “Friends in High Places: The Stereotype of Dangerous Thessalian Hospitality in the Later Classical Period,” 248. Mili, *Religion and Society in Ancient Thessaly*, 116.

⁹⁸ Mili, *Religion and Society in Ancient Thessaly*, 261.

⁹⁹ For example, Pindar, *Tenth Pythian*. Bacchylides, *Ode*, 14b 6-10. See also, Detienne, “The Memory of the Poet” in *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*, 39-52.

¹⁰⁰ Does Socrates mean only the Athenians? And if not, who ought to be included among “the Greeks”? This ambiguity creates the sense that this distinction between Greeks and Thessalians might function as a point of differentiation. Is Socrates implying that the Thessalians are not properly Greeks? Such a claim would have some basis as Thessaly’s relationship with Athens was fraught. Regions in northern Greece, such as Thessaly and Macedon, were generally looked upon with suspicion. However, the relationship between Athens and Thessaly spanned the entire spectrum of kinship and hostility due to Thessaly’s lack of unity, i.e., there was not general hostility or alliance between Athens and Thessaly due to the fractured nature of Thessalian society. Individual relationships between families often had a greater influence. Aston, “Friends in High Places: The Stereotype of Dangerous Thessalian Hospitality in the Later Classical Period,” 263. Thucydides is our primary source on Athenian-Thessalian relations. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.107.7, 2.22.3, 4.78.

(σοφία)? And if Meno himself is a Thessalian, should he not also have a share in it? And if he has a share in it, then would he not have direct experience of its coming to be in him?¹⁰¹ Socrates' praise of Thessaly seems to turn Meno's questions back on him, but it also draws attention to the relationship between the *arete* of the *polis* and the *arete* of the individual. Second, Socrates subverts Meno's presumption of superiority as well. While no Greek would dispute Thessaly's reputation for wealth or horsemanship (since they are well established in these matters), Thessaly has only recently become known for its wisdom (σοφία) according to Socrates. Because Socrates concludes his speech with his own admission not to know what *arete* is, it creates some doubt about the sincerity of Socrates' attribution of wisdom (σοφία) to the Thessalians, and so tacitly to Meno too. Or, in a more characteristically Socratic move, he may believe the hear-say about Thessaly's reputation for wisdom (σοφία) but doubt its value for pursuing *arete*. In either case, we can immediately infer an air of suspicion towards Meno in Socrates' response. Meno's over-confident and ostentatious questioning is reminiscent of the ostentatious over-confidence of a person who recently became very wealthy, whom we would call *nouveau riche*; however, in this case, we would more accurately call Meno and the Thessalians who behave like him *nouveau sage*. Meno's behavior betrays a lack pedigree, and this lack "reveals" itself through Meno's dialogical comportment and the reputation of Gorgias' students.¹⁰² Socrates and Meno are in a different "class" so to speak. We can see another sign of this Socratic, or perhaps more broadly Athenian, suspicion towards Thessaly manifest in the *Crito*, when Socrates personifies the laws speaking to him.¹⁰³ We can find additional traces of this attitude in other Athenian sources as well.¹⁰⁴ We will not attempt to determine whether the Athenians were justified in their prejudice against the

¹⁰¹ We might infer that Meno thinks *arete* can be taught insofar as his instruction from Gorgias has allowed him to speak confidently about it. Of course, it is one thing to speak about *arete*, and it is another to exhibit it. Gorgias does not claim to teach *arete*, but he does teach how to speak cleverly. Plato, *Meno*, 95c.

¹⁰² "And in particular this is the habit (ἔθος) to which [Gorgias] has habituated (εἰθίκεν) you, namely, of answering both fearlessly and magnificently (ἀφόβως τε καὶ μεγαλοπρεπῶς) whenever anyone asks you anything, as is fitting for those who know (ὥσπερ εἰκὸς τοὺς εἰδότας) ..." Ibid., 70b.

¹⁰³ Plato, *Crito*, 53d. They ask him, "Or will you leave those places and go to Crito's friends in Thessaly? There you will find the greatest license (ἀκολασία) and disorder (ἀταξία)..." In the *Gorgias*, Socrates describes the corrupt soul using this word, ἀκολασία, as an apparent antonym to σωφροσύνη. Cf. Plato, *Gorgias*, 505b. On Athenian self-understanding and attitudes towards Thessaly, see Aston, "Friends in High Places: The Stereotype of Dangerous Thessalian Hospitality in the Later Classical Period." Mili, *Religion and Society in Ancient Thessaly*. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle*, 84. Mallkin, *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity*. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*. Bakola, "A Missed Joke in Aristophanes' Wasps." Pownall, "The Decadence of the Thessalians: A Topos in the Greek Intellectual Tradition from Critias to the time of Alexander." Westlake, *Thessaly in the Fourth Century B.C.*, especially 40-46.

¹⁰⁴ Aeschines, *Against Timarchus*, 178; Demosthenes, *On the Chersonese*, 42; Demosthenes, *Against Leptines*, 109.

Thessalians as it falls outside the purview of this inquiry; however, the awareness of such an attitude helps add more nuance to the tone of Socrates' response.

Let us take a brief step back to review how the beginning of Socrates' speech functions as both a response to and subversion of Meno's questions/challenge. Socrates immediately reframes the discussion of *arete*. Rather than inquire about *arete* through the codified discourse of the sophists, as Meno attempted through his initial formulation, Socrates considers the reputations of Meno's *polis* (Thessaly), his associates (Aristippus and the Aleudai), and his instructor (Gorgias). Meno occupies a very different socio-political milieu than Socrates, and so the conditions under which their respective lives have developed differ considerably as well. Meno's current stage of development also distinguishes him from Socrates, and Meno's personal development appears proportional to that of Thessaly. Meno comes from a *polis* which has only recently acquired a reputation for wisdom (σοφία), and Meno's behavior demonstrates this immaturity.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, Socrates only mentions Athens' drought of wisdom (σοφία) and the departure of wisdom (σοφία) from his *polis*. He dissimulates the weight of his insight rather than confidently assert it, and he engages the problem of *arete* so circumspectly that his speech appears tangential and irrelevant on first glance. But we cannot allow ourselves to be fooled like Meno will be. If we search for what is necessary in Socrates' response, then we see an intimation of our problematic from the very beginning. Socrates addresses Meno's *polis*, the *polis* itself (Thessaly) and its constituents (Aristippus, the Aleudai, and Gorgias), because we cannot understand *arete* apart from the *polis*. The beginning of Socrates' investigation of *arete* with Meno develops out of a reflection on Meno's *polis*. There is nothing abstract or "other-worldly" about it. Meno's questions disclose his distance from the problem of *arete*, but Socrates' response—its conversational form and contextual concern for Meno's unique existential position—clears a site for the inquiry to take root. To speak on *arete* requires one to speak on the *polis*.

We might wonder why Socrates approaches the dialogue in this way; however, there is an obvious reason for Socrates to speak with subtle sophistication. After all, Meno was trained by Gorgias the famous rhetorician who teaches a proficiency in clever speech. Socrates subverts any pretense of superiority through his response to Meno's challenge. Socrates speaks no less cleverly

¹⁰⁵ Presently, we have only encountered his curt and detached framing of the question about *arete*, but Meno will show what kind of man he is with greater detail as we proceed through the dialogue.

(even if he does not mean to), yet his speech opens up the problematic character of an inquiry into *arete*.¹⁰⁶ Meno, on the other hand, approaches the dialogue with Socrates boldly and aggressively, jumping immediately into “learned” discourse because of his dual conceit. On the one hand, if he shares a likeness to the Meno of Xenophon’s account, then he may do so because of his lack of regard for Socrates. At worst, he would simply overpower Socrates in the dialogue, and at best, he could learn something new from Socrates about how to exhibit *arete*, which would make him more powerful. His concern for *arete* corresponds with its expedience as a means to an end. On the other hand, Meno’s vain estimation of his own knowledge of *arete*, which was cultivated by Gorgias’ instruction, leads him into this encounter with Socrates. If Meno can recite teachings on *arete* proficiently, then he may impress Socrates, the others who are present, and anyone who hears about the exchange. While such a concern for reputation diverges from Socrates’ own concern for *arete* (as we will see), from Meno’s perspective, an encounter with such a “dangerous” adversary would present him with an easy opportunity to earn a good reputation (εὐδόκιμος) for his “wisdom” (σοφία).¹⁰⁷

Socrates presents his discourse in a deceptively simple and familiar mode of speech. The deception is, again, twofold. Socrates’ speech deceives because its content appears irrelevant, and so if Meno (or any other listener) fails to heed it, then the speech will sound like babbling and a mere concession of ignorance. However, the simplicity of Socrates’ speech deceives in another way as well. Socrates speaks conversationally with Meno and in everyday terms, but this ordinary speech presents an extraordinarily difficult problem. Socrates claims not to know “what *arete* is,” but his approach to Meno’s questions implies that a proper investigation of *arete* must include a consideration of the *polis*. We might expect the former question to take an abstract and general form (a search for what *arete* is itself by itself), but if we investigate it in conjunction with the latter insight, then the inquiry requires concrete considerations (of Thessaly, Athens, or some other *polis*). This tension intimates but one dimension of the difficulty involved in an inquiry of *arete*, and yet, it only appeared to us through a close analysis of Socrates’ subtle speech. We do not yet

¹⁰⁶ On Socrates’ “unintentional cleverness,” see Plato, *Euthyphro*, 11d. On a dialogical comportment that opens up rather than closes off inquiry, see Plato, *Meno*, 75d-75e, 80e.

¹⁰⁷ Meno may not respect Socrates, but others do. Because prestige is a social good, it only matters for Meno’s sake how others see the exchange. On Meno’s awareness of Socrates’ reputation as an interlocutor, see Plato, *Meno*, 80a. Warnek reads the situation similarly. Warnek, *Descent of Socrates Self-Knowledge and Cryptic Nature in the Platonic Dialogues*, 125.

know how Meno will respond to such subtlety. Will he be an amiable interlocutor or a combative one?¹⁰⁸ For amiable interlocutors, an engagement with Socratic philosophical practice presents an opportunity for a more thorough investigations of problem with grave consequences and a confrontation with their deeply rooted presuppositions. Although this process is challenging, it facilitates growth. On the other hand, for combative ones, Socratic philosophical practice appears reminiscent of sophistic mind-games and intellectual sleights-of-hand which function only to embarrass the interlocutor or make him look foolish. Such interlocutors often oppose Socratic philosophical practice vehemently and refuse to confront their presuppositions. In either case, Socratic philosophical practice draws attention to genuine problems without easy solutions, and we should expect to see this process unfold in the *Meno* as well.

Many moments in a dialogue go unnoticed (or, at least, unremarked upon) by Socrates, the interlocutor(s), and/or the spectators (e.g., the *παῖς* or Anytus in this dialogue). At the same time, the text presents itself to *us*, and we should watch out for moments which hide themselves from the dialogical participants but which appear clearly to us as the “silent participants.” One such moment of thematic importance is the opposition in Socrates’ speech between the Greeks’ admiration of Thessaly for horsemanship and wealth, on the one hand, and Socrates’ suggestion to include wisdom (σοφία) as a third cause for admiration. For reference, Socrates proclaims, “Meno, it used to be that Thessalians were well-reputed among the Greeks and were admired both for horsemanship and for wealth, but now, as it seems to me, they are to be admired for wisdom also...”¹⁰⁹ Socrates begins his speech with his recognition of the Greeks’ admiration for Thessaly. Socrates does not simply express his own axiological esteem for Thessaly, but he instead expresses the esteem of the Greeks at large.¹¹⁰ However, Socrates immediately augments Thessaly’s good reputation with his own personal judgment (“as it seems to me” (ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ)) after the contrastive particles (“νῦν δέ”). The structure of the sentence encourages the inclusion of wisdom (σοφία) as a third object of admiration alongside the other two—were it not for the interruption of “...but now, as it seems to me (νῦν δέ, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ)....” The syntax tempts this reading because

¹⁰⁸ *Charmides*, *Theatetus*, *Laches* are examples of dialogues with amiable interlocutors; whereas *Gorgias* and *Protagoras* are examples of dialogues with combative interlocutors. The *Republic* includes both kinds of interlocutors. Thrasymachus is combative while Glaucon and Adeimantus are amiable. Socrates also remarks upon two ways of engaging such interlocutors later. Plato, *Meno*, 75d-e.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 70a. “ὦ Μένων, πρὸ τοῦ μὲν Θεσσαλοὶ εὐδόκιμοι ἦσαν ἐν τοῖς Ἑλλησιν καὶ ἐθαυμάζοντο ἐφ’ ἰππικῇ τε καὶ πλούτῳ, νῦν δέ, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, καὶ ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ....” The Greek will be crucial to the following analysis.

¹¹⁰ There may be a hint of flattery in this remark too.

the second half of the sentence (the part which follows the contrastive particles) borrows its subject and verb from the first half.¹¹¹ This syntactical structure is common in Attic Greek prose, but it has a subtle effect, namely, implying a connection between contrastive claims within this sentence. While part of this process is merely syntactical and produces semantic content, the implied subject and verb (“to be admired” (ἐθαυμάζοντο)) hints at the assimilation of the recent (νῦν δέ) reputation for wisdom (σοφία) into the previously established (“it used to be” (πρὸ τοῦ μὲν)) reputation/admiration for Thessalian horsemanship and wealth. Although this sentence poses no problems syntactically, it draws attention to two enormous contextual complications.

The first complication concerns the status of the latter claim (namely, that Thessaly should be admired for wisdom (σοφία) too). It seems unlikely that Socrates would admire a Thessalian wisdom (σοφία) which came to be as a result of Gorgias’ instruction (Socrates calls Gorgias “responsible” (αἰτιός) for Thessaly’s wisdom (σοφία)). Meno’s posing of the question concerning the genesis of *arete* gave us a preliminary glimpse into one consequence of Gorgias’ instruction (a codified and generalized teaching on *arete*). Our reading of Socrates’ suspicious and subversive response to Meno borrows considerably from Xenophon’s account of Meno’s character. Because of it, we have justification to doubt Socrates’ sincerity both because of the combative dynamic and the subversive undertones that we have been tracking so far in their conversation. However, Xenophon’s account is an augmentation to our reading not a foundation, and we will learn more about Meno as we progress through our inquiry. Nevertheless, despite the syntactical permissibility of including wisdom (σοφία) with horsemanship and wealth, we have sense of suspicion about the likelihood of Socrates’ agreement about the worthiness of Greek admiration for Thessalian wisdom (σοφία) like the admiration for Thessalian horsemanship and wealth. As we proceed, we will determine whether this suspicion finds textual justification. The second complication builds off the implicit distinction in kind between horsemanship and wealth, on the one hand, and wisdom (σοφία), on the other hand. Wisdom (σοφία) is an *arete*.¹¹² Horsemanship and wealth are goods, but are they also *aretai*? The answer may not be as clear as it seems. Meno will very basically assert being wealthy (the acquisition of gold and silver) to be *arete*, and

¹¹¹ “πρὸ τοῦ μὲν” signals the first half of a contrastive claim, and “νῦν δέ” signals the second half. In the first half, Socrates claims that “...ἐθαυμάζοντο ἐφ’ ἱππικῆ τε καὶ πλούτῳ...” In the second half, he only says “καὶ ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ.” The most reasonable reading requires that we borrow the subject and verb from the first half as the sentence to which “καὶ ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ” should be attached.

¹¹² Ibid., 74a.

Themistocles' son Cleophantus earned a reputation for being a good horseman, which requires a certain *arete* too.¹¹³ While we may intuit a distinction, the syntactical subsumption of admiration for wisdom (σοφία) into the Greek admiration for Thessalian horsemanship and wealth bespeaks, at the very least, the plausibility of thinking horsemanship and wealth as *aretai*. What is responsible for this slippage and also for our sense of a distinction in kind? We cannot address this problem yet, so we must again note it and move on.

The corruptive power of Thessalian generosity appears as a common concern (and an indication of a general suspicion) in various Athenian works—including Plato's *Crito*.¹¹⁴ The suggestion of admiration for Thessalian wisdom (σοφία) inverts the direction of the corruptive force.¹¹⁵ Socrates appears to offer generous praise to Thessaly (and by extension, to Meno as well, who functions as a proximate representative), when he adds wisdom (σοφία) alongside horsemanship and wealth.¹¹⁶ Socrates tempts Meno with this generous “gift” (his admiration of Thessalian wisdom (σοφία)) just as moving/escaping to Thessaly appeared as an enticing (or dangerous) prospect to many Athenians (including Socrates). If Meno accepts this gift, then he might succumb to the same fate as those who acclimate themselves to the luxurious Thessalian lifestyle (an obvious example being Gorgias himself). Meno would dispossess himself of the

¹¹³ On wealth as a good, see *ibid.*, 78c, 87e. Horsemanship appears again in Socrates' discussion of “good men” and *arete* with Anytus. *Ibid.*, 93d.

¹¹⁴ Other examples include Aristophanes' *Wasps*, Theopompos of Chios' *Philippika*, and Xenophon's *Memorabilia*.

¹¹⁵ That is, Athens' (or at least *an* Athenians') corruption of Thessaly (or at least *a* Thessalian). This inversion plays off the charge of corruption against Socrates which he addresses in the *Apology*. The nature of Socratic “corruption” in this case (and likely in the ones for which he was brought into court) may share in the ambivalence of the *pharmakon*—it has the power both to cure and poison.

¹¹⁶ Book IV of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* begins with a discussion of generosity (ἐλευθεριότητος); however, his remarks do not extend beyond its application to the distribution of wealth. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1119 b22. The term appears throughout the Platonic corpus as well albeit less *explicitly* as an *arete* (although still alongside other, more commonly recognized *aretai*). For example, in the *Republic*, Socrates remarks, “...am I not right in saying that neither we, nor the guardians we are raising, will be educated in music and poetry until we know the different forms of moderation, courage, frankness (ἐλευθεριότητος), high-mindedness (μεγαλοπρεπείας), and all their kindred...” Plato, *Republic*, 402c. G.M.A. Grube offers this translation of ἐλευθεριότητος as “frankness,” which suggests that the term does not necessarily have the restricted sense which we find in Aristotle's account. Finally, in Liddell and Scott's Greek lexicon, they describe ἐλευθεριότητος as “the character of an ἐλευθέριος, esp. freeness in giving, liberality,” citing its usage in Plato, Aristotle, and a passage from Plutarch. One of the usages in Plato comes from the passage in the *Republic* cited above, and the other comes from *Theaetetus*, 144d, which refers both to one's manner of handling money and also to one's general manner, i.e., a freeman, free-spirit. For this sense, including its usage in Democritus, Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, and others, see Liddell and Scott's entry on ἐλευθέριος. Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 582. These various usages offer precedent for understanding Socrates' inclusion of wisdom (σοφία) as a kind of “generosity” (freeness in giving), which also subverts Meno's self-confidence. Meno's acceptance of the praise will require him to “prove” himself.

search for *arete*, thinking himself already wise (σοφός) due to Socrates' praise.¹¹⁷ Meno, of course, would likely not see the risk of this prospect, since his understanding of the “dangerous gift” as a Thessalian would differ significantly from that of an Athenian. However, it is clear to us, who share no meaningful predilection towards Athens or Thessaly, that the content of Socrates' suggestion shares an analogical structure with the temptation of Thessalian generosity. Meno may also have a greater interest in the reputation for wisdom (σοφία) than for being wise (σοφός) anyway. Generosity (ἐλευθεριότητος), like wisdom (σοφία), being fearless (ἄφοβος), or magnificence (μεγαλοπρεπής), can be a good thing, but its usage matters. Does Socrates benefit Meno with his generous praise? It remains to be seen. Nevertheless, Socrates subsequently intimates the relative benefit of answering questions fearlessly and magnificently, when he describes this consequence of Gorgias' instruction (i.e., “answering both fearlessly and magnificently whenever anyone asks you anything, *as is fitting for those who know*”).¹¹⁸ If Gorgias' students do become “knowers” (εἰδότες), then they answer questions properly when they answer fearlessly and magnificently. However, if they are not knowers (εἰδότες), then they err. Moreover, if Gorgias' students are not knowers, then it also seems unlikely that Thessaly deserves admiration for wisdom (σοφία), since Socrates holds Gorgias responsible for it. These dialogical habits (answering fearlessly and magnificently) are not sufficient conditions for the exhibition of this *arete* (wisdom (σοφία)), although they may be useful in other ways.¹¹⁹ While it may be fitting

¹¹⁷ This dispossession mirrors the warning of the laws in the *Crito*, when they explain why Socrates should not escape to Thessaly: “You will spend your time ingratiating yourself with all men, and be at their beck and call. What will you do in Thessaly but feast, as if you had gone to a banquet in Thessaly?” Plato, *Crito*, 53e. Aston explicates the implications of this passage beautifully: “A curious change is depicted as concomitant with the physical and geographical shift entailed in going to Thessaly: among Kriton's Thessalian *xenoi*, Sokrates would have the status of a slave. The image of the disguise donned for the purpose of escape is one thing..., but this constitutes a permanent loss of status....[T]he philosopher would be at his hosts' beck and call, their instrument, locked into the reciprocal relationship of patronage, obliged to use his wisdom to repay his hosts for all the dinners he would perforce be receiving.” Aston, “Friends in High Places: The Stereotype of Dangerous Thessalian Hospitality in the Later Classical Period,” 252-253.

¹¹⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 70b. Emphasis mine. “...ἀφόβως τε καὶ μεγαλοπρεπῶς ἀποκρίνεσθαι ἐάν τις τι ἔρηται, ὥσπερ εἰκὸς τοὺς εἰδότες...”

¹¹⁹ Meno calls “magnificence” an *arete* at 74a and Socrates does not object to its classification. What then is the relationship between habit (ἔθος) and *arete*? Why does Socrates call it a habit here, but he does not correct Meno's classification of it as an *arete* later? Can a habit become an *arete*, or perhaps habits constitute parts of *arete* as a whole? See also Plato, *Republic*, 487a. During his discussion of a philosophical nature with Glaucon, Socrates makes the following claim: “Is there any objection you can find, then, to a pursuit that no one can adequately follow unless he's by nature good at remembering (φύσει εἶη μνήμων), quick to learn, high-minded (μεγαλοπρεπής), graceful, both a friend and relative of truth, justice, courage, and moderation?” (translation modified). Socrates seems to suggest that these qualities, some of which are commonly called *aretai* (namely, justice, courage, moderation), come to be by nature. We, of course, run into two problems here. First, we are not investigating the *Republic*, and we cannot excise this part of the text from its broader context. Furthermore, this line of inquiry is almost immediately interrupted by

for a knower to answer fearlessly and magnificently, it is not yet clear whether Meno (or the other Thessalian followers of Gorgias) belong to that category.¹²⁰ Consequently, the sincerity of Socratic generosity in the attribution of wisdom (σοφία) to the Thesalians becomes a more dubious prospect as we delve deeper into the implications of Socrates' speech. Simultaneously, the speech panders to Meno's sensibilities and seductively entices him to engage with it.¹²¹

Thus far, our analysis has primarily drawn attention to textual difficulties which we cannot yet address. We have many suspicions, but we need to press deeper into our inquiry to find out whether these suspicions are justified. Nevertheless, we have found some support even in the early stages of our inquiry. For example, we had some reservation about the sincerity of Socrates' praise of Thessalian wisdom (σοφία). Our suspicion initially arose from an analysis of the sentence's syntactical form in which the Greek admiration for horsemanship and wealth subsumed wisdom (σοφία) too; however, as we continued our analysis of Socrates' speech, we found another reason to doubt Thessalian wisdom (σοφία). Socrates holds Gorgias responsible for the influx of wisdom (σοφία) in Thessaly, but he also remarks on Gorgian instruction. Gorgias cultivates certain habits of speaking in his students, namely, answering fearlessly and magnificently as is fitting for those who know. Socrates' attribution of a likeness between Gorgias' students and knowers drew

Adeimantus (487b), who compares Socrates to an expert playing a game with amateurs. One implication of this comparison is that Socrates may be making advances in the discourse which a more experienced interlocutor would not be willing to accept. In other words, we may not be able to take Socrates at face-value. The second problem is that this claim seems to be at odds with our present one, namely, that Gorgias habituated his students to answer magnificently (μεγαλοπρεπῶς). This claim seems to imply that these habits came to be through instruction. While this passage from the *Republic* may not be able to help us resolve the question concerning the relationship between habit and *arete* (or which kind *μεγαλοπρεπής* is), it does draw our attention to the potential inclusivity of Meno's presupposed disjunctions. That is, perhaps Meno errs in positing an exclusive relationship between the paths of *arete's* coming to be.

¹²⁰ Socrates seems also to raise doubts about the Aleudai, who were the ruling family of Larissa, just a few lines later. He calls them "lovers of wisdom" (ἐραστὰς ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ), which, of course, does not make them "philosophers" (φιλοσόφους). To illustrate the implications of this description, we should compare Socrates' word choice here to his description of Aristippus as Meno's lover (ἐραστής) later in the sentence. As Sharples notes, "The Thesalians' admiration for Gorgias is by implication put on a similar level to Aristippus' infatuation for Meno; note the repetition of 'lovers'/'lover'" (Sharples, 124). Also, Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 40. While it might seem that a "love of wisdom" would be a prerequisite for becoming wise, the kind of love (erotic) and its object (the sort of "wisdom" (σοφία) that Gorgias teaches) seems to undermine Gorgias' students' status as knowers. We can extend this doubt to Meno's status as one among "those who know," since Socrates' suspicion seems to stem partially from his instruction, namely, Gorgias, who also instructed the Aleudai. Other factors withstanding, we can see Meno's engagement in the present discourse as some indication of the insufficiency of Gorgias' teaching with respect to *arete*. While not relevant currently (although it will be later), the Aleudai made an alliance with the Achaemenid Empire. See Herodotus, *The Histories*, 7.6.2, 7.130.3, 7.172-174.

¹²¹ I.e., Socratic generosity panders to Meno's vain sensibility (namely, to be praised as "wise"), and performatively, its enticing claims mixed with seductive praise draws Meno in while discouraging antagonism. Cf. Socrates' interaction with Thrasymachus, in which he makes him "gentle." Plato, *Republic*, 336b-354c especially 354b.

attention to the possibility that they may not, in fact, know that about which they speak. That is, they may answer fearlessly and magnificently without knowing what they are talking about. If Gorgias' students (Meno and the Aleudai) do not know what they are talking about, then in what sense does Thessaly deserve admiration for wisdom (σοφία)? This praise seems undeserved. Even so, Socrates does not raise doubts about Thessalian wisdom (σοφία), even if only tacitly, for no reason. But rather, this approach to Meno's question about the genesis of *arete* revealed to us the necessity of an examination of one's *polis* in any proper discourse on *arete*. Not only did we infer this necessity based upon Socrates' decision to respond to Meno's questions in the way that he did, but the relationship between the *polis* as the site of human activity and the activities for which a *polis* becomes admired implies the importance of a rooted inquiry into *arete*. Let us unpack this claim further.

When we examined the syntax of the sentence on the various objects of Greek admiration, we noticed immediately that wisdom (σοφία) is unequivocally an *arete*. While we suspected that horsemanship and wealth differed in kind from wisdom (σοφία), we could not easily exclude them as *aretai* insofar as *arete* has something to do with human goods. Technical know-how (τέχνη) about horsemanship may not be sufficient for a good life, but it is necessary if one wants to be a good horseman. Moreover, wealth may not be sufficient for a good life, but it is a human good. Finally, wisdom (σοφία) alone may not be sufficient for a good life, but anyone who exhibits *arete* must also be wise (σοφός). At this point in our inquiry, we only know that Meno asked Socrates to speak about the *arete* particular to human beings. In his response, Socrates named several human goods particular to Meno's *polis*. The pairing of Meno's question with Socrates' answer raises some questions for us as we move forward. How do human goods relate to the human good? How does *arete* relate to human goods and the human good? And what role does the *polis* play in these relations?

Having taken this step back to review our path, we can now move on to the final two parts of Socrates' speech: his self-abasement and his abasement of Athens through the counterfactual discourse of an imaginary Athenian and his final provocation of Meno's vanity. As we progress towards the conclusion of Socrates' speech, we should keep two questions in mind. How do these two parts function in the dynamic between Meno and Socrates? And what do they contribute to the present account of *arete*?

Socrates claims that “some drought of wisdom” (“ἀὐχμός τις τῆς σοφίας”) has come to be in Athens and that the Athenians are at risk of wisdom (σοφία) departing from Athens to Thessaly. The ecological and prophetic imagery paints a peculiar picture of the relationship between Athens and Thessaly. On the one hand, Socrates speaks of a drought of wisdom, and our Platonistic prejudices compel us to attempt to divide the imagery up as though the soul needs wisdom as vitally as the body needs water, hence the dire nature of a drought of wisdom. Of course, such an inclination is not wholly without a textual basis; however, if we consider for a moment the way in which wisdom (σοφία) has thus far been discussed, the obviousness of the division between body and soul begins to fade. The most concrete evidence of Thessaly’s recent cultivation of wisdom (σοφία) is the habit of its ruling class (the Aleudai) to answer questions fearlessly and magnificently like someone who knows. Through our analysis, we have developed some suspicion towards Socrates’ identification of Gorgias’ pupils (Meno and the Aleudai) with knowers. Thus, we might wonder whether there is adequate justification to assign, purely and unproblematically, this “drought of wisdom” to the domain of psychic calamity. Rather, if we follow the discourse, it seems to speak to a very concretely rooted concern in Athens and Thessaly. Or can one answer fearlessly and magnificently disembodied? Moreover, we can see the materiality of the so-called “drought of wisdom” play out in Socrates’ worry about the risk of wisdom’s departure from Athens. We might connect this description of the risk of wisdom’s departure from Athens to Thessaly with the scene from the *Crito*. In that situation, Socrates and Crito discussed the departure of Socrates’ physical body to Thessaly. Were it not for Socrates’ resolve in his decision, Athens would have been at risk of wisdom (σοφία) departing to Thessaly in a very material and concrete way. Aside from upsetting the convenient division between body and soul, what does this prophetic aspect of Socrates’ speech tell us about *arete* as we progress towards the conclusion of his speech?

In order to see the consequences, let us look at Socrates’ impersonation of an Athenian, whom he suggests would claim not even to know what *arete* itself is, much less how it comes to be. Prior to this assertion, this hypothetical Athenian remarks that Meno, whom he addresses as “stranger” or “ξένε,” must think him blessed (μακάριός) to expect him to know about *arete*.¹²² We

¹²² The connotations of “stranger” differ here than those which we might associate with the term in English. Stranger can have two decisive senses, both of which point to the protected status of the stranger: (1) stranger as the guest-friend, which is used in cases of political obligation whether through a treaty or “tie of hospitality.” (2) stranger, in the sense of wanderer or refugee who travels under the protection of Ζεὺς ξένιος. Such a traveler may just be a god or

can glean several key insights from Socrates' introduction of this hypothetical Athenian, an approach to dialogue which starkly contrasts with Meno's own introduction. We will consider this textual moment first formally and then contextually through the following questions: Why does Socrates move into a hypothetical discourse? Why does this hypothetical Athenian address Meno as a stranger (ξένος)? And might this address tell us anything about the relationship between being blessed (μακάριός) and knowing about *arete*?

Let us begin superficially and then progress deeper into Socrates' speech. One effect of a hypothetical discourse is the softening of corrective speech in a discussion between individuals of unequal social positions. Rather than "teach" Meno a more amicable way of speaking directly, we might understand this move as a way for Socrates to model a friendlier approach to their discussion.¹²³ By taking on the persona of a hypothetical Athenian to address Meno, Socrates makes an effort to diffuse the combative introduction and redirect the discussion as is fitting for a discourse between friends.¹²⁴ One way that Socrates corrects Meno's inquiry is through a refinement of his questions. In his opening questions, Meno distinguishes something teachable (διδασκτὸν) from something that comes through learning (μαθητὸν). However, when Socrates' hypothetical Athenian repeats the question, whether or not *arete* is teachable subsumes learning (μαθητὸν).¹²⁵ In fact, the term "μαθητὸν" generally disappears from the dialogue especially, and notably, because of the later introduction of "recollection" (ἀνάμνησις).¹²⁶ Although our understanding of *arete* may be insufficient to determine whether Socrates exhibits *arete* through such a gesture, we can, at the very least, note it for now. We should also note the introduction of theological diction: the "stranger" (ξένε) address and the mention of being blessed (μακάριός). While Socrates' concern for the human relationship to the divine will reappear throughout the dialogue, this initial reframing opens their inquiry to a different register than Meno's framing

goddess as well. See Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1189. The beginning of the *Sophist* warrants including here as well. Socrates asks, "Are you bringing a visitor (ξένον), Theodorus? Or are you bringing a god without realizing it instead, like the ones Homer mentions? He says gods accompany people who are respectful and just. He also says the god of visitors (ξένιον)—who's at least as much a god as any other—is a companion who keeps an eye on people's actions, both the criminal and the lawful ones. So your visitor might be a greater power following along with out, a sort of god of refutation to keep watch on us and show how bad we are at speaking—and to refute us." Plato, *Sophist*, 216a-b.

¹²³ Socrates' tacit refusal to teach is noteworthy here not only because of his later account of anamnesis but also because of his claim not to be a teacher. Plato, *Meno*, 82a. Plato, *Apology*, 19d-e.

¹²⁴ Plato, *Meno*, 75d.

¹²⁵ "...—to know (εἰδέναι) about *arete*, whether it is something teachable (διδασκτὸν) or in what way it comes about." Ibid., 71a.

¹²⁶ Hoerber, "Plato's Meno," 83.

would have allowed.¹²⁷ Meno does not even consider the human relationship to the divine as a part of human *arete*.

Besides modeling greater clarity and a friendlier dialogical comportment, Socrates' move into hypothetical discourse also signals to us that Meno has failed to recognize a crucial component of the inquiry, namely, the divine. The introduction of the Athenian and his address of Meno as “ξένε” initially direct our attention away from Socrates, but we must keep in mind what the Athenian insists that Meno risks, namely, “thinking [the Athenian] to be someone who is blessed (μακάριός)...”¹²⁸ In other words, the person who knows about *arete* is blessed (μακάριός), that is, a human who is dear to the gods and lives a good life. Using the persona of the hypothetical Athenian as a mask, Socrates implies that *Meno* himself might be divine or at least dear to the gods (insofar as all strangers/foreigners/visitors (ξένοι) are). Such a remark likely has an enticing effect on Meno as well.¹²⁹ While we may find Meno to be human (all too human) as the dialogue progresses, this remark also directs our attention towards some presuppositions about the human good. A reverence for the divine, which is implied by his mention of being blessed (μακάριός), causes the Athenian to address Meno as “ξένε”—someone genuinely unknown yet worthy of regard. This relation to another differs considerably from the regard for other humans that Xenophon describes in his account of Meno. This hypothetical discourse also has another consequence. It would be audacious for Socrates to describe himself as blessed (μακάριός) outright. However, because of the hypothetical Athenian's insinuation that Meno might be a divinity in disguise (a “ξένος”) and (perhaps for that reason) that Meno must think him blessed (μακάριός), we begin to wonder about Socrates himself. While the address of Meno may be ironic, could the hypothetical Athenian's claims reflect something about Socrates and his relationship to *arete*? We cannot answer this question yet, but we will see what we can find as we progress. Let us turn now to the content of the hypothetical Athenian's speech to see both new insights into *arete* and how the prophetic aspect of Socrates' speech intimates the role of the divine in human life.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ This reframing is important for several reasons, but one of the more obvious is in anticipation of the dialogues' conclusion. A theological register must be permissible into the discourse to arrive at the conclusion that *arete* comes to be through divine allotment (θεία μοίρα).

¹²⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 71a.

¹²⁹ That is, this air of reverence (due or undue to him) may draw Meno into the dialogue.

¹³⁰ See Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, 27-29. Mikalson, *Greek Popular Religion in Greek Philosophy*, 29-31.

As we have already noted, Socrates' hypothetical Athenian addresses Meno as “ξένε” or “stranger” in his initial greeting. But why? On one level, we can see this greeting as a reinstatement of Socrates' prior division between Athens and Thessaly. Meno is a foreigner (ξένος) in Athens. But is the division between Athens and Thessaly xenophobic or philosophic? That is, does Socrates insist on the difference between Athens and Thessaly, between himself and Meno, simply because they hail from different *poleis*, or is there perhaps a more subtle insinuation about the relationship between *arete* and *polis*? Does human *arete* not require the *polis* as the site of its growth? Consequently, would the *polis* in which a person developed then also affect the way that a human exhibits *arete*? In addition to these philosophical concerns, we should also consider another valence of the “ξένος” as a political, social, and theological phenomenon. The treatment of the stranger (ξένος) and the practice of “hospitality” (ξένια) appear prominently in the texts of many classical Greek authors, e.g., in Homer, Hesiod, Aeschylus, Euripides, Thucydides, Herodotus, and Xenophon just to name a few.¹³¹ While it might be interesting to consider if, and in what ways, Socrates and Meno perform the acts customary of ξένια, doing so seems difficult to justify textually, since none of the conventional gestures of ξένια appear in the *Meno*.¹³² Nevertheless, we will briefly consider the stranger (ξένος) and the practice of “hospitality” (ξένια) in classical Greece because of its social, political, ethical, and cosmological implications. Not only should we be sensitive to these dimensions because it will allow us to make more sensitive inferences about the dialogue as an ancient Greek text, but they may also help us to understand the inquiry into *arete* within the *Meno*.

What does the hypothetical Athenian imply by addressing Meno as “ξένος”?¹³³ We must distinguish between “technical” and colloquial senses of the word “ξένος.” The technical sense refers to the “ξένος” as one of the diads in the custom of guest-friendship, through which Greeks and non-Greeks alike created ritual bonds between themselves and a member of another group. In

¹³¹ “ξένια” is the ritualized practice of hospitality for foreigners, which is nominally legitimized through appeal to the gods.

¹³² See Steve Reece's *The Stranger's Welcome* for an account of the formal conditions of *xenia* as it appears in Homer. For other authoritative treatments of the social institution of *xenia*, the social position of the ξένος, and their relationship to the gods, see John Gould's “Hiketia,” Christoph Auffarth's “Protecting Strangers: Establishing a Fundamental Value in the Religions of the Ancient Near East and Ancient Greece,” F.S. Naiden's *Ancient Supplication*, Jon D. Mikalson's *Greek Popular Religion in Greek Philosophy*, Gabriel Herman's *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City*. Another reason not to pursue such an interpretation is that Anytus seems to be Meno's host not Socrates.

¹³³ On the usage of the vocative form of ξένος (ξένε) especially in Plato, see Dickey, *Greek Forms of Address From Herodotus to Lucian*, 146-149.

its colloquial sense, a “ξένοϛ” simply refers to someone with an unknown identity, namely, a stranger or a foreigner.¹³⁴ The *Odyssey*, for example, provides a well-known example of the “ξένοϛ” as a stranger who reveals him/herself to be a divinity in disguise.¹³⁵ We also ought not overlook Plato’s *Parmenides*, in which one of the primary characters simply called “ξένοϛ.” While the hypothetical Athenian likely addresses Meno as “ξένοϛ” in a more colloquial register, we will briefly consider some salient aspects of the technical sense because of its influence (even if only peripheral) on every usage.¹³⁶

In its colloquial sense, the decisive feature of a stranger/foreigner (ξένοϛ) is his/her occupation of a different social group than that of the speaker.¹³⁷ For example, an Athenian would address a Thessalian in this way while in Athens but not a fellow Athenian of a separate socio-economic class (such as an aristocrat to an artisan or a slave). However, in its technical sense, “ξένοϛ” as guest-friend names an intense obligation whose bond could extend even beyond the expectation for kin or close friends. This extraordinary obligation partially explains why guest-friend (ξένοϛ) relations were such valuable assets to individuals with considerable wealth.¹³⁸ While this custom was not institutionalized (in the way that we might speak of institutional marriage now), its value appears ubiquitously throughout a variety of Greek texts. Not only did guest-friend (ξένοϛ) relations serve symbolically as an illustration of power and influence, but they also carried considerable practical benefit to each party involved.¹³⁹ The socio-political utility of a guest-friend (ξένοϛ) illuminates the desirability of the relationship, but we must also draw out the theological

¹³⁴ It can also mean guest, host, or mercenary.

¹³⁵ *Odyssey* 17.483-87; 9.269-71; 14.56-58. See also, Auffarth, “Protecting Strangers: Establishing a Fundamental Value in the Religions of the Ancient Near East and Ancient Greece,” 200-205. Socrates also refers to this possibility in the beginning of the *Sophist*. Plato, *Sophist*, 216a-b.

¹³⁶ Socrates will also use ξένοϛ in the technical sense later. Plato, *Meno*, 78d, 91a.

¹³⁷ Hermann, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City*, 11. “However, only ξένοϛ and its rare derivatives, idioxenos and doryxenos, refer invariably to individuals originating from different social units.... In other words, each individual in a xenos-dyad was an outsider with respect to his partner’s group.” Also Dickey, *Greek Forms of Address From Herodotus to Lucian*, 146. “...ξένε is used by natives of the place in which it is spoken, to addressees who come from somewhere else.”

¹³⁸ Hermann, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City*, 128. “[Xenia] embraced a range of cooperative acts as wide as one could possibly find in any human society: xenoi could be found providing each other assistance—and, it should be noted, substantial assistance—in solving family affairs; in avenging personal grievances’ in lending money’ in offering shelter, refuge or asylum; in ransoming each other from captivity’ in achieving political power’ in subverting governments’ and overthrowing empires. The reason for this was that ritualized friendship acted both as a substitute for and above all a complement to kinship roles. The range (if not the intensity) of the exchanges between xenoi was thus wider than that between kinsmen or close intimates.” See also 36.

¹³⁹ We will see this aspect highlighted later at 78d, when Socrates calls Meno the Great King’s ancestral ξένοϛ.

significance, since it undergirds both the technical and colloquial senses of “ξένος” as a basis for each member’s obligation to the other.

If an individual failed to honor his or her responsibility to a stranger/ guest-friend (ξένος), the failure was not *just* a moral, social, or legal dereliction of duty. Rather, the failure to honor these responsibilities amounted to a transgression against the gods (and especially against Zeus). In his study of ritualized friendship, Hermann cites Aeschines as an exemplary case of the severity of such a transgression:

Wishing to point out the monstrosity of Demosthenes’ crime (i.e., the torture and execution of his *xenos*, Anaxinos of Oreos), Aeschines suggested that this was no ordinary homicide. It was much worse, the killing of a man with whom Demosthenes had eaten, drunk and poured libations at the same table. This is what turned his execution into an *asebema*, a crime against the gods. For what the eating, drinking and libations achieved was a further reinforcement of the bond....Through these rites the gods were invoked as witnesses, and thus the feasting rituals merged with the hospitality rituals. In consequence, the *xenos*-stranger, as the *xenos*-guest-friend, became the protégé of Zeus Xenios.¹⁴⁰

While it is easy for us to differentiate two distinct senses of “ξένος,” namely, stranger/foreigner, on the one hand, and member of the “guest-friend” relation, on the other, the boundary was likely not so clearly established. The transition from “ξένος” as stranger to “ξένος” as “guest-friend” through the consecration of ritual illustrates their interrelatedness. Moreover, the consecration of this relationship took place under the blessing of the gods, and as a result, it always, in principle, entailed obligation both to the realm of mortals and the divine. Zeus, who bears the epithet “ξένιος” among others, seems to represent the dual fealty to the divine demanded by the proper treatment of the guest and guest-friend.¹⁴¹ We must also, of course, bear in mind that a “ξένος” could simply be a divinity in disguise.

In this sense, we can see the way in which the theological and the socio-political did not function as discrete domains. Pro-social behavior, especially towards the stranger/foreigner (ξένος), carried material benefit for those who engaged in it, but it also conformed with certain normative expectations whose theological basis played a broader role in shaping mores. Moreover,

¹⁴⁰ Hermann, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City*, 66.

¹⁴¹ Ten of the twelve oaths uttered in the *Meno* are to Zeus, who oversees hospitality and the protection of strangers. Oaths to Zeus appear at 82a, 83b, 84a, 89c, 90e, 92b, 93e, 95b, 96b, 98a. The other two oaths are to the gods generally and to Hercules. They occur at 71d and 91c respectively. See Winterbottom, “Speaking of the Gods.” On the consequences of betrayal of suppliants, see Naiden, *Ancient Supplication*, 122-125.

we can see the operation of the mythological trope of the divinity in disguise as a literary expression of a broader cosmology, a cosmology in which gods lived together in the world with humans. This cosmology carries consequences for a person's ethical responsibility to others, but it is neither altruistic nor coercive.¹⁴²

Two aspects of the human relationship to the divine, which appeared tacitly within our *analysis* of the “ξένος,” may be useful for our analysis of the hypothetical Athenian's speech: “religious correctness” (ὀσιότης) and “proper respect” (εὐσέβεια).¹⁴³ In his study focusing on religious dimensions in Greek philosophy (specifically, Plato, Aristotle, and Xenophon), Mikalson insists on the importance of differentiating these two commonly conflated terms, since they together constitute service to the gods. “‘Service to the gods’ is ‘religious correctness’ and ‘proper respect’ for the deities. It is to pray, sacrifice, and make dedications correctly, and to begin every task with the gods. To perform this ‘service’ is a matter of ‘sound thinking.’”¹⁴⁴ Insofar as the hypothetical Athenian addresses Meno as a stranger (ξένος), the underlying assurance of his proper treatment falls within the domain of “proper respect.”¹⁴⁵ With the “ξένε” greeting, the hypothetical Athenian begins with an acknowledgment of the divine, but this acknowledgement does not take the form of a religious ritual. The greeting picks out the other as neither comrade (ἑταῖρος) like Aristippus) nor fellow citizen (πολίτης) but a stranger (ξένος). As a greeting, it acknowledges the extension of the bounds of obligation beyond what is due within one's own *polis* to a universal duty towards the other—another human whose protection under the divine stems from a kinship with the divine (and also, notably, the divine capacity to appear as human).¹⁴⁶ This reverent comportment towards others differs considerably from the habits which Gorgias inculcates.

But what about religious correctness (ὀσιότης)? Mikalson describes religious correctness (ὀσιότης) in three ways: Religious correctness (1) “...concerns the ‘sacred’ (to hieron) and involves knowledge of and adherence to the traditions and conventions about ‘the sacred.’” (2) “

¹⁴² Concerning scholarly positions related to the possibility of altruistic behavior in Greek culture, see Christ's helpful overview in “Helping Behavior in Classical Athens,” 256-258.

¹⁴³ Such distinctions appear as the subject of discussion in *Euthyphro*, in which Socrates notably claims “...in the past too I considered knowledge about the divine to be most important...” Plato, *Euthyphro*, 5a.

¹⁴⁴ “Religious correctness” translates ὀσιότης. “Proper respect” translates εὐσέβεια. And finally, “sound thinking” translates σωφροσύνη. Mikalson, *Greek Popular Religion in Greek Philosophy*, 41-42.

¹⁴⁵ “Crimes against xenoī and suppliants are a particular concern to the gods, and therefore they are described in terms of respect and fear of the gods involved, not of ‘religious correctness.’” Ibid., 158.

¹⁴⁶ Socrates will explicitly introduce an originary kinship in a mythological/theological context later. Plato, *Meno*, 81d.

...[It] is more of a state of being, of being in conformance with religious traditions and conventions concerning ‘the sacred’.” (3) “...[It] is a neutral passive state, in which an individual has not by his action fractured a relationship with the gods.”¹⁴⁷ In the first place, we must note that Socrates will later identify religious correctness (ὁσιότης) as a “piece” of *arete*.¹⁴⁸ In other words, a consideration of the importance of religious correctness (ὁσιότης) has a textual basis in the *Meno* itself.¹⁴⁹ While a part of religious correctness (ὁσιότης) deals with religious convention, we can also find its ordinary appearance in the hypothetical Athenian’s speech. We have already analyzed the dialogical clearing which the Athenian’s diction (the “ξένε” greeting and the assertion of being blessed (μακάριός) as a condition for knowing about *arete*) opens beyond the limits imposed by Meno’s framing. However, even the content of the speech reveals a concern for being in harmony with the divine and the sacred. Human *arete* is important. A person must be blessed (μακάριός) to know about it. Consequently, the Athenian broaches the subject humbly, not presuming to know even what *arete* itself is. Its gravity for human life demands such a comportment. One cannot simply begin an inquiry into *arete* as though it were any thing whatsoever. A proper beginning serves as the ground for their search.¹⁵⁰

What has our analysis of the second section of Socrates’ response unpacked? We analyzed the Athenian’s address of Meno as “ξένε,” and we became more sensitive to the intermingling of the divine in the ordinary. Even as a socio-political phenomenon, the “ξένος” relation in its technical sense presupposed a world in which humans share a relationship with the divine. The importance of this relationship played an even greater role in the other senses of the “ξένος” as stranger, foreigner, or visitor. We also found the Athenian’s supposition that a person must be blessed (μακάριός) to know about *arete* telling of the need for a sensitivity to the divine and the sacred as a part of living a good life (i.e., being blessed). The gentle assertion of these matters through hypothetical discourse added another way for human *arete* to come to be in addition to the ways that Meno asserted in the beginning of the dialogue. It opened a dialogical clearing for a

¹⁴⁷ Mikalson, *Greek Popular Religion in Greek Philosophy*, 168-169.

¹⁴⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 78d-78e.

¹⁴⁹ It is also, of course, relevant to other dialogues as well. Mikalson includes ample illustrative examples from the Platonic corpus in his footnotes. “‘Religious correctness’ is not one of the cardinal Platonic *aretēs* (justice, wisdom, courage, ‘sound thinking’ [σοφροσύνη]), but when the list is extended beyond these, we find only ‘religious correctness’, not ‘proper respect for the gods’.” Mikalson, *Greek Popular Religion in Greek Philosophy*, 142

¹⁵⁰ Tarrant very briefly remarks on the necessity of kinship with divine for this special knowledge. See Tarrant, *Recollecting Plato’s Meno*, 26. Neither Klein, Sallis, nor Sharples remark at all on the kind of person who is blessed (μακάριός) and so would know about *arete*.

fuller inquiry into *arete*. And yet, we can discern another insight from this part of Socrates' speech when we pair it together with the first part. Our analysis focused initially on the extensive discussion of Meno's *polis*, its reputation and its constituents. We found it troubling that we could not dismiss horsemanship and wealth as *aretai* despite our intuition that these things differed in kind from wisdom (σοφία). Could the Athenian's claim "not to know at all what that thing *arete* itself is" help us? How does "itself" function within this claim? It could mean that the Athenian does not know at all what *arete* is "by" itself. Such a sense would conform to the framework initially posited by Meno which called for an abstract and detached inquiry into *arete*. It would entail an inquiry into *arete* by itself, that is, separate from everything "worldly." However, our analysis of the first part of Socrates' response drew attention to the rooted character of the inquiry. Socrates responded to Meno's questions about the *arete* particular to humans by speaking about the *polis* particular to Meno. Based upon this approach, we inferred the necessity of inquiring into *arete* through a consideration of the *polis* too. From this prior insight, a new question emerges: How does the cultivation of an attunement to the human relationship to the divine affect an inquiry into human *arete* within the *polis*?

During our examination of the Athenian's greeting, we noticed the way that the ξένοι address drew the speaker out of his familiar relation to others, that is, his relation to the other members of his *polis*. A mindfulness of one's relationship with the divine required one to treat the foreigner (ξένος) with an extra-ordinary reverence. This imperative draws attention to a tension between one's obligation as a member of a *polis* and one's obligation as a human. On the one hand, a person has an obligation to one's *polis* as the site of *arete*. For example, Thessaly's renown for its horsemanship illustrates a concrete and unique good that only a person from Thessaly could exhibit. People from other *poleis* can certainly become expert equestrians, but those who come from Thessaly stand apart from the rest. But, on the other hand, the special reverence due to the foreigner (ξένος), which even manifests in the obligations of the guest-friend (ξένος) relation, highlights a limit of one's obligation to the *polis*. As an illustration, if a person were concerned about religious correctness (ὁσιότης) but hailed from a *polis* whose customary reception of strangers (ξένοι) required hostility, then one would be required to make an axiological judgment about the value of the former obligation against the latter. What is required of a person as a human is not always the same as what is required of a person as a member of a *polis*. In this sense, we might understand the Athenian's claim. A confusion about *arete* might emerge from a recognition

of the competing measures of *arete*. There is the *polis*' measure of *arete*, and there is also a human measure. An inability to reconcile these two measures could conceivably lead a person to claim not to know at all what *arete* itself is.

For the conclusion of his speech, Socrates returns to himself and speaks again in his own voice directly to Meno:

And I myself, Meno, am in this condition, too. I share the poverty of my fellow citizens (πολίταις) in this matter and blame myself for not knowing (εἰδῶς) about *arete* at all. And how could I know (εἰδείην) what sort of thing (ὅποῖόν) something is, if I do not know what it is (οἶδα τί ἐστίν)? Or does it seem possible to you that someone who has no cognizance (γινώσκει) of Meno at all, who he is, could know (εἰδέναι) whether he is handsome (καλός) or rich (πλούσιος) or well-born (γενναῖός), or the opposite of these? Does it seem possible to you?¹⁵¹

Blaming himself now for not knowing about *arete*, Socrates asks Meno to consider the problem of *arete* through analogical reasoning about “knowing” Meno himself. Klein notes the ambiguity in the sense of “know” in Socrates’ claim. On the one hand, “not to know” might mean a lack of direct acquaintance with Meno. However, Klein dismisses this sense as too dissimilar to the case of *arete* since we hear *arete* spoken about often. On the other hand, “not to know” might mean that he is acquainted with Meno but insufficiently to know him “really.” Again, Klein dismisses this sense since it would not prevent a person from saying *anything* about Meno (or *arete*). On the contrary, Klein thinks that using Meno as an example shows that one *can* know relevant qualities about something even without “knowing what it is.”¹⁵² Thus, it is a bad example if it is supposed to show the necessity of beginning with the “τί ἐστίν” question. Sharples questions a further implication of the analogue, namely, whether knowledge of *arete* is like acquaintance with a person at all, though he ultimately concludes that the analogy is “just ironical.”¹⁵³ In Cristina Ionescu’s commentary on the *Meno*, she suggests two distinctions to explain Socrates’ analogy: “(a) that we distinguish between the sense that Meno assigns to the illustration and that in which Socrates intends it...and (b) that the example about knowing Meno, employs ‘knowledge’ in the common-sense use of the term, and is thus meant only as analogical to the philosophical sense

¹⁵¹ Plato, *Meno*, 71b.

¹⁵² Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, 42. See also Sallis, *Being and Logos*, 66. Sallis basically agrees with Klein concerning the ambiguity of knowing in Socrates’ question, but Sallis takes the point of the questions to demonstrate Meno’s lack of self-knowledge, i.e., despite thinking himself handsome, rich, and/or well-born, he still does not even know himself.

¹⁵³ Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, 125.

involved in knowing *arete*, and not as an instance of that specialized kind of cognitive grasp.”¹⁵⁴ The former suggestion does not differ from the approach of Klein and Sallis, namely, Socrates chooses Meno as his example to appeal to Meno’s vanity and to draw the reader’s attention to Meno’s inability to keep up with Socrates in the conversation. Of course, this sort of meta-social dynamic is the very thing which we have been tracking this whole time, and so naturally, Klein, Sallis, and Ionescu’s accounts inform our reading of this section.

However, Ionescu’s second observation on the nature of Socrates’ remark speaks to a broader assumption about how to read this part of the text. Naturally, we assume Socrates does not suggest “knowing” (γινώσκειν) Meno as an instance of the kind of “knowing” involved in “knowing” (οἶδα) *arete*. The selection of different verbs for “to know” helps to bear out this distinction. However, the singular usage of the verb “γινώσκει” sticks out because it appears within a sea of “οἶδα”/ “εἰδέναι.”¹⁵⁵ Socrates asks, “Or does it seem possible to you that someone who has no ‘cognizance’ (γινώσκειν) of Meno at all, who he is, could know (εἰδέναι) whether he is handsome or rich or well-born, or the opposite of these?”¹⁵⁶ Socrates uses various forms of the verb “οἶδα” to speak about knowing *arete* in the prior two sentences. If we follow Ionescu’s suggestion, then what we find here is that “knowing” (γινώσκειν) Meno, who he is, is not a specialized form of knowing, but “knowing” (εἰδέναι) whether he is handsome, rich, well-born (or the opposite) *is* a specialized form of knowing like knowing *arete*. Consequently, we could not simply dismiss “knowing” (εἰδέναι) whether Meno is handsome, rich, or well-born together with “knowing” (γινώσκειν) who Meno is. Moreover, Ionescu’s suggestion that Socrates’ usage of “knowledge” may be simply colloquial offers little satisfaction. Even if robust distinctions between forms of knowing had not been firmly established, the haphazard dismissal of this distinction as mere colloquialism seems insensitive to the importance of this textual moment. Let us venture our own reading.

We can glean three extraordinary insights from the final section of his speech. First, Socrates builds off of the prior hypothetical discourse, insisting that he and his fellow citizens (πολιται), like the hypothetical Athenian, do not know about *arete*. This claim is extraordinary

¹⁵⁴ Ionescu, *Plato’s Meno*, 7.

¹⁵⁵ Despite οἶδα and εἰδέναι not sharing a common root, lexical convention links them together. Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 226-227, 544.

¹⁵⁶ Plato, *Meno*, 71b. Note Anastaplo and Berns’ use of “cognizance” to differentiate the shift in verbiage.

because of its absurdity. It is much more likely that *only* Socrates would make such a claim whereas every other Athenian citizen would claim to know about it. If we consider Anytus as a representative of Athenian sentiment on the matter, then most Athenians *do* think they know about *arete*. Socrates would likely be aware of this pervasive attitude since he never leaves Athens and frequently converses with his fellow citizens. Socrates' follow up question implies the second noteworthy insight. He asks how he could know "what sort of thing (ὅποῖόν) something is," if he does not know "what it is" (τί ἐστὶ). Let us linger here for a moment so that we can see what is remarkable about this seemingly intuitive claim.

Methodologically, we can understand why knowing "what" (τί) something is ought to precede asking "what sort of thing" (ὅποῖόν) something is. The so-called "Socratic elenchus" builds off of this intuition insofar as it privileges the search for "definitions" ("what something is" or the "τί ἐστὶ" question).¹⁵⁷ However, it warrants considering whether this division and axiological prioritization emerges out of a concern for the *Meno* or "Plato's philosophy." For we can easily make sense of this distinction differently within the framework which we have been developing so far. When we analyzed the hypothetical Athenian's speech, we found a tension between the *polis*' measure of *arete* and a human measure of *arete*.¹⁵⁸ Both measures attend to the *arete* particular to humans, but they do so in different ways. The former emerges out of the site that is required for the cultivation of certain sorts of "*aretai*." We considered Thessalian horsemanship as one example, and it is an especially pertinent one because the *arete* exhibited by the good horseman supposes *arete* to be "some sort of thing," namely, teachable (διδασκτὸν) in the form of technical know-how (τέχνη). On the other hand, when Socrates raises the "τί ἐστὶ" question as a genuine question, he effectively problematizes the presuppositions of the *polis*. If a *polis* excels in the cultivation and instruction in a technical knowledge (τέχνη) about some task, that is, if it is able to make people *good* at that task (so much so that others begin to admire the people of that *polis* for their proficiency), then it is easy to see how being good at some task can transform into being simply good. Life in the *polis* precipitates this slippage. The good horseman can, in certain circumstances, earn a reputation as a good man *because of* his proficiency in horsemanship. However, the revitalization of the "τί ἐστὶ" question disrupts this slippage. It unsettles the familiar,

¹⁵⁷ Vlastos is most famous for his insistence on the elenchus, but his influence still lingers in later commentaries.

¹⁵⁸ To be clear, this "human measure" still requires a *polis*. The necessity of the *polis* for human *arete* is not in question, but rather, the inquiry concerns the way that the *polis* and human *arete* relate to one another.

conventional understanding of *arete* in the same way that the confrontation with the stranger (ξένος) disrupts the familiar and conventional orientation towards others. Consequently, we may not be justified in supposing an epistemological character of “knowing” in relation to the τί/ὅποῖόν distinction, but rather, it may also point to the tension between the measure of *arete* of the *polis* and the measure of *arete* that forces a person beyond the *polis*. The *polis* alone may not be sufficient for human *arete* despite being necessary for it.

The final dimension of this part of Socrates’ speech comes from his description of Meno as handsome (καλός), rich (πλούσιος), and well-born (γενναῖός). Socrates poses the description counter-factually. He asks whether someone who has no “cognizance” (γινώσκειν) of Meno could know (εἰδέναι) whether he is any of these qualities. While it is true that Socrates does not technically attribute these qualities to Meno outright, it is not a particularly subtle insinuation. Socrates has already described the people with whom Meno spends his time (the Aleudai, Aristippus, Gorgias), and it is unlikely that anyone who keeps such company would not be one of the three, if not all of them. Meno’s association with such people is not just the justification for reading the counterfactual attributively, but it also bears upon the question of *arete*. Socrates uses the same verb to speak about knowing (εἰδέναι) *arete* as he does to speak about knowing whether Meno is handsome (καλός), rich (πλούσιος), or well-born (γενναῖός). When it comes to Meno himself, who he is, one must “know” (γινώσκειν) him. What distinction can we find in Socrates’ word choice? To “know” Meno requires a direct encounter with him. It requires some experience. It is the only way to put the man to the test, and he will be “tested.” *Arete*, being handsome (καλός), rich (πλούσιος), or well-born (γενναῖός), on the other hand, do not require the same sort of direct experience. This claim does not mean that one cannot have a direct experience of them, but simply that the knowing about them with which the inquiry concerns itself has a different character. They require something in addition to experience. While Socrates does not give any indication of what else might be required for knowing about them, the shared form of knowing that governs them might imply a connection. Could being handsome (καλός), rich (πλούσιος), and/or well-born (γενναῖός) be conditions of *arete*? We previously examined wealth (πλούτω) as one measure of *arete* in the *polis*, and it would not be difficult to apply the same reasoning to being handsome (καλός) or well-born (γενναῖός).¹⁵⁹ From this connection, it seems that there is a certain way in

¹⁵⁹ This claim is not mere idle musing. Anytus will later claim that the “Athenian gentlemen” or the Athenian noble/beautiful and good men (ἀθηναῖοι κάλοι καγαθοὶ ἄνδρες) are the teachers of *arete*.

which *arete* appears within the *polis*, that is, a sort of “aesthetics” of *arete*. We must continue our analysis with this possibility in mind.

Our analysis of this last section of Socrates’ speech deviates significantly from the dominant reading. Our interest in the epistemological dimensions is ancillary at best, if not completely absent. Instead, our approach has unpacked the speech as one which begins to broach a problem in relation to *arete* that requires genuine inquiry. Although the *polis* provides a necessary site for the cultivation of *arete*, it also allows for the development of a restricted and confused measure of *arete*. We considered the peculiarity of this process through the transformation of the good horseman into the good man. The *polis* gives humans access to many goods (e.g., horsemanship, wealth, and even wisdom (σοφία)), but none of these goods seems to suffice as conditions for *arete* “itself.” We have uncovered a very troublesome tension in Socrates’ opening discourse on *arete*, but will Meno see it?

Meno does not comment on any of the peculiarity in Socrates’ response. He simply agrees with Socrates’s final question (whether someone could know (εἰδέναι) that Meno is handsome (καλός), rich (πλούσιος), and/or well-born (γενναῖός) without knowing (γινώσκειν) him) and focuses his attention on Socrates’ purported ignorance about *arete*. Socrates reaffirms his ignorance and extends his claim to everyone he has ever met. Naturally, such a claim disturbs Meno, who believes that he *does* know about *arete*, especially, though not exclusively, because he has studied under Gorgias. When Meno asks Socrates whether he means to include Gorgias among those who are ignorant about *arete* and whether he had met Gorgias when he visited Athens, Socrates claims, “I am not a very good rememberer, Meno....”¹⁶⁰ Although Meno clearly does not know Socrates well enough to think much of it, this remark should stand out to us because we *are* aware that Socrates has an extraordinary ability to remember arguments, stories, and conversations. In many dialogues, Socrates’ memory plays an important role in elucidating his point, and his tongue-in-cheek claim to have a bad memory may have been a running joke.¹⁶¹ Even

¹⁶⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 71C.

¹⁶¹ It would be excessive to cite every instance of Socrates’s ability to recall verses from poetry and arguments (both famous ones and the ones made by his interlocutor). Perhaps the best justification for our doubt in Socrates’ sincerity comes from a remark made by Alcibiades in *Protagoras*. Alcibiades, in support of Socrates’ objection to Protagoras’ long-winded style of speaking, describes the familiar phenomenon of becoming lost when one’s interlocutor rambles on endlessly: “...and going on and on until most of the listeners have forgotten what the question was about, although I guarantee you Socrates won’t forget, *no matter how he jokes about his memory*.” Emphasis mine. Plato, *Protagoras*, 336d.

shortly after making this claim in this very dialogue, Socrates recounts Empedocles and Pindar from memory to satisfy Meno.¹⁶² Thus, we must wonder: Why would Socrates lie to Meno so blatantly?

There seems to be three reasons for Socrates to lie in this part of the dialogue. First, this lie allows Socrates to place the onus on Meno. If Socrates claims to remember Gorgias' speech when Gorgias came to visit, then Meno will not have to take responsibility for what *he* thinks about *arete*. Meno can defer either to Socrates' memory or the Gorgias' speech, but in either case, Meno does not have to "recollect" ("ἀνάμνησον") *arete* himself. While it is not clear yet what Socrates does know, his understanding of *arete* seems to emerge out of a dialogical give-and-take (whether the interlocutor is Meno, the slave boy, or Anytus). Curiously, the other reasons for Socrates to lie also relate to language, though in very different ways.

Klein offers two powerful accounts of the morphology of the Greek words in Socrates' response as well. He notes that the word "μνήμων," rendered in the English here as "rememberer," was also the nickname of Artaxerxes II.¹⁶³ After reminding the reader of the passage in Xenophon's *Anabasis* which recounted Meno's torture and death after the war at the hands of Artaxerxes II, Klein suggests another rendition of the sentence that draws attention to its tragic irony: "I am not quite Artaxerxes the Second."¹⁶⁴ Klein proposes two implications: Socrates is not going to kill Meno, or Socrates shall not let Meno escape him. Unfortunately, Klein only posits these two claims and does nothing to render their meanings intelligible within the larger context. Let us consider them further. The latter claim (Socrates shall not let Meno escape him) is difficult to incorporate. Of course, we can read Socrates "not letting Meno escape" as Socrates holding Meno accountable, i.e., by imploring Meno to say what *arete* is rather than refer to Socrates' memory or Gorgias' speech. But in that case, would it not make more sense for Socrates to say that he *is* like Artaxerxes II, since Artaxerxes II did not let the historical Meno escape either? Moreover, this interpretation has the additional problem of rendering the dependent clause unintelligible (that is, "...so I'm not able to say at present how he seemed to me then."). On the other hand, the former claim (Socrates is not going to kill Meno) functions more seamlessly. Initially, it might seem strange for Socrates

¹⁶² Ibid., 76c-d.

¹⁶³ Klein, "On the Platonic Meno and the Platonic Dialogues," 362. For an ancient source attributing this nickname to Artaxerxes, see Plutarch, *The Age of Alexander*.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 363. See also Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 2.6.21-29.

to invoke the name of Meno's torturer as a means of reassuring him. While we have been tracking the subtle combativeness between Meno and Socrates—to which Socrates' invocation of Artaxerxes II would contribute—it is still not clear what a dialogical threat of this nature amounts to. Could Socrates leading Meno into ἀπορία be a psychic rupture akin to physical death?¹⁶⁵ In that case, the irony of such a threat would only be apparent to us, i.e., that Socrates will “kill” the old Meno insofar as he will no longer be able to understand *arete* in the way he did previously, but this death will make him better. In that case, Socrates would be more like a foil to Artaxerxes II, who sought to harm Meno through retributive vengeance. Nevertheless, the cohesiveness of this interpretation of the threat exceeds the other (Socrates will not let Meno escape). Furthermore, if we focus on this interpretation, the dependent clause still makes sense in context. Socrates reassures Meno that Socrates is not Artaxerxes II, so Socrates will not harm Meno; however, Socrates will “kill” the Meno who thinks that he knows what *arete* is. Consequently, in order to make such a transformation, Socrates cannot tell Meno how Gorgias seemed to Socrates when Gorgias was in Athens because Socrates' judgment about Gorgias' purported knowledge is not really what is at stake in the conversation. As Socrates implores, “speak yourself.”¹⁶⁶

However, as we will find throughout our investigation, Meno struggles to speak for himself, and Klein remarks on this inability in his second morphological observation. He notes the way that the word rememberer, μνήμων, memory, μνήμη, and Meno, Μένων, appear to share a common root.¹⁶⁷ To this list, we might also add “recollect” (“ἀνάμνησον”), which also makes an appearance in Socrates' response.¹⁶⁸ And yet, despite the apparent similarity, “...in Meno's name the sequence of the letter mu and nu is somewhat deranged....The stem in Meno's name men- is the stem of the Greek word signifying ‘to stay put’, ‘to remain where one is’, ‘not to move’.”¹⁶⁹ We noted the significance of Meno's name early on as one of the few things that we *could* know about Meno without historical context. Considering our analysis of the tension at the center of the inquiry into *arete*, we can likely anticipate that Meno will struggle to reckon with the ambivalent

¹⁶⁵ Liddell and Scott suggest the following translations for ἀπορία: difficulty (of passing or of dealing with) or perplexity. Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 105. Whenever we point out the “ἀπορία of *arete*” in our analysis, we will focus on the difficulties, challenges, perplexities, and puzzles, which inquiry into *arete* entails. We will preserve the Greek in these cases to emphasize both many challenges of searching for *arete* and the unique, dialogically situated encounter with these challenges within the *Meno*.

¹⁶⁶ Plato, *Meno*, 71c.

¹⁶⁷ Klein, “On the Platonic Meno and the Platonic Dialogues,” 363.

¹⁶⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 71c.

¹⁶⁹ Klein, “On the Platonic Meno and the Platonic Dialogues,” 363.

measures of *arete*. It seems unlikely that someone who is “stuck” will navigate the dialectical pull of the inquiry successfully. As we move forward, it may be useful to consider the following questions: What sort of “memory” (μνήμη) allows Socrates to remain sensitive to the tension of *arete*? How does memory (μνήμη) relate to and differ from recollection (ἀνάμνησις)? Socrates already distinguishes them at this point in the dialogue despite the explicit thematization of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) appearing later.¹⁷⁰ And finally, how do memory (μνήμη) and recollection (ἀνάμνησις) bear upon the tension between the *arete* of the *polis* and the *arete* excessive to the measure of the *polis*? With these questions in mind, let us proceed to Meno’s first attempt to account for what *arete* is.

Meno’s First Attempt to Say What *Arete* Is (71d-75c)

How have we arrived at this point in the dialogue, i.e., at Meno’s first attempt to say what *arete* is? We have reached this point through an enticing Socratic provocation. Our analysis has tracked the inception of a problem within Socrates’ response to Meno’s questions concerning human *arete*. Human’s must live in a *polis* because the *polis* provides the site for human goods. Sometimes these goods become known as *aretai*, an example of which we analyzed in Socrates’ remark on the Greek’s admiration of Thessalian horsemanship, wealth, and recently wisdom. And yet, the goods offer an insufficient measure of *arete* itself, since, as Socrates’ hypothetical Athenian remarks, a person who knows about *arete* is blessed. That is, there is something about *arete* that exceeds the limits of the *polis*. And so, despite acknowledging Thessalian renown, Socrates does not think he, or anyone else, knows what *arete* is. His confusion is understandable to us too, since even in this very early stage of the inquiry, we have already found ourselves in the midst of much confusion about *arete*. While we can be confident that our inquiry concerns the *arete* particular to humans, we have run into more problems than solutions at this point.

Through an appeal to Xenophon’s account of Meno, our reading of Meno’s initial questions took on a more nefarious hue. We saw Meno as someone more concerned with power than understanding. Meno engaged in a sort of “game” with Socrates for the sake of his personal advantage. If Meno can defeat Socrates in a dialogical duel, then he would reinforce his (and Thessaly’s) recent renown for “wisdom.” At worst, if he cannot defeat Socrates, then Meno will

¹⁷⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 81b.

learn a new technique to add to his arsenal. Although this reading depends upon Xenophon's account for now, we will soon witness Meno's dialogical engagement in *this* text. Will he answer Socrates fearlessly and magnificently as is fitting for a knower?¹⁷¹ Even in Meno's first attempt to say what *arete* is, it will be evident that he does think he knows what *arete* is already. Meno does not see anything problematic about *arete*. His approach will be combative not inquisitive. Socrates, on the other hand, will engage Meno as a friend and not as "one of those wise men with a bent for strife and contention."¹⁷² Socrates's dialogical approach has a more collaborative character, but it can also be almost paternalistic. For example, Socrates will suggest that Meno "can get some serious practice (μελέτη) for the answer about *arete*,"¹⁷³ when Meno struggles to define shape. Might Socrates suggest practice to Meno in order to draw him into the problematic character of *arete*? That is, could it be a way for him to experience a genuine inquiry into *arete*, and so "know" (γινώσκειν) about it? Let us defer these questions until they appear in the text. Instead, we will examine Meno's first attempt to say what *arete* is.

Meno's response is strange. Explicitly, Meno presents an answer that could easily convince certain listeners. He does not posit anything obviously controversial. In fact, his claims seem to conform to certain commonly held beliefs, if we note that very similar claims are presented in other Platonic dialogues (and other contemporary works).¹⁷⁴ He claims:

But it's not hard (οὐ χαλεπὸν) to tell [what *arete* is], Socrates. First, then, if it's the *arete* of a man you want (εἰ βούλει), it's easy (ῥᾴδιον) to say that this is the *arete* of a man to be sufficient (ικανὸν) to carry on (πράττειν) the affairs of the *polis* and while carrying them on to do well by his friends (φίλους εὖ ποιεῖν) and harm to his enemies (ἐχθροὺς κακῶς) and to take care that he not suffer any such thing himself. And if it's the *arete* of a woman you want (εἰ δὲ βούλει), that's not hard (οὐ χαλεπὸν) to go through, in that she needs to manage the household well (τὴν οἰκίαν εὖ οἰκεῖν), conserving what is inside and being obedient to her man. And the *arete* of a child (παιδός) is different, both female and male, and of an elderly man, and, if you want (εἰ μὲν βούλει), of a freeman (ἐλευθέρου) or, if you want, (εἰ δὲ βούλει), of a slave (δούλου). And there are a great many other *aretai*, so that *there is no difficulty* (οὐκ ἀπορία) *in speaking about what arete is*. For according to each activity (πράξεων) and each time of life relative to each task (ἔργον) for each of us there is an *arete*, and in the same way, I suppose, Socrates, there is also a vice (κακία).¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Exactly as he was trained to do by Gorgias. Plato, *Meno*, 70b.

¹⁷² Ibid., 75d.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 75a.

¹⁷⁴ For an overview and examples from ancient texts, see Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle*, especially 95-102; 116-124; 273-278.

¹⁷⁵ Plato, *Meno*, 71e-72a. Translation modified. Emphasis mine.

We can break down Meno's method in the following way: He presents a couple of specific cases (the *aretai* of a man and woman respectively), and he claims that just as these two specific cases have their specific *aretai* so too do other specific cases (children, the elderly, freemen, and slaves) have their own respective *aretai*. He concludes with a concise claim about *arete*, namely, everyone has an *arete* that depends on what a person does in the *polis* and their development in life. It warrants repeating that Meno's response concerns *human arete*, and Meno's understanding of human *arete* assumes its appearance in the *polis*. In fact, a human's place in the *polis* seems essential to understanding human *arete* according to Meno. Meno assures Socrates that there is no *ἀπορία* here.

Rhetorically, Meno's response paints a different picture. Meno repeats reassurances to Socrates several times throughout the response. At four different times, Meno insists upon the easiness/lack of difficulty in saying what *arete* is. The tragic irony in the last iteration overwhelms the speech. How can we possibly believe that there is "no *ἀπορία*" in saying what *arete* is when our analysis has tracked the development of an aporetic tension even in the earliest stages of the dialogue? In fact, Meno's attempt to say what *arete* is reassures us of our suspicion that there is a genuine *ἀπορία* in this inquiry because Meno's account of *arete* is so myopically aimed at a person's function within the *polis*. While we of course acknowledge the necessity of the *polis* for human life, we have no reason to think that the affairs of the *polis* exhaust the purpose of human existence. Besides emphatically reassuring Socrates of the easiness of saying what *arete* is, Meno also repeats the phrase "if you want" ("εἰ βούλει") four times throughout his speech. What do these repetitions reveal? As tokens of reassurance, they have the opposite effect. The oversaturation of Meno's speech with these little reassurances creates a sense of insecurity—a sense that Socrates' circumspect approach to the problem may be quite justified. If Socrates' response to Meno did not convince us that *arete* may harbor many complications, then Meno's rhetorical weakness leads us back to Socrates' cautiousness. Meno puts on a façade of strength (answering fearlessly and "magnificently") to distract from the vacuousness of his engagement with the problem of *arete*. Moreover, we might also understand his interest in gratifying Socrates as a way to distract from his ignorance. If Socrates preferred gratification as much as Meno, then Socrates' gratification alone could make Meno's answer sufficient. Socrates would not think about *what* Meno said, but he would simply enjoy hearing it in the way he wants. As the dialogue progresses, we will find Meno frequently repeating this phrase ("if you want"). What does it tell us about Meno's

understanding of dialogue? Meno seems unduly concerned with gratification (both his listener's and his own). He seems to view dialogue transactionally. In a discussion, the speaker gives "knowledge" (and/or gratification) to the listener, and the listener gives back some good whether that be money, honor, or affection. Consequently, Meno seems very concerned about giving Socrates what he wants so that Socrates will give Meno something in return. Of course, Socrates' dialogical comportment differs considerably, and his engagement with Meno concerns a genuine inquiry into *arete*, which also entails falling into its *ἀπορία*.

Socrates does not find Meno's answer gratifying. On the contrary, Socrates finds Meno's answer quite problematic. With a hint of irony, Socrates begins to address Meno's speech.

I seem to have hit upon some great good fortune (εὐτυχία), Meno, if, while seeking one *arete* I have discovered a sort of swarm (σμήνος) of *aretai* gathered about you. But, Meno, following up this image about swarms, if after you had been asked by me about the very being of a bee (μελίττης περὶ οὐσίας), just what it is, and you were saying that there are many and of all sorts, what would you answer me if I asked you: "Then are you saying that they are many and of all sorts and different from one another in this by which they are bees (τῷ μελίττας εἶναι)? Or that it is not this in which they differ, but in something else, such as beauty (κάλλει) or size (μεγέθει) or something else of this sort?"¹⁷⁶

What is this "good fortune" (εὐτυχία) that Socrates has hit upon? Is he "just" being ironic here, acting as if it were a good thing that Meno gave so many examples of *arete* while failing to address what it is? Or might there be more depth to his remark? For example, why does Socrates suddenly introduce the bee into his discussion here? Could it be that, like the cultural significance of the Thessalian horse, a broader web of significations is at work here with the bee as well? And might that web also tell us more about *arete* once we draw out more of the implicature?¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 72b. See also Plato, Republic, 552c. "Shall we, then, say of him that as the drone springs up in the cell, a pest of the hive (σμήνους), so much a man grows up in his home, a pest of the state?" Why does the image of the bee seem to appear so frequently throughout the Platonic corpus?

¹⁷⁷ Concerning "Plato's bees," commentators are mostly silent. The most common observation, if there is any comment at all, is the pertinence of the genius-species relation to the question of the *eidos* of *arete*. See, Thomas, *Musings on the Meno*, 84-85; Thompson, *The Meno of Plato*, 76-77. Commentators who say nothing or very little include Anastaplo and Berns, Guthrie, Ionescu, Sallis, Scott, Sharples, Tarrant, and Weiss. Klein gives Plato's bees the most attention. See Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 47-49. Klein suggests that this reference to "the being of bees" ("μελίττης περὶ οὐσίας") illustrates the enormity of the definitional task to the extent that doing so would require a shared metaphysical foundation prior to answering such a question at all. However, the cultural signification upon which we have placed our focus in this inquiry, highlights an even more basic assumption. Would a definition of a natural kind, such as the bee, exhaust the "being of the bee"? It seems unlikely unless we wish, for some reason, to suggest that its cultural signification is not "real."

The bee was a complex creature in the ancient world broadly (not just in Classical Greece) which held both symbolic and material significance (e.g., apiculture). Not only did their honey serve an array of functions from religious rites to child rearing, but bees themselves were believed to share a special relationship with many chthonic divinities and religious cults. In Arthur Cook’s seminal work on the bee in ancient Greek mythology, he concludes “The general impression produced on the mind of the average Greek must have been that the bee was a cthonian creature intimately connected with, if not actual [sic] embodying, the soul.”¹⁷⁸ The bee’s cthonian character manifests throughout Greek mythology as a representation of the concomitant forces of life and death.¹⁷⁹ Thus, when Socrates claims to see a “swam of *aretai*” (“σμῆνός ἀρετῶν”) around Meno, the religious affiliation of the bee swarm resonates in his rhetoric to help explain why Socrates would see the event as a bit of good fortune (εὐτυχία). The imagery wavers between allusion and context. Both the bee and *arete* respectively share an intimate connection with the divine, being themselves progeny of the divine (especially Zeus).¹⁸⁰ The bee was also of interest to certain philosophers who saw the hive as a model for a well-formed society.¹⁸¹ The bee even appears alongside *arete* in the *Phaedo*, when Socrates states:

“Then aren’t the most fortunate (εὐδαιμονέστατοι) of these, and the ones who go to the best region (βέλτιστον τόπον),” he said, “those who’ve devoted themselves to the popular (δημοτικὴν) and political (πολιτικὴν) *arete* people call moderation (σωφροσύνην) and justice (δικαιοσύνην), which is born of habit (ἔθους) and of care (μελέτης), without philosophy and without mind (ἄνευ φιλοσοφίας τε καὶ νοῦ)?”

“In what way are these the most fortunate (εὐδαιμονέστατοι)?”

“Because it’s likely that they’ll arrive again into some such political (πολιτικὸν) and tame (ἡμερον) class as perhaps that of bees or wasps or ants, or even back again into the same human class, and from them will be born measured men (ἄνδρας μετρίους).”¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Cook, “The Bee in Greek Mythology,” 19.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ This remark on *arete* is a bit tongue in cheek. It is not baseless hyperbole since Socrates does claim in the end of the dialogue that *arete* comes to be through divine allotment (θεία μοίρα). It is not clear, however, that divine allotment (θεία μοίρα) is the *only* way for *arete* to come to be in humans.

¹⁸¹ Notably, Aristotle, Plato, and Xenophon.

¹⁸² Plato, *Phaedo*, 82b. Translation modified. Socrates will later warn Simmias and Cebes, imploring them: “...if you’re persuaded by me and give little thought to Socrates and much more to the truth, you must agree with me if I seem to you to say what’s true; and if I don’t, you must strain against me with every argument you’ve got, taking care that I don’t, out of eagerness, go off, having deceived both myself and you, *like a bee that’s left its stinger behind*.” Ibid., 91c. Emphasis mine. “Fortunate” may not be a perfect translation of “εὐδαίμων,” but it has a few benefits: Its connotation lies somewhere between “happy” and “blessed,” and its connotation better implies the mixture of circumstance and individual well-being than “happy” does, a word which suffers from its association with a psychological state in English. It also has a natural antonym in “unfortunate.” Moreover, the sense of “εὐδαίμων”

Although Socrates claims that certain *aretai*, the ones which people call moderation (σωφροσύνη) and justice (δικαιοσύνη), come to be through habit (ἔθος) and care (μελέτη) “without philosophy or mind” (“ἄνευ φιλοσοφίας τε καὶ νοῦ”), this claim does not interest our inquiry. Instead, we take cues from two other parts of this speech. First, Socrates tells the consequence for humans of living in accordance with these *aretai*, namely, becoming the most fortunate (εὐδαιμονέστατοι). This remark harmonizes with our prior analysis of being blessed (μακάριος) as a condition for knowing about *arete*. Becoming superlatively “fortunate” or “blessed” seems to be the reason for cultivating *arete*. Second, Socrates claims that they are “most fortunate” because of the likelihood of their reincarnation into a similarly political (πολιτικός) and tame (ἥμερος) class of beings, namely, bees, wasps, or ants. We will defer the issue of reincarnation for now and instead note the transcendence of *arete* beyond human life in the *polis*. Human *arete* is good for humans, making those who exhibit it the most fortunate (εὐδαιμονέστατοι), but this *arete* exceeds human life in the *polis*. Even so, it is not simply good for humans but for *all* political (πολιτικός) beings—all beings who live together with others in a *polis*. Again, we find ourselves in the midst of a tension between what is good for a human being as a human and what is good for a human as a member of the *polis*.

The image of the “swarm” of *aretai* resonates with ancient apian mythology in another way too: through the mythic practice of bee generation called *bugonia*. According to several ancient sources, *bugonia* involved the generation of a swarm of bees from the corpse of a steer.¹⁸³ As Ovid later described it, “one soul destroyed created thousands.”¹⁸⁴ This mythic practice speaks, tacitly and unsystematically, to one of the issues that Socrates raises against Meno’s answer. What is the common, same, continuous which underlies the appearance of difference? The bee itself functions as a perfect image of this problem, since they share a continuity in appearance while also being differentiated as parts of a whole (the swarm).¹⁸⁵ In the case of *bugonia*, “soul” is the common force which allows for one (the steer) to become many (the swarm of bees). But what about with

(“fortunate”) in this context is quite harmonious with the sense in which we might call someone “fortunate” who enjoys all the good things in life.

¹⁸³ For example, Antigonus of Carystus. Although he does not address the practice by name, Aristotle denies that an animal can be born from other animals. Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 759a.

¹⁸⁴ “The killing of one life created a thousand lives” (Mille animas una necata dedit).” Ovid, *Fasti I*, 380.

¹⁸⁵ The most explicit repetition of this issue appears in the Protagoras. Socrates asks Protagoras whether *arete* is one and justice, moderation, and piety are its parts; or if these *aretai* are just different names of one single thing (*arete*). When Protagoras tells Socrates that *arete* is one, and the aforementioned *aretai* are just parts, Socrates asks, “Parts as in the parts of a face: mouth, nose, eyes, and ears? Or parts as in the parts of gold, where there is no difference, except for size, between parts or between the parts and the whole?” Plato, *Protagoras*, 329d-e.

arete? What is the analogue to “soul” in the *bugonia* relationship that connects the being of *arete* (“just what it is”) and specific *aretai*, such as the *arete* of a man or a woman in Meno’s account? Reasoning further, Socrates claims, “And so too, surely, about the *aretai*: even if they are many in number and of various kinds, still they all have some one, same *eidos* through which they are *aretai* and upon which one would somehow do well to focus one’s gaze...”¹⁸⁶ Conspicuously, we find ourselves confronted again by a tenet of Platonism: “the form” or *eidos*. While the infatuation with Plato’s so-called “theory of forms” might be disproportionate with its actual importance throughout the corpus, the *eidos* clearly does appear here (and in an important way). Let us first briefly consider some issues related to the “theory of forms,” and then we will consider them in relation to the *Meno*.

Many traditional explanations of “Plato’s theory of forms” also entail an assertion of “two worlds”—one of appearances and another “true world of forms.”¹⁸⁷ Consequently, this question of the *eidos* is formidable. Naturally, there are philosophical implications, but even rhetorically and interpretively, we must be wary about our decision here, since it has the power to determine in advance the direction of our inquiry. Thus, the decision to leave *eidos* in the Greek reflects our commitment to “letting the text speak” as much as possible. In this spirit, we must consider the contours of the treatment of the Platonic *eidos* so that we can better understand the implications for our inquiry. With regard to our investigation, there are two primary issues concerning *eidos* which manifest in various ways throughout all Platonic scholarship: (1) Whether or not to understand it as a rigidly defined technical term, and (2) Whether to consider its usage in this dialogue alone or consider it alongside its broader usage in the corpus. When we choose a translation for *eidos*, we are already assigning a technical definition to the term.¹⁸⁸ But does the text justify such a practice? For example, at this point, how can we justify a decision to choose any one of these equally legitimate translations of *eidos*: look, form, shape, kind, type, class, idea? This decision has many implications later as well. How should we differentiate *eidos* from *idea*? And

¹⁸⁶ Plato, *Meno*, 72C. Translation modified

¹⁸⁷ Alican and Thesleff. “Rethinking Plato’s Forms,” 12. Alican and Thesleff concisely articulate this same concern. Therein, they cite three illustrative examples of this so-called “traditional” account: Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 144. Benson, *A Companion to Plato*, 174. Welton *Plato’s Forms: Varieties of Interpretation*, 1.

¹⁸⁸ Even this digression and the decision to leave the word in Greek speaks to its assumed importance. However, the assumption that *eidos* has a contextual importance is very different than the assumption that it is central to Plato’s metaphysics and epistemology broadly. In the former case, we must recall that Socrates himself tells Meno that the *aretai* “all have some one, same *eidos* through which they are *aretai*...” On the other hand, there is nothing in the text so far that would justify our belief that *eidos* has a broader (i.e., outside of the *Meno*) philosophical importance.

is there even justification to assert a robust distinction between them? This issue leads back to the beginning. It is entirely plausible that *eidōs* sometimes has one sense and another sense at other times, that is, it may not have the character of precise terminology. This lack of continuity can occur within a single dialogue, but it can, and does, take place between dialogues as well. Moreover, the way that one chooses to address the (dis)continuity of the usage of *eidōs* likely stems from one's assumptions about textual chronology and "Plato's philosophy." For example, those who believe there is a development in Plato's thought throughout the corpus will be more inclined to see greater terminological precision in the "later" dialogues versus the "earlier" ones. Or they may read "earlier" usage as anticipatory of later developments. Moreover, such an assumption forces the content of later dialogues to determine the meaning of earlier ones, and this process takes place on the basis of a dubious and speculative dating process.¹⁸⁹ The way that one answers the chronology question also likely informs/is informed by one's assumptions about "Platonic philosophy" as a whole, namely, those who think that we can find a (relatively) complete philosophic system dispersed throughout the dialogues will be more inclined to read the dialogues developmentally, whereas those who are less concerned with recovering such a philosophic system will have less at stake in the chronology of the texts.

Explicitly, Platonic chronology does not concern our inquiry, but it does implicitly. We have treated the *Meno* as a text that both speaks for itself *and* participates in a web of intertextuality. Moreover, we have never sought a Platonic philosophy, but instead, we have sought to understand what the *Meno* can teach us about *arete*. Consequently, it is clear that we have approached the text with certain assumptions about how to read it. However, having such assumptions is not itself problematic. They function as preconditions of our ability to navigate through the text lest we never even begin in the first place. Thus, it is ultimately these assumptions along with the text that shape the way that we must read *eidōs* in this context. What, then, can we say here? First, we can say that this context offers no justification to the "participation" account of *eidōs*, that is, Socrates is clearly not saying that there is some ideal, abstract "form" of *arete* in which all *aretai* "participate" derivatively. In fact, one notable insight from our analysis of Socrates' opening speech was its intensely rooted and concrete character. The use of *eidōs* here seems to function universally but not "abstractly." Socrates is searching for the human *arete* that

¹⁸⁹ For a critique of the traditional order of dialogues, see Thesleff's *Platonic Patterns: A Collection of Essays*. For a critique of method, see Howland, "Re-reading Plato: The Problem of Platonic Chronology."

transcends the measure of *arete* unique to each *polis* while remaining rooted in the *polis*. The bees of a swarm differ from one another, and yet despite this difference, no bee is any more or less bee than any other. Analogously, Meno's attempt to say what *arete* is picks out individual difference (the *arete* of men, women, children, the elderly, the free, slaves) as constitutive of the whole (human *arete*). Just as worker bees and queen bees are both bees despite serving distinct functions within the hive, so too are men and women both humans despite their different tasks within the *polis*.

Furthermore, the bee is also both divine and chthonic. It shared a name with certain priestesses, played decisive roles in mythologies, somehow related to the soul, produced a substance (honey) that many societies believed to possess special properties. Yet the bee played a role in rituals concerning death and generation as well, whether again through the use of its honey or even the practice of *bugonia*. The bee represented a being on the threshold of the mortal and the divine, and it is in this sense that it again shares a likeness to the problem of *arete*. The measure of *arete* in the *polis* emerges out of the *polis* as the site of human activity. The *polis* gives humans access to many goods, but what about the human good? Do the “most fortunate” ones (εὐδαιμονέστατοι) or those who are blessed (μακάριος) not name the people who have secured their claim to the human good? And yet, there is a very obvious issue: Would anyone at any time throughout the history of human existence claim that every member of a *polis* was able to secure their claim to the human good? Not everyone becomes “fortunate” or blessed (μακάριος). If every person born in a *polis* became fortunate or blessed, then the cultivation of the *polis*' measure of *arete* would likely suffice. But life in the *polis* does not play out in this way. The *arete* of the *polis* lacks something necessary for the realization of the human good. Finally, the bee bears upon the question of *arete* in another way. In Socrates' speech from the *Phaedo*, we saw him praise the bees pro-social tendencies/habits. This political (πολιτικός) and tame (ἡμερος) creature exhibited habits whose benefit transcended its species—a human reborn from a swarm of bees would *likely* become a measured man (μέτριος ἀνὴρ).¹⁹⁰ This transcendent beneficence, which also appeared in our analysis of the “ξένε” greeting, seems to be a recurrent theme in our analysis thus far, and we should continue to track it throughout our investigation. Bearing these apian insights in mind, let us continue with our analysis.

¹⁹⁰ Emphasis on likely. Socrates does not seem to assert this with brazen self-confidence.

Meno claims to understand (μανθάνειν) the problem, yet he does not “grasp what is being asked as well as [he] would like (βούλομαι).”¹⁹¹ This response compels Socrates to ask Meno whether he thinks this way only about *arete*, or if he thinks the same way about health (ὕγεια), stature (μέγεθος), and strength (ἰσχύς) also. Again, Socrates speaks of the *eidos* and uses it in the same way as before. “Or is it the same *eidos* everywhere, if it is indeed health (ὕγεια), whether it exists in a man or in anyone else whatever?”¹⁹² Socrates continues, reasoning, “If a woman is really strong (ἰσχυρὰ), will she not be strong by the same *eidos* and by the same strength? For ‘by the same’ I mean this: strength does not differ with respect to being strength whether it exists in a man or in a woman.”¹⁹³ Let us pause here and ask ourselves two questions: First, why is Socrates talking about health (ὕγεια), stature (μέγεθος), and strength (ἰσχύς), when he ostensibly is really concerned about *arete*? Second, why does Socrates choose these corporeal examples? After Meno claimed to know what *arete* is, he asserted that there were all different kinds of *aretai*, and “what *arete* is” depends upon the type of person about whom one inquires. These examples are interesting because they are both illustrative and problematic. For example, in the case of strength, we can see Socrates’ point quite clearly. In strength competitions, we often separate competitors according to weight classes. Even so, it is perfectly consistent to say that a competitor in a heavier weight class is stronger than a competitor in a lighter one *and* that both competitors are strong without qualification. In this example, we acknowledge both a relative and universal measure of strength. The former allows us to compare one competitor to another, and the latter allows us to judge them both as “strong.” Does this distinction between a relative and universal measure not mirror the same distinction that we have tracked between the measure of *arete* in the *polis* and the measure of *arete* of human beings? In this way, we can understand Socrates’ assertion that “Strength does not differ with respect to being strength whether it exists in a man or in a woman.” This point is quite crucial to their inquiry into *arete*. Perhaps this reasoning explains why Socrates seems to think the comparison between *arete* and health (ὕγεια), stature (μέγεθος), and strength (ἰσχύς) unproblematic, even though Meno objects here, responding, “it somehow seems to me, at any rate, Socrates, that this [i.e., *arete*] is no longer like those others [i.e., health, stature, strength].”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Plato, *Meno*, 72d.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 72e.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 73a.

Meno's objection leads us back into our second question: why does Socrates choose these particular examples?

Not only is the corporeal character of these example striking, but the example of stature (μέγεθος) stands out from the others. If we understand stature (μέγεθος) as one's height, then it is strange to include it alongside health and strength. For health and strength fluctuate over time, and a person can affect the state of his or her health and strength, but one cannot do anything to change the "height" of one's body.¹⁹⁵ However, just as in English, the word "stature" or "μέγεθος" can mean both stature as height or as greatness (especially through one's achievements). In this latter sense, stature harmonizes much more with health and strength, and yet, stature stands apart from health and strength in another way too. Although Socrates introduces it alongside health and strength to illustrate to Meno the kind of answer about *arete* for which they are searching, he does not explicate his reasoning on stature as he does with health and strength. Why include it at all, if health and strength suffice? And if it were important to include, why not say more about it (like the others), since it is the least obvious of the examples—at least superficially? Its omission draws our attention to it, leading us to ask about the purpose of Socrates' reasoning. Upon first glance, one might broadly categorize health (ὕγιαια), stature (μέγεθος), and strength (ἰσχύς) as "biological" attributes. As biological attributes, they describe how a human comes to be *by nature*. This description is reminiscent of Meno's opening questions: whether *arete* comes to be in humans by practice, learning, nature, or some other way. If we understand them as biological attributes, they become problematic illustrations. If, as biological attributes, they were like *arete*, then should we not also conclude similarly about *arete*? However, such an inference does not seem quite right, and Meno voices the same intuition in his objection. And yet, we must ask whether these examples *must* be understood as biological attributes. Could we understand them otherwise? The omission of any further explication of stature (μέγεθος), which forced us to linger with this example longer than the others, drew our attention to another way of becoming (that is, not strictly by nature). Nature, of course, has *some* effect on one's stature (stature as others' perception of one's greatness), but deeds play such a constitutive role in one's stature that it would be too reductive to describe it as simply a biological attribute. In other words, there is a measure of stature that goes beyond what is given by nature. As an illustration, we never admire the stature of babies. Through

¹⁹⁵ This strange phrasing excludes augmentations to height with attire.

our analysis of stature, we might conclude that an analogous measure determines our perception of health and strength, and further, *arete* as well. Not only does each one seem to have a relative and universal measure according to which we judge whether a person exhibits or health (ὕγεια), stature (μέγεθος), and strength (ἰσχὺς), or *arete*, but these qualities *as human goods* bear upon *arete*. While themselves not sufficient for *arete* (that is, being healthy, having an impressive stature, and being strong do not alone constitute *arete*), they do play a part in it.¹⁹⁶ These examples reflect a similar tension in the determination of *arete* to the problem we considered in Socrates' opening speech (i.e., concerning the tension between a relative (the *arete* of the *polis*) and universal measure (a human *arete*)), but they also contribute to the confusion about *arete*. Again, Socrates' initial caution seems further justified.

Returning once more to Meno's first attempt, Socrates wonders, "Then can one manage (διοικεῖν) a *polis* well (εὖ), or a household, or anything else whatever, if one does not manage it moderately (σωφρόνως) and justly (δικαίως)?"¹⁹⁷ Because of our prior analysis, we can more easily understand Socrates' point here. Meno's first attempt to say what *arete* is only accounted for the relative measure of *arete*. The measure of *arete* for a man depends upon his accomplishment of one task, and the measure of *arete* for a woman depends upon her accomplishment of another. However, Meno's attempt gives no measure for the *arete* common to them as humans. Socrates' addition of a "way" of accomplishing their respective tasks gestures towards the beginning of an inquiry into a universal measure. This "way" (e.g., "moderately (σωφρόνως) and justly (δικαίως)") transcends an individual's purpose (e.g., the management of the *polis* or the household) in the *polis* without negating the purpose. At least on the surface, it seems possible to abide by both a universal measure of *arete* and a relative one. While this tentative harmony may be reassuring, we can easily imagine scenarios in which the accomplishment of one's task forces a person to choose between its accomplishment and one's commitment to a universal measure of *arete*. In other words, despite the clarificatory utility of this example, we can also anticipate how superficially we have begun to dig into this problem. Even so, one must begin somewhere, and Socrates' response leads us helpfully into his subsequent reasoning. We will finally witness an explicit introduction of a part of the problem which we have struggled to outline. Socrates concludes, "Then both need the same

¹⁹⁶ Consequently, the corporeal valence of these examples attests again to the rooted and concrete concern of the inquiry. Socrates does not inquire into an other-worldly *arete*, but an *arete* which humans exhibit in certain conditions of health (ὕγεια), stature (μέγεθος), and strength (ἰσχὺς).

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 73a.

things, if they are going to be good (εἴπερ μέλλουσιν ἀγαθοί εἶναι), both the woman and the man, namely, justice and moderation.”¹⁹⁸ We have noticed the appearance of many goods for human life throughout the dialogue so far, but now, we find a different sense of the good. The concern which requires one to inquire about *arete* is how to become a good person, that is, how to secure for oneself the human good. This human good differs from the *polis* good despite both concerning human beings. Let us follow our new insight deeper into Socrates’ reasoning.

Socrates continues his reasoning, arguing “Then all human beings (ἄνθρωποι) are good (ἀγαθοί) in the same way (τῷ αὐτῷ τρόπῳ); for it is from the same things that they happen to become good....They would surely not be good (ἀγαθοί) in the same way (τῷ αὐτῷ ἂν τρόπῳ) if they didn’t have the same (αὐτῇ) *arete*.”¹⁹⁹ This argument adds the missing piece to our prior analysis of the relationship between health (ὑγίεια), stature (μέγεθος), and strength (ἰσχὺς), and *arete*. Our analysis focused upon the different measures (relative and universal) that operate within each of these qualities. Socrates’ preliminary commentary on Thessaly and Meno’s first attempt to say what *arete* is both describe the relative measure of *arete* as the measure of *arete* in the *polis*. However, neither account describes a measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good, but this additional argument does make it clear that our inquiry into *arete* concerns the search for such a universal measure. There must be some measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good lest no good people exist. This universal sense of the human good mirrors the sense of health, stature, and strength that allow very different people to stake a common claim to health, stature, and strength. Despite our newfound clarity about the terms of our inquiry, we also have new problems as well. Although we understand that we search for a measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good, we have no idea yet what that measure entails (or if it *does* exist). Socrates did claim that justice (δικαιοσύνη) and moderation (σωφροσύνη) are *necessary* for a person to become good, but it does not seem that justice and moderation are *sufficient* for being a good person.²⁰⁰ *Arete* must involve more than justice and moderation, but we have no idea yet what else is necessary. Even so, the gravity of the search also impresses itself on us. The human good has both teleological and axiological weight. Becoming good (or “fortunate” or “blessed”) is a choice-worthy pursuit. Who would not want to become a good, fortunate, and/or blessed person? Despite the universal appeal

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. Translation modified.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 73c.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 73b.

of the subject matter, the human good poses enormous challenges, which we have only begun to unravel.

Socrates has reached the conclusion of his response to Meno's first attempt, and so he asks Meno to try to say and recollect (ἀναμνησθῆναι) what Gorgias, and Meno too, claim *arete* to be. We hear the ambiguity in this imperative, but does Meno? Before moving on to Meno's second attempt, let us briefly review what our analysis of Meno's first attempt has revealed. Meno assured Socrates that there is no ἀπορία in saying what *arete* is. Meno answers the question fearlessly and magnificently, describing the relative measure of *arete* for each member of the *polis*. However, Socrates was not satisfied with this answer. Socrates sought a more universal *arete*, an *arete* that suffices for all human beings. As we made our way through Socrates' reasoning, we found that this *arete* is the measure of the human good. Socrates's concern lies with the *arete* that good people exhibit. Such a search is as difficult as it is important, and we have already touched upon several of the difficulties. In the beginning of our analysis, we recognized various goods (e.g., horsemanship, wealth, and wisdom) in Socrates' commentary on Thessaly, but these goods do not make people good nor did the later good qualities with which Socrates flattered Meno (being handsome, rich, and well-born). We found even more goods when we analyzed Socrates' reasoning about health, size, and strength. In the *polis*, we find ourselves surrounded by so many goods, and yet, does the possession of any (or all) of these goods sufficiently guarantee that a person will be a good person? Surprisingly (perhaps), no. How can the *polis* allow humans to possess and cultivate so many goods without also becoming good people in the process? Such a condition seems almost *aporetic* despite Meno's assurance. Perhaps Meno's second attempt will help to clear up some difficulties.

Meno's Second Attempt to Say What *Arete* Is (75c-77a)

In his second attempt, Meno asserts "...to be able to rule (ἄρχειν) over human beings..." is *arete*.²⁰¹ This assertion expresses a decisive ambiguity. Does Meno mean that those who rule set the measure of *arete*, or does he mean that ruling over others is the sufficient condition for *arete*? Does ruling over others give the ruler the license to "proclaim" (whether explicitly or performatively) what is good for humans in the *polis*, or does the act of ruling over the *polis* make

²⁰¹ Ibid.

a human good? This ambiguity gestures towards another complication for our inquiry into *arete*, namely, that the rulers *do* play some part in the determination of the measure of *arete* in the *polis*. This custom functions adequately in the establishment of a relative measure of *arete*. Consequently, the rulers of a *polis* have axiological power in addition to practical power. A wide array of human goods can become the relative measure of *arete* in the *polis*, since the only necessary condition is the preservation of the *polis*. However, due to the relativity of such a measure, someone in the *polis* will suffer. This measure of *arete* is exclusive, which, naturally, makes it problematic, even inadequate, as a universal measure—the kind of measure that we have tracked as a concern in Socrates’ speeches. Philosophical difficulties aside, we may also have some concern about Meno making such an assertion. If Meno thinks *arete* requires ruling over others, and he has been trained to act *like* a man who knows what he is talking about, then he poses a clear threat to the *polis*.²⁰² His brazen ignorance poses a minor threat to himself and others as an individual, but he would pose a much bigger one if he had power over the *polis* too. This second attempt even highlights his ignorance (his *mere* likeness to a knower) because it fails to heed Socrates’ response to his first attempt. If Socrates objected to his first attempt because of its inadequacy as a universal measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good, then an exclusive measure of *arete* (the ability to rule over others) offers very little. Obviously not everyone can be a ruler, and so according to Meno’s answer, a large portion of the human population has no share of the human good.

Socrates immediately undermines Meno’s account in two ways. First, he points out the obvious examples of its exclusivity. Slaves and children cannot be rulers, and so it follows that they would have no share of the human good. Their exclusion poses problems for Meno’s argument, since he just claimed that slaves and children have their own *arete* too. Not only do Meno’s answers lack rigor, but they are even inconsistent. Second, Socrates poses the same issue that he just raised previously. “Shall we not add to that ‘justly, but not unjustly?’”²⁰³ A part of

²⁰² Cf. *Ibid.*, 76c. Despite Meno’s esteem for the ability to rule, Socrates will tease Meno for his deficiency as a “ruler” of their discussion.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 73d. Meno addresses Meno as “my very good man” (ὁ ἄριστος), which we could take as an ironic gesture towards the gap between Meno himself and his claims about *arete*. If Meno were to become ruler of a *polis*, then he may become known as one of “the best men” (ἄριστοι) insofar as he is a ruler, but his sufficiency before the relative measure of *arete* belies his inadequacy before the universal measure. For Socrates’ response draws attention to the potential for injustice in the measure of *arete* as those who rule, that is, one need not be just to be a ruler. And yet, they had just agreed that justice is a necessary part of the universal measure of *arete*.

Socrates' objection to Meno's prior attempt arose from an insistence that a universal measure of *arete* must consider the *way* that a person completes the task. Even if a man and a woman have different tasks in the *polis*, as Meno claimed in his first attempt, they both exhibit the same *arete* if they act in the same way (namely, moderately and justly). Emphasizing again his likeness to a knower, Meno confidently agrees with Socrates and asserts "For justice (*δικαιοσύνη*), Socrates, is *arete*."²⁰⁴ Does Meno make this claim about *arete* as an amendment to his assertion about the ability to rule, or does he assert it independently? Does Meno "perform" the *arete* of his ruler by proclaiming this new measure of *arete*, namely, "justice"? It is possible, which makes Socrates' swift and obvious refutation all the more amusing. He asks, "is [justice] *arete*, Meno, or some particular *arete*?"²⁰⁵ This distinction is obvious but important nonetheless. Any search for a universal, inclusive measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good must distinguish between what is necessary and sufficient. Justice may be necessary, but it alone is not sufficient.

Socrates follows up on this distinction with a series of questions about the relationship between a particular thing and the kind of thing which a particular is. He compares the cases of shape (*σχῆμα*) and color (*χρῶμα*) to *arete*. Just as Socrates recognizes that roundness is a particular shape and not shape itself, Meno also recognizes that justice is a particular *arete* and not *arete* itself, proudly listing off courage (*ἀνδρεία*), moderation (*σωφροσύνη*), wisdom (*σοφία*), magnificence (*μεγαλοπρέπεια*), and "a great many others" (*ἄλλαι πάμπολλα*) as illustrations.²⁰⁶ Even so, Meno still struggles to say what that *arete* is which is the same over all the particulars—a universal, inclusive human *arete*. The fact that Meno struggles is not by itself noteworthy, since we have attuned ourselves to the complexity of the problem. Socrates is asking a very difficult question. However, what *is* noteworthy about Meno's struggle is his refusal to recognize that they inquire into a genuinely problematic subject-matter. Meno never admits the aporetic character of their inquiry, but he simply insists upon his own inability to grasp the question. If only Meno could grasp the question, *then* he would be able to answer it. Having led Meno through an analogous distinction using shape (*σχῆμα*) and color (*χρῶμα*), Socrates exhorts Meno in the following way: "Try to say [what is it that is the same over all shapes], so that you can get some serious practice (*μελέτη*) for the answer about *arete*."²⁰⁷ Socrates' suggestion that Meno can get some practice

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 73e.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 74a.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 75a.

(μελέτη) harkens back to Meno's opening questions. Meno asked whether *arete* came to be from practice (μελέτη). Could Socrates exhort Meno to practice here as a tacit affirmation of practice's role in *arete*'s becoming? Perhaps. It could be that Meno's participation in this exercise would better draw Meno into the difficulty surrounding an inquiry into *arete*. However, Meno refuses Socrates. He will *not* try to say what is "the same" (ταυτός) over all shapes. Why does Meno refuse? While it may be somewhat indulgent to answer this question about shapes, Meno insisted that he could not answer in this way about *arete*. If Meno understands the problem through shapes, then perhaps some practice would help him with the more difficult problem of *arete*. However, if Meno does not care much about *arete*, then Meno may be less inclined to indulge Socrates. Meno also may refuse because he knows that answering a question is more difficult than asking.²⁰⁸ Whatever his reason may be, Meno nonetheless turns the task back over to Socrates, "No, but you say it, Socrates."²⁰⁹ This refusal is the first time that Meno has put up any resistance to Socrates. While Meno does not object on an especially substantive basis, we ought to take note of it because of the digression that it introduces.

Socrates responds with amicable clarification, "Do you want (βούλει)? Am I to gratify (χαρίσωμαι) you?"²¹⁰ Meno affirms his desire. This verb "βούλει" has appeared previously in the dialogue. We noted Meno's repetition of it during his first attempt to say what *arete* is, and we interpreted it as a reflection of his dialogical comportment. Meno gives Socrates what Socrates wants so that Socrates will give Meno what Meno wants in return. However, we now find Meno unable to give Socrates what he wants, and yet, Meno still demands that Socrates gratify him. Why does Socrates oblige? Why does Socrates persist with Meno throughout the dialogue despite his growing unruliness and inability to track the complexity of the problem of *arete*? The answer may lie in Socrates' response. When Meno promises to tell Socrates about *arete* if Socrates answers his question about shape, Socrates agrees to the terms. He declares, "One must give it a try (προθυμητέον). For it is worthy (ἄξιον)."²¹¹ While this admission may appear insignificant and

²⁰⁸ Cf. Plato, *Republic*, 336c. Lashing out at Socrates, Thrasymachus insists, "You know very well that it is easier to ask questions than answer them."

²⁰⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 75b.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 75b. McKirahan suggests this translation as the more literal one. McKirahan, *Plato's Meno*, 10. Anastaplo and Berns choose the translation that sounds more familiar to English speakers: "You want me to gratify you?" However, the literal translation with its curtness better highlights Meno's imperiousness in the dialogue—especially when he admits unapologetically that he *does* want Socrates to gratify him.

²¹¹ Plato, *Meno*, 75b. Translation modified.

unremarkable, Socrates' declaration of it as worthy (ἄξιος) bespeaks a decisive reason for tarrying with this difficult, even aporetic, problem concerning human *arete*. Our analysis has tracked the inception and development of this problem throughout the dialogue so far, and we have understood it in terms of its relation to the human good. What is the measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good? It is a question concerned with being a good person. We do not yet know many answers (or whether there are any), but the importance of the inquiry (that it is worthy) does seem clear. Of course, we can defer to Socrates' assertion, but more fundamentally, we understand its worthiness insofar as we share in a concern for the human good. Insofar as we care, like Socrates, about being good people, then the questions and complexities surrounding an inquiry into a universal, inclusive measure of the human good concern us too.

Bolstered by the prospect of hearing Meno tell him about *arete*, Socrates ventures a satisfactory account of shape: "...[I]t is that which alone (μόνον), of all the things that are (τῶν ὄντων), which always (ἀεὶ) happens to accompany color (χρῶματι). Is that sufficient for you, or do you somehow seek it in some other way? For I would be content (ἀγαπῶν) if you could tell me about *arete* in this way?"²¹² Socrates' account bears a resemblance to his prior manner of speaking about *eidos*.²¹³ Instead of "one" (ἓν) and "the same" (ταὐτός), Socrates here says "alone" (μόνος) and "always" (ἀεὶ).²¹⁴ His account is simple—it posits as few conditions as are necessary. In this sense, Socrates likely speaks earnestly when he claims that he would be content to hear *arete* spoken about in this way. Of course, we ought to wonder whether it is possible to speak about *arete* in this way. Is *arete* similar enough to shape (σχῆμα) that it can serve as a model for speaking about *arete*? Such a question does not occur to Meno. Instead, he shows his lack of resolve for their inquiry into *arete*. Meno expresses his dissatisfaction with Socrates' answer, calling it "simple-minded" (εὐήθεος).²¹⁵ Why does Meno think so? His objection is quite reasonable, although he may have missed the point. Meno claims that Socrates' account relies on a familiarity with color, and so Socrates should also say what color is in the same way. Of course,

²¹² Ibid., 75c.

²¹³ Ibid., 72c.

²¹⁴ While perhaps not immediately relevant, Thesleff's account of "asymmetrical contrasts" in *Platonic Patterns* is useful here for a macroscopic view of the operation of contrasts within the Platonic corpus generally as well as ample examples from the dialogues. Thesleff, *Platonic Patterns*, 399-410.

²¹⁵ McKirahan notes "(εὐ + ἦθος) originally 'good natured,' but frequently 'foolish.'" McKirahan, *Plato's Meno*, 11. The double entendre seems likely here, especially because of the fact that Meno and Socrates display very different "habits." Socrates' definition does appear both good natured and foolish.

Meno is technically correct. If one does not know what color is, then Socrates' account of shape, which hinges upon knowing color, would not suffice. However, there are two issues with his pedantry. First, is it reasonable to believe that Meno does not know what color is? Or does he only object for the sake of contentiousness? Naturally, there are different degrees of sophistication with which one can speak about "color"; however, this point leads to another issue, namely, it is irrelevant. Socrates spoke in this way about shape as means of satisfying Meno so that he would, in exchange, tell Socrates about *arete*. Secondly, Socrates's account of shape provides a model for speaking about *arete*. He spoke about shape in a way that would help Meno to answer the subsequent question. Socrates agreed to indulge this digression because he believed the primary matter (*arete*) so important that it was worth his effort, but now, Meno defers his responsibility. Does it make sense for Socrates to account for color so that his account of shape will be more complete, when Socrates only spoke about shape so that Meno would tell him about *arete*? Meno seems to have lost sight of what is at stake in their inquiry. Perhaps he never really saw its worth in the same way as Socrates. Unsurprisingly, Socrates pauses for a moment to comment on dialogical practice. Let us consider these comments, since they offer us an uncharacteristically frank commentary on Socrates' approach to dialogue.

When asked how he would respond to an interlocutor who claimed not to know what color is, Socrates asserts:

The truth (τάληθῆ) is what I would have answered. And if the questioner were one of those wise men (σοφῶν) with a bent (ἐρόμενος) for strife (ἐριστικῶν) and contention (ἀγωνιστικῶν), I would tell him, "That's what I said. And if I don't speak correctly (ὀρθῶς), it's your task to take up the argument and refute it." But if, being friends (φίλοι) as both I and you are now, they should want to have a discussion with one another, then surely a somehow more gentle (πρότερον) and more dialectical (διαλεκτικώτερον) way of answering is required. And it is perhaps more dialectical to answer not only with the truth (μὴ μόνον τάληθῆ), but also through those things which he who is being questioned could agree that he knows. I too, indeed, will try to speak to you in this way. For, tell me, is there something you call an end (τελευτήν)? I mean this sort of thing, like a limit (πέρας) or an extremity (ἔσχατον)—all these, I say, are the same thing (ταυτόν), though perhaps Prodicus would differ (διαφέροιτο) from us; but you, at any rate, do call something as having been limited (πεπεράνθαι) or ended (τετελευτηκέναι). This is the sort of thing I want to say, nothing very subtle (οὐδὲν ποικίλον).²¹⁶

²¹⁶ Plato, Meno, 75d-e.

Socrates insists that he would simply respond with “the truth” to his interlocutor, but if we pair this insistence with Socrates’ behavior in this dialogue (and others), then it becomes more difficult to understand what exactly “speaking the truth” entails. We need not naively assume truth corresponds singularly with some object. For example, Socrates can both speak the truth in both iterations of his account of shape without forcing us to wonder whether one account is “truer” than the other. Even so, the two iterations of his account of shape alongside his Gorgian style account of color do draw our attention to the necessity of hidden factors that determine the way that Socrates decides to speak “the truth.” If all three accounts speak the truth about shape and color, then what measure of truth led Socrates to assert the first account first (and so on).²¹⁷ Furthermore, Socrates also obviously does *not* speak the truth at times. For example, when Socrates previously claimed not to be a good rememberer, we noted the absurdity of this claim (given his ability to recite poetry and arguments from memory) and its outright contradiction in another dialogue. Additionally, Socrates claims here that he would stand his ground and defer the responsibility of refutation to the interlocutor, if he were in a dialogue with “one of those wise men (σοφῶν) with a bent (ἐρόμενος) for strife (ἐριστικῶν) and contention (ἀγωνιστικῶν),” but he does not do so in practice. Even if we do not think it appropriate to categorize Meno as “one of those wise men (σοφῶν)” (since he is arguably on the border), we can consider Socrates’ behavior in other dialogues with explicit “sophists,” e.g., Thrasymachus in the *Republic*, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in *Euthydemus*, Callicles in the *Gorgias*, Protagoras in *Protagoras*. In none of these dialogues does Socrates behave in the way that he claims he would here in the *Meno*. Consequently, whatever Socrates means by “the truth” involves more judgment and behind-the-scenes discretion than it might seem.

Even so, we can also read Socrates’ digression here more imminently within its dialogical context. Just as in the prior case of the hypothetical Athenian, Socrates may use this hypothetical

²¹⁷ “[T]hat which alone, of all the things that are, which always happens to accompany color” is Socrates’ first account of shape. Ibid., 75b. “[T]he limit of a solid” is his second account of shape. Ibid., 76a. “[A]n effluence of shapes commensurate with sight and perceptible” is his Gorgian style account of color. Ibid., 76d. One might suppose that Socrates changes his account according to the needs of Meno, but this answer does not address the problem. Socrates mentions his awareness of Meno’s instruction from Gorgias, and so if he merely spoke in the terms that his interlocutor knows (as he suggests is appropriate for a dialogue between friends), he could have just led with a Gorgian style account of shape. The point is that “the truth” does not just mean an earnest expression of whatever “comes to mind,” but a judgment also accompanies speaking the truth which determines *how* Socrates speaks the truth. This “hidden measure” that governs the way Socrates speaks the truth mirrors the hidden measure of *arete* in its ambivalence between the *arete* of the *polis* and the *arete* of the human good.

discourse with one of those so-called wise men (σοφοί) as a gentler, corrective gesture. If Meno wants to act like someone with a bent (ἐρόμενος) for strife (ἐριστικός) and contention (ἀγωνιστικός), undermining the inquiry with pedantic and irrelevant objections, Socrates too will take on a different comportment in the investigation.²¹⁸ Even if Socrates “threatens” Meno with the possibility of this other, harsher persona, Socrates still maintains a well-disposed and cooperative comportment towards Meno. The tone of his response shifts as Socrates continues, claiming that Meno clearly is not one of those men and that the two of them are friends. Subsequent to his harsher, more instructive beginning, Socrates proceeds to treat Meno “gently” and “more dialectically,” gauging Meno’s familiarity with several key terms before proceeding. Because they are friends (φίλοι) (and so cooperating in their inquiry), Socrates must assume that Meno, somehow, earnestly does not know what color is, and Socrates should modify his account of shape accordingly.²¹⁹ Thus, Socrates prepares for a second attempt to say what shape is.

Making sure to speak in terms that Meno understands, Socrates asks Meno whether he agrees that there is something having been limited (πεπεράνθαι) or ended (τετελευτηκέναι), i.e., an end (τελευτή), limit (πέρας), or extremity (ἔσχατος). Socrates claims that these three terms are all the same (ταὐτός) just as he claimed previously that there is something which is the same (ταὐτός) over all those things called shapes.²²⁰ He seems again to model the kind of answer about *arete* that would suffice. However, as he prepares for his second account, Socrates casually mentions that Prodicus would differ. Who was Prodicus? Why would he differ, and with respect to what would he differ from Meno and Socrates? Why does Socrates even mention him here at all? Prodicus of Ceos was a sophist, whose expertise in precise use of words followed his name around Greek texts like an epithet.²²¹ Socrates will mention Prodicus again later in the dialogue, suggesting that he was Socrates’ teacher just as Gorgias was to Meno.²²² If we assume that Prodicus would object to the equation of these three terms (end (τελευτή), limit (πέρας), or extremity (ἔσχατος), then his teacher would merely live up to his reputation as someone concerned

²¹⁸ Irrelevant because their main concern is *arete*, of course.

²¹⁹ While there is an earnest dimension, there is also clearly irony here as well. Is color so obscure that one cannot safely assume that an interlocutor would know what it is?

²²⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 75a.

²²¹ Nails, *The People of Plato*, 255. See also Plato, *Protagoras*, 337a-c, 358a-e, 340a-341b, *Euthydemus*, 277e, *Phaedrus* 267b. Ancient authors who mention him are the following: Plato, pseudo-Plato, Xenophon, Aeschines of Sphettus, and Aristophanes.

²²² Plato, *Meno*, 96d.

with precise speech. However, Prodicus may be relevant to our investigation of the dialogue in another way. Let us consider what else Socrates' allusion to Prodicus might imply.

How do we know who Prodicus was? This question does not ask the modern epistemological concern for certainty, i.e., how can we ever *really* know any ancient figure? In every piece of ancient testimony, Prodicus comes to us as a hazy figure—one who occupies a place somewhere between history and fiction. And yet, this ambiguity has pervaded our investigation since the beginning. Meno comes to us as this sort of figure as well, even if Xenophon's *Anabasis* has a more historical tenor than his *Memorabilia* or *Symposium*. Even Socrates seems to occupy this ambiguous position. Why has this haziness not been a problem for us? It is because we are not concerned with historical facticity in our inquiry. In both the case of Socrates and Meno, we have used present context (the *Meno*) and historical, cultural context to inform our sense of each figure. This sense plays an important role in our interpretation because it provides a basis for connections and implications which do not appear visibly or explicitly. The invisible and implicit are crucial components of nuance. They are what make a wink suggestive and not just an inexplicable spasm. In our endeavor to cultivate a greater sensitivity to Socrates and Meno as characters in the *Meno*, we have often looked beyond this text. Of course, we have tried to remain within the text as much as possible, since our inquiry concerns the *Meno*, but we nevertheless cannot help moving "outside" of the *Meno*. It would be impossible to separate what occurs "inside" the text from what intervenes from the "outside." Even so, we endeavor, as much as possible, to focus upon the immediate (con)text as the limit of our inquiry. Without the *Meno* as our limit, we would run around endlessly from connection to connection. While obviously an artificial limit, it is important for *us*, even if the text itself permits connections well beyond the ones we make. Every time that we recognize a connection, overlap, contradiction, etc. between the *Meno* and other Platonic dialogues, intertextuality shows itself. However, it is not just the Platonic dialogues which engage in this play, but as we have seen from the beginning, many texts within this cultural purview engage one another. Upon such a basis we invoked Xenophon earlier, and now his testimony will help us again. Thus, we ask once more, how can we know who Prodicus was, i.e., how do we develop a sense of his character and relevance to the *Meno*? Naturally, we look first to the *Meno*, in which Prodicus is mentioned twice. We can then look more broadly to the Platonic corpus. In doing so, we can see both his positive esteem (as far as a sophist can enjoy such esteem within the

Platonic corpus), and his reputation for verbal distinctions.²²³ In both the *Protagoras* and *Laches*, his name appears within broader inquiries concerned with *arete* too despite never explicitly being named as a teacher of *arete*.²²⁴ However, if we move beyond the Platonic corpus, we can learn from Xenophon of a written work (σύγγραμμα)—attributed to Prodicus—concerning two directions for Hercules’ life.

In Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, Xenophon’s Socrates recounts from memory Prodicus’ written work (σύγγραμμα) “On Hercules.” He tells the following story:

When Hercules was passing from boyhood to youth’s estate, wherein the young, now becoming their own masters, show whether they will approach life by the path of *arete* or the path of *kakia*, he went out into a quiet place, and sat pondering which road to take. And there appeared two women of great stature making towards him. The one was fair to see and of high bearing; and her limbs were adorned with purity, her eyes with modesty; sober was her figure, and her robe was white. The other was plump and soft, with high feeding. Her face was made up to heighten its natural white and pink, her figure to exaggerate her height. Open-eyed was she; and dressed so as to disclose all her charms. Now she eyed herself; anon looked whether any noticed her; and often stole a glance at her own shadow.

When they drew nigh to Hercules, the first pursued the even tenor of her way: the other, all eager to outdo her, ran to meet him, crying: “Hercules, I see that you are in doubt which path to take towards life. Make me your friend; follow me, and I will lead you along the pleasantest and easiest road. You shall taste all the sweets of life; and hardship you shall never know. First, of wars and worries you shall not think, but shall ever be considering what choice food or drink you can find, what sight or sound will delight you, what touch or perfume; what tender love can give you most joy, what bed the softest slumbers; and how to come by all these pleasures with least trouble. And should there arise misgivings that lack of means may stint your enjoyments, never fear that I may lead you into winning them by toil and anguish of body and soul. Nay; you shall have the fruits of others’ toil, and refrain from nothing that can bring you gain. For to my companions I give authority to pluck advantage where they will.”

Now when Hercules heard this, he asked, “Lady pray what is your name?”

“My friends call me *Eudaimonian*,” she said, “but among those that hate me I am nicknamed *Kakian*.”

Meantime the other had drawn near, and she said: “I, too, am come to you, Hercules: I know your parents and I have taken note of your character during the time of your education. Therefore I hope that, if you take the road that leads to me, you will turn out a right good doer of high and noble deeds, and I shall be yet more highly honored and more

²²³ For examples of this reputation in the Platonic corpus, see Plato, *Cratylus*, 384b; *Theatetus*, 151b.

²²⁴ The references to Prodicus in *Protagoras* and *Laches* still relate to his knack for making distinction, but *Protagoras* and *Laches* stand out as two dialogues in which Prodicus’ name appears *and* in which substantive, extended inquiry into *arete* occurs.

illustrious for the blessings I bestow. But I will not deceive you by a pleasant prelude: I will rather tell you truly the things that are, as the gods have ordained them. For all things good and fair, the gods give nothing to man without toil and effort. If you want the favor of the gods, you must worship the gods: if you desire the love of friends, you must do good to your friends: if you covet honor from a city, you must aid that city: if you are fain to win the admiration of all Hellas for *arete*, you must strive to do good to Hellas: if you want land to yield you fruits in abundance, you must cultivate that land: if you are resolved to get wealth from flocks, you must care for those flocks: if you essay to grow great through war and want power to liberate your friends and subdue your foes, you must learn the arts of war from those who know them and must practice their right use: and if you want your body to be strong, you must accustom your body to be the servant of your mind, and train it with toil and sweat.”

And *Kakia*, as Prodicus tells, answered and said: “Hercules, mark you how hard and long is that road to joy, of which this woman tells? But I will lead you by a short and easy road to *eudaimonia*.”

And *Arete* said: “What good thing is thine, poor wretch, or what pleasant thing dost thou know, if thou wilt do naught to win them? Thou dost not even tarry for the desire of pleasant things, but fillest thyself with all things before thou desirest them, eating before thou art hungry, drinking before thou art thirsty, getting thee cooks, to give zest to eating, buying thee costly wines and running to and fro in search of snow in summer, to give zest to drinking; to soothe thy slumbers it is not enough for thee to buy soft coverlets, but thou must have frames for thy beds. *For not toil, but the tedium of having nothing to do makes thee long for sleep.* Thou dost rouse lust by many a trick, when there is no need, using men as women: thus thou trainest thy friends, waxing wanton by night, consuming in sleep the best hours of day. Immortal art though, yet the outcast of the gods, the scorn of good men. Praise, sweetest of all things to hear, thou hearest not: the sweetest of all sights thou beholdest not, *for never yet hast thou beheld a good work wrought by thyself.* Who will believe what thou dost say? Who will grant what thou dost ask? Or what sane man will dare join thy throng? While thy votaries are young their bodies are weak, when they wax old, their souls are without sense; idle and sleek they thrive in youth, withered and weary they journey through old age, and their past deeds brings them shame, their present deeds distress. Pleasure they ran through in their youth: hardship they laid up for their old age. *But I company with gods and good men, and no fair deed of god or man is done without my aid.* I am first in honor among the gods and among men that are akin to me: to craftsmen a beloved fellow-worker, to masters a faithful guardian of the house, to servants a kindly protector: good helpmate in the toils of peace, staunch all in the deeds of war, best partner in friendship. To my friends meat and drink bring sweet and simple enjoyment: for they wait till they crave them. And a sweeter sleep falls on them than on idle folk: they are not vexed at awaking for it, nor for its sake do they neglect to do their duties. The young rejoice to win the praise of the old; the elders are glad to be honored by the young; with joy they recall their deeds past, and their present well-doing is joy to them, for through me they are dear to the gods, lovely to friends, precious to their native land. And when comes the appointed end, they lie not forgotten and dishonored, but live on, sung and remembered for

all time. O Hercules, thou son of goodly parents, if thou wilt labor earnestly on this wise, thou mayest have for thine own the most blessed *eudaimonian*.”²²⁵

Xenophon’s account of Prodicus’ story (from Socrates’ memory) shows us another way to account for the human good. If we return momentarily to the *Meno*, we recall that the allusion to Prodicus might appear to be exhausted by his reputation for making verbal distinctions. However, we learn from Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* that Prodicus also wrote a story about *arete*, *kakia*, and their respective assumptions about the human good, which we can infer from their respective promises. What did we learn about the human good from the goddess *arete*’s promise? In the first place, the story conveys an aesthetic measure of *arete*, although it may appear merely descriptive. Her appearance was fair, noble, pure, modest, and sober. She spoke matter-of-factly, loftily, respectfully, and sternly. While on one level, we can understand this description as a personification of *arete*, we can also infer these qualities as prescriptive measures of the human good. That is, good people look and act in this way according to the story. Furthermore, we can also discern a judgment about the tasks worthy of good people. *Arete* acknowledges the value of a good pedigree, praises the effects of education, and demands that one work hard (toil)—no matter one’s craft—in order to live in her image. Again, as a mytho-theological discourse, the story might seem descriptive, but the mytho-theological dimensions ennoble its content. When *arete* insists on the dearness of certain tasks to herself and the gods, she simultaneously prescribes their worth. The story accounts for the human good mythologically, and in doing so, it obscures its decisions about the human good.

If we return to the *Meno* with this insight, how might we interpret Socrates’ claim that “Prodicus would differ” with an eye towards our concern for *arete* as a universal, inclusive measure of the human good? On the one hand, Prodicus might differ from Socrates and Meno in his approach. Rather than engage an interlocutor dialogically, Prodicus tells a story about the human good—a method which may be more appropriate when discussing difficult matters with youths.²²⁶ While Meno may not be young in age, his dialogical immaturity may warrant such an approach. He seems to be struggling to keep up with Socrates’ arguments. In this sense, Socrates’ commitment to dialogical engagement could be that about which Prodicus would disagree with Socrates. Perhaps Socrates should just tell Meno a story about *arete* instead of modeling the way

²²⁵ Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2.1.21-34. Translation modified and emphasis mine.

²²⁶ See Plato, *Protagoras*, 320c.

to speak about it. On the other hand, Prodicus' "difference" may refer to a more fundamental division between Prodicus' and Socrates' respective assumptions about the human good. If we use Prodicus' story from the *Memorabilia* as our guide, it seems that Prodicus, more akin to Meno than Socrates, sees no *ἀπορία* in the question concerning the human good. While the reasoning underlying his prescriptions may be obscure, the mytho-theological basis of Prodicus' prescriptions about the human good serves as the foundation of its acceptance. *Arete's* appearance and proclamations self-justify their sufficiency for the human good, that is, because she (*arete* personified) makes the claims, they are so. However, our analysis of Socrates' reasoning throughout the *Meno* does not reveal much sympathy with this approach to the question of the human good. We can see a more profound difference between Socrates and Prodicus through Socrates' resistance to a simple reconciliation of the human good and the good of the *polis*. The question concerning the human good poses a problem for human life in the *polis* despite needing to take place in the *polis*.

Let us return now back to Socrates' effort to account for shape. Having come to an agreement about what a limit (*πέρας*) is, Socrates seeks and receives Meno's approval of what a solid (*στερεόν*) is, although it is not clear why Meno would more easily know what a solid is than what color is, as Klein notes.²²⁷ On the basis of their agreement, Socrates posits his second account of shape: "shape is the limit of a solid (*“στερεοῦ πέρας σχῆμα”*)."²²⁸ Now that Socrates has completed his end of their agreement, Socrates and Meno can return to their primary investigation of *arete*. Unfortunately, Meno—true to his name—is *still* stuck on color (*χρῶμα*). While it was strange for Meno to claim not to know color previously, his insistence seems even stranger now because Socrates has not even mentioned color in his second account! Socrates reacts strongly, expressing his dismay. He calls Meno "*ὑβριστής*"—outrageous, audacious, hubristic.²²⁹ Why? Because he troubles an old man, but he will not even "*ἀναμνησθεῖς* and say whatever Gorgias says *arete* is."²³⁰ Socrates no longer even humors the possibility that Meno knows about *arete*. At this point, Socrates just wants Meno to tell him what *Gorgias* says.²³¹ Besides the

²²⁷ Ibid., 75e-76a. Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 59-62.

²²⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 76a.

²²⁹ Ibid., 76b.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 71d. Initially, Socrates left it ambiguous whether he thought Meno knew about *arete* or whether he thought Meno knew what Gorgias thought about *arete*.

possibility that Meno is incapable of recollecting what Gorgias says, i.e., because he never understood it in the first place or he understood it but has since forgotten, why else might Meno refuse to answer?

From Meno's name alone, we drew a couple conclusions. He may be "stuck," or he may suffer from some sort of derangement of memory, but these explanations, while common, are quite vague. How is Meno "stuck"? He is not stuck like a parrot, who might repeat the same phrases over and over and so appear "stuck" on it. Meno is stuck on the outside of the problem. While we would not blame Meno for struggling to answer Socrates' question about what *arete* is, we could blame him more both for refusing to acknowledge that he does not understand the problem *and* for not even caring about it. And yet, not to care about this problem of *arete* implies that he does not care about being a good person. If Meno grasped the gravity of the inquiry into *arete*, the human good, and the *polis*, then we might reasonably expect him to honor his agreement with Socrates once Socrates showed him a model answer. However, the fact that Meno wants to hear Socrates answer what color is now shows a certain audacity. Meno's request implies a greater concern for pedantic contentiousness than for what it takes to be a good person. Does he not care about becoming a good person because he thinks himself good already, or does he just think it is not very important generally? In either case, Meno's orientation to the problem deserves Socrates' reproach. We can see an additional indication of his haphazard regard for the problem when he casually renegotiates the terms of their agreement. He promises, "But whenever you tell me [about color], Socrates, I'll tell you [about *arete*]." ²³² We sense no urgency in Meno's promise despite what is at stake in the inquiry. For what reason would a person care more about "what color is" than what is required to be a good person? Meno's desire for gratification seems to inhibit his development as a person. If we find ourselves persuaded that *arete* poses a significant challenge to human existence, then Meno's indifference to what is problematic in the question concerning *arete* leaves him stuck in arrogant mediocrity.

Socrates teases Meno for his ridiculous request before he accepts it; however, Socrates also makes a strange admission of his own weakness, an admission which may be important to recall later. Socrates remarks:

²³² Ibid., 76b.

Even someone who is blindfolded could know, Meno, from conversing with you that you are handsome (καλός) and still have lovers (ἔρασταί).

Why indeed?

Because you do nothing but impose commands (ἐπιτάτεις) in your arguments (λόγοις), the very thing that spoiled people (τροφῶντες) do, so as to tyrannize (τυραννεύοντες) as long as they are in their prime. And at the same time it is likely that you've noticed about me, that I have a weakness (ἥττων) for beautiful people (τῶν καλῶν). So I will gratify (χαριῶμαι) you and I will answer.

By all means then, gratify (χάρισαι) me.²³³

Anastaplo and Berns have rendered “καλός” as “handsome,” which seems appropriate here. However, it also may be worth reflecting on this decision and what makes it fitting in this context. For example, why might it be misleading to translate “καλός” as “beautiful” here? Of course “beautiful” has an aesthetic dimension just as “handsome” does; however, “beautiful” also tends to go beyond the surface. Something can be “beautiful” because of the way that its parts come together to form a whole. People can be “beautiful” in appearance, but they can also be “beautiful” because of their actions, character, or concerns. In the case of Meno, these latter ways of being beautiful seem not to apply. It would be difficult earnestly to call a man beautiful who behaves pedantically, arrogantly, and contentiously as we have seen Meno behave in the dialogue thus far. Even so, Socrates has made multiple allusions to Meno's appearance (his handsomeness) but *not* any other kind of beauty. Why does it matter? We might find a clue in Socrates' justification for pointing out Meno's handsomeness. There seems to be a subtle shift in the sense of καλός after Socrates remarks upon Meno's imperious tendency. Socrates claims that beautiful people (like Meno) tyrannize (τυραννεύοντες) over others *because* of their beautiful appearance. Beautiful people become “spoiled” (τροφῶντες) by others' acquiescence to their demands. The word for “spoiled” (τροφῶντες) means to live softly or luxuriously.²³⁴ A “spoiled” person is someone who lives an easy or comfortable life. This tendency highlights something remarkable, if we pair Socrates' observation with Meno's second attempt to say what *arete* is, namely, “...to be able to rule (ἄρχειν) over human beings....”²³⁵ When we place these two claims side by side, Socrates' observation becomes quite relevant to their inquiry into *arete*. Being a beautiful person (especially in appearance) sufficiently justifies one's “rule” over another. It may not be “right” for spoiled,

²³³ Ibid., 76c.

²³⁴ Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 822.

²³⁵ Plato, *Meno*, 73c.

beautiful people to tyrannize over others, but as a matter of fact, according to Socrates, they do. This adds an additional valence to our inquiry into the measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good. While it seems unlikely, as we have already concluded, that being beautiful alone would sufficiently secure a person's share of the human good, we can understand Socrates' observation about beautiful people as an acknowledgment of beauty as a relative measure of *arete*. Consequently, Socrates' repeated references to Meno's appearance no longer seem like inexplicable, Socratic quirks, but they gesture towards beauty's bearing upon the inquiry into *arete*.

Furthermore, when Socrates follows up his observation with an admission of his weakness (ἥττων) for/ inability to resist or yield to beautiful people/things (οἱ καλοί), his admission becomes philosophical, if we hear it as an obstacle in the search for the *arete* sufficient for the human good. It is common in Greek for the substantives within prepositional phrases to be implied only. In this case, we should be aware that the phrase “οἱ καλοί” does not mean “beautiful people” any more than it means “beautiful things.” The way we understand this phrase wholly determines the meaning of Socrates' digression. If we understand “οἱ καλοί” as “beautiful people,” then Socrates only seems to offer a questionable justification for his submission to Meno. On the other hand, if we understand “οἱ καλοί” as “beautiful things,” then we might instead hear Socrates' admission as an acknowledgement of beauty as a part of the human good. We have assumed that Socrates persists with the inquiry because of his resolved commitment to investigating the *arete* sufficient for the human good, and so it seems strange for him to claim to compromise his resolve because he finds Meno so superficially attractive. However, we can continue to assume Socratic resolve *and* understand his admission, if we think Socrates' weakness for “beautiful things” as a question concerning the place of beauty in relation to the human good. Because we can understand beauty as a relative measure of *arete*, beauty must have some relation to the good, i.e., it must be good for humans in *some* way. The question is not how to rid oneself of a superficial infatuation with beautiful appearance, but rather, how can we understand the necessity of beauty in our search for a universal and inclusive measure of *arete*? To put it in another way, ugly people (like Socrates) also have a legitimate claim to human good. Given the aesthetic concern, it is perhaps fitting that Meno forces Socrates to speak about color (χρῶμα).

Socrates presents his next attempt to gratify Meno in a style most familiar to him. Socrates agrees to say what color is “in the style of Gorgias” (“κατὰ Γοργίαν”) and to do so, he reasons through a series of technical, Empedoclean terms before arriving at a vague and abstract account. Socrates honors his custom of speaking in terms that his interlocutor claims to know despite being forced to use more opaque and technical diction. This contrast between Socrates’ current and prior ways of speaking raises an obvious question: How can Meno not know what color is, but he has no difficulty understanding Empedoclean “effluences” (ἀπορροαί) and “passageways” (πόροι)? After establishing his premises, Socrates concludes with the following account of color (χρόα): “From these very agreements, as Pindar says, ‘heed what I say’ (σύνες ὃ τοι λέγω). For color (χρόα) is an effluence of shapes (ἀπορροή σχημάτων) commensurate (σύμμετρος) with sight and perceptible.”²³⁶ We ought to take note of three subtleties in this account. First, Meno asked Socrates to define color (χρῶμα), but now Socrates speaks about color (χρόα).²³⁷ Klein reads Meno’s use of “χρῶμα” in his initial inquiry as Meno’s adherence to Empedoclean terminology.²³⁸ While Klein does not outright assert the implication of this reading, it seems likely that the juxtaposition of Socrates’ informal “χρόα” against Meno’s technical “χρῶμα” highlights Meno’s lack of genuine concern for his question about color. When Socrates explained shape in terms of color as a model for speaking about *arete*, Meno objected to taking for granted that he knew color (χρῶμα). Meno feigned an interest in terminological precision, but now, he does not even acknowledge that Socrates has shortened “χρῶμα” into “χρόα.” Is Meno’s insensitivity to this distinction limited to his dubious concern for “color,” or might it also extend to Empedoclean philosophy and *arete* as well?

The second noteworthy subtlety stems from the obscurity of the new terms. Socrates’ account in the Gorgian style is quite vague. Not only does understanding the terminology require perquisite knowledge of Empedoclean philosophy (in contrast to Socrates’ prior accounts), but Socrates even remarks on the way that these very terms could equally apply to accounts of sound or smell as well.²³⁹ And Meno agrees! That this Empedoclean terminology can be redeployed to

²³⁶ Ibid., 76d. Translation modified.

²³⁷ Of all the commentators publishing in English, only Klein remarks on this change. Cf. Sallis, Sharples, Ionescu, Tarrant.

²³⁸ Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, 68.

²³⁹ 76d. Klein thinks that Meno’s agreement to the broader applicability of the definition demonstrates his rashness because it would *not* be easy to understand sound as an “effluence of shape.” Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, n46. It seems to me that Meno agrees that one could use the concepts “effluence” and “passageway” to explain sound

explain the other senses makes dialogue about such matters “easy.” There is no ἀπορία here. The broad applicability of the Empedoclean terminology may be the reason that Socrates remarks on the harmony between this style of answer and Meno’s habituation, which is, of course, a consequence of Gorgias’ instruction. One “benefit” of using this terminology is that one can sound wise without needing to understand it. The speaker only needs to understand how to *use* the terminology. The easiness and broad applicability of the terminology does not seem to function as a critique of Empedoclean philosophy. Instead, we might better understand this observation as an indication of the contrast between Socrates’ concern in dialogue versus Meno’s (or Gorgias’). Whereas Socrates would rather speak simply and understandingly, Meno would rather speak with such complicated terminology that understanding becomes obscure. Finally, we can read Socrates’ tongue-in-cheek quotation of Pindar as a culmination of the implicature surrounding Socrates’ and Meno’s respective approach to discourse. What is the significance of this quotation, and why does Socrates recite this seemingly mundane verse from the great Sicilian poet?

Surprisingly, few commentators on the *Meno* consider *this* reference to Pindar worthy of much consideration. Albeit inordinately dismissive, Sharples’ note is telling of the broader sentiment, “The quotation adds nothing to the context of the passage, but is in keeping with the high-flown literary air (see on 76e3 below). Klein 68 n.40 suggests that Plato is alluding not to the Pindaric passage itself but to its citation at Aristophanes, *Birds* 935; this seems farfetched.”²⁴⁰ Apparently, Sharples considers Klein’s reading so implausible that he need not expand on his dismissal. Let us consider the multiple appearances of this phrase “σύνες ὃ τοι λέγω” outside the *Meno* so that we might better understand its implications and whether or not it “adds nothing to the context of the passage.”

This quote appears also in *Phaedrus*, although Socrates is not its speaker in that dialogue. After hearing a speech on love from Phaedrus, Socrates disagrees with Phaedrus that the speech writer has “omitted nothing worth mentioning about the subject.”²⁴¹ When Phaedrus hears Socrates’ response, he becomes very excited by the prospect of hearing Socrates add more to the

and smell—not “effluence of shapes.” While the difference here is slight, the implication about Meno’s character differs. Regarding Empedocles philosophy, especially on sight, effluences, and passageways, see M.R. Wright, *Empedocles: The Extant Fragments*, 240-243. Aristotle also writes about Empedoclean color and sight in *Sense and Sensibilia*, 437 b23-438 a5.

²⁴⁰ Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, 136.

²⁴¹ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 235b.

account. Flirtatious undertones permeate their entire exchange, and in the heat of the moment, Phaedrus and Socrates banter in the following way:

S: Oh, Phaedrus, I was only criticizing your beloved in order to tease you—did you take me seriously? Do you think I'd really try to match the product of his wisdom with a fancier speech?

P: Well, as far as that goes, my friend, you've fallen into your own trap. You have no choice but to give your speech as best you can: otherwise you will force us into trading vulgar jibes the way they do in comedy. Don't make me say what you said: "Socrates, if I don't know my Socrates, I must be forgetting who I am myself," or "He wanted to speak, but he was being coy." Get it into your head that we shall not leave here until you recite what you claimed to have "in your breast." We are alone, in a deserted place, and I am younger and stronger. From all this, "heed what I say" (σύνεξ ὅ τοι λέγω) and don't make me force you to speak when you can do so willingly.²⁴²

Both the context and the content of Phaedrus' response reinforce the plausibility of Klein's reading of the Aristophanic shade of meaning in the *Meno*. Phaedrus refers explicitly to the likeness of their banter to that of a comedy. Phaedrus thinks they have not diverged into comedic discourse *yet*, but the playfulness of the exchange, while characteristically Platonic, would not be wholly out of place in a Greek comedy either. Moreover, Phaedrus subversively quotes Socrates himself as an attempt to goad him into giving his speech prior to his recitation of the Pindaric/Aristophanic phrase. Amusingly, Phaedrus' subversive repetition of Socrates' own words against him imitates one of Socrates' own dialogical "tricks." Earlier in the dialogue, Socrates made the same remarks to Phaedrus, and he did so in a cheeky gesture akin to courtship.²⁴³ Socrates enticingly seduced Phaedrus with an image of himself—of which Socrates knows beautiful people are fond.²⁴⁴ The exchange between Socrates and Phaedrus is amusing because the erotic implicature underlying their dialogue seems to concern hearing a speech. At the same time, it is never entirely obvious that they only care about the speech. The dialogue constantly walks the boundary between physical desire and dialogical desire. It is in such a spirit that Phaedrus repeats the subversive quotations. Augmenting Socrates' own words, Phaedrus more strongly *incorporates* the *corporeal* force, emphasizing the phrase "in your breast" and noting his own strength and youth. At the height of Phaedrus' pursuit, he repeats the Pindaric/Aristophanic phrase: "heed what I say" (σύνεξ ὅ τοι λέγω). Because of the context, the grandiloquent and somber resonance typical of Pindar's style

²⁴² Ibid., 236d. Translation modified.

²⁴³ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 228b-c.

²⁴⁴ Plato, *Meno*, 80c.

seems a bit out of place. Contextually, the quote seems to suggest that Phaedrus wants Socrates to pay attention to what he is *really* saying. Phaedrus tells Socrates to see the implicature behind all his remarks. For all the reasons that Phaedrus lies out prior to the phrase, Phaedrus suggests that Socrates ought to stop resisting—or else. As is fitting for a dialogue on love, Phaedrus uses seduction and enticement—not violence—to “force” Socrates to speak.²⁴⁵ Let us compare this usage to its appearance in Aristophanes’ *Birds* to see if we can find more support for Klein’s “farfetched” connection.

The Birds tells the story of Pisthetaerus and Euelpides who want to start a new life outside of Athens. They search for the Hoopoe in order to receive counsel on their best course of action, and after hearing the Hoopoe’s story, Pisthetaerus suggests that birds ought to found their own *polis*. Upon convincing Hoopoe and the other birds, Pisthetaerus (along with Euelpides) set out to found Nephelokokkugia. While they organize their new *polis*, Pisthetaerus leads a service, during which various humans approach him including a poet. The poet enters the scene speaking with a lofty, poetized diction and invoking the names of other great poets. As Pisthetaerus continues to speak with the poet, it becomes clear that the poet wants something in exchange for his beautiful musings. He says:

This little kindly gift the Muse / accepts with willing condescension; / but let me to an apt remark / of Pindar call my lord’s attention.

The fellow does not seem inclined to leave us.

Out among the Scythians yonder / see poor Straton wander, wander, / poor poor Straton, not possessed / of a whirly-woven vest. / All inglorious comes, I trow, leather jerkin, if below / no soft tunic it can show. / Conceive my drift, I pray (ξύνες ὃ τοι λέγω).²⁴⁶

Similar to the scene in *Phaedrus*, the invocation of Pindar accompanies implicature. That is, in both *Phaedrus* and *The Birds*, the speakers use the phrase to make their request sound loftier *and* to ask for something without being explicit. In the former, the quote consolidates innuendo and the threat (or promise) of seduction in a way that draws Socrates’ attention to the implications of Phaedrus’ remarks. In the latter, the poet’s reference functions in a similar way. Rather than ask

²⁴⁵ Cf. Plato, *Republic*, 327c. The compulsion of seduction in the *Phaedrus* contrasts with the compulsion of force, which Polemarchus implies in the *Republic*. Socrates suggests persuasion, which is more akin to seduction, in place of violent compulsion, but Polemarchus refuses to listen. We will see persuasion appear as an important force later in our inquiry.

²⁴⁶ Aristophanes, *The Birds*, 936-945.

for a tunic directly, the poet tries to entice Pisthetaerus (and the priest with him) into obliging his request. While Aristophanes' poet is a bit more overt, the quote still functions as a call for the interlocutor to heed the speaker's inexplicit request. Ideally, we would compare the way that "σύνες ὃ τοι λέγω" was used in *Phaedrus* and *The Birds* to its use in Pindar so that we could see its transformation through multiple recitations. Unfortunately, we do not have a straightforward record of the original phrase in Pindar. In a footnote to the prior passage from *The Birds*, translator Benjamin Rogers includes the following note: "Pindar, addressing Hiero (Ἱέρων), who had re-colonized Catania under the name of Aetna, said: σύνες ὃ τοι λέγω, ζαθέων ἱερῶν ὀνόνημι πάτερ κτίστορ Αἴτνας (Schol.). See also Pindar, *Pyth.* ii. 127, *Nem.* vii. 1, below 945."²⁴⁷ While the source of this quotation is obscure, it seems worth noting that this usage of "σύνες ὃ τοι λέγω" falls in line with its usage in *Phaedrus* and *The Birds*. The Pindaric verses imply an identity between Hiero and the founder (father) of Aetna, but they do not simply proclaim the identity matter-of-factly. Rather, by prefacing the claim with "σύνες ὃ τοι λέγω," the verses draw attention to the implicature of the message, i.e., that Hiero deserves honor, respect, glory, etc. The main difference between this iteration and its recitation in the *Phaedrus* and *The Birds* is the lack of subversive or ironic undertones. The absence of such an undertone does not come as surprise, since the subversive dimensions play off of the lofty and earnest tone of the earlier Pindaric verses. Now that we have established a broader context, let us return to the *Meno* to see how the recitation operates within our inquiry.

Let us recall what Socrates said: "From these very agreements, as Pindar says, 'heed what I say' (σύνες ὃ τοι λέγω). For color (χρῶμα) is an effluence of shapes (ἀπορροή σχημάτων) commensurate (σύμμετρος) with sight and perceptible."²⁴⁸ Klein reads the reference beautifully as a subversion of the scene from *The Birds*, suggesting that Socrates complements Meno's request for an account of shape with his account of color as an inversion of the poet's request for a complementary tunic to supplement his jerkin.²⁴⁹ However, our own analysis allows us to take Klein's reading a step further. Following convention, Socrates asks Meno to pay attention to the

²⁴⁷ Rogers, *Aristophanes: The Peace, The Birds, The Frogs*, 220-221, N c. "Heed what I say, sacred Hiero having the same name, father, founder of Aetna" Translation mine. The references to *Pythian Ode II and Nemean Ode VII* are not especially helpful. The exact phrase does not appear in either text, and what does appear is not similar enough to be useful.

²⁴⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 76d. Translation modified.

²⁴⁹ Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 68 n 40.

implicature of his response. What he is saying is not *all* that he is saying. Consequently, we may begin to wonder which part of Socrates' discourse he is imploring Meno to focus upon. Does Socrates implore Meno to heed the emptiness of his account of color? Does he implore Meno to heed the pattern of his response so that Meno will better be able to account for *arete*?²⁵⁰ Or, perhaps, Socrates implores Meno to heed his words in the future. In this sense, his recitation of the Pindaric verses would signal to Meno, if he were not already aware, that their explicit discourse does not exhaust their subject-matter. We can understand this sense of Socrates' imperative as a gesture towards the problem concerning *arete* upon which our own analysis has focused. If we interpret Socrates' imperative through our analysis of the relationship between *arete* and the human good, then we could understand Socrates' command as an indication not to become preoccupied with his indulgent account of color in the Gorgian style. This manner of speaking obstructs the already difficult problem of *arete*, and Socrates has only spoken in this way as a good-faith gesture in his dialogue with Meno.

Despite Socrates' recitation of the subversive, Pindaric verse, which we understand as a signal to pay attention to what is not said *explicitly*, Meno does the exact opposite. He does not heed Socrates at all. On the contrary, Meno is very pleased with Socrates' account, and he claims that Socrates "put this answer in the best (ἄριστά) possible way."²⁵¹ How could Meno think so? According to Socrates, Meno must consider it best "Perhaps because it was said in accordance with the way in which you have been habituated (κατὰ συνήθειαν)."²⁵² Insofar as Socrates disagrees with Meno's judgment that his Gorgian style answer is "best" (ἄριστος), it adds even more justification for our suspicion that Meno may have no idea about what is "best"—that is, the best way of answering what color is or what is best for humans. Could his ignorance be a result of remaining on the outside of the problem of *arete* and the human good? Could his instruction play a part in his inability to see the ἀπορία? We have been tracking Meno's habituation all along, exploring the ways that Gorgias' instruction and habituation has done him a disservice throughout their inquiry, and now, Socrates brings it up explicitly. He even reproaches Meno for his preference for a "deep sounding" (τραγική) answer.²⁵³ Meno, of course, does not hear the reproach and simply agrees. Meno seems like someone who simply cannot be helped. He seems stuck in his habits,

²⁵⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 77b.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 76d.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 76e.

which make him answer “fearlessly and magnificently” *like* a knower. But this likeness is only superficial like his handsome appearance, and so Meno seems less like a knower and more ὕβριστής”—outrageous, audacious, or hubristic. What can Socrates do?

If Meno suffers from a poor education, one which inculcated habits that inhibit him from a genuine encounter with the problem of *arete*, is he—and, more generally, anyone who suffers a similar fate—doomed? Perhaps not. Socrates tells Meno that this answer (the Gorgian style account of color) is not better, but the other one is.²⁵⁴ He continues, “And I think it would not seem so to you, if it were not necessary, as you were saying yesterday, for you to leave before the Mysteries (μυστηρίων), but were both to stay around and to be initiated (περιμείναις τε καὶ μνηθείης).”²⁵⁵ What are the Mysteries (μυστήρια)? And how might an initiation into the Mysteries help to change Meno’s mind about which answer is best? “The Mysteries” likely refers to the Eleusinian Mysteries, of which there were two: the greater and the lesser. They were festivals that took place in the fall and spring respectively.²⁵⁶ These festivals were held to honor and commemorate the goddess Demeter and Kore, her daughter Persephone, at Eleusis, which was a deme just outside of Athens. It is likely that Socrates refers here to the Lesser Mysteries, since certain pre-initiation rituals were necessary prior to participation in the Greater Mysteries, although participation in the former would obviously imply a return for the latter.²⁵⁷ Little is known about the Lesser Mysteries, since secrecy about the initiation process was strictly enforced.²⁵⁸ However, the reason for this secrecy, along with the ritual journey along the Sacred Road, might have persuaded Meno to think differently, if only he would stick around for initiation.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ It is not clear whether “the other one” refers to the first or second account of shape, and there does not seem to be compelling reasons to privilege one over the other.

²⁵⁵ Ibid. Note Socrates’ use of the verb “stick around” (περιμείναις) which shares a common root with Meno’s name.

²⁵⁶ There is some evidence that the lesser mysteries could take place more than once a year. See Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 239-240.

²⁵⁷ For extensive overviews of the festival procession and rituals involved, see: Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries of the Ancient World*, 5-20; Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 342-360; Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 243-285.

²⁵⁸ For testimonies about Athenians against whom punitive measures were taken as a response to perceived transgression against the vow of secrecy, see Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 224-226.

²⁵⁹ The Sacred Road was (and still is at some parts) a road between Eleusis and Athens which initiates traveled as a part of the ritual.

According to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, our most ancient text on the origin of the Eleusinian Mysteries, Demeter herself taught certain kings and leaders the conduct of her rites and her mysteries.²⁶⁰ From this text, we learn the following about the Eleusinian Mysteries:

Awful (σεμνά) mysteries which no one may in any way transgress or pry into or utter, for great reverence (σέβας) of the gods checks the voice. Blessed (ὄλβιος) is he among men upon earth who has *seen* these mysteries; but he who is uninitiate and who has no part in them, never has lot of like good things once he is dead, down in the darkness and gloom.²⁶¹

Reverence (σέβας) of the gods inspires secrecy about initiation—not an exclusive mystical or occult knowledge.²⁶² This repetition of the role of a reverential disposition harkens back to our prior analysis of being “blessed” (μακάριος) in the hypothetical Athenian’s speech.²⁶³ Whereas our prior analysis focused upon the necessity of a universal rather than a relative measure of *arete*, Socrates’ reference to the Mysteries draws our attention to another measure: inclusivity. It may seem strange to mention inclusivity after Socrates vaguely suggests to Meno that he should stick around for initiation into a cult whose foundational text denies “good things” to the uninitiated in the afterlife. Such dogma sounds quite exclusive, if anything. However, our inquiry does not concern all of the idiosyncrasies of the Eleusinian Mysteries. We only examine it through our concern for *arete*, the human good, and the *polis* in the *Meno*. Consequently, we can understand the role of an inclusive measure through the beliefs and practices surrounding the Eleusinian Mysteries in two ways. As a consequence of one’s reverence for the gods, a person refuses to speak about the rituals of initiation. This experience of reverential awe draws attention to a human’s humble existence before the divine. Objects of reverential awe overwhelm their viewer with a sense of what is greater than oneself. Before Demeter’s uncanny power, all humans tremble. Rulers and slaves submit equally to the divine.²⁶⁴ In this way, Meno’s initiation in the Mysteries could facilitate his reorientation within the world. It could do so in a second way as well.

The Eleusinian Mysteries did not “teach” lessons to its initiates. The Mysteries did not require one to learn the cults’ tenets, but rather, initiation involved a process that the participants

²⁶⁰ *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 475.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 477-482. Translation modified and emphasis mine.

²⁶² According to Bremmer, “It is the very holiness of the rites that forbids them to be performed or related outside their proper context.” Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries of the Ancient World*, 18.

²⁶³ Plato, *Meno*, 71a.

²⁶⁴ We ought to recall that Meno asserted that *arete* is the ability to rule others at the beginning of this section; however, according to the Eleusinian Mysteries, the ability to rule has no bearing upon the human good.

were forced to undergo/experience.²⁶⁵ Not only might the performance of rituals in Eleusis prove transformative for Meno, but the preceding journey along the Sacred Road could also have persuasive power over him. The “Sacred Road” was so named because it was the path between Athens and Eleusis which the members believed Demeter traveled in search of Persephone; however, it also served a practical function as the road on which sacred objects were transported.²⁶⁶ Moreover, passage along the Sacred Road involved a performative dimension as well. On a certain portion of the road, initiates passed under a bridge. On this bridge, hooded men waited, “...piling insult on exalted persons so that they would be humbled and would not be visited with the jealous reactions of the evil spirits.”²⁶⁷ Similar to the feeling of reverential awe inspired in individuals who undergo the rites at the sanctuary in Eleusis, this practice (called “γεφυρισμοί” or “gross abuse”) aimed to humble individuals, especially and particularly individuals of social distinction. It effectively destroyed distinguished individual’s enjoyment of their exclusive social goods, transforming goods of the *polis* into a cause of derision. While we may not know the original function of this practice, we can see it as an acknowledgement of a contradiction in the *polis*. Some members of the *polis* enjoy goods from which other members of the *polis* are excluded. We can see this practice as a response to the inadequacy of the *polis*, that is, its insufficient measure of *arete*. Why would this practice confront social distinction, if exclusive social goods (i.e., the good of the *polis*) did not pose a problem for the share of the human good promised by this cult? Through this practice, we can see simultaneously the insufficiency of the *polis*’ measure of *arete* and the necessity of inquiring into *arete*. In this other way, Meno may also benefit from initiation.

Meno expresses eagerness to hear more. Socrates seems to have enticed Meno to continue with their inquiry. Socrates also shares in the excitement (προθυμία), but at the same time, Meno still owes Socrates an account of *arete*. Socrates has not forgotten, and he reminds Meno what he wants (“what *arete* is”) and how he wants it (“whole and healthy”). He concludes, “the patterns (παράδειγματα), at any rate, you have got from me.”²⁶⁸ Our interpretation leading up to this point has already anticipated that Socrates’ accounts of shape and color were patterns (παράδειγματα)

²⁶⁵ As Parker points out, “[T]his was a cult of showing, not of teaching....” Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 360.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 346.

²⁶⁷ Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 256. Bremmer claims that more confusion of social hierarchy occurred during this part of the journey. Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries of the Ancient World*, 7.

²⁶⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 77b.

for Meno to follow in his attempt to say what *arete* is. While these patterns may model a style for answering what *arete* is, we have emphasized several problematic dimensions of saying what *arete* is contrary to Meno's claim that there is no ἀπορία. Even though Socrates and Meno digressed at length about shape and color, saying what each one is poses a meager challenge compared to saying what *arete* is. We suspect that Socrates already knows since he claimed in the beginning not to know at all what *arete* is, but has Meno realized it as well?

Let us review our findings in this section before we move on to the final section of this chapter. Meno made a second attempt to say what *arete* is, asserting first that *arete* is being able “to rule (ἄρχειν) over human beings” and then simply “justice” (δικαιοσύνη).²⁶⁹ Neither of these attempts to say what *arete* is satisfied Socrates, and we inferred from the subsequent discussion about them that Meno's second attempt did not account for the necessity of inclusivity as a measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good. We found an implicitly exclusive measure of *arete* appear three times during their discussion. First, Meno's assertion of the ability to rule as the measure of *arete* clearly excluded most people from being good, since not everyone can rule in the *polis*, but our prior analysis led us to consider universality as necessary for the human good. If everyone has a share to the human good, then being able to rule cannot be the measure. Second, we analyzed Socrates' remark about Meno's behavior as typical of beautiful people (οἱ καλοί). We found significance in this seemingly tangential back-and-forth due to the pervasiveness of using beauty as a justification for rule. In the *polis*, beautiful people tend to get their way, whether or not their “rule” has a more than superficial foundation. Even though everyone recognizes beauty as a good, which may be a reason for its confusion as *the* good, *being* beautiful is an even more exclusive measure of *arete* than the ability to rule, so it surely cannot be a sufficient measure either. Finally, when Socrates tried to give Meno a pattern after which Meno could model an account of *arete*, we found that Meno had a predilection for a certain style of answer. Meno considered Socrates' Gorgian style account of color best, even though Socrates pointed out its problematic opacity. This style of answer added more complexity than either of Socrates' prior accounts of shape, but it had even less precision. Even so, Meno preferred it over the simpler ones despite also claiming not to know what color is. We can understand the difference between Meno's and Socrates' stylistic preferences as another indication of the value of inclusivity. The Gorgian style answer depends

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 73c-73d.

upon an understanding of Empedoclean philosophy, and so without this prerequisite knowledge, a listener would struggle to understand it. In contrast, Socrates spoke in a more inclusive way, assuming only that his interlocutor know what color or a solid is. Our analysis of inclusivity as a necessary measure of the *arete* sufficient for the human good culminated in Socrates' suggestion that Meno stay around for the Mysteries. While the suggestion itself was quite vague, our analysis drew out the ways in which Meno's participation in the initiation could, perhaps, persuade him of the importance of an inclusive measure of the human good. The transformative power of his initiation would, perhaps, reorient and re-habituate Meno in a way that would persuade him, in harmony with Socrates that the tragic (τραγική) answer is not best. Let us move on now to Meno's third attempt.

Meno's Third Attempt to Say What *Arete* Is (77b-79e)

Apparently captivated by Socratic gratification and perhaps inspired by his invocation of Pindar, Meno cites "the poet" ("ὁ ποιητής") in his third attempt to say what *arete* is. "Well then, it seems to me, Socrates, that *arete* is just what the poet says, 'both to rejoice and to be capable in beautiful things (χαίρειν τε καλοῖσι καὶ δύνασθαι).' I too say that this is *arete*: to desire (ἐπιθυμοῦντα) beautiful things (τῶν καλῶν) and to be capable (δυνατὸν) of providing (πορίζεσθαι) them for oneself."²⁷⁰ It seems Meno was not convinced that the way Socrates spoke about shape was best, since Meno's third attempt to speak about *arete* shares more similarities with the Gorgian style account than with Socrates' other two accounts. Invoking poetic authority, Meno asserts something that sounds deep (τραγική). As we might expect, this account does not satisfy Socrates who already told Meno how he wanted Meno to speak about *arete*. Even so, Socrates engages Meno's attempt earnestly (presumably because the endeavor is worthy). His first question is clarificatory, asking whether desiring beautiful things (οἱ καλοῖ) is the same as desiring good things (οἱ ἀγαθοί). Meno agrees that they are the same.²⁷¹ We have already remarked upon this connection between beautiful things (οἱ καλοῖ) and good things (οἱ ἀγαθοί) during our analysis of Socrates and Meno's banter on the tendencies of beautiful people. Based upon the prior engagement, we are aware that this connection could also imply an identity between beautiful people (οἱ καλοῖ) and good people (οἱ ἀγαθοί). We know already that beauty cannot be the measure of *arete* sufficient

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 77b.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

for the human good; however, its reappearance here bespeaks the complexity with which our inquiry is concerned. That is, beautiful things/people seem to share an intimate connection with good things/people such that the assertion of their identity is not simply a matter of “ignorance.” If something is beautiful, then its beauty is often sufficient for us to call it good. And yet, therein lies the *ἀπορία*. For, in spite of this sufficiency, when it comes to the human good, being a beautiful person is *not* sufficient for being a good person, and in fact, *because* humans live in the *polis* with others, the insufficiency of beauty as a condition for goodness is quite evident. Consequently, questions concerning the relationship between beauty and the human good go well beyond the surface. Especially in the *polis*, the goodness of beauty confronts the insufficiency of a beautiful appearance as a measure of a good person.

Meno’s claim that *arete* is the desire for beautiful things (οἱ καλοί), which he agrees are also good things (οἱ ἀγαθοί), does very little to address the difficulty of saying what *arete* is. Does Meno mean that the exhibition of *arete* (that is, being a good person) amounts to the desire for good/beautiful things and its provision comes as a consequence of this desire? Or does he mean that all people desire good/beautiful things, and those who exhibit *arete* (that is, good people) are the ones who provide these good/beautiful things for themselves? The former concerns the kinds of things that a person desires, that is, the kinds of things a person considers good/beautiful, whereas the latter concerns a person’s ability to provide what one wants (good/beautiful things) for oneself. Socrates begins his examination with the former claim. He asks Meno whether anyone desires bad things (τά κακά), and Meno insists that some people do.²⁷² However, if we infer from Socrates’ subsequent reasoning, he clearly does not agree with this assumption. His reasons against Meno’s presupposition in the following way. First, Socrates distinguishes between people who recognize bad things (τά κακά) as bad and people who mistake bad things as good.²⁷³ Concerning the former group, Socrates wonders whether they really desire bad things (τά κακά) while recognizing them as bad. Supposing that he may not share a common understanding about the meaning of “desire” (ἐπιθυμεῖν), Socrates asks Meno what he means. To desire (ἐπιθυμεῖν) means to become one’s own (γενέσθαι αὐτῷ).²⁷⁴ Based upon this understanding of desire, Socrates asks whether the people who want to make bad things (τά κακά) their own think that the bad things

²⁷² Ibid., 77c.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

benefit (ὠφελεῖν) or harm (βλάπτειν) them.²⁷⁵ Meno thinks that some people think bad things benefit while others think they harm. The former, Socrates concludes, clearly do not think that the bad things are bad after all, but rather, the people who desire bad things, which they think will benefit them, are simply mistaken. They think the bad things (τά κακά) are good (τάγαθά), and so they desire them *as* good things (οἱ ἀγαθοί).²⁷⁶ Besides this conclusion, we ought to note Socrates' addition of "benefit" here as a way of describing what is "good" about "good things" (τάγαθά).

Meno agrees with Socrates' conclusion that some people desire bad things while mistaking them as good things. Consequently, Socrates now reasons through a separate argument about people who desire bad things, knowing that they are harmful. He begins by asking whether these people know (γινώσκειν) that they are harmed.²⁷⁷ Meno insists that they do. Socrates then asks whether being harmed (βλαπτόμενος) is a sufficient condition for being miserable (ἄθλιος), and with Meno's agreement, he further identifies being miserable (ἄθλιος) with being unfortunate (κακοδαίμων).²⁷⁸ Socrates' reasoning culminates in this question concerning the end (τέλος) of human life: Does anyone want (βούλεται) to be miserable (ἄθλιος) and unfortunate (κακοδαίμων)? Meno, like Socrates, thinks not. Thus, Socrates concludes that no one wants bad things (τά κακά), as harmful things (οἱ βλαπτόμενοι), since such a person would be both miserable (ἄθλιος) and unfortunate (κακοδαίμων), and no one desires (ἐπιθυμεῖν) to acquire (κτᾶσθαι) bad things (τά κακά) lest they do become miserable.²⁷⁹ Even though Socrates primarily reasons negatively, that is, he reasons about what humans do *not* want, we can draw inferences from Socrates' reasoning about the human good. In the first place, good people are fortunate (εὐδαίμονες), which is the obvious antipode to being unfortunate (κακοδαίμονες).²⁸⁰ Everyone wants (βούλεται) to be fortunate (εὐδαίμων). This claim harmonizes with our prior analysis of being blessed (μακάριος) and the *arete* of the bee. A part of this "wanting" involves the desire (ἐπιθυμεῖν) for good things (τάγαθά), which is to say, beneficial things (ὠφελουμένοι). The benefit of good things explains their desirability. Even so, the human desire for good things, while certainly universal and inclusive, does not account for *arete* in a satisfactory way. How could a person *not* be good (not

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 77d.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 77e.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 78a

²⁷⁹ Ibid.,

²⁸⁰ Other commentators also understand "κακοδαίμων" as the antonym to "εὐδαίμων" despite its explicit absence at this part of the *Meno*. See Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 77; Ionescu, *Plato's Meno*, 26.

exhibit *arete*), if the condition were just the desire for good things? And yet, clearly, not everyone is a good person. Perhaps the second part of Meno's account resolves this problem (namely, being capable of providing beautiful things for oneself). Before we move on, let us consider the intertextual play of Socrates' reasoning about the human good as it may help our ongoing investigation of the relationship between *arete*, the human good, and the *polis*.

Socrates addresses Meno's claim that *arete* is the desire (ἐπιθυμεῖν) for beautiful things (οἱ καλοί) in three key ways. He identifies beautiful things (οἱ καλοί) with good things (οἱ ἀγαθοί); he changes "desire" (ἐπιθυμεῖν) to "want" (βούλεσθαι); and he asserts being unfortunate (κακοδαίμων) as the end at which the pursuit of bad things would aim. The argument that no one knowingly desires what is bad appears many times throughout the corpus (and not always from Socrates).²⁸¹ However, if we turn to the *Symposium*, we will find Diotima present Socrates with a similar argument to the one that Socrates presents to Meno in the *Meno*. In both cases, the speaker (Diotima and Socrates respectively) proposes the substitution of good things (οἱ ἀγαθοί) for beautiful things (οἱ καλοί). Diotima reasons with Socrates in the following way:

"I'll try to teach you [the need (χρεῖαν) of love for human beings], Socrates, after I finish this. So far I've been explaining the genesis (γεγονώς) [i.e., its origin and coming to be] of Love (ὁ Ἔρως). Now, according to you, he is love (ὁ Ἔρως) for beautiful things (τῶν καλῶν). But suppose someone asks us, 'Socrates and Diotima, what is the love of beautiful things?' It's clearer this way: 'The lover of beautiful things has a desire (ἐρᾷ ὁ ἐρῶν τῶν καλῶν); what does he desire? (τί ἐρᾷ)'"

"That they become his own (γενέσθαι αὐτῷ)," I said.

"But that answer calls for still another question, that is, 'What will be for that one (τί ἔσται ἐκείνῳ), for whom beautiful things come to be (ὃ ἂν γένηται τὰ καλά)?"

I said there was no way I could give a ready answer to that question.

Then she said, "Suppose someone changes the question, putting 'good' (ἀγαθῶ) in place of 'beautiful' (καλοῦ), and asks you this: 'Tell me, Socrates, a lover of good things has a desire (ἐρᾷ ὁ ἐρῶν τῶν ἀγαθῶν); what does he desire (τί ἐρᾷ)?"

"That they become his own (γενέσθαι αὐτῷ)," I said.

"And what will be for that one (τί ἔσται ἐκείνῳ), for whom good things come to be (ὃ ἂν γένηται τὰγαθά)?"

²⁸¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 509d-e; *Protagoras*, 358d. Also relevant are Plato, *Laws*, 731c; *Republic*, 382a-c, 412e-413a, 589c; *Sophist*, 228c, 230a; *Timaeus*, 86d-e. For an overview of the subject, see Gulley, "The Interpretation of 'No one does wrong willingly' in Plato's Dialogues."

“This time it’s easier to come up with the answer,” I said. “He will be fortunate (εὐδαίμων ἔσται).”

“For, by the acquisition of good things (κτήσει γάρ, ἔφη, ἀγαθῶν) fortunate ones are fortunate (οἱ εὐδαίμονες εὐδαίμονες). There’s no need to ask further, ‘What does one want, the one wanting to be fortunate (τί δὲ βούλεται εὐδαίμων εἶναι ὁ βουλόμενος)?’ The answer you gave seems to be final (τέλος).”²⁸²

In the *Meno*, Socrates reasons negatively, that is, no one wants bad things (τά κακά), which are harmful things (τοὺς βλαπτομένους), because no one wants to be unfortunate (κακοδαίμων). From his reasoning, we inferred the inverse, positive insight about the human good, namely, humans want good things (τὰ ἀγαθὰ), which are beneficial things (ὠφελουμένοι), because everyone wants to be fortunate (εὐδαίμων).²⁸³ We find this implicit reasoning made explicit in the *Symposium*, and Diotima even asserts the finality of this end (τέλος), namely, being fortunate (εὐδαίμων).²⁸⁴ Conspicuously, Diotima suggests the replacement of beautiful things (οἱ καλοί) with good things (οἱ ἀγαθοί) at the beginning of her reasoning so that Socrates can answer her questions more easily. Socrates does not seem to know, or, at least, he cannot say, how being beautiful (i.e., when beautiful things “become one’s own” (“γενέσθαι αὐτῷ”)) affects a person, but the consequence of being good seems obvious to him. This tension echoes the troublesome appearance of the beautiful (κάλος) in the *Meno*. Socrates seems infatuated with Meno’s beauty, but its inclusion in the dialogue mostly causes more problems than it solves. As we have observed previously, being beautiful is not sufficient for being a good person, but Socrates’ abiding interest in the aesthetic draws our attention to its seriousness for our inquiry. In the *Symposium*, Diotima concludes that love is the way that humans possess good things forever, that is, through beautiful reproduction, and being in touch with true beauty allows one to give birth to true (ἀληθῆ) *arete*.²⁸⁵ While an analysis of Diotima’s reasoning could help us to understand the aesthetic problem in relation to the human good, it would also take us well beyond the scope of our inquiry. We note this conclusion only for the sake of reinforcing our sense that an adequate account of the human good must include a reckoning with the beautiful.

²⁸² Plato, *Symposium*, 204d-205a. Translation modified.

²⁸³ Socrates reasons more extensively about the connection between good and beneficial things in *Gorgias*, 474c-477e. See also Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy, Volume 4*, 247.

²⁸⁴ The addition of harm and benefit are absent in Diotima’s account.

²⁸⁵ Plato, *Symposium*, 206b-207a, 212a.

Other commentators have interpreted Meno's "desire for beautiful things" as an expression of his aristocratic sensibility. Might Meno be surrounding his account of *arete* with elitist airs, glorifying a certain aesthetic appreciation that only educated and noble individuals would recognize?²⁸⁶ While, on one level, we sympathize with this reading, insofar as we too have seen Meno as an arrogant and misguided individual, we can also understand Meno's introduction of beautiful things (οἱ καλοί) in a very different way. We should point at that, besides this remark on beautiful things (οἱ καλοί), which occurs within a poetic recitation, Meno really expresses no explicit interest in beautiful things (οἱ καλοί) at any other point in the dialogue.²⁸⁷ By contrast, Socrates repeatedly mentions both beautiful things/people (οἱ καλοί) and the beautiful (ὁ κάλος). While the temptation to see Meno as a snobbish aristocrat may have some appeal, it might make more sense to see his introduction of beautiful things here as a reflection of his desire to pander to Socrates.²⁸⁸ As we will see shortly, Meno seems much more interested in material goods (gold and silver) than aesthetic ones. To his credit, Meno hits the mark. Socrates reasons through his response to Meno more systematically here than in either of Meno's prior two attempts to say what *arete* is. Socrates only digresses once, and only once Meno asserts the priority of material goods.²⁸⁹ Even so, Meno's account of *arete* as something that concerns beautiful things is too superficial for Socrates. We can see an indication of this superficiality through Meno's quick concession of the identity between beautiful things and good things. While we found a parallel replacement of beautiful things with good things in the *Symposium*, Diotima does not say that they are the same. She only suggests replacing the former with the latter to help Socrates answer. In the *Meno*, Meno could have agreed that beautiful things are good things while insisting that *arete* is the desire for beautiful things *as* beautiful things. For Meno to make such a distinction, he would have to admit that the relationship between the human good and the beautiful presents some difficulty. As we saw in Socrates' interaction with Diotima, it is difficult to say why a person wants to make beautiful things one's own/be beautiful despite the desire to do so. Meno's introduction of beautiful things does sound deep (τραγική), but he does not seem to know what he says. In contrast, Socrates

²⁸⁶ Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 73-74. Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, 138. Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's Meno*, 33.

²⁸⁷ He will tell Socrates that Socrates "spoke beautifully" at various points, but this phrase is colloquial and so not the most compelling evidence.

²⁸⁸ While he does not say *what* he has heard, Meno does mention that he has heard about Socrates before their meeting. Plato, *Meno*, 80a.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 78d.

seems to speak quite carefully. With this observation in mind, let us next consider Socrates' transition from desire (ἐπιθυμεῖν) to want (βούλεσθαι).

Socrates first shifts the diction of Meno's account when he proposes the connection between being miserable (ἄθλιος) and unfortunate (κακοδαίμων).²⁹⁰ After Meno recognizes their relatedness, Socrates asks, "Now is there anyone who wants (βούλεται) to be miserable and unfortunate?"²⁹¹ Immediately, we should notice the similarity between Socrates' use of βούλεται here and Diotima's use of it. She said, "There's no need to ask further, 'What does one want, the one wanting to be fortunate (τί δὲ βούλεται εὐδαίμων εἶναι ὁ βουλόμενος)?' The answer you gave seems to be final (τέλος)."²⁹² The object of "βούλεται" in both cases is the same, but in the *Meno*, Socrates states it inversely, i.e., no one wants (βούλεται) to be unfortunate (κακοδαίμων). In both accounts, "βούλεται" expresses the orientation of a person towards the final end (τέλος) of human life, or, in the terms of our inquiry, the human good. In contrast, desire (ἐπιθυμεῖν) aims at goods, that is, something which is good for the sake of something else. One reason that Meno may not have acknowledged this shift in diction is because he does not recognize anything problematic about *arete* as we have persistently pointed out. One difficulty in accounting for *arete* emerges out of this distinction. Humans desire goods, *and* humans want the human good. The acquisition of goods does not sufficiently guarantee one's share of the human good, even though a share of the human good does include some provision of goods. If some share of goods is *only* necessary, then *arete* cannot be the provision of goods for oneself, since *arete* is sufficient for the human good. If goods are only necessary, then what else is needed to secure the human good? Meno does not seem to know, which is not a problem on its own, but he also does not seem ready to admit that he does not know. As Socrates continues to interrogate Meno's third account of what *arete* is, we find more evidence of his confusion concerning the limited value of goods in the pursuit of the human good.

Having made his case against the claim that *arete* is desiring (ἐπιθυμεῖν) beautiful things (οἱ καλοί), Socrates moves on to the second part of Meno's account, in which he claimed that *arete* is "the ability to provide (πορίζεσθαι) good things (τάγαθά) for oneself."²⁹³ He first asks Meno to

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 78a.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Plato, *Symposium*, 205a. Translation modified.

²⁹³ Plato, *Meno*, 78c. Note that Socrates has kept the substitution of good things for beautiful things, whereas "beautiful things" were the implicit object of Meno's original claim.

specify what kinds of things Meno calls goods (ἀγαθά). Does he mean health (ὕγεια) and wealth (πλοῦτος)?²⁹⁴ Tellingly, Meno would like to add other goods, namely, the acquisition of gold (χρυσίον) and silver (ἀργύριον) and honors (τιμή) and a position of authority (ἀρχή) in the *polis*. Upon hearing Meno’s addition of these other goods, Socrates playfully mocks Meno, proclaiming, “Very well; to provide oneself with gold and silver, then, is *arete*, as declares Meno, the ancestral guest-friend (πατρικὸς ξένος) of the Great King.”²⁹⁵ As an accommodation to Meno’s revision, Socrates’ has replaced “the ability to provide (πορίζεσθαι) good things (ἀγαθά) for oneself” with the provision (πορίζεσθαι) of gold and silver for oneself. Apparently, *arete* does not concern the provision of good things generally but very particular, material goods. With an undoubtedly ironic undertone, Socrates questions Meno about the way that one procures one’s wealth. Should it be done justly (δικαίως) and piously (ὀσίως)? Meno agrees that such qualifications are necessary, and so Socrates amends the recent amendment accordingly. And yet, this reasoning seems familiar, and it likely seems that way because it shares similarities with Socrates’ response to Meno’s first account.²⁹⁶ Once again, they have only found pieces of *arete* during their search for *arete* “whole and healthy.” In our inquiry, we understand this search for *arete* “whole and healthy” as a search for the *arete* sufficient for the human good. Despite the similarity between these two parts, let us return to one discernable difference between the first account and this one.

After hearing the kinds of goods that Meno meant in his account, Socrates calls Meno “the ancestral guest-friend of the Great King (ὁ τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως πατρικὸς ξένος).” We can reasonably assume that this so-called “Great King” refers again to the Achaemenid king, Artaxerxes II. Our confidence in such an assumption stems from the combination of our broader assumption about the intertextual play of the *Meno* with Xenophon’s *Anabasis*, Socrates’ prior references to Aristippus, Thessaly, and Gorgias, and the earlier pun on Artaxerxes’ name.²⁹⁷ We find Xenophon’s semi-historical, semi-fictionalized character of Meno modified in a Platonic style. Xenophon’s account of Meno’s viciousness has colored our perception of Meno’s behavior such that we see him partially as a conniving opportunist without scruples.²⁹⁸ Even so, we see

²⁹⁴ As we noticed previously, Thessalian wealth is a good for which the Greeks admire Thessaly according to Socrates.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 78d.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 74a.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 71c. The reference is to our analysis of Socrates’ claim not to be a good rememberer.

²⁹⁸ Grote rejects intertextuality most extremely, writing “There is nothing in the Platonic dialogue to mark that meanness and perfidy which the Xenophontic picture indicates.” Grote, *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates Volume II*, 232. Grote’s extraordinarily rigid take significantly precedes the other commentators, and so it is perhaps

Meno through his engagement with Socrates in the *Meno* as well. When examining Socrates' opening monologue, we explored some of the idiosyncrasies of the "ξένος"-relation within Classical Greek culture because of Socrates' "ξένε" greeting in hypothetical discourse. Through our investigation, we found that participation in this relationship both required considerable means (social and material) and gave considerable influence as well. This relationship was unique because it carried intense obligations, obligations which exceeded those expected of kin, and these obligations partially arose from divine sovereignty over the pact. To violate the "ξένος"-relation was not a violation of political law, but it was an affront to the gods (ἄσέβημα). This bond was sacred. Consequently, when Socrates calls Meno the ancestral guest-friend (πατρικὸς ξένος) of the Great King, a part of this address must imply the spectrum of Meno's obligations to this foreign king. It seems unlikely that Socrates would consider being beholden to Artaxerxes II in this way a good thing, especially because he mentions it after Meno proposes a dubious account of *arete* as the provision of gold and silver for oneself. By focusing on Socrates' pointed remark, we are forced to confront the difference between Socrates' prior address of Meno as "ξένε" and his current address of Meno as the ancestral guest-friend of the Great King ("ὁ τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως πατρικὸς ξένος"). How does Socrates' repetition of "ξένος" strike us in this second iteration?

A form of the word "ξένος" first appeared when Socrates gave his voice to a hypothetical Athenian. This persona addressed Meno not as Meno but as "stranger" (ξένε). As a speaker, Socrates spoke not as himself but as if he were any Athenian despite making a claim that, we suspect, only Socrates alone would make, namely, that he does not know what *arete* is, and anyone who does know about it is blessed (μακάριος). Now, Socrates repeats Meno's declaration concerning *arete*, one which he himself would never make (*arete* is the provision of gold and silver for oneself), and he supports it through the invocation of Meno as ancestral guest-friend (πατρικὸς ξένος) of the Great King (Artaxerxes II). In both cases, the rhetorical effect of Socrates' speech depends upon the dissolution of his own identity. Socrates hides himself behind the persona of an Athenian who makes a *Socratic* claim as if it were a trivially Athenian one. This rhetorical practice

somewhat forgivable insofar as scholars had not yet studied intertextuality. More recent commentators tend to reject intertextuality tacitly, i.e., by excluding any extratextual sources (unless, of course, that source is another Platonic dialogue) in their analysis. For example, Scott, *Plato's Meno*. Klein most liberally and fruitfully incorporates intertextual play into his analysis of the *Meno*, drawing extensively from non-Platonic texts. Most take a more moderate approach, referring occasionally to other Greek texts and liberally to other Platonic dialogues. For example, Ionescu, *Plato's Meno*; Sharples, *Plato: Meno*; Thompson, *The Meno of Plato*; Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's Meno*.

mirrors the mythological trope of the divinity in disguise, who must alter his/her appearance to interact with mortals. This similarity need not imply an elevation of Socrates to the level of quasi-divinity, but rather, we can see it as another way of performing the dialogical comportment upon which Socrates insister earlier, i.e., that they speak in terms familiar to both speakers.²⁹⁹ Socrates becomes a “stranger” (ξένος) to himself so that Meno might better heed his words, just as a divinity takes on the (dis)guise of a human for the sake of human understanding. Through this rhetorical practice, Socrates effectively becomes a mirror for Meno when he repeats Meno’s own words back to him. This form of instruction can affect change in a listener by giving the listener the opportunity to recognize one’s own responsibility for one’s words. Socrates’ augmentation of Meno’s revised account of *arete* with his acknowledgement of Meno’s “ξένος”-relation with Artaxerxes II hints at the precarity of Meno’s suggestion. We might understand Socrates’ invocation of this relationship also as an insinuation about the dependency of Meno’s understanding of human goods on his involvement in this very demanding relationship with Artaxerxes II. What might Socrates be implying with his reference to *Meno*’s special relationship with *Artaxerxes II*?

Ancient Greek testimony from fourth and fifth century BCE recounts a complex network of relations in the Mediterranean region. The texts of Thucydides (Athenian), Herodotus (Achaemenid), and Xenophon (Athenian) provide us with some of the most detailed records of the events in this region at that time.³⁰⁰ While the *Meno* does not often receive attention as a window into Graeco-Achaemenid relations, hints of their cultural exchange sneak into the dialogue in subtle ways. For example, Socrates’ characterization of Meno as a “tyrant” probably does not explicitly refer to the Achaemenid imperial practice, as the word seems to have a dual register (political and colloquial) in the same way that it does in English, but it takes on a more pointed tone when paired with Meno’s Achaemenid affiliation.³⁰¹ Meno the Thessalian comes to Athens, ordering around the locals and procuring their riches (their “knowledge” of *arete*). However, even setting aside the Achaemenid practice, Athens spent many years under the rule of various tyrants prior to the stabilization of its now famous “democracy.” Pisistratus, Solon, Clesithenes were all

²⁹⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 75d.

³⁰⁰ We might also include Aristotle’s texts as reliable sources about Athenian politics, but it is worth noting that the events which we will be considering took place prior to his birth. In this way, his texts differ from those of Thucydides, Herodotus, and Xenophon.

³⁰¹ For the most explicit reference, see *ibid.*, 76b. Socrates may imply it at 86d. The relationship between Athens and the Achaemenid Empire was a bit more nuanced than outright antagonism. However, the periods of alliance between the two empires seem often based upon expedience.

Athenian tyrants whose respective reigns led to the enfranchisement of certain Athenian citizens within the Athenian *polis*. Furthermore, we cannot overlook Athens' most infamous bout with tyranny under the Thirty Tyrants. Athens' history of tyrannical governance does not come as a result of Achaemenid influence (at least not directly), but in both cases, we can see a concrete, material struggle for power as a driving force behind this form of political organization.³⁰² We might also say the same about Meno, whose esteem for very particular material goods, namely, gold, silver, honors, and offices, could appear as a symptom of a common yet dangerous understanding of the human good. With this tension in mind, we might read this confrontation between Socrates and Meno as a reflection of the broader struggle within Athens during its maturation from agrarian village to Mediterranean empire. As Athenian power grew, the social and political needs of her people changed as well. We might frame this transformation in terms of our own inquiry as a confrontation between older and newer assumptions about the human good. The introduction of foreign influence, wealth, and new opportunities for the Athenian people must have posed many new challenges for the Athenian *polis*. Let us turn to Xenophon's *Hellenica* so that we can examine an example of the confrontation between the *arete* of the *polis* and the *arete* of the human good.

After a battle for the Piraeus, in which Athens conceded Piraeus and Munichia, Xenophon recounts a speech made by Thrasybulus, the famous Athenian general and statesman, before an assembly composed of members of the Thirty tyrants, "the Eleven," and the Ten governing in Piraeus. Thrasybulus "advises" in the following way:

"I advise you," he said, "men of the town (ἐκ τοῦ ἄστεως ἄνδρες), to 'know yourselves.' And you would best learn to know yourselves were you to consider what grounds you have for arrogance (μέγα φρονητέον), that you should undertake to rule (ἄρχειν) over us. Are you more just (δικαιότεροί)? But the commons (δῆμος), though poorer than you, never did you any wrong (ἠδίκηκεν) for the sake of money (χρημάτων); while you, though richer (πλουσιώτεροι) than any of them, have done many disgraceful things (αἰσχρὰ) for the sake of gains."³⁰³

In his speech, Thrasybulus voices his suspicion about the basis of the Thirty's claim to rule (ἄρχειν). If we use parts of Meno's accounts of *arete* as a guide, we can see Thrasybulus reckon

³⁰² For a compelling take on the transformation of Athenian society through competition among the social elite, see Morgan's *Greek Perspectives on the Achaemenid Empire: Persia Through the Looking Glass*, especially 52-66; 106-124; 129-147.

³⁰³ Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 2.4.40. In this excerpt, Thrasybulus only speaks about justice, but he goes on to doubt the Thirty's claim to courage and "intelligence" (γνώμη) as well.

with very similar assumptions about *arete*. Even though Thrasybulus clearly disputes their claim to rule, he mentions that they are not just (δικαίος), or, at least, they are no more just than the common people (δῆμος). In our analysis, we have considered justice as a necessary condition of *arete* as a measure of the human good. While being just is not sufficient, one must be just in order to be a good person. Thrasybulus does not reproach the Thirty for being bad people explicitly, but if we add Meno's account of *arete* as the ability to rule into our consideration, then we can see that Thrasybulus disputes the Thirty's claim to *arete*. That is, we can understand the Thirty's claim to rule as a claim to *arete*, and yet Thrasybulus points out their inadequacy before another measure of *arete*. Thrasybulus calls out the Thirty specifically for their relationship with money (χρήματα). For the sake of "gains," they do disgraceful things (αἰσχρὰ). This sentiment expresses tacitly what we have tracked throughout our investigation. Wealth or the possession of money may be a human good, but it fails as a measure of *the* human good. If we take Thrasybulus' account as a guide, then we might conclude that the Thirty were not good people. One reason that they were not good people is that they cared so much about money that they were willing to do disgraceful things despite already being wealthy. We can find Socrates express a similar concern at the conclusion of his speech in the *Apology*. Socrates requests of the jurymen, "...[W]hen my sons grow up, avenge yourselves by causing them the same kind of grief that I caused you, if you think they care for money or anything else more than they care for *arete*, or if they think they are somebody when they are nobody."³⁰⁴ Just as in Thrasybulus' speech, we see Socrates reject the possession of money as a sufficient measure of the human good. *Arete* is the sufficient measure of a good person, and yet, it is not clear what *arete* entails—which is notable because Socrates claims to care so much about *arete*. And yet, his fellow Athenians judge him to be guilty! We will examine the tension between wealth and *arete* momentarily. First, we must return to the *Meno* and consider the implication of Socrates' emphasis on Meno's relationship with the Great King.

Now that we have *some* additional insight into the socio-political circumstance in Athens underlying Socrates' exchange with Meno, we can hear more complexity in the character of Socrates' remark. While it may or may not be obvious without the historical background that Socrates likely does not flatter Meno with this address, we are now more sensitive to the tenor of this slight. Meno suggests an account of *arete* that, at least in Athens, seems quite immature. Even

³⁰⁴ Plato, *Apology*, 41e.

if we assumed that only Socrates would claim not to know at all what *arete* is, we drew out of Thrasybulus' speech a tacit confrontation with wealth as a measure of *arete*. Socrates, Thrasybulus, and perhaps other Athenians too already seem to acknowledge that *arete* cannot *just* be the provision of wealth. The distribution of power in Athenian society changed significantly during the sixth century, and it is easy to see how those who gained so much during this time would also believe that increasing one's wealth is the fulfillment of the human good. While not every Athenian (or person living in Athens) grew wealthier during this time, members of the aristocratic class as well as recently enfranchised members of the demos experienced unprecedented opportunities to acquire wealth and build relations. For example, it had only recently become possible for certain members of Athenian society to create relationships with people abroad, which was an opportunity previously only accessible to those with excessive wealth. This opportunity relates directly to Athens' relationship with the Achaemenid Empire. In her chapter on the Athenian perspective of the Achaemenid Empire, Janet Morgan notes the development of new social practices as the structure of Athenian society placed more power into the hands of the demos. One such new venture would be the participation in an embassy to the Achaemenid Empire:

An invitation to participate in an embassy clearly enhanced the status of those involved. It was an opportunity to behave as an aristocrat, with state backing. At a time when guest-friendships with Achaemenids could be seen as non-democratic, the ambassadors were given *carte blanche* to develop relationships with them.³⁰⁵

Although Meno was not an Athenian, and so would likely not be subject to the same scrutiny as an Athenian, Socrates' response likely reflects a common attitude of contempt for those who openly consorted with the Achaemenid Empire for their own private benefit. Despite the many ways that Athenian culture was enriched as a direct result of their cultural exchange with the Achaemenid Empire, it is not difficult to understand why some Athenians might feel disdain for those became wealthier and more powerful as a result of their engagement with an empire responsible for the deaths of many Athenians (and Greeks more broadly). Many Athenians were resistant to the cultural exchange between Achaemenid Empire and Athens as well.³⁰⁶ Nevertheless, Socrates does not seem to speak in an exclusively xenophobic register. Even though

³⁰⁵ Morgan, *Greek Perspective on the Achaemenid Empire*, 160.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 162.

Meno's "treachery" might have disturbed some Athenians, we can still hear the suspicion in Socrates' introduction of Meno's relationship with Artaxerxes II through a concern for the human good. The cultivation of and participation in this relationship implies a certain understanding of what is good for a human being. According to Socrates' prior reasoning, humans *do* sometimes want bad things, but they want them because they *think* those things are good. Consequently, we can understand this moment as another indication of Meno's failure to think the problem of *arete*. He does not seem to recognize any issue with using one's ability to secure "good things" (specifically material goods) as a measure of being a good person. Interestingly, there is a name for the overvaluation of this particular, relative good (money or wealth), namely, avarice.

Even though none of the common Greek words for avarice (e.g., φιλοχρηματίαν, φιλάργυρον, φιλοκέρδεια) appear in the *Meno*, the growing prosperity of Athens in the background offers one explanation for the appearance of this contradictory desire in Socrates' encounter with Meno.³⁰⁷ Socrates expresses concern about the development of avarice on many occasions, and in so far as Meno's suggestion implies his confusion about the relative good of money and wealth in human life, the danger of avarice bears directly on our inquiry.³⁰⁸ How does an inordinate care for money/wealth affect a person's pursuit of *arete* as the measure of the human good? We should recall that Socrates immediately asks Meno whether it is important to add "justly" or "piously" to the provision of gold and silver for oneself.³⁰⁹ From this remark and our prior analysis, we can infer that the provision of gold and silver is not a final end, lest one provide gold and silver for oneself without regard for *how* they are acquired. These qualifications emphasize the importance of one's relationship with others in one's endeavors. Avarice hides the necessity of a care for one's relationship to others (whether to other humans (justly) or to the divine (piously)). Personal advantage, or "gain" as Thrasybulus put it, becomes primary. In the *Republic*, Socrates also voices his concern for avarice in connection with an allusion to the Achaemenid Empire. Socrates tells a story about the transformation of the soul of the person who honors money too highly while describing the differences between the soul of the timocratic man and that of the oligarchic man. He supposes the transformation to unfold in the following way:

³⁰⁷ That is, the contradictory measures of the human good required to prioritize the provision of money for oneself above all else.

³⁰⁸ Plato, *Republic*, 347b, 390d, 391c, 469d, 485e, 486b, 553c, 580e; *Laws*, 747b, 832d, 938b-c.

³⁰⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 78d.

Humbled by poverty, he turns greedily to making money, and, little by little, saving and working, he amasses property. Don't you think that this person would establish his appetitive (ἐπιθυμητικόν) and money-making (φιλοχρήματον) part on the throne, setting it up as a great king (μέγαν βασιλέα) within himself, adorning it with tiaras (τιάρας) and collars and girding it with Achaemenid swords (ἀκινάκας).³¹⁰

We can understand the ascension of the “appetitive” (ἐπιθυμητικός) and “money-making” (φιλοχρήματον) part of the soul as an image of an axiological shift. Whereas the love of honor (φιλοτιμία) informed the timocratic man's measure of a good person, a love of money, or “avarice” (φιλοχρήματον), leads the soul of the oligarchic man to measure a good person according to their wealth. Notably, such a man adorns the seat of highest value in his soul (i.e., “the throne”) with Achaemenid paraphernalia. Socrates continues his description, explaining other psychic consequences for this man:

He makes the rational (λογιστικόν) and spirited parts (θυμοειδές) sit on the ground beneath appetite, one on either side, reducing them to slaves (καταδουλωσάμενος). He won't allow the first to reason about or examine anything except how a little money can be made into great wealth. And he won't allow the second to honor (τιμᾶν) anything but wealth and wealthy people (πλοῦτόν τε καὶ πλουσίους) or to have any ambition other than the acquisition of wealth (ἐπὶ χρημάτων κτήσει) or whatever might contribute to getting it.³¹¹

While Socrates' prior account of the “tri-partite soul” clearly operates within this speech, we will not consider it in our analysis since it would require us to depart too much from our inquiry. However, we have not considered these passages for naught. We can bracket Socrates' prior reasoning about the tri-partite soul and still consider the consequences of this axiological shift on the oligarchic man's assumptions about the human good. When a person places too much value on this particular human good (wealth), then such a person must necessarily neglect other goods. And yet, these other goods are clearly good. In addition to wealth, Socrates suggested “health” as a good, and Meno did not dispute it. The admission of health as a good poses a direct challenge to the axiological framework of the avaricious person. For example, if one cannot enjoy one's wealth without one's health, then whence come the priority of acquiring wealth over all else? We also can find challenges to the axiological priority of acquiring wealth in Socrates' suggested qualifications regarding the way of acquiring wealth as well. If one must do “bad things” to acquire one's wealth,

³¹⁰ Plato, *Republic*, 553c. Translation modified. The tiara is Achaemenid headdress. Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 805.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 553d.

then how can the person who does bad things be a good person? Meno seems not to have considered these challenges to his assertion about *arete*.

The avaricious individual lives an untenable contradiction. Avarice compels a person to assume a very particular measure of the human good, namely, being as wealthy as possible. We can hear this assumption resonate in Meno's account, that is, *arete* is the provision of gold and silver for oneself. While being wealthy may benefit a person in some ways, it also shows its inadequacy as a measure of the human good when we admit the existence of other human goods. Our analysis has already engaged two other human goods (health and beauty), and being wealthy does not secure one's health or beauty anymore than being healthy secures wealth or beauty (and so on). Although the enjoyment of these goods could improve any human's life, none of them suffice as a measure of the human good. In other words, *arete* is not any one of these particular goods. We have analyzed a couple references to Achaemenid imagery in Platonic texts. The Achaemenid empire was very wealthy, powerful, and influential, and these qualities surely enticed many Greeks to pursue a life that shared in some of these goods. Moreover, insofar as Athens and other Greek regional powers prided themselves on their autonomy, Achaemenid imperialism must have disturbed their pursuit of the human good. Of course, this encounter with imperialism did not seem to stifle Athens' own imperialist agenda. Nevertheless, this opportunity for wealth and power shifted the orientation of the *polis* in accordance with these enticing incentives. As Morgan pointed out in her research, the *polis* sanctioned the participation in embassies. Both cultural exchange between Athens and the Achaemenid Empire and the relationality of life in the Athenian *polis* both affected Athenian assumptions about the human good. Through an examination of Socrates' address of Meno in his relation to "the Great King," we became more sensitive to some of the issues which arose as a consequence.

When we examined Socrates and Meno's dialogue in the prior two sections, we found Meno's accounts of *arete* lacking in universality and inclusivity. In what way does Meno's third account fail? We have primarily focused on the human relation to "goods." Do humans only want "good things," and if so, how do these goods relate to the human good? Our analysis of the first half of Meno's account considered Socrates' reasoning about the human good (the end of human life as being fortunate (εὐδαίμων), blessed (μακάριος), and a good person). Everyone wants goods, but some people mistake bad things for good things. A key difference between good things and

bad things is that the former are beneficial whereas the latter are harmful. In other words, the relationality between the person and that which they wanted determined the character of the objects as either good or bad. In our consideration of the second part of Meno's account, we against found relationality to be decisive. When Meno insisted upon an understanding of *arete* that privileged the good of wealth above all other goods, Socrates questioned Meno about the way that a person acquired their wealth. From this qualification, we inferred the significance of one's relation to others (both human and divine) as a necessary component of the *arete* sufficient for the human good. A good person must relate to others in the right way. This conclusion, which we state for the first time now, arises from the inadequacy of a selfish measure of *arete*. Avarice is but one example. The avaricious person places their own interest—which is itself very narrowly understood as being as wealthy as possible—above all else. Perhaps the most incisive objection to this measure comes from the consequence of its absolute application. That is, the avaricious person would sometimes do bad things to provide wealth for him or herself, and yet, if *arete* is the provision of wealth for oneself, *and* if *arete* is sufficient for the human good, then we would have to conclude that a good person (that is, a wealthy person) sometimes does bad things. Our analysis of Thrasybulus speech also drew out this contradiction. A wealthy person, especially one who honors wealth above all else, can often fail to satisfy their obligation to others—an obligation which arises from the necessity of living with others in the *polis*.

Upon realizing that Meno's third attempt to say what *arete* is has left them in no better a position than the one from which they began, Socrates coyly asks Meno if he is playing (παίζεν) with him.³¹² We strongly suspect that Meno is not, but it is a curious remark from Socrates. In the beginning, we read Meno's initial line of questioning as an attempt to engage in a certain kind of game—one in which Meno would either win honor through besting Socrates or acquire new knowledge to wield in future discussions—but Meno's behavior has changed during his most recent account. Throughout the present discussion, Meno passively agreed with everything Socrates said, whereas he behaved a bit more combatively during their discussion previously.³¹³ Socrates even commented on two ways of engaging in discussion because of Meno's contentiousness. On the other hand, Socrates maintains his playful disposition at every turn. But

³¹² Ibid., 79a.

³¹³ Meno does amend Socrates' list of goods with gold, silver, honors, and offices, but this amendment hardly seems combative compared to his behavior during their discussion of shapes and colors, in which he called Socrates' account of shape simple-minded and pedantically insisted that Socrates account for color.

why? Why would Socrates “play around” with Meno throughout their discussion while simultaneously insisting upon the importance of *arete*?³¹⁴ There is something enticing about Socratic philosophical practice so much so that he notes his imitators during his trial.³¹⁵ And yet, it is also clear why imitation can be dangerous. Socrates frequently dissimulates and even outright lies occasionally. Should this part of Socratic philosophical practice be modeled too? It would be difficult to teach his sensitivity to dialogical subtlety and nuance. These faults also seem relatively innocuous compared to his negligence as a father and husband. We may wonder whether a dialogue between two “Socrates” could function as well. Two adept interlocutors *could* both play with one another throughout a dialogue if they were both adequately attentive to the active/passive dynamic. It may be that this dynamic occurs in every dialogue, but especially because of Socrates’ preference for short question and answer discussions, Socrates’ interlocutors fall consistently into one of these two positions. Especially in the *Meno*, Socrates plays a more active role in leading the discourse. Meno has not raised any serious questions since the ones he asked at the beginning. Tellingly, when Meno resisted his passive role, Socrates began to play with him most intensely.³¹⁶ It seems that Socratic play serves as placation of an agitated, passive interlocutor, and Socrates likely encountered many agitated interlocutors, since Socratic philosophical practice is very demanding intellectually and existentially. We have drawn out of the dialogue a difficult and urgent problem concerning the relationship between *arete*, the human good, and the *polis*. While this subject is clearly quite important, it also bears directly on the way one chooses to live one’s life, and depending on the interlocutor, a genuine reckoning with this problem could result in the devaluation of one’s highest values. Consequently, we can also understand Socrates’ use of play as a tactic to preserve dialogical harmony and encourage his interlocutor’s continued participation. This behavior conforms with his suggestion that one ought to be gentle with one’s interlocutor.³¹⁷

³¹⁴ Diogenes of Sinope was another playful philosopher. While the Socrates of the Platonic dialogues certainly does not present himself as a full-blown cynic, the subversive and ironic gestures do bear a resemblance to Diogenes such that a closer examination of this other figure could help us to develop a better sense of this unique disposition. The connection between Socrates and Diogenes has roots leading back into antiquity. According to Diogenes Laertius, Plato himself called Diogenes of Sinope a “Socrates gone mad (μαινόμενος).” Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 55.

³¹⁵ Plato, *Apology*, 23c.

³¹⁶ Plato, *Meno*, 76b-c.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 75d.

With a sense of uncertainty, Meno asks Socrates how he could be playing with him. Socrates responds:

Because just now when you were requested by me not to shatter *arete* or to change it into small coin (κερματίζειν) and I gave you patterns (παραδείγματα) in accordance with which it was to be answered, yet you paid no attention (ἡμέλησας) to this and tell me that *arete* is to be able to provide good things for oneself along with justice. And this, you declare, is a piece (μόριον) of *arete*?³¹⁸

Socrates even explains himself playfully. Just as Meno proposed the provision of pieces of gold and silver in his last account of *arete*, Socrates now accuses Meno of breaking *arete* into small pieces.³¹⁹ We can hear this play through the insinuation that Meno is trying to “pay off” Socrates with a piece of *arete* like one might do with gold and silver. However, Socrates rejects the payment and reproaches Meno for his negligence. Meno did follow a pattern, but it was not the one that Socrates had laid out for him to follow. Upon reviewing with Meno the inadequacy of his response, Socrates reminds him that they had agreed to speak in terms familiar to one another, and since Socrates has claimed from the beginning not to know what *arete* is, any account which assumes an understanding of *arete* in advance will be inadequate.³²⁰ Consequently, Socrates asserts the necessity of renewing the inquiry once again.

Conclusion

Having made our way through Meno’s three attempts to say what *arete* is, we have arrived at the conclusion of our inquiry in Chapter I. Although we still have no definitive answers to the questions about how *arete* comes to be or what it is, we have made our first steps towards the delineation of our problematic and the introduction of challenges to the inquiry. From the interaction between Socrates and Meno, we have drawn out *arete*’s rootedness in the *polis*. The pursuit of *arete* and the human good must take place in the *polis*, but this necessity also means that we must reckon with challenges that emerge from living with others in the *polis*. Let us review our analysis thus far and mark out what will require further attention in subsequent chapters.

We began our inquiry with an appeal to the testimony about Meno in Xenophon’s *Anabasis*. From that text, we learned about a Meno who was not a good man and who even scorned

³¹⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 79b.

³¹⁹ Regarding this translation and Socrates’ play on Meno’s previous use of the diminutive, see Anastaplo and Berns, “Notes,” 59.

³²⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 79d.

those who tried to be. Heeding this testimony attuned us to the tension which might underlie the exchange between Socrates and Meno. It also gave us a greater sensitivity to the potential combativeness of Meno's abrupt beginning in our own text. Once we began to analyze Socrates' response, we found greater justification for a suspicious attitude towards Meno. He may not be the villain of Xenophon's account, but he is not just an ordinary man either. Socrates' speech indicates a lot about him. Meno is a Thessalian, a comrade and lover of Aristippus, and a student of Gorgias. As we worked to reconcile Meno's questions with Socrates' strange response, we found that these relationships between Meno, his polis, and his associates reflected the necessity of a rooted inquiry into *arete*. We cannot begin to interrogate *arete* without interrogating the *polis* from which said *arete* may emerge as well. When we analyzed Socrates' account of Meno's *polis*, we unpacked an early iteration of one conflict between the pursuit of *arete* and life in the *polis*. According to Socrates, the Greeks admire Thessaly for Thessalian horsemanship, wealth, and wisdom (σοφία). Consequently, we might suppose that a life in Thessaly promises these goods for its inhabitants, but does the *polis*' cultivation of these human goods in its constituents mean that those who possess them are good people? While we suspected not, we also recognized the way that a person with a reputation for good horsemanship, wealth, or wisdom can sometimes become known as simply "good" in the *polis*. There seems to be some confusion about *arete* that arises from the relationship between good people (the human good) and the acquisition of human goods. When we analyzed questions about the conditions for becoming a good person in the *polis*, we understood this challenge as the problem concerning an *arete* sufficient for the human good.

When he heard Socrates admit that he (and every other Athenian) does not know at all what *arete* is, Meno eagerly offered an account of *arete*. He proclaimed the easiness of answering this question many times, and he even assured Socrates that there is no ἀπορία here. Meno explained *arete* as the task of each constituent of the *polis* relative to their social position and time of life.³²¹ However, as we considered Socrates' response to Meno, we became aware of a particular condition which Meno's account did not satisfy. An account of the *arete* sufficient for the human good must be universal, that is, it must be a sufficient condition for *every* person to become a good person.³²² Just as some measure of strength allows different people both to be strong so too do we search for

³²¹ Ibid., 71e-72a.

³²² As Socrates claims, "Then all human beings are good in the same way; for it is from the same things that they happen to become good." Ibid., 73c.

some measure of *arete* that allows all people to be good. Meno's account of *arete* was deficient insofar as he asserted relative measures of *arete* in the *polis* as sufficient for all human beings.

In Meno's second attempt, he claimed that *arete* is the ability to rule over others and then that *arete* is simply justice.³²³ In the former claim, we found a noteworthy ambiguity. If *arete* is the ability to rule over others, does Meno mean that the rulers determine the measure of *arete* or that the act of ruling itself is the measure of *arete*? Through a greater consideration of this ambiguity, we found another tension in an inquiry into the *arete* sufficient for the human good, namely, that the rulers seem to have an axiological power in the determination of *arete*. In the case of the former, the pursuit of *arete* sufficient for the human good can easily place the good of the rulers (their share of the human good) at odds with others in the *polis*. It is possible for many to suffer for the good of a few. In the case of the latter, this measure of *arete* excluded most people from their share in the human good as well since it is impossible for every member of a *polis* to rule. In either case, Meno's second account of *arete* did not propose an adequately inclusive measure. However, Socrates implored Meno to consider Meno's other claim that "*arete* is justice" with greater detail. This claim revealed an elementary mistake about the relationship between part and whole. In the same way that roundness is not shape but a particular shape so too is justice not *arete* but a particular *arete*. Socrates used the example of shape to create a model for Meno to follow in his attempt to account for *arete*; however, Meno became unruly during this process, refusing to practice answering in the way Socrates would like. Instead, Meno demanded for Socrates to say what shape is, and Socrates agreed because, according to him, Meno's future promise to account for *arete* makes his agreement "worthy (*ἄξιον*)."³²⁴ This seemingly inconsequential remark gave us a glimpse into the impetus behind Socrates' resolve for the inquiry into *arete*. Even though inquiring into *arete* presents enormous challenges to one's reasoning *and* to the way one chooses to live one's life, the end, which is knowing how to be a good person, warrants persevering through this difficult process. It is worthy to do so. Even so, Meno did not seem to share this conviction since he became pedantically preoccupied with "color," which Socrates mentioned during his account of shape. If Socrates were debating with Meno, then it could make sense to require Socrates to account for color since his account of shape depended upon it. We understood Meno's inclination to approach the discussion in this way as a direct

³²³ Ibid., 73c-d.

³²⁴ Ibid., 75b.

consequence of Gorgias' instruction. Gorgias, as Socrates pointed out in his opening speech, inculcated certain habits into his students, habits which made them *appear* like knowers of that about which they speak. And yet, contextually it seemed strange for Meno to worry so much about color both because it seemed reasonable for Socrates to assume that Meno would know color and because Socrates only accounted for shape to provide a model for Meno to account for *arete*.

Meno's unruly behavior led Socrates to comment on Meno's beautiful appearance for a second time. Particularly, Socrates commented on beautiful people's tendency to impose commands and tyrannize over others. This remark struck us as peculiar, and so we considered it more closely. Upon further investigation, we found an indication of yet another complication with *arete*. To begin, Meno claimed that *arete* is the ability to rule over others, and subsequently, Socrates remarked on the tendency of beautiful people to tyrannize over others. Just as being a ruler can justify one's claim to being good so too can being beautiful justify one's claim to rule, and this analogical relationship highlights the complexity of an inquiry into the human good. Additionally, we inferred the likelihood of *some* relationship between the good of beauty, the *polis*' measure of *arete*, and the *arete* sufficient for the human good. Even though Meno has a superficial share of beauty (a beautiful appearance), which, as a measure of the human good, would be just as exclusive as the ability to rule, the recognition of beauty as a good seemed to imply that the *arete* sufficient for the human good has an aesthetic condition as well. We found this insight harmonious with the increasingly aesthetic concern of the dialogue. Socrates stylized his account of color, a subject which itself relates to aesthetics, for Meno according to Meno's preference, that is, in a Gorgian style. This way of speaking about color pleased Meno, but Socrates did not think it best. It too was exclusive insofar as it was both vague and also required prerequisite understanding of Empedoclean philosophy. Dissatisfied by Meno's preference, Socrates suggested that Meno might be persuaded otherwise if he would stay around for initiation into the Mysteries. Once again, we investigated this peculiar suggestion, and we found a few ways that Meno's initiation could help him to become more involved in the inquiry. Initiation would have required Meno to participate in various rituals that could draw attention to Meno's position within the cosmos—as a human in relation to other humans and to the divine. His participation could persuade Meno away from the relative and exclusive measures of *arete* that serve the good of the *polis* (in a limited sense) towards a more universal and inclusive measure of *arete* that serves the human good.

Perhaps inspired by the possibility of initiation (or Socrates' subversive recitation of Pindar), Meno invoked poetic authority before asserting his third attempt to say what *arete* is. He claimed that *arete* is to desire beautiful things (οἱ καλοί) and to be capable of providing them for oneself.³²⁵ We noticed several features of this third attempt. We found additional justification for attending to the relationship between beauty, *arete*, and the human good. While this account might seem to reflect Meno's sensibility, we understood Meno's inclusion of beautiful things as a way of appealing to Socrates, who even expressed his weakness for beautiful things/people previously. Socrates's focused reasoning about this account of *arete* seemed to imply his keenness about the subject, and our analysis of Socrates' reasoning also focused upon his subtle navigation of the terms. Socrates considered the two parts of Meno's account separately, and in his response to the first part, he concluded that all people want good things for themselves, even if some people mistake bad things for good things. We analyzed Socrates' substitution of several key terms during his response. He substituted good things (τὰγαθά) for beautiful things, want (βούλεται) for desire (ἐπιθυμεῖν), and he insisted that those who are miserable (ἄθλιοι) are unfortunate (κακοδαίμονες). We understood this last point about being unfortunate as a negative claim, the converse of which implies that good people who want good things which contribute to them being fortunate (εὐδαίμονες). We also honed in on Socrates' introduction of beneficial things (ὠφελουμένοι) as an indication of what makes good things good. We made this observation in anticipation of the third condition of *arete* that is sufficient for the human good, namely, relationality. Just as the benefit of good things makes them good for people, so too does the benefit of good people make them good in relation to others. We found Meno especially insensitive to the importance of caring for one's relationality when we analyzed Socrates' consideration of the second part of his account. When Socrates asked him what kinds of goods are the one which *arete* gives a person the power to provide for oneself, Meno asserted his concern for the acquisition of gold, silver, honors, and offices. Because of Meno's insistence on these sorts of goods, we found Socrates' address of Meno as the ancestral guest friend of the Great King especially noteworthy.

As we considered the significance of this address, we found its relevance to broader changes in the socio-political framework in Athens. The transformation and social mobility of certain Athenian constituents allowed for an opportunity to accumulate wealth and relationships

³²⁵ Ibid., 77b.

with the Achaemenid Empire, to which the aristocratic elite alone had access previously. Consequently, this change in the Athenian *polis* affected its constituents' attitudes towards wealth. Although Socrates does not seem to dispute that wealth is *a* good, it, of course, is not a sufficient measure of the human good. In other words, being wealthy does not make a person good. We analyzed avarice as a quality that affects certain people who consider the provision of money for themselves as an end in itself. This relationship with wealth posed clear problems when we paired it with other conditions of the human good and even with other human goods. For example, no one would dispute that being healthy is a good in human life, and yet, if someone were to take being wealthy as *the* human good, it would give such a person no greater share of the other human goods. The impotence of wealth in the provision of other human goods posed an axiological problem. Whence come the priority of this human good, when humans want other human goods just as much as this one? Furthermore, the provision of one good gives a person no greater share of the other. Being wealthy does not make a person healthy or beautiful and vice versa. There is no necessary, immanent relationship between the goods besides that they are goods. We discovered another concern through analysis of Socrates' response. He asked Meno whether a person should provide golds and silver for themselves justly or piously? We interpreted this question as a concern for one's relation to others. The axiological priority of money-making in the avaricious person permits a person to do bad things for the sake of making money. Such a possibility poses a problem because it would imply that a "good" person should sometimes do bad things, and it seems unlikely that an account of the *arete* sufficient for the human good (that is, being a good person) would justify such behavior. After pointing out the inadequacy of Meno's third account of *arete*, Socrates insisted that they must begin anew. With this proposal, we ended our investigation in Chapter I.

As we move on to Chapter II, we find ourselves confronted with many more questions than answers; however, we do know a few things. First, we know that we are investigating *arete* in a very specific sense. Our inquiry concerns human *arete*, particularly that *arete* which suffices as a measure of the human good. In other words, we search for what it takes to be a good person in a *polis*. It is not a theoretical question, but one which is entangled with each individual's life in the *polis*. We also know a few conditions of an *arete* sufficient for the human good: the measure must be universal, inclusive, and relational. On the other hand, we have found many complications as well. In the *polis*, humans have access to many different kinds of goods, an esteem for which often varies from *polis* to *polis*. How do these goods relate to the human good? Furthermore, the rulers

of a *polis* seem to have an axiological power over the determination of what is good in the *polis*. This power of the rulers gives them the authority to shape the good in their own image, and so anyone who questions the human good, like Socrates, also tacitly questions the rulers of the *polis*. Practically speaking, this feature makes an inquiry into the human good quite dangerous, as we know from Socrates' own life. Despite the danger, we have found Socrates insist on the worthiness of the inquiry. Through what means can Socrates remain committed to the inquiry while simultaneously staving off violent retaliation? We have reflected on Socrates' dialogical comportment throughout our inquiry, and we found him playful, subversive, and persuasive. While Meno himself may not be a ruler, he does "rule" Socrates at certain points in the inquiry. Moreover, Anytus, an actual Athenian ruler, will appear much later in the dialogue so we do not consider this matter idly. As we continue our investigation, let us remain aware of Socrates' approach to the inquiry as an inquiry with dual urgency. The inquiry is urgent because it concerns the measure of a good human life, but also, because the inquiry must take place in a *polis*—a *polis* which simultaneously stakes its own claim upon the lives of its inhabitants.

CHAPTER III: SOCRATES RESPONDS TO MENO'S CONTENTIOUS ARGUMENT: A TEMPTATION TOWARDS ANOTHER DIALOGICAL COMPORIMENT

Introduction

In Chapter I, we explored Meno's three attempts to account for *arete* in a way that satisfied Socrates. We also began to develop the outline of our own problematic. We have understood Socrates' concern for *arete* in terms of the *arete* sufficient for the human good. In other words, we search for the measure of *arete* which good people exhibit against the measures of *arete* that emerge in the *polis*, e.g., being a ruler, wealthy, beautiful, etc. Both measures serve the same nominal function; however, what is necessary to be a "good person" according to the measure of the *polis* often does not suffice as a measure of the human good. We analyzed a few shortcomings of the measures that emerge in the *polis* in Chapter I. For example, the rulers of a *polis* might be considered good *because* they are the rulers, but such a measure of the human good excludes so many other people from their share of the human good. Moreover, just as when the avaricious person mistakenly takes being wealthy as the *arete* sufficient for the human good and so does bad things in the name of "the good" (understood as being wealthy) so too can the rulers of a *polis* fall into the same predicament. This contradiction, i.e., a measure of *arete* that allows "good people" to commit bad deeds in pursuit of "the good," highlights one dimension of ἀπορία in an inquiry of the *arete* sufficient for the human good. Even when Meno first assured Socrates of this question's easiness (namely, what *arete* is), we doubted the basis of Meno's self-confidence—both because of our sensitivity to the problem and because of our prior analysis of Socrates' remark about Meno's *polis*. As we progressed through their preliminary discussion, we found Socrates' claim not to know at all what *arete* is appropriately cautious. Even so, we drew out three conditions which this *arete* must satisfy: an *arete* sufficient for the human good must be universal, inclusive, and relational. It also must be rooted in the necessity of living in a *polis*. The pursuit of this *arete* is never abstract or detached. Our investigation of Chapter II will begin from a similarly rooted position. Meno rejects Socrates' insistence on beginning again, and he does so in a very curious way. Making an image of him as a torpedo-fish, Meno mocks and threatens Socrates. Why might Meno react so harshly to Socrates despite Socrates' amicable comportment? Before we look closer at Meno's response, let us briefly compare the structure of our textual divisions in Chapters I and II respectively.

We divided Chapter I into five sections. In the first section, we built a context around Meno's questions about the genesis of *arete*, that is, whether it comes to be through instruction, practice, nature, or some other way. In the second section, we analyzed Socrates' response, in which he gave an account of Meno's *polis*. He mentioned Thessaly's reputation for horsemanship, wealth, and wisdom among the Greeks, Meno's association with the ruling class (Aristippus and the Aleudai), and his instruction from Gorgias. When we considered this speech more closely, we found a rooted approach to the inquiry into *arete* rather than an abstract one. We saw this beginning as a necessary foundation for Socrates to speak about *arete* with Meno since Thessaly provided him a site for the cultivation of Thessalian goods. A part of inquiring into *arete*, which also means inquiring into being a good person, requires a simultaneous engagement with the *polis* as the site of human goods. Even so, our consideration of Meno's three attempts, which we divided into sections three, four, and five, also unpacked the inadequacy of the Thessalian measure. Despite claiming to know *arete*, Meno could not say what *arete* is, which we understood as an inability to account for a universal, inclusive, and relational measure of *arete*.

Our divisions in Chapter II will follow a similar pattern although with important deviations. We will not begin with a section on the framing of the question as we did in Chapter I. We might understand the whole of Socrates' engagement with Meno in Chapter I as a dialectical development of the question in contrast to Meno's rote recitation. Instead, in the first section of Chapter II, we will analyze Meno's digression from the inquiry and memory of his experience in the *polis*. Although he does not recount the reputation of Athens broadly, he does mention the reputation of a certain Athenian, Socrates. Meno will also remark upon his own success within the *polis*, and while he does not speak through a hypothetical persona, he does offer a warning to Socrates, should Socrates, hypothetically, ever become a foreigner (ξένος) in another *polis*. Whereas Socrates responded subversively yet still cooperatively, Meno will respond with more open hostility. The subsequent three sections in Chapter II diverge considerably from the final three sections in Chapter I, and so we will not attempt to force a strict correspondence between them. Nevertheless, we might still see them as a foil for one another—a foil in which we find the development of the inquiry into *arete* in Meno's style juxtaposed against the Socratic style. Our analysis in this chapter will primarily focus on Socrates' development of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) in an array of dialogical modes, and as we progress, we ought also to sustain our concern for the

relationship between *arete*, the human good, and the *polis*. Let us see for ourselves how the dialogue changes when Socrates more actively leads it.

Conflicting Images (80a-80d)

Agitated by his inability to say what *arete* is now in front of Socrates (and others), Meno stubbornly refuses to continue their discussion:

Socrates, I certainly used to hear, even before meeting you, that you never do anything else than exist in a state of ἀπορεῖς yourself and make others (τοὺς ἄλλους ποιεῖς) ἀπορεῖν. And now you seem to me to be bewitching (γοητεύεις) me and drugging (φαρμάττεις) me and simply subduing me with incantations (ἀτεχνῶς κατεπάδεις), so that I come to be (γεγονέναι) full of ἀπορίας. And you seem to me, if it is even appropriate to make something of a joke (σκῶψαι), to be altogether, both in looks (εἶδος) and in other respects (τᾶλλα), like the flat torpedo-fish (ταύτη τῆ πλατεία νάρκη) of the sea. For, indeed, it always makes anyone who approaches and touches it paralyzed (ναρκᾶν), and you seem to me now to have done that very sort of thing to me, making me paralyzed (πεποιηκέναι ναρκᾶν). For truly, both in soul (ψυχὴν) and in mouth (στόμα), I am paralyzed (ναρκῶ) and have nothing with which I can answer you. And yet thousands of times I have made a great many speeches (λόγους) about *arete*, and before many people, and done very well, in my own opinion (ἐδόκουν) anyway; yet now I'm altogether unable to say what it is. And it seems to me that you are well-advised not to sail away or emigrate from here: for, if you a foreigner (ξένος) in a different *polis*, were to do this sort of thing, you would probably be arrested as a sorcerer (γόης).³²⁶

In Meno's response, we find validation for our initial suspicion towards his approach to the discussion with Socrates. He says himself that he had heard about Socrates' reputation prior to meeting him. While it would be futile to attempt to ascribe a definitive motive to Meno, his admission of his familiarity with Socrates (along with his esteem for his prior speeches) lends greater plausibility to our reading of Meno's ulterior motives, i.e., that Meno wanted *something* from his interaction with Socrates. Not only does Meno seem concerned that he appears to know about *arete* in front of others, but we might even say that Meno previously seemed like a knower to *himself* as well—or at least he did prior to meeting Socrates. And yet, now, Meno neither seems like a knower to Socrates nor does he seem like one to himself either, since he cannot say what *arete* is. When we alluded to a Socratic power that would undermine Meno's own desire for power, we only gestured towards such a power in a vague way. However, if we compare Meno's memory of his prior experience speaking about *arete* to his present attempt to do so, we can see an example

³²⁶ Plato, *Meno*, 80a-80b. Translation modified.

of this very sort of subversive, Socratic power. Whereas Meno so convincingly appeared to know about *arete* that he and his listeners really believed that he knew about *arete*, Socrates has disrupted Meno's belief so fundamentally that Meno accuses Socrates of bewitching and drugging him. Effectively, Socrates has transformed Meno "the knower" into a Meno who now appears *not* to know about *arete* thereby casting retrospective doubt on his prior status as a knower. Remarkably, Socrates seems to have changed being into appearance. Of course, this transformation does not shock us since our suspicion towards "Thessalian wisdom" arose from our careful consideration of Socrates' initial response in Chapter I. Even so, how does Meno's response in Chapter II play off the Socrates' prior, introductory "digression" in Chapter I, a response which we found to be neither a digression nor unjustified?

Let us first view the parallels between their speeches side by side before analyzing the implications. Socrates began with a reference to Thessaly's reputation among the Greeks. The Greeks admire Thessaly for its horsemanship, wealth, and recently its wisdom according to Socrates.³²⁷ Meno also refers to reputation, but he refers to Socrates' reputation rather than that of Athens. Meno has heard that Socrates does nothing other than exist in a state of ἀπορία and that he does the same to others as well. If we had to draw an inference about Meno's and Socrates' respective share of the human good based upon these reputations, then we might consider Meno more likely to be a good person than Socrates. Superficially, a wealthy and wise equestrian seems much more likely to live a good life than a man who wanders around in ἀπορία and draws others into it with him. Next, Socrates presents an image of Meno, whom Gorgias has trained to answer *like* one of "those who know."³²⁸ Our analysis focused on Meno's *mere* likeness to a knower, and so we approached each of Meno's attempts to say what *arete* is with suspicion. Even so, this image of Meno is quite subtle, but its subtlety intensifies its subversive effect. A part of our reading of this image (i.e., Meno's likeness to a knower) was anticipatory of what followed, but once we made our way through the investigation in Chapter I, the distance between Meno and "someone who knows" grew further apart. Its persuasive power intensified during our progression through the dialogue. In contrast, Meno creates a much more explicit and caustic image of Socrates as a torpedo fish. It is not simply that Socrates and the torpedo fish both paralyze those who come in contact with them, but Meno even mentions their likeness in look (εἶδος). This remark comes

³²⁷ Ibid., 70a.

³²⁸ Ibid., 70b.

across especially harsh because of our prior analysis of Socrates' interest in beautiful things/people (οἱ καλοί) and their relation to the human good. Both Socrates and Meno also describe the circumstances in which they find themselves presently, sharing a common inability to say what *arete* is. However, Socrates gives no reason for his inability to say what *arete* is besides simply not knowing at all about it (or living through a drought of wisdom in Athens). On the other hand, Meno attributes his inability to speak about *arete* to a Socratic incantation or drug since he had spoken well about it in the past. The juxtaposition of Socrates' insistence that he does not know at all about *arete* against Meno's insistence that he *did* know draws attention to their respective orientations to the problem. For Socrates, *arete* is something unknown yet worthy of investigation, whereas for Meno, *arete* is something known yet temporarily out of reach. Finally, Socrates concludes his speech with a challenge to Meno. How could Socrates possibly know how *arete* comes to be if he does not even know what *arete* is? We might reframe this question using the terms of our inquiry in the following way: How could Socrates know how to be a good person, if he does not even know the measure of a good person? For the exhibition of *arete* is sufficient for being a good person, and so one must know "what *arete* is," if a person has any chance of being good. Meno, however, poses a very different sort of "challenge" to Socrates. He warns, "...you are well-advised not to sail away or emigrate from here: for, if you a foreigner (ξένος) in a different *polis*, were to do this sort of thing, you would probably be arrested as a sorcerer (γόης)." ³²⁹ How might we also understand Meno's challenge using the terms of our inquiry?

When we analyzed each of Meno's attempts to say what *arete* is in Chapter I, we found them wanting in various ways. Meno did not seem to understand the extent of the difficulty which a determination of the measure of the human good entails. In Meno's warning, we can see a reiteration of the same naïve attitude towards the problem. Meno advises Socrates not to leave Athens because outside of Athens, as a foreigner (ξένος) in a different *polis*, Socrates' power to draw others into his ἀπορία would likely put him at risk of retaliation from the *polis*. We can draw out several assumptions from this reasoning. Either Athens has a very idiosyncratic measure of the human good (compared to other *poleis*), which is inclusive of Socrates' dialogical practice despite its interrogation of this measure, or Athens does not at all care about the human good since it allows a man like Socrates to subvert the ordinary measures of the human good so freely. In either

³²⁹ Ibid., 80b.

case, Meno's remarks come across quite critical of Athens. The Athenians may tolerate Socrates' behavior, but it would not be received so well in other places.³³⁰ Furthermore, Meno shows himself utterly insensitive to the necessity of a universal measure of the human good. When he speaks about Socrates as a foreigner (ξένος), Meno does so without the reverence of Socrates' prior address. In Meno's hypothetical, Socrates' identity as a foreigner (ξένος) would be precisely what would place him at risk. Outside of Athens, Socrates would not be considered a "good man" but rather a bad one. Consequently, Meno seems to maintain his prior insistence on a relative measure of the human good. Socrates' potential arrest in another, hypothetical *polis* implies that his behavior would be considered bad or harmful in any *polis* other than Athens. It is not necessary to think about the *arete* sufficient for the human good, since each *polis* determines good and bad people differently (or, at least, Athens differs in this regard from every other *polis*), if we follow through with Meno's reasoning. Or, Meno may imply that the question of the human good is already known—it has already been decided—and anyone, like Socrates, who points out complications in this measure clearly cannot be good. Why question a good thing? Of course, all of our inferences about Meno's warning merely gesture back to Meno's earlier reassurance: there is no ἀπορία about *arete*. Apparently, there is no difficulty in determining the measure of the human good. Let us return to our comparison of Socrates' and Meno's similar speeches and see what we can glean.

Even though we identified many similarities between parts of Socrates' and Meno's speeches, they strike us very differently. Why? Their respective comportments towards the problem of *arete* starkly differentiate their relationship to the discourse. It is very difficult to trust Meno when he speaks. On the one hand, Xenophon's account of Meno always looms in the background, even if we do our best not to rely too heavily upon his testimony. We simply cannot stop ourselves from considering whether Meno of the *Meno* genuinely cares about being a good person—a concern which is at the heart of our inquiry. On the other hand, Socrates' testimony about Thessaly and Meno's own engagement in the dialogue thus far also indicate potential explanations for Meno's lack of concern about *arete*. After Socrates mentioned that Meno's teacher Gorgias habituates his students to answer questions fearlessly and magnificently as is

³³⁰ Of course, as we will see in this very dialogue, the "average" Athenian might not find Socrates' particularly charming either. Before concluding the discussion, Anytus also warns Socrates, and Socrates even acknowledges that Anytus seems angry with him. Plato, *Meno*, 94e-95a.

fitting for one who knows, we must constantly ask ourselves whether Meno speaks as someone who knows about the subject of his speech or whether he speaks *like* someone who knows. Furthermore, Socrates' testimony about Thessaly's reputation also provided us with a framework for understanding Meno's accounts. Could Thessaly's reputation for wealth explain why Meno attempted to account for *arete* as the acquisition of gold, silver, honors and offices? Perhaps Meno does genuinely consider being wealthy as an adequate measure of the human good. Moreover, could Thessaly's recent reputation for wisdom explain why Meno appears so disturbed by his inability to speak well about *arete* in front of Socrates that he jeers and threatens him? If these explanations do persuade us, then we should also recognize Socrates' persuasive power over us. In what way? That there is *ἀπορία* about *arete*. We can see another dimension of the *ἀπορία* through an early observation in our comparison. We briefly noted that Socrates' and Meno's respective reputations seem to imply that Meno would more likely be a good man than Socrates. We based this inference upon Meno's greater share of goods: being a horseman, wealthy, and wise.³³¹ To this list, we might also add handsome and well-born, but no matter how many goods Meno enjoys (or has the opportunity to enjoy as a Thessalian), we *still* do not see him as a good man. What signs can we find that he even tries to be one? He cannot account for the *arete* sufficient for the human good, although he has no problem asserting the *arete* sufficient for a good reputation or an enjoyment of particular human goods. If Meno cannot account for the measure of a good person, then how would he know whether he meets it? But, on the other hand, Socrates, whose reputation tells of no goods, appears incomparably more sensitive to and concerned about the problem of *arete*. In fact, when we consider Socrates' *ἀπορία* about *arete* in the *Meno*, his *ἀπορία* gives us more of a reason to trust him than not to trust him. He may not know exactly how to be a good person, but he does seem to put more effort into figuring it out than Meno.

When we consider Meno's unruly response to renewing the inquiry together with our analysis of *arete* thus far, such a disruption of the dialogue seems inevitable. If Meno really believes that there is no *ἀπορία* about *arete*, a belief which we have no reason to doubt, then how many times can we reasonably expect him to account for *arete* unsuccessfully before objecting? Perhaps more than three, but at some point, he must either object or change his view. Our analysis

³³¹ It makes no difference whether Meno was actually a proficient horseman or not, which warrants mentioning because there is no indication in the *Meno* that he was. The more important point is that, as a Thessalian, Meno would have had the opportunity to secure this good for himself.

in Chapter I drew out the insufficiency of Meno’s abiding assumptions about *arete* and the human good. At this point, Meno must make a decision. He cannot rely on his prior assumptions about *arete*, and he also cannot proceed any further in the discussion with these assumptions. There is no passage (*ἀ-πορία*). Moreover, Meno’s personal encounter with *ἀπορία* (in contrast to the hearsay about Socrates) does reveal something insightful about Socratic philosophical practice. Meno claims that Socrates seems to be “bewitching,” “drugging” (*φαρμάττειν*) and “subduing” him. Thanks to Derrida’s analysis in *Plato’s Pharmacy*, we can hear the ambivalent play of these accusations especially that he has been “drugged.”³³² If we harken back to our analysis of the remember/Artaxerxes II pun in Chapter I, we can see this remark as a play on Socrates’ reassurance not to kill Meno. While Socrates has not harmed Meno physically, he has “poisoned” Meno’s prior assumptions about *arete*. Socrates has “killed” the Meno who previously seemed to others and to himself to know about *arete*.³³³ And yet, this Socratic poison also harbors the potential to cure. While we may sympathize with Meno’s struggle to accept the inadequacy of his most basic assumptions about human life, we can simultaneously see that the “death” of these beliefs opens the possibility for him to understand *arete* differently. Just as Socrates pointed out in his reasoning about people who seem to want bad things, sometimes people mistake bad things for good things, and in this case, Socrates “poisoning” Meno’s desire for bad things (i.e., his misguided assumptions about *arete* and the human good) would ultimately help him to desire good things (i.e., being a good person). Unfortunately, Meno does not seem to see his engagement in the discourse this way.

Before comparing Socrates to a torpedo fish, Meno insists that he is making “something of a joke (*σκῶψαι*).”³³⁴ How does Meno’s “joke” compare with Socratic dialogical “play,” which we considered at the end of our analysis of Chapter I? Our analysis of Socratic “play” stemmed from the peculiarity of Socrates’ question at that textual moment. He asked if Meno is playing (*παίζειν*) with him. The verb “to play” (*παίζειν*) shares a common root with the word for child, *παῖς*, and in this sense, we can hear an innocence in Socrates’ question, even if Socrates seemed to ask the

³³² The connection here comes from the word “drugging” (*φαρμάττειν*). See Derrida, *Plato’s Pharmacy*, 95-100, especially 98.

³³³ Scott compares Meno’s accusation of sorcery to a similar one made by Callicles in *Gorgias* (483e-484a). Through the comparison, Scott concludes that “The reference to enslavement shows that those who use witchcraft are doing so to exploit the other party for their own ends, which recalls the notion of manipulation, echoing the way Meno characterizes Socrates as a Predator.” Scott, *Plato’s Meno*, 70. For another example, see Plato, *Euthydemus*, 288b.

³³⁴ Plato, *Meno*, 80a.

question disingenuously.³³⁵ By contrast, Meno's "joke" may not be quite so innocent. While the English word "joke" sounds playful, the word "σκώπτειν" frequently implies "to mock, jeer, or scoff at."³³⁶ This very subtle variation in diction reflects a broader trend in Socrates' and Meno's respective orientation towards their interlocutor. Socrates has consistently shown a preference for cooperative-discourse, a mode of engagement in which the interlocutors work together in their search for the "truth," whereas Meno has regularly flirted with eristics, which aims at refutation and contention. While this distinction might illustrate an entirely different point in a different context, within the *Meno*, these contrasting modes of engagement seem more significant in a dialogue concerning *arete*, the human good, and the *polis*. It would be difficult to call Socrates a conformist or even simply agreeable, and yet, Meno somehow behaves much more combatively. Does this behavior make him a "bad person?" Such a claim would be difficult to justify, since our inquiry concerns the measure of a good person. Even so, dialogical comportment does seem to bear upon our guiding concern. While being a good person may seem to concern "living" in a general sense, the reappearance of dialogical comportment throughout our analysis may point to another decisive feature of our inquiry. Insofar as we recognize the necessity of living in a *polis*, we must also recognize the necessity of dialogue. It is not simply that living with other people requires speaking with other people, but the very inquiry into *arete* and the human good presupposes a dialogical engagement. As we have emphasized throughout our analysis, Meno's dialogical comportment obstructs his engagement with the problem of *arete*. The consequence of Meno's distance from the problem is not simply "theoretical." Meno's refusal to engage with the complications concerning *arete* and the human good actively prevent him from being a good person. His refusal of the ἀπορία about *arete* entails a refusal of his own share of the human good. Meno's mockery of Socrates only provides us another example of his position outside of the problem, which is to say, that it seems increasingly less likely that he is a good person.

Nevertheless, Meno's rejection of and retaliation against Socratic philosophical practice, while perhaps foolish to us, is not surprising. It is a quite common and comfortable response for a person to reject any challenge to his or her fundamental values and orientation within the world. Meno might even be blameless insofar as we recognize his entanglement with the opinions of the

³³⁵ Ibid., 79a. *παῖς* also names something ominous. We will consider its polyvalence later when the *παῖς* enters the dialogue.

³³⁶ See Liddell and Scott, *A Greek English Lexicon*, 1618.

polis.³³⁷ Very few people would earnestly consider matters of such existential importance with a fair-mind and even welcome such a challenge. Even so, Meno's choice of imagery is as remarkable as his reaction is unremarkable. The "torpedo fish," or electric ray, does not seem to be a mere case of serendipity, coincidentally coinciding with the demands of the analogy. Rather, there is a conspicuous presence of this fish within the works of several other ancient Greeks (e.g., Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Theophrastus just to name a few), and interest in this creature sustained into posterity as well, playing a role in the development of electrophysiology.³³⁸ Even within Platonic scholarship, a remarkable confusion about its identity has slipped into the works of many scholars.³³⁹ Thus, even if we had not made it a habit of attending carefully to such textual moments, this case in particular seems to warrant attention.³⁴⁰

With respect to the *Meno*, the greatest distinction between the torpedo fish and the sting ray stems from their methods of predation. The former uses electricity whereas the latter uses venom. Although it may seem trivial to confuse the two, the implications for Meno's image vary considerably. The sting ray must sting its prey in order to inject its venom, but the torpedo fish need not physically contact its prey at all for its paralysis to take effect. Similarly, Socrates has not "touched" Meno despite Meno's complaints of paralysis because of Socrates. We will return to this distinction at a later point in our analysis. Nevertheless, it is easy to see why readers of the passage confuse these two fish, since the image follows directly after Meno's accusation that Socrates seems to be "drugging" him. However, Meno's claims function as separate parts of distinct arguments. Meno's observation that Socrates must be "bewitching," "drugging" and "subduing" him serves as a premise for his conclusion that he is in a state of ἀπορία. As a part of

³³⁷ The *polis* is, after all, the necessary site of the human good. It is difficult to condemn someone who embraces the goods of the *polis*.

³³⁸ Wu, "Electric Fish and the Discovery of Animal Electricity."

³³⁹ Regarding the mistaken identity, a handful of scholars mistake the torpedo fish for the sting ray, whose names are similar in English. While the *Meno* clearly is not a biological taxonomy, knowing whether the creature under consideration uses venom or electricity to hunt its prey clearly affects one's understanding of Meno's imagery. For a brief overview of this case of mistaken identity in Platonic scholarship, see Thorp, "Till Human Voices Wake us and We Drown," n3 75.

³⁴⁰ In other parts of the dialogue, scholarly interest can often be sparse; however, in this case, many scholars have commented on this image of the torpedo fish. Moreover, there is even a study of this image using a "micro-intertextual approach," in which the image of the torpedo fish is compared across several texts, including (but not limited to) in Plato, Aristotle, and Theophrastus. Interestingly, the treatment of the torpedo fish in Plato is cursory and largely irrelevant compared to the work done with the other texts. For that reason, this study is more useful to our investigation for its sections on method than its insight into the *Meno*. Regarding the torpedo fish in *Meno*, see Cordonier, "A Micro-Intertextual Approach to Ancient Thought: The Case of the Torpedo Fish from Plato to Galen," 17-18.

a separate line of reasoning, Meno draws the conclusion that Socrates is like the torpedo fish because Meno finds himself paralyzed (both in soul and in mouth) like those who encounter the torpedo fish. So what does Meno's image imply about Socrates if we read it appropriately as a comparison to the torpedo fish? Let us turn to Aristotle's and Theophrastus' accounts of the torpedo fish as ancient testimonies on the torpedo fish's biomechanics.³⁴¹

In his *History of Animals*, Aristotle describes the torpedo fish's habits and behavior in the following way: "The torpedo creates paralysis (ναρκᾶν ποιῶσα) in the creatures that it wants to catch, overpowering them by the power of shock that is resident in its body (τῷ τρόπῳ ὃν ἔχει ἐν τῷ σώματι) and feeds upon them; it also hides in the sand and mud, and catches all the creatures that swim in its way and come under its narcotizing influence."³⁴² We can glean two key characteristics of the torpedo fish from Aristotle's observations. It creates paralysis ("ναρκᾶν ποιῶσα") in its prey, and it possesses this means of hunting in its body.³⁴³ Aristotle does not specify how the torpedo fish "creates" this paralysis. Nevertheless, Socrates does seem like the torpedo fish in this regard. Through some mysterious means of transmission, Socrates, like the torpedo fish, creates paralysis in whoever comes near him (Meno, in this case). The productive character of this paralysis, i.e., that the torpedo fish produces paralysis in its prey, seems important to the comparison, especially if we anticipate the contrast between the torpedo fish's production of paralysis with the subsequent introduction of recollection (ἀνάμνησις).³⁴⁴ If we understand Meno's comparison of Socrates to a torpedo fish according to Aristotle's account of the torpedo fish, then we could see Meno's retaliation against Socrates as a response to a transgression, i.e., Socrates created something unwanted inside Meno which Meno considers harmful. And yet, just as the fish's ability to torpify its prey depends on the prey's independent receptivity to being torpified so too does Socrates' ability to stimulate ἀπορία in Meno depend on Meno's independent receptivity to ἀπορία. Socrates has not "done" something *to* Meno, but rather, Socrates simply drew Meno's attention to some complications with *arete*, for which Meno could not give an

³⁴¹ Hippocrates mentions the torpedo fish within his report on the respective lightness and heaviness of various kinds of fish on digestion. Hippocrates, *On Regimen*, II, XLVIII.

³⁴² Aristotle. *History of Animals*, 620 b20. Translation modified.

³⁴³ Meno uses the exact same verbal phrase to describe his experience: "making me paralyzed," or "πεποιηκέναι ναρκᾶν."

³⁴⁴ That is, Meno's accusation that Socrates has created something new inside of him conspicuously contrasts with Socrates' claim that the teacher does not "produce" learning in the student.

adequate account.³⁴⁵ Were Meno not habituated to answer questions fearlessly and magnificently *like* someone who knows, then perhaps he would be more open to an examination of *arete* as a genuine, human problem. Perhaps he would have seen the problems himself were he not habituated to imitate a “knowing” style of speech. Even so, we ought to wonder about this framing of Socrates’ and Meno’s dynamic as one between a predator and prey. We may understand why Meno would choose to portray Socrates as a predator, but does such a portrayal match our own encounter with the dynamic between Socrates and Meno? Let us turn to Athenaeus’ account of Theophrastus to help flesh out this dimension of the comparison further.

In Athenaeus’ *The Learned Banqueters*, we find Theophrastus’ contribution to ancient interest in the torpedo fish. “And in his *On Biting and Venomous Creatures*, [Theophrastus] claims that [the torpedo fish] can send its power even through sticks and through fishing spears (διαπέμπεσθαί φησι τὴν νάρκην τὴν ἀφ’ αὐτῆς δύναμιν καὶ διὰ τῶν ξύλων καὶ διὰ τῶν τριοδόντων), causing those who hold such implements in their hands to become paralyzed.”³⁴⁶ Theophrastus’ account adds two additional features to the image of the torpedo fish: paralysis is a power (δύναμιν) which the fish has, and it is a power which the fish can send through intermediary objects.³⁴⁷ We too have assumed that Socrates has his own special power, even if we have only a nebulous sense of it thus far. Even so, the addition of the torpedo fish’s ability to transmit its

³⁴⁵ Ionescu claims that Meno’s experience of ἀπορία is disingenuous because Meno does not take responsibility for his ἀπορία. “Meno, on the other hand, places the fault for his perplexity not in himself, but in Socrates. This, however, is the decisive mark of the non-genuine nature of Meno’s aporia.” Ionescu, *Plato’s Meno*, 30. And yet, we ought to wonder about the textual basis for such an assertion. There is no denying that the παῖς (whom we will consider later in this Chapter) and Socrates both react differently to their experience of ἀπορία than Meno. However, if we look ahead in the dialogue, we will not find Meno making claims about *arete* which depend upon his prior assumptions that we have analyzed thus far. Not only does Meno indirectly assert that he has now had the experience of ἀπορία about which he had only previously heard rumors, but Meno will never again (in this dialogue) suppose the provision of human goods (wealth or otherwise) to be *arete*, which we understand as the measure of the human good. Do these signs not point to a genuine experience of ἀπορία? Ionescu goes on a bit later to claim “...while genuine aporia, we shall see, turns out to be a virtue rather than a deficiency (84a-84d).” Ibid., 30. Indeed, Meno may mistakenly consider his experience of ἀπορία to be a bad thing, when it is actually good (beneficial) (cf. Plato, *Meno*, 77e), but this mistake does not make his ἀπορία any less genuine. This distinction between “genuine” and “disingenuous” experiences of ἀπορία would actually pose a problem later when analyzing Socrates’ claim that goods are not “innately” good. Plato, *Meno*, 87e-88a. Furthermore, we also have a vested interest in reading Meno’s experience of ἀπορία as “genuine” because it bolsters our own claim that living in the *polis* requires one to confront the ἀπορία of *arete*, an ἀπορία which responds to the failure of the *polis*’ measure of the human good to satisfy a universal, inclusive, and relational measure of the human good. Even if Meno only experiences the ἀπορία of *arete* in a rudimentary way, the experience itself (regardless of its other qualitative dimensions) lends credence to the very contradiction at the heart of life in the *polis* which we are tracking.

³⁴⁶ Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters*, vol. 3, Bk. VII, 314c4-6. Translation modified.

³⁴⁷ Cordonier, “A Micro-Intertextual Approach to Ancient Thought: The Case of the Torpedo Fish from Plato to Galen,” 20.

paralysis through intermediary objects, e.g., sticks and spears, helps us to address the omission of a means of transmission in Aristotle's account. During our consideration of Aristotle's account, we humored the framing of the relationship between Meno and Socrates as one between a predator (Socrates) and his prey (Meno), whose mouth and soul Socrates paralyzed. However, we can read Theophrastus' account as an inversion of the predatory/prey dynamic.³⁴⁸ The torpedo fish, in addition to using its power for hunting, can also use its power to defend itself. Consequently, we can compare Socrates' likeness to a torpedo fish in this way as well. Just as the torpedo fish uses the tools of the hunter to transmit its paralysis into the hunter so too does Socrates use Meno's "tools" (his words and speeches) against him to paralyze him. In both cases, the source of the "hunters'" strength becomes their weakness—spears and sticks for the fishermen and cunning language for Meno. By placing his image of Socrates as a torpedo fish after his accusation of witchcraft, we are tempted to judge Socrates harshly as if he were preying upon Meno; however, through a deeper analysis, we see Meno's image turn back on itself and reflect more about Meno.

We have examined Meno's image of Socrates as an expression of his frustration with Socratic philosophical practice. Meno likely had become accustomed to an efficacious use of language, distributing it indiscriminately like money to achieve his goals. When Meno spoke confidently in the past, he appeared to know what he was talking about. Now, he finds himself in unfamiliar territory where his "currency" no longer carries the same axiological weight. As we noted previously, Socrates and Meno do not approach dialogue in the same way, and so despite having an abundance of means (as a wealthy, educated aristocrat), Meno seems utterly unprepared for the dialogical task. Meno's enjoyment of an array of human goods (wealth, beauty, education, etc.) has given him no greater insight into *arete*, or, to put it otherwise, Meno does not seem to be a good man despite his enjoyment of many human goods. We might even consider Meno's enjoyment of these goods as the reason for his inability to acknowledge the ἀπορία about *arete*, that is, he would rather enjoy his share of human goods than inquire about *arete*. Our analysis of the torpedo fish helps us to see Meno's and Socrates' respective engagement with the problem in a new way. From Aristotle, we learned that the torpedo fish's ability to affect its prey depends upon the prey's independent and prior capacity to be affected, and from Theophrastus, we learned that the torpedo fish defends itself by transmitting its power through the tools of its predators.

³⁴⁸ Though in a different way, Scott also recognizes the sense in which Meno implies that Socrates is predatory like the torpedo fish. Scott, *Plato's Meno*, 70.

Throughout our analysis in Chapter I, we saw many signs of Meno's elementary engagement with the problem of *arete* whereas we understood Socrates' cautiousness as one sign of his experience with the problem. Meno's speeches could not affect Socrates because Socrates lacked an independent, prior receptivity to them. We did not take Socrates' claim not to know at all what *arete* is at face value, and the proficiency with which he subverted each of Meno's accounts provides evidence for our assumption. Moreover, Meno's "power" had limited effect. Whether his power comes from his beautiful appearance, his fearless and magnificent speeches, or his wealth, Meno still could not say what *arete* is. By contrast, Socrates' "power" allowed him to sustain his engagement in the discourse about *arete* despite the ἀπορία. Even though Socrates may be quite experienced in this sort of inquiry into *arete*, and so perhaps familiar with some of the complications which tripped Meno up, Socrates remained committed to the inquiry nevertheless.³⁴⁹ Meno, on the other hand, seems quick to give up despite his cursory engagement. Could this lack of resolve stem from his indifference to the problem of *arete*?

We have understood the problem of *arete* as the complications which arise from an attempt to determine the measure of a good person. The ἀπορία emerges from life in the *polis*. Humans must live together with others in the *polis*, and yet, when humans live together in the *polis*, various measures of a good person emerge and conflict with one another. We have considered being wealthy, beautiful, and a ruler as a few common measures of a good person in the *polis*. And yet, none of these suffice. We began our analysis in Chapter II with a comparison of some similarities between Socrates' first speech in Chapter I and Meno's speech which we currently consider. We concluded our comparison with an exploration of Meno's threat in the terms of our inquiry. For review, Meno warns, "And it seems to me that you are well-advised not to sail away or emigrate from here: for, if you a foreigner (ξένος) in a different *polis*, were to do this sort of thing, you would probably be arrested as a sorcerer/juggler (γόης)."³⁵⁰ Our prior analysis focused upon Meno's assumptions about *arete* and the human good, which we inferred from his threat. Insofar as Meno seems to consider his present experience of ἀπορία harmful, he warns Socrates that, outside of Athens, the constituents (and rulers) of any other *polis* would consider him a bad man and arrest him. Literally, Meno claims that Socrates would be arrested as a "sorcerer" or γόης. *Prima facie*, this translation harmonizes with Meno's prior accusations of bewitching (γοητεύεις),

³⁴⁹ Cf. Plato, *Meno*, 89e.

³⁵⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 80b. Translation modified.

drugging (φαρμάττεις), and subduing him with incantations (ἄτεχνῶς κατεπάδεις).³⁵¹ However, another translation of “γότης,” a “ juggler,” might offer additional insight into the character of Meno’s accusation. Let us consider this term in a couple other contexts, namely, Demosthenes’ *On the Crown* and Plato’s *Symposium*, so that we may hear the resonance of it in the *Meno* with greater sensitivity.

A juggler is not just someone who alternates between tossing and catching objects, but someone manipulative, deceptive, and clever especially with their speech. In many Ancient Greek texts, this term “γότης” appears within a constellation of other pejorative names for someone who takes advantage of others or is otherwise deserving of reproach. For example, in a part of Demosthenes’ speech from *On the Crown*, he proclaims that, “To crown all—as though all his own speeches had been made in a disinterested and patriotic spirit—[Aeschines] bids you be on your guard against me, for fear I should mislead and deceive you, calling me an artful speaker (δεινόν), a mountebank (γότητα), an imposter (σοφιστήν), and so forth.”³⁵² The translator chooses “mountebank” (a “quack”) to translate “γότης” (γότητα), which is amusing in the context of the *Meno* because of the connection between a “mountebank” and medicine (φαρμακόν).³⁵³ Even so, there need not be anything “magical,” as the translation “sorcerer” might imply, about this common reproach “γότης.”³⁵⁴ In fact, the word so frequently appears within a string of reproaches and euphemisms for a bad person that its appearance in the *Symposium* stands out starkly because of the subversive repetition of this convention during Diotima’s speech on Love (Ἔρως). According to Socrates’ testimony in the *Symposium*, Diotima describes Love (Ἔρως) as “γότης,” a characteristic which he shares with his father Resource (Πόρος). She claims:

But in accordance with his father he plots to trap the beautiful and the good (τοῖς καλοῖς καὶ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς), and is courageous (ἀνδρείος), stout, and keen, a skilled (δεινός) hunter,

³⁵¹ Concerning the implications of the “sorcerer” reading and its connection to *Gorgias*, see Scott, *Plato’s Meno*, 70-71; Ionescu, *Plato’s Meno*, 30.

³⁵² Demosthenes, *On the Crown*, 18. 276.

³⁵³ Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 855. φαρμακόν is simply “a drug, medicine.” But also, see entry II of φαρμακός: “One who is sacrificed as an atonement for others, a scape-goat, Ar.; and, since worthless fellows were reserved for this fate, φαρμακός became a general name of reproach, Id., Dem.”

³⁵⁴ Besides Demosthenes’ speech in *On the Crown*, we can find similar usage of “γότης” in other speeches. For example: “Men of Athens, deal with me as you choose. I was credulous; I was deceived; I made a blunder; I admit it. Beware of that man, men of Athens; he is double-faced (ἄπιστος), a trickster (γότης), a scoundrel (πονηρός). See how he has behaved to me; see how he has made me his dupe.” Demosthenes, *On the False Embassy*, 19.109. “I think that not Phrynondas and not Eurybatus, nor any other of the traitors of ancient times ever proved himself such a juggler and cheat (μάγος καὶ γότης) as this man, who...dares to look you in the face and say that Thebes actually made the alliance with you....” Aeschines, *Against Cteiphon*, 3.137.

always weaving devices, desirous (ἐπιθυμητής) of “practical wisdom” (φρονήσεως) and inventive, philosophizing (φιλοσοφῶν) through all his life, a skilled magician (δεινὸς γόης), druggist (φαρμακεύς), sophist (σοφιστής).³⁵⁵

When we compare Demosthenes’ speech in *On the Crown* to Diotima’s speech in the *Symposium*, we can see a conspicuous subversion of rhetorical convention through the repetition of the exact same terms without the negative implicature. According to Demosthenes, his accuser, Aeschines, called him an artful speaker (δεινός), a mountebank (γόητα), and an imposter (σοφιστής), while Diotima describes Love (Ἔρως) as a skilled magician (δεινὸς γόης), druggist (φαρμακεύς), and sophist (σοφιστής).³⁵⁶ Diotima repeats each of Demosthenes’ reproaches, even adding in “druggist” (φαρμακεύς), but when she attributes these qualities to Love (Ἔρως), they sound like praise. When someone is called a “γόητα,” it most often implies that such a person is bad. Such a person *clearly* does not exhibit *arete*. It seems likely that Meno warns Socrates about leaving Athens in this way. However, as we found in Diotima’s speech, Love (Ἔρως) is also “a skilled magician” (δεινὸς γόης). Might an awareness of this subversive deviation draw our attention to another dimension of Meno’s speech in the *Meno*?

One of the most fundamental differences between the common usage of “γόης” and its usage in the *Symposium* is the being whom the term names. In the former, men accuse other men of being bad with this word, whereas in the latter, Diotima *praises* Love (Ἔρως) with it. On the surface, the distinction between mortal and divine could explain how something “bad” in humans could be “good” in divinities. However, we might better understand the distinction in a way that enhances our inquiry if we focus on the end or aim towards which these bad men and Love (Ἔρως) respectively direct their actions. Aeschines warns his audience about Demosthenes lest he use deception and misdirection to take advantage of them as is fitting for an artful speaker (δεινός), a mountebank (γόητα), and an imposter (σοφιστής). By contrast, Diotima claims that Love (Ἔρως) “schemes” as well, but when the god does so, he does it for “all that is beautiful and good (“τοῖς καλοῖς καὶ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς”).” The question which we must ask ourselves is: Can a human be a juggler (γόητα) like Love (Ἔρως) scheming for beautiful and good things? Generally speaking,

³⁵⁵ Plato, *Symposium*, 203d. Translation modified. We have emphasized Benardete’s translation of “φρονήσεως” with “practical wisdom” using quotation marks. For now, we will only note his decision and defer the challenge of working with this term until it appears explicitly in the *Meno* at 88c.

³⁵⁶ Even though the translators of these respective texts choose different words, we should pay attention to the repetition in the Greek.

such a suggestion seems precarious; however, if we consider Socrates' dialogical comportment in the *Meno*, then we can find some striking parallels between Socrates and Diotima's account of Love (Ἔρως). We have noted several instances in which Socrates deceived and manipulated Meno, and yet, we somehow never doubt his concern for what is good, beautiful, and true. Socrates seems adept at the benevolent resourcefulness which approaches that of Love (Ἔρως) himself. Thus, when Meno calls Socrates a juggler (γόης), we can hear a tinge of tragic irony in his accusation. On one level, Meno's accusation against Socrates likely implies his negative judgment about Socrates. To others (e.g., to Meno, Anytus, or ordinary citizens), Socrates appears to be a bad man, whose resolve for *arete* has led him further from the human good than any other constituent of the *polis*. But, if we hear this "accusation" as an unknowing expression of Socrates' kinship with Love (Ἔρως), then we might instead hear the folly in Meno's condemnation. That is, Socrates, who schemes for all that is beautiful and good (οἱ καλοὶ καὶ οἱ ἀγαθοί) like Love (Ἔρως) himself comes closer to *arete* than any other mortal. The tragedy, of course, is that Meno, Anytus, and an Athenian majority will condemn Socrates as a bad man, that is, as an artful speaker (δεινός), a juggler (γόητα), an imposter (σοφιστής), and especially a scapegoat (φαρμακός). And yet, he is like a god (Love (Ἔρως)) because of these qualities. Our analysis of the polyvalent play of this term juggler (γόης) highlights just how far Meno is from understanding *arete*. Contrary to Meno's insistence, it seems more likely that Meno never understood *arete* in the first place.

As we might expect, Socrates takes no offense to Meno's caustic speech and quips back immediately. "You are a clever rogue (πανούργος), Meno, and you almost deceived me."³⁵⁷ Klein emphasizes the resonance of "πανούργος" with an accusation of sophistry in his commentary, suggesting that being a "know it all" (πανούργος) is a considerable part of the sophist's promise.³⁵⁸ A "know it all," as most people know, tends not to live up to the name, and the sarcastic implicature underlying the English phrase seems appropriate here as well. Even so, Socrates does not call Meno a "clever rogue" (πανούργος), or know it all, because he knows all about *arete*, but rather, Socrates has noticed something else about Meno's speech. Socrates supposes that Meno made an image of him to entice him into a reciprocal exchange. He explains:

I'm aware (γινώσκω) of why you portrayed me in a likeness (ἠκασας). . . . So that I would make a likeness of you in return (ἀντεικάσω). And I know (οἶδα) this about all beautiful

³⁵⁷ Plato, *Meno*, 80b

³⁵⁸ Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 89-90. Also, Ionescu, *Plato's Meno*, 31.

people (πάντων τῶν καλῶν), that they delight (χαίρουσιν) in having images made (εἰκαζόμενοι) of them; it pays for them. Because, I suppose, even the images (εἰκόνες) of beautiful people (τῶν καλῶν) are beautiful (καλαῖ). But I will not make an image of you in return.³⁵⁹

Despite previously analyzing Socrates' interest in Meno's beautiful appearance, this remark still seems strange. In speech, Socrates claims to know what Meno wants, and he refuses to gratify Meno's desire. And yet, in deed, Socrates does the very thing which he explicitly denies he would do, namely, create an image of Meno. Does he not say here that Meno is like one of those beautiful people who delights in having images made of himself? Or, perhaps, might we hear this contradiction between word and deed more incisively? Socrates may not deny that he will make an image of Meno, but he may deny that he will make a beautiful one—one which would delight Meno. If we understand Socrates' claim in this way, then we find another ἀπορία about *arete*, which we understand in this case as being beautiful. Beautiful people delight in images of themselves because the images are also beautiful, but if the image of a beautiful person lacks the same beauty, then the beautiful person would likely not delight in the image at all. After remarking on Meno's image of the torpedo fish, Socrates adds another blemish to his image of Meno:

And now about *arete*, I do not know what it is; but you, of course, perhaps, did know it earlier, before you came into contact with me, but now you are certainly like one who does not know (ὅμοιος εἶ οὐκ εἰδότη). Nevertheless, I am willing to look with you and seek together (συζητῆσαι) for whatever it is.³⁶⁰

Socrates' early comment about Meno's likeness to someone who knows and his comments on Meno's beautiful appearance culminate in this remark.³⁶¹ We can hear these comments come together in Socrates' simultaneous refusal of an image of Meno as a handsome man, which he nonetheless acknowledges, with his acknowledgment of Meno's superficial likeness to a knower (εἰδότη). When we take these two remarks together, we run up against an ἀπορία about *arete*. If the measure of a good person relies upon one's appearance, then sometimes a person may appear good and other times that same person may appear bad. To be clear, this problem need not imply that beauty is not good. We can simply recognize this ἀπορία about *arete* as an ἀπορία that arises

³⁵⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 80c

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 80d

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 70b. "And in particular this is the habit to which he has habituated you, namely, of answering both fearlessly and magnificently whenever anyone asks you anything, as is fitting for those who know (ὥσπερ εἰκὸς τοὺς εἰδότης)"

out of the desire to elevate the goodness of beauty to the measure of the human good. Beauty can be both good and an insufficient measure of the human good. If we pair our analysis of Meno's inadequacy before the inquiry into *arete* together with Socrates' infatuation with Meno's handsome appearance, then it becomes quite clear that beauty can be good *and* insufficient for *arete*. Despite Meno's insistence, he seems not to know about *arete*! And yet, Socrates does not blame him for not knowing. Socrates even admitted himself that he does not know either. Nevertheless, Socrates implores Meno to cooperate with him, suggesting that they seek together (συζητήσαι) for *arete*. Not knowing about *arete* does not imply that someone is a bad person, but not knowing does not imply that one need not try to know either. The inquiry into *arete* is itself worthy (ἄξιος).

The Contentious Argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) and Socrates' Myth of Recollection (ἀνάμνησις) (80d-82b)

Meno clearly did not appreciate Socrates' image, and his antagonistic tone speaks much louder than whatever perplexity his response might induce. Meno removes the prefix “συ-” (in “seek together,” συζητήσαι), which we noted as a cooperative gesture in contrast to Socrates' otherwise unflattering image of Meno, before responding quite contentiously to Socrates' suggestion. Meno asks:

And in what way will you seek (ζητήσεις), Socrates, for that which you know nothing at all about what it is? What sort of thing among those things which you do not know are you proposing to seek for yourself? Or, even if, at best, you should happen upon it, how will you know it is that which you did not know?³⁶²

Does this argument present a serious obstacle to their search for *arete*? Not really.³⁶³ As Sallis points out, Meno himself likely does not even believe this argument, since he asked whether *arete* comes from learning in the beginning.³⁶⁴ Furthermore, our attentiveness to various ἀπορία about *arete* throughout our analysis might also imply that participation in the search—the experience of ἀπορία in one's attempt to know how to be a good person—is more important than finding “the answer.” Even so, we may wonder why Meno would make this argument. Socrates asks Meno,

³⁶² Ibid., 80d.

³⁶³ Concerning the significance of Meno's argument, there is division in the scholarship between those who think it does and does not present a serious challenge. See Ionescu, *Plato's Meno*, 41 for a breakdown of the scholarly positions on the challenge and several scholars from each camp who maintain these positions.

³⁶⁴ Sallis, *Being and Logos*, 77.

“Do you see that you are bringing down a contentious argument (ἐριστικὸν λόγον) ...?”³⁶⁵ We can hear this question as an allusion back to Socrates’ prior commentary on various modes of dialogical engagement.³⁶⁶ Might we read Meno’s posing of these questions as a recantation of his prior commitment to engage with Socrates as friends? Although Meno’s contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) together with Meno’s image of Socrates as a torpedo fish and his warning to Socrates not to leave Athens all convey a hostile dialogical comportment, Socrates *still* will abstain from the kind of response which he claimed appropriate when dealing with “one of those wise men with a bent for strife (ἐριστικῶν) and contention (ἀγωνιστικῶν).”³⁶⁷ In fact, Socrates’ response is quite surprising for a couple reasons. While his subsequent account of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) raises many questions on its own, we also might wonder why Socrates does not respond to Meno’s argument more directly as he does in the *Euthydemus*. Let us turn momentarily to the *Euthydemus* so that we can better heed the dynamic between Meno’s argument and Socrates’ response in the *Meno*.

In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates relays to Crito his encounter with the sophists Dionysodorus and Euthydemus from memory. During that encounter, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus confront one of the boys in the group, Clinias, with a similar version of Meno’s contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος).³⁶⁸ And yet, Socrates responds very differently, explicating the ambiguity on which the argument hinges and undermining its gravity. He explains:

³⁶⁵ Plato, *Meno*, 80e. Translation modified.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 75c-e. “The truth (τάληθῆ) is what I would have answered. And if the questioner were one of those wise men (σοφῶν) with a bent (ἐρόμενος) for strife (ἐριστικῶν) and contention (ἀγωνιστικῶν), I would tell him, ‘That’s what I said. And if I don’t speak correctly (ὀρθῶς), it’s your task to take up the argument and refute it.’ But if, being friends (φίλοι) as both I and you are now, they should want to have a discussion with one another, then surely a somehow more gentle (πρότερον) and more dialectical (διαλεκτικότερον) way of answering is required. And it is perhaps more dialectical to answer not only with the truth (μὴ μόνον τάληθῆ), but also through those things which he who is being questioned could agree that he knows.”

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ In Gareth Mathews’ chapter “Avoiding Perplexity: The Paradox of Inquiry,” he compares Meno’s argument to the argument in the *Euthydemus*. He concludes the following: “The big difference between the two arguments is that the *Euthydemus* argument requires an equivocation on ‘manthanize’ [i.e., to learn/to understand], whereas no equivocation at all is required to fall into the grip of the Paradox of Inquiry. The eristic argument from the *Euthydemus* is thus sophistical in the popular (pejorative) sense that it requires a wordplay to produce its paradoxical result. The Paradox of Inquiry, by contrast, depends on no wordplay. It can induce perplexity even when the meanings of the constituent terms are kept constant throughout” (59). While he offers a helpful disambiguation of the arguments from these two dialogues, Mathews does not recognize (or, at least, does not address) a decisive ambiguity which gives Meno’s argument its power. Meno asks, “in what way will you seek, Socrates, for that which you know nothing at all about what it is?” (80d). For convenience, we can replace “that which you know nothing at all about what it is” with just “*arete*” since *arete* is uncontroversially their object of inquiry in this context. If someone knows what *arete* is, then that person need not search for what *arete* is, but if someone does not know what *arete* is, then the inquirer will search

In the first place, as Prodicus says, you must learn (μαθεῖν) about the correct use of words (περὶ ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητος); and our two visitors are pointing out this very thing, that you did not realize that people use the word “learn” (μανθάνειν) not only in the situation in which a person who has no knowledge (μηδεμίαν ἔχων ἐπιστήμην) of a thing in the beginning acquires it later, but also when he who has this knowledge already (ἔχων ἤδη τὴν ἐπιστήμην) 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” (συνιέναι) rather than “learn” (μανθάνειν), but they do sometimes call it “learn” (μανθάνειν) as well.) Now this, as they point out, had escaped your notice—that the same word is applied to opposite sorts of men, to both the man who knows (τῷ τε εἰδότη) and the man who does not (καὶ ἐπὶ τῷ μὴ). There was something similar to this in the second question, when they asked you whether people learn (μανθάνουσιν) what they know (ἐπίστανται) or what they do not know (ἄ μὴ). These things are the sophomoric (παιδιά) part of study (τῶν μαθημάτων) (which is why I also tell you that the men are jesting (προσπαίζειν)); and I call these things “sophomoric” (παιδιὰν) because even if a man were to learn many or even all such things, he would be none the wiser (οὐδὲν ἄν μᾶλλον εἰδείη) as to how matters stand but would only be able to make fun of people (προσπαίζειν), tripping them up and overturning them by means of the distinctions in words, just like the people who pull the chair out from under a man who is going to sit down and then laugh gleefully when they see him sprawling on his back. So you must think of their performance as having been mere play (παιδιὰν).³⁶⁹

Socrates elucidates the argument’s “trick” with astute precision. According to Socrates, this argument does not produce ἀπορία in the listener, but rather, it has no effect, causes the listener to appear foolish, or instills sloth and contentment in its believers. Socrates calls arguments that depend upon this sort of equivocation the “sophomoric” (παιδιά) part of learning. They may be amusing, but learning them does not help a person to know things any better than not knowing them. We can see Socrates’ observation about this sort of argument play out in the *Euthydemus*, when the sophists Dionysodorus and Euthydemus use the equivocal sense of “learn” (μανθάνειν) to make the adolescent Clinias appear foolish. The fact that Socrates responds differently in the *Meno* than he does in the *Euthydemus* seems unremarkable on its own. The two situations differ

to no avail since that person would not know if he or she did happen to find *arete*, being ignorant about it. Meno’s argument depends upon an ambiguity about *arete*—what kind of thing it is. Meno begs the question about what kind of thing *arete* is, assuming it to be something perfectly secure (and so unnecessary to examine) when “known” and wholly unsettled (and so impossible to find) when “unknown.” But we can see that these possibilities are not exhaustive. We have understood *arete* as a dialectical phenomenon, which means, on the one hand, that we find manifestations of *arete* in the *polis*. Every *polis* provides a site for *some* number of “good people” who exhibit the *arete* of that *polis* (e.g., wealthy people, rulers, beautiful people, etc.). On the other hand, we have also understood *arete* as the sufficient condition of the human good. This measure exceeds the measure of the *polis* despite requiring the *polis* to provide a site for it. Insofar as being a good person is the end of every human life, every person has a share of the human good. The tension between these measures of a good person—a tension which may never reach a conclusive resolution—illustrates another possibility beyond the disjunction Meno proposed.

³⁶⁹ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 277e-278c. Translation modified

considerably, and, as we are well aware, each dialogue tells its own story. However, even a cursory analysis of the *Euthydemus*'s context will provide us a more nuanced foundation upon which we will build our interpretation of Socrates' response to Meno's contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος).

In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates implores Dionysodorus and Euthydemus to demonstrate their ability to persuade a young man (Clinias) "to love wisdom (φιλοσοφεῖν) and care (ἐπιμελεῖσθαι) for *arete*."³⁷⁰ Socrates notes Clinias' youth and pedigree (he is the son of Alcibiades), and so Socrates chooses him as a worthy individual for Dionysodorus and Euthydemus to persuade. Socrates mentions the presence of other youths as well, for example, Ctesippus, one of Clinias' lovers, and the many followers of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. In fact, these "followers" contribute to a certain dialogical mood, laughing and cheering when Euthydemus or Dionysodorus reach a spectacular conclusion. Despite the gravity of the demonstration's purpose (i.e., persuading Clinias to love wisdom and care for *arete*), the behavior of the followers shifts the mood of this initially urgent demonstration towards that of a spectacle or performance. Even Euthydemus' and Dionysodorus' backgrounds undermine the nominal weight of the encounter, i.e., two "lawyers" and military strategists who have renounced their prior professions in favor of sophistry.³⁷¹ The contrast between their blasé transition from one expertise to another and their mass of followers gestures towards the precarity underlying this otherwise playful atmosphere. We have understood inquiry into *arete* as a concern for being a good person, and so when Euthydemus and Dionysodorus use the opportunity to persuade Clinias to love wisdom and care for *arete* to entertain their followers and other by-standers, we can see their behavior as an imminent threat both to a group of impressionable youths and even the *polis* itself. Does their orientation towards *arete* not undermine its perceived importance, which is to say, the importance of being a good person? We can hear hints of this danger in Socrates' closing remarks:

But the greatest thing of all is that your skill is such, and is so skillfully (τεχνικῶς) contrived, that anyone can learn (μαθεῖν) it in a very short time....This ability of your wisdom (σοφὸν) to be picked up rapidly is a fine thing (καλόν), but not something which lends itself well to public performance. If you will be persuaded (πείθησθε) by me, be

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 275a

³⁷¹ Ibid., 273c

careful not to talk in front of a large group; the listeners are likely to learn it by heart (ἐκμαθόντες) quickly and not know to praise (εἰδῶσιν χάριν) you.³⁷²

In Socrates' final counsel to Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, we can hear echoes of parts of his speech in the *Apology*. Socrates warns them not to speak their "wisdom" (σοφός) publicly lest their listeners learn it quickly and not realize that they are its teachers. This warning resonates with Socrates' account of the young men who followed him and who would often imitate his behavior by questioning others.³⁷³ According to Socrates, the public belief in his corruption of the youth spread because of this behavior. Moreover, we might also hear Socrates' private warning of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus as an example of the private, corrective speech appropriate to someone who "accidentally" harms others.³⁷⁴ While we could refer to our own analysis of *arete* in the *Meno* as justification for considering Euthydemus and Dionysodorus' "wisdom" harmful, we could also reflect on Socrates' later indictment and execution as another indication of the urgency of Socrates' warning. "Action" often receives greater axiological priority than "speech," but our comparison of this scene in the *Euthydemus* to Socrates' own indictment emphasizes the superficial esteem for the former over the latter. In fact, we have frequently commented peripherally on the difference between Socrates' and Meno's dialogical comportment, and although we have given preference to Socrates' style, we have not yet gone so far as to claim that dialogical comportment directly bears upon *arete*. And yet, this comparison between the *Euthydemus*, the *Apology*, and the *Meno* draws attention to the relationship between dialogue and *arete*. To put the matter simply, *how* one speaks with others may be a part of being a good person. Against this backdrop, let us begin to examine how Socrates responds to Meno.

If we attempted to place Meno in the setting of the *Euthydemus*, into whose position would Meno fit? Meno is too mature to be in the position of Clinias, having received instruction from Gorgias and begun civic engagement, and yet, he is neither authoritative nor competent enough to be in the position of Euthydemus or Dionysodorus. The character from *Euthydemus* whom Meno most closely approximates would likely be one of the followers. Like the followers of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, Meno behaves in conformity with his instructor. Meno answered Socrates' question about *arete* fearlessly and magnificently as is fitting for one who knows, and even his

³⁷² Ibid., 303e-304a. Translation modified.

³⁷³ Plato, *Apology*, 23c.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 26a.

contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) shows some cunning in speech.³⁷⁵ Not only does Meno’s dialogical comportment prevent him from a genuine inquiry into *arete* together with Socrates, but he even speaks dangerously and harmfully, which we can conclude from our analysis of the *Euthydemus*. To the uninitiated, Meno’s contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) may have a certain power; however, Meno’s “wisdom” is immature—he is “*nouveau sage*.” Previously, we interpreted Meno’s concern for beauty in his third account of *arete* as an appeal to Socrates’ weakness for beautiful things.³⁷⁶ Now, Meno sounds much more subversive and conniving when he asks, “Doesn’t this argument (λόγος) seem to have been said beautifully (καλῶς), Socrates?”³⁷⁷ As he did previously, Meno appeals to Socrates’ love of beauty; however, Socrates claims to see no beauty in this argument. Instead, he suggests an entirely new starting point for their inquiry. Because of our attunement to dialogical comportment, we can see Socrates’ movement into mythological discourse as a way of disrupting Meno’s habitual, contentious dialogical comportment, a move which resonates with our analysis of his prior suggestion to stick around for initiation into the Mysteries. With this new beginning, perhaps Socrates can disrupt Meno’s familiar habits of thinking and behaving. However, to do so, he must take on the difficult task of transforming Meno’s fundamental assumptions about the world—assumptions which we drew out through our prior analyses. It is perhaps for this reason that Socrates begins anew with a foundational myth.³⁷⁸

When he denies the beauty of Meno’s argument, Socrates claims that it is because he has heard “from both men and women wise (ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ γυναικῶν σοφῶν) about things divine (τὰ θεῖα πράγματα)—.”³⁷⁹ Conspicuously, Socrates avoids calling it a “λόγος” here explicitly despite Meno interrupting and inquiring about it as such. He does, however, call it “true” (ἀληθῆ) and

³⁷⁵ Plato, *Meno*, 70b, 95c.

³⁷⁶ *Arete* is “to desire beautiful things and to be capable of providing them for oneself.” Ibid., 77b.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 81a.

³⁷⁸ Socrates *does* respond to Meno’s contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος). However, he does not respond in kind, that is, he does not present a counter-argument to Meno’s argument. When Socrates calls the argument “contentious” (ἐριστικὸν), we can hear this criticism as an indictment of Meno’s dialogical comportment. From the beginning of the dialogue, we have tracked Meno’s troublesome dialogical behavior, and we even noted several moments which we read as Socrates’ attempts to correct Meno’s behavior. Our recent examination of dialogical comportment has drawn out its importance for *arete*, that is, being a good person, and so, we approach Socrates’ story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) as a radical attempt to disrupt Meno’s habitual dialogical comportment.

³⁷⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 81a. Klein considers Socrates’ pause here, which is signified by the m-dash, quite significant and an instance of the “inward gaze” spoken of in other dialogues, e.g., *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*. Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, 92-93.

“beautiful” (κάλος).³⁸⁰ Perhaps Socrates begins to speak in this vague and enigmatic way in order to mark the transition into a new mode discourse, one which requires the cultivation of a reverent and holy mood. Let us consider what Socrates relays about these “things divine.” Subsequently, we will examine the relationship between Socrates’ mythological speech and Meno’s contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος), the function of this speech within the dialogue (in its immanent context and within the *Meno* more broadly), and what additional insights into *arete* we can glean from this speech (and what follows). Socrates conveys what he has heard in the following way:

Those who say it are among those priests and priestesses who have made it their concern to be able to give an account (λόγον) about those things they have taken in hand. And Pindar speaks too and many others of those poets (ποιητῶν) who are divine (θεϊοί). And what they say is this—but consider (σκόπει) whether they seem to you to speak the truth (ἀληθῆ λέγειν)—for they declare the human soul (ψυχήν) to be immortal, and that at one time it comes to an end, which indeed they call dying, and again, at another time, it comes into being, but it is never destroyed. Indeed, because of this, one is required to live through one’s life as piously as possible (ὀσιώτατα). “For those from whom

Persephone has accepted redemption for the ancient affliction, of these in the ninth year she sends the souls above again to the upper sun. From them glorious kings (βασιλῆες ἄγαυοί) grow up, men with sweeping strength (σθένει κραίνοι) and greatest wisdom (σοφία τε μέγιστοι), and for the rest of time they are called holy heroes (ἥρωες ἄγνοι) by mankind.”

Inasmuch as the soul (ψυχή) is immortal and has been born many times and has seen all things both here and in the house of Hades, there is nothing which it has not learned. So that there is nothing wondrous (θαυμαστὸν) about its also being able to recollect (ἀναμνησθῆναι) about *arete* and about other things, which it already knew (ἠπίστατο) before. For inasmuch as all nature is akin (τῆς φύσεως ἀπάσης συγγενοῦς οὐσης) and the soul has learned all things (μεμαθηκυίας τῆς ψυχῆς ἅπαντα) there is nothing to prevent someone who recollects (ἀναμνησθέντα) (which people call learning (μάθησιν)) one thing from discovering all other things, so long as he is brave (ἀνδρείος) and does not grow tired (ἀποκάμνη) of seeking (ζητῶν). For seeking (ζητεῖν) and learning (μανθάνειν) therefore consist wholly in recollection (ἀνάμνησις). So then one must not be persuaded (πείθεσθαι) by this contentious argument (ἐριστικῶ λόγῳ). For it would make us lazy (ἀργούς) and is pleasant only for fainthearted (μαλακοῖς) people to hear, but the other argument makes us both ready to work (ἐργατικούς) and seek (ζητητικούς). Trusting (πιστεύων) in this one to be true (ἀληθεῖ), I am willing (ἐθέλω) with you to seek (ζητεῖν) for whatever *arete* is.³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 81a.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 81b-81e.

Perhaps more than any other part of the *Meno*, this passage has served as the site of an intense battle for Plato's soul. On the one hand, a majority of Anglophone scholars insist that this part of the text reveals a key insight into Plato's epistemology ("recollection" as an assertion of latent/prenatal knowledge), and on the other hand, there are those who confine their interpretation to the context—both immanent and intertextual—in which the passage occurs. A review of the literature on the *Meno* reveals that the former group dominates the discourse to such an extent that their assumptions (especially concerning the "pre-natalist" reading of recollection) about the text function as the standard interpretation.³⁸² For example, if we consider Cristina Ionescu's commentary, she proposes the following task: "We should now try to reconstruct the philosophical view that Plato's Socrates might have intended for a more sophisticated audience. For Plato the myth serves to answer the serious problem regarding the possibility of attaining knowledge as a result of search."³⁸³ Despite initially claiming to read the Orphic-Pythagorean view and Platonic view throughout, Ionescu here dismisses the Orphico-Pythagorean view as the concern of less sophisticated listeners. This view is a part of "the surface level" or ornamental or merely aesthetic in contrast to the "Platonic" parts of the text, but Ionescu never addresses the basis for her differentiation of the beginning of one "level" from the end of another.³⁸⁴ Dominic Scott's approach more convincingly addresses some of the nuance in the relationship between this passage and the problems raised by its introduction into the dialogue. For Scott, Socrates' speech has multiple functions: to solve the epistemological problem introduced by Meno, to entice Meno into further inquiry, and to implore Meno to take the "priestly *logos*" seriously.³⁸⁵ Although Scott

³⁸² Of course, one reason for the perceived dominance of the former camp stems from the confinement of this investigation to Anglophone, Platonic scholarship. Due to the overwhelming amount of scholarship on Plato, it was necessary to impose restrictions; however, there may be more diverse approaches to Platonic texts throughout international scholarship, especially in German scholarship. Why Anglophone, Platonic scholarship would be dominated by epistemological inquiry likely correlates strongly with the dominance of so-called "analytic philosophy" within the philosophy departments of the US and UK. Weiss' and Klein's commentaries stand out as the only two which receive regular recognition within more "mainstream" Anglophone, Platonic scholarship.

³⁸³ Ionescu, *Plato's Meno*, 54.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 51-63. "With the picture of anamnesis thus disclosed, Plato successfully rejects at least some of the skeptical worries about the possibility of knowledge. The theory of recollection explains the possibility of successful search on the basis of the latent knowledge present within our soul and our capacity to actualize or make explicit this knowledge through courageous practice of dialectic." Ibid., 62. "If the image of the disembodied soul is not meant literally, but rather as a metaphor for the purely intelligible nature of the soul in separation from the body, then recollection itself must be a metaphor for the actualization of the a priori latent knowledge that is in principle available to all of us. Recollection then is a metaphorical expression of the idea that our duty to inquire is grounded ontologically, for it is the soul's innermost and abiding nature to contemplate the truth of beings by virtue of the ontological affinity between the two." Ibid., 92.

³⁸⁵ Scott, *Plato's Meno*, 94.

incorporates a contextual analysis into his reading of Meno's epistemological challenge, his subsequent analysis (especially of the exhibition with the *παῖς* and Socrates' discussion of the exhibition with Meno) focuses heavily on arguments that justify the assertion of "latent knowledge."³⁸⁶ There is no question that this focus emerges in response to a part of the *Meno*, but even within Scott's otherwise sensitive contextual analysis of the *Meno*, it is not clear how the question concerning the possibility of latent knowledge fits into an interpretation of the dialogue as a whole. This grounded albeit compartmentalized approach to the *Meno* typifies the commentaries within Anglophone Platonic scholarship.³⁸⁷

A commentator's approach to this passage (i.e., Socrates' introduction of recollection (*ἀνάμνησις*)) often depends upon their sense of the importance of Meno's contentious argument (*ἐριστικός λόγος*), although other assumptions about Plato's philosophy, e.g., "Plato's theory of forms," can supersede it.³⁸⁸ In our approach, we have not taken Meno's contentious argument (*ἐριστικός λόγος*) as a serious philosophical problem. On the one hand, we read it as "sophistic" in the pejorative sense because it begged the question about the kind of thing *arete* is. Our analysis of *arete* in the *Meno* has not at all assumed it to be the kind of thing which is perfectly secure when known and wholly unsettled when unknown, but rather, we have seen *arete* vacillate within a dialectical tension between the measure of the human good and the measure of "the good" in the *polis*. On the other hand, we read Meno's contentious argument (*ἐριστικός λόγος*) also as a symptom of Meno's broader dialogical comportment. Partially because of his education from Gorgias and partially because he is a Thessalian aristocrat, Meno has comported himself combatively throughout the dialogue. We have come to understand the reappearance of this

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 108-125.

³⁸⁷ Despite our critical orientation towards the dominant, Anglophone approach to Platonic scholarship, we must nonetheless recognize this work. Although it is by no means exhaustive, the following list is representative of this approach to reading the *Meno*: Benson, *Clitophon's Challenge: Dialectic in Plato's Meno, Phaedo, and Republic*, 78-91; Bluck, *Plato's Meno*, 9-10. Fine, *The Possibility of Inquiry: Meno's Paradox from Socrates to Sextus*, 31-176; Ionescu, *Plato's Meno*, 49-92. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*, 161-182, also "Plato on Recollection" in *A Companion to Plato*, 120-122; Scott, *Plato's Meno*, 92-125; *Recollection and Experience*, 33-51. Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, 8-9, 143; Tarrant, *Recollecting Plato's Meno*, 34-53, esp. 48 (Tarrant emphasizes the pedagogical dimension more than the epistemological, but his sympathies ostensibly lie with the concern for Meno's epistemological problem); A.E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and his Work*, 136-138; Thomas, *Musings on the Meno*, 127-147. For examples of the influence of Anglophone scholarship on translations of the *Meno*, see the notes of the following translators: R. E. Allen, *The Dialogues of Plato, Volume 1*, 141-142; W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy, Vol. 4*, 249-253; Alex Long, *Meno and Phaedo*, vii-viii; Robin Waterfield, *Meno and Other Dialogues*, 173-175.

³⁸⁸ Vlastos, for example, says, "The exploration of the consequences of the full-strength theory of recollection is so closely related to the creation of the Theory of Ideas that it can even be said to determine the main features of this theory." Vlastos, "Anamnesis in the *Meno*," 164.

contentious behavior as a symptom of Meno's failure to care for the problem of *arete*. In both word and deed, Meno does not know about *arete*. Meno is not a good person despite his share of many goods. Does our reading preclude an interpretation of Meno's argument as a serious philosophical problem? No. It very well may be the case that this contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) raises philosophical challenges to the possibility of certain sorts of inquiry. Nevertheless, this question does not concern our own analysis, which focuses on the relationship between *arete*, the human good, and the *polis*. With this focus in mind, let us now begin our own analysis of this passage.³⁸⁹

Socrates begins his speech with an invocation of the authority of an unspecified group of priests and priestesses. Apparently, Socrates does not consider their identities important, which stands out particularly because he *does* name Pindar as one of the divine poets. Nevertheless, if we infer their identity from Socrates' speech, it seems likely that they are either Orphic or Pythagorean priests and priestesses.³⁹⁰ Why might Socrates begin in this way? We should recall what has taken place between the conclusion of Chapter I and this passage. Meno has become defiant towards Socrates, mocking him for his likeness to a torpedo fish (80a), warning him not to leave Athens lest he be arrested as a "bad man" (80b), and now obstructing the continuation of their inquiry with a contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) (80d). Not only does Meno seem not to know about *arete*, but he seems not to care about it either. However, when Socrates mentioned just now that he had heard something from "men and women wise (ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ γυναικῶν σοφῶν) about things divine (τὰ θεῖα πράγματα)," Meno suddenly seemed much more interested in what Socrates had to say. This behavior parallels his reaction previously, when Socrates suggested that he ought to stay around for initiation into the Mysteries.³⁹¹ Upon hearing that suggestion, Meno expressed an

³⁸⁹ Some Anglophone scholars, to whom our approach owes a considerable debt, include: Ebert, "The Theory of Recollection in Plato's *Meno*: Against a Myth of Platonic Scholarship"; Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 92-98; Sallis, *Being and Logos*, 79-91; Warnek, *Descent of Socrates: Self-Knowledge and Cryptic Nature in the Platonic Dialogues*, 131-134; Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's 'Meno'*, 63-76.

³⁹⁰ Scholars unanimously agree that these priests and priestesses are either Orphic or Pythagorean, although some give preference to either the one or the other. Rarely does anyone offer significant justification for eliminating the other alternative, and the most common practice is simply to admit they could be one or the other without coming down on either side. However, Ebert's reading stands out because of his compelling incorporation of elements from the Pythagorean tradition to explain the effect of Socrates' speech. Ebert, "The Theory of Recollection in Plato's *Meno*: Against a Myth of Platonic Scholarship," 188. Weiss also leans Pythagorean, although she does so on the basis of the scholarly belief that Plato wrote the *Meno* after a trip to Sicily, during which he would have been exposed to the ideas. Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's Meno*, 67. Ultimately, there does not seem to be a significant difference for our reading between the identification of the priests/priestesses as definitively Orphic or Pythagorean.

³⁹¹ Plato, *Meno*, 76e-77a.

interest in hearing about “many other such things (πολλὰ τοιαῦτα),” and his engagement in the dialogue was temporarily reinvigorated, saying for a third time what he thinks *arete* is shortly after. We should also recall that the need to reinvigorate Meno’s engagement came just after two contentious moments. Socrates called Meno audacious (ὕβριστής) for making problems for an old man, and Socrates also described Meno’s preference for the Gorgian style answer “tragical” (τραγική), i.e., one that merely sounded profound. We must recall these prior details because of the way that this part of the text echoes them. As Ebert observes:

That both [Gorgias and Empedocles] are present is made clear by the form and content of what Socrates says. Here again we find him using the same mixture as before: Empedoclean theory, i.e., the soul’s immortality and its transmigration as well as the kinship of all nature, a lengthy quotation from Pindar, this time used to prop up Empedoclean metaphysics, and stylistic devices typical of Gorgias, i.e. homoioteleuta and parisa (cf. γεγονυῖα καὶ ἑωρακυῖα καὶ τὰ ἐνθάδε καὶ τὰ ἐν Ἄιδου 81c5-6), or the hyperbata at 81a10-b1.³⁹²

As we pointed out, Meno has behaved like “one of those wise men with a bent for strife (ἐριστικῶν) and contention (ἀγωνιστικῶν),” and yet, Socrates does not attempt to refute Meno. Rather, Socrates speaks to Meno as a friend (φίλος), answering Meno “not only with the truth” but also with things that Meno knows.³⁹³ While Meno may not know *arete*, he does claim to understand Empedoclean philosophy and Gorgias’ style of speaking. When we notice the similarities between this speech and Socrates’ previous manner of responding to Meno, then we can see Socrates’ response to Meno’s “contentious argument” (ἐριστικός λόγος) more as a response to Meno’s contentious dialogical behavior than to the argument. Consequently, when we see Socrates’ response as a response to Meno’s dialogical comportment, then we can also begin to recognize one reason for Socrates to tell him a story (μῦθος), namely, that Meno is immature like a child.³⁹⁴ He lacks the dialogical dexterity to navigate through discourse.

Insofar as we have pointed out Meno’s curiosity about certain subject-matters (especially speeches on divine matters) and his affinity for a certain style of speech, we can see how Socrates is able to incorporate such fantastic claims into his story without much justification, e.g., the

³⁹² Ebert, “The Theory of Recollection in Plato’s *Meno*: Against a Myth of Platonic Scholarship,” 187-188.

³⁹³ Plato, *Meno*, 75d.

³⁹⁴ Cf. Plato, *Protagoras*, 320c. The social dimension (namely, between elder and youth) in this mode of communicative behavior will show up again during Socrates’ exhibition with the παῖς.

transmigration of the soul, and an originary kinship between all things.³⁹⁵ We might interpret Meno's acceptance of Socrates' account as a consequence of his familiarity with this style of speech and his preference for tragical answers. It seems that Socrates has seduced Meno. Even so, Socrates may signal the need for skepticism.³⁹⁶ In a parenthetical remark, Socrates implores, “—but consider (σκόπει) whether they seem to you to speak the truth (ἀληθῆ λέγειν)—....”³⁹⁷ To whom does Socrates make this remark? The most obvious answer is emphatically Meno. However, our analysis so far has focused upon Meno's fondness for this very sort of answer. Meno's susceptibility to it is the reason why we assumed that Socrates has presented his account in this way. Thus, does Socrates have any reason to believe that Meno would seriously “consider the truth” of his speech? If not, how instead could we understand this imperative? We might read this peripheral remark as a signal to us. Even though we have not questioned *that* Socrates speaks truth (mostly), we have noted the opacity of the conditions of speaking truth.³⁹⁸ Here too we ought to wonder what sort of “truth” Socrates implores Meno and us to consider. Not only does the speculative nature of Socrates' claims present challenges to our acceptance of this “truth,” but Socrates himself will later indicate some reservation about his own argument.³⁹⁹ Thus, just as when Socrates' previously insisted upon answering with the “truth,” this exhortation to consider the truth also raises questions about the measure of truth. Moreover, our uncertainty about the measure of truth clearly harmonizes with the central tension of our analysis, namely, the measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good. When we focus on the dynamic between Socrates and Meno, we can see several ways in which Socrates speaks particularly to Meno, but can we also learn something about *arete*, the human good, and the *polis*?

³⁹⁵ Klein makes an important distinction here, namely, that this usage of soul (ψυχή) does not approximate the familiar, albeit vague, sense of “life force.” This soul (ψυχή) continues outside the limits of birth and death, and beyond death—through a strange kinship with nature—it becomes omniscient. Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 96.

³⁹⁶ Weiss goes so far as to claim that Socrates implies a subtle critique of the priestly caste who “...endorse the myth so as to be able to give an account of their piety business.” She bases this reading on a pair of passages from *The Republic*, in which priests are criticized for selling their services as remedies to injustices. She also suggests that Socrates's insinuation must take an extremely subtle form lest Socrates disrupt his own effort to persuade Meno by invoking their authority. This wonderfully subversive reading harmonizes with our conclusion at the end of Chapter I that Meno may suffer from avarice like the priestly caste in the piety business. Despite our sympathy for the subversive implicature, this reading of Socrates' invocation of the priests and priestesses does not fit in with our own textual concern for *arete*, the human good, and the *polis* especially well. Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's Meno*, 66.

³⁹⁷ Plato, *Meno*, 81b. Translation modified.

³⁹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 75c.

³⁹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 86b.

After asserting that the soul is immortal (and so one must live as piously as possible), Socrates recites a poetic passage, which presumably comes from Pindar.⁴⁰⁰ We should remember Socrates' previous recitation of Pindar as well: "heed what I say" (σύνεξ ὃ τοι λέγω).⁴⁰¹ In Chapter I, our analysis led us through the transformation of this citation from its lofty and noble beginning in Pindar to its ironic, subversive, and parodic reiterations in *The Birds*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Meno* too. Even in Pindar, we read this imperative as a signal to the listener to pay attention to the insinuation underling the explicit discourse. Perhaps here also we should read the repetition of Pindar as a sign to heed what Socrates is saying. Socrates may recite Pindaric poetic verses because of his reverence for Pindaric insight, but at the same time, we would never naively believe in a "pure" recitation. Socrates does not recite this Pindaric story (μῦθος) simply as *true* but rather as *beautiful* and true.⁴⁰² We might even go so far as to say that it is a "good" story, which typically means compelling, captivating, and inspiring. In this sense, the effect tends to supersede the "truth." But, of course, we must wonder: as a "good story," is it also a story about *arete* and the human good? We can only answer this question when we analyze the story itself.

Socrates prefaces his story with the authority of others, whom he vaguely refers to as simply priests and priestesses, and then he appeals *again* to poetic authority, particularly Pindar.⁴⁰³ Thus far, we have heard these references to others as references to the *authority* of others, an authority which appeals particularly to Meno's sensibilities; however, we should also hear this appeal to others as an indication of *arete*'s relationality. Socrates does not tell Meno what he thinks *arete* is, and it is not simply because of the now trite sense of Socratic ignorance. Others participate in the search for *arete* and the human good in the *polis*. Socrates himself lacks the authority to speak on *arete* because *every* individual as an individual lacks such an authority. No single person decides the human good. Meno may like to hear things that sound deep, but this predilection for superficial profundity is not the only reason for Socrates to begin his story in this way. Not only must humans live in community with one another, but, as we find in the very first line of the verses, humans relate to others beyond what one human owes to another. According to the verses, the

⁴⁰⁰ No scholars question the attribution of this citation to Pindar. For a study of the evidence grounding this attribution, see Rose, "The Ancient Grief. A Study of Pindar, Fr. 133 (Bergk), 127 (Bowra)," 79-80.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 76d.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 81a. Socrates tells Meno that the men and women wise about things divine told him something true and beautiful.

⁴⁰³ Does it require less personal responsibility (and personal endorsement) when Socrates recounts what he has heard from others than if he were to speak himself? Cf. Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's Meno*, 65 n39.

goddess Persephone herself is the gatekeeper of psychic incarnation, when she accepts “redemption for the ancient affliction.”⁴⁰⁴ While an undoubtedly vague and mystical reference, we need not know the precise referent to heed the insight into *arete*. Each person lacks the individual means of securing the human good for himself (or herself too but not in this story). According to the story, Persephone decides when a good man will be born. With Persephone’s approval, what sort of good men emerge? Humans call them holy heroes (ἥρωες ἄγνοι), which names glorious kings (βασιλῆες ἀγαυοὶ) with sweeping strength (σθένει κραίπνοι) and greatest wisdom (σοφία τε μέγιστοι). We ought to note the similarity between the good men of this story and the human goods which we saw throughout our analysis in Chapter I. Glorious kings are like Meno’s rulers.⁴⁰⁵ Strength was an example along with health and stature of human goods which have both relative and universal measures.⁴⁰⁶ And, of course, wisdom appeared very early when Socrates spoke about the recent reputation of Thessaly.⁴⁰⁷ Conspicuously, Socrates’ story seems to tell us nothing different than what Meno previously said about *arete*. What then makes this story any better than Meno’s inadequate accounts from their prior discussion?

Having laid this mythological foundation, Socrates reasons through some of the consequences that follow from it. Because of the soul’s transmigration (i.e., that it has been reborn many times and seen things during those lifetimes and during its time in Hades) and its kinship with nature (“τῆς φύσεως ἀπάσης συγγενοῦς οὐσης”), “there is nothing to prevent someone who recollects (ἀναμνησθέντα) (which people call learning (μάθησιν)) one thing from discovering all other things, *so long as* he is brave (ἀνδρεῖος) and does not grow tired (ἀποκάμνη) of searching (ζητῶν).”⁴⁰⁸ Socrates augments his story about Persephone and the holy heroes (ἥρωες ἄγνοι) with these Pythagoreanism/Empedoclean philosophical inferences and some Gorgian rhetorical flourish—philosophical and rhetorical approaches with which Meno is also likely quite familiar.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁴ We might also see this reference as the groundwork for Socrates’ later claim concerning divine allotment (θεῖα μοῖρα). Persephone’s acceptance determines the passage of redeemed souls back to the earthly realm, and when these souls become incarnate as humans, they grow into men who exhibit *arete*.

⁴⁰⁵ Plato, *Meno*, 73c.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 72d-e.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 70a.

⁴⁰⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 81d. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁰⁹ Ebert is especially illuminating on all the parallels: “Now the claim that human beings are able to recollect things from previous lives is part of the Pythagorean tradition: in the legends told about Pythagoras...Pythagoras is able to remember all the persons he has been in earlier lives....This gift was given to (Pythagoras as) Aethalides by the god Hermes, hence as a special privilege marking him out among other mortals....Incidentally, something to the same effect can be extracted also from Empedocles: Empedocles too claims to have been a young man, a young woman, a bush, a bird, and a fish (Empedocles fragm. 117 Diels/Kranz). What is more, Empedocles seems to attribute to

Nearly all of Socrates' speech conforms with beliefs which Meno either holds or with which he is familiar. However, the final conditional ("so long as" (ἐάν)) marks a decisive turn in Socrates' speech, a conditional which all of the other familiar and "ordinary" claims could easily obscure.⁴¹⁰ On the basis of the story, any person can, in principle, access the soul's knowledge of all things, but the access depends on having the proper comportment. This condition relieves much of the weight which the presuppositions supporting recollection (ἀνάμνησις) take for granted. Even a superficial consideration of Socrates' claims about recollection (ἀνάμνησις) draws out many questions. For example: From what time does a person recollect? Would one recollect *arete* from what one saw in a past life, or from what one saw in Hades? If the former, whence come the knowledge which one must recollect? Does a knowledge of *arete* come from the accumulation of experiences, or does the knowledge come from one particular incarnation—an *aretaic* one which someone would only chance upon after many other incarnations? But whence come the knowledge of *arete* during that incarnation? Would there not be an infinite regress if one's knowledge of *arete* always relied upon a recollection of some prior incarnation? We still find no origin here. Or, perhaps one must pass through many incarnations in order to recollect one's originary kinship? But, if the knowledge of *arete* (and everything else) depends upon an originary kinship, whence come individuation?⁴¹¹ Why did the soul ever forget in the first place? And what about that which one might recollect from the soul saw in Hades? Why should we suppose that time in Hades would offer greater insight into human *arete* than what is recollected from many worldly incarnations?⁴¹² It is difficult to see how recollection does anything other than create more complicated questions about the genesis of *arete*. By contrast, the condition that one be a brave and tireless seeker is a

Pythagoras...the ability to recollect everything that happened in ten or twenty lifetimes (fragm. 129 Diels/Kranz)." Ebert, "The Theory of Recollection in Plato's Meno: Against a Myth of Platonic Scholarship," 188. While some of the details do clearly differ, the extent to which Socrates has spoken in terms familiar to Meno particularly could easily go unnoticed.

⁴¹⁰ Concerning the importance of this conditional, see Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 96-97. Klein considers it important, but he offers little commentary otherwise.

⁴¹¹ Warnek, *Descent of Socrates: Self-Knowledge and Cryptic Nature in the Platonic Dialogues*, 132.

⁴¹² Weiss notes, "Indeed, if we look at the end of the *Apology*, we find Socrates expecting to do in Hades precisely what he did in Athens (though perhaps with a better clientele): search for somebody wise and examine people's views about virtue (*Ap.* 41b-c). Moreover, since these activities will constitute for him, as he says, 'inconceivable happiness' (*Ap.* 41c3-4), it is apparent that he envisions having in Hades no greater access to *Knowledge* [sic] of virtue than he does on earth." Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's Meno*, 73. Although Weiss's point about the redundancy of recollecting what was seen in Hades is well taken (depending, of course, on the vagueness of the present account of transmigration), it does seem a bit pessimistic to suggest that we would have no greater access to knowledge if we could recollect discussions with, potentially, every human who has ever existed.

simpler solution to a more concrete problem (i.e., how to approach inquiry into *arete*), and we can easily understand it as a direct response to Meno's contentious dialogical comportment.

Does Meno's contentious dialogical comportment lead us to consider him a bad man? We may confidently judge the Meno of the *Anabasis* harshly, but the Meno of *Meno* is less cartoonishly villainous. The Meno of *Meno* may be audacious, contentious, and pedantic, but does this behavior make him bad? We lack a measure against which to judge him. By contrast, our analysis of the conclusion of Meno's torpedo fish speech, in which Meno warned Socrates not to leave Athens lest he be arrested as a sorcerer/juggler (γόης), drew out the connotations of Meno's accusation. Meno seems to think that Socrates would be condemned in any other *polis* as a bad man, even if, ironically, Socrates may be the only person in Athens (or perhaps all of Greece) who devoted his life to figure out what it takes to be a good man. Why would Socrates be condemned? According to Meno, Socrates is bewitching, drugging, and subduing him with incantations, actions which have led Meno into ἀπορία. For us, the situation appears much less fantastical. Meno had been trained to answer questions in a certain way (fearlessly and magnificently like someone who knows), and when Socrates examined his answers, he found them wanting in various ways. Nevertheless, Socrates maintained his conviction that they should continue their inquiry (despite Meno's three failed attempts), since that which they seek (*arete*) is too important to give up. We never question Socrates' resolve for the inquiry. He makes it clear. Nor do we question Meno's lack of resolve. He also makes it clear. In a sense, we might consider the confrontation between Socrates' resolve for inquiry into *arete* and Meno's indifference to *arete* to be the tension which provokes Socrates' movement into mythological discourse. In what way could Socrates *reason* with Meno that he should be a good person? Meno does not want to be one! Meno's contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) signals to us the inadequacy of the argument (λόγος). Arguments cannot convince someone who uses arguments contentiously. But what about a story (μῦθος) with familiar themes in a familiar style? Might this persuade Meno to think and act differently?

Having woven together the prior sequence of events in a particular way, we can see Socrates' presentation of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) to Meno in a new light. In order to convince Meno to continue to participate in their search for *arete*, Socrates must persuade Meno to care about *arete*. Socrates begins to do so by speaking to Meno as a friend. We have already noted many ways in which Socrates' account panders directly to Meno's sensibilities, but even if

Socrates panders to Meno, it need not imply that Socrates “lies” to him either. Socrates promised something true *and* beautiful. Accordingly, we can still draw out several implications from Socrates’ speech. The displacement of Meno’s self-possession (i.e., that his soul is his alone) undermines some of the motivation to act in a self-interested way. Socrates’ story (μῦθος) assumes a cosmology in which human life is both transitory and not *simply* one’s own. It is transitory in the sense that each individual incarnation only represents a moment of the soul’s eternal existence, and this psychic continuity through transmigration undermines the weight of any one individual identity.⁴¹³ Furthermore, pious living may appear restrictive and undesirable, but it nevertheless plays an important role in proper maintenance of the soul. In this way, pious living orients a person towards each person’s relation to others, the divine, and the cosmos. Moreover, the soul’s preservation beyond corporeal individuation—coupled with the imperative to prioritize one’s soul above all other worldly concerns—orients a human humbly within the cosmic order. For example, if Meno were to heed this message, then he might see the importance of subordinating his desire for wealth and power to the care for his soul. He might be less inclined to act in his own immediate interest and more inclined to act towards a more universal good. We need not understand these implications as definitive assertions about *arete* and the human good, but we might better understand them as provocations and temptations which Socrates lays out for Meno in particular. This tepid framing of them as provocations and temptations does not imply a suspicion about their “truth,” but rather it follows from the same uncertainty about the measure of truth which we have previously pointed out. There is never anything “matter of fact” about Socrates’ truth, and so the status of these claims is rather opaque. Nevertheless, we pointed out the weight of Socrates’ condition—that one be a brave and tireless seeker. While this condition may be less spectacular than the preceding claims about recollection (ἀνάμνησις), it is also more helpful for the inquiry. Before we analyze the consequences of this condition for our inquiry, let us consider what Socrates’ story “does.”

⁴¹³ Bremmer expounds on this distinction, differentiating two types of soul in Classical Greece against the backdrop of Ernst Arban’s prior analysis of free soul and body soul. A free soul represents “...the individual personality and the body souls [endow] the body with life and consciousness...Homer distinguishes between a free soul, corresponding with *psyche*, and body souls, corresponding with *thymos*, *noos*, and *menos*.” However, “in both these periods [i.e., in Homer and prior to Homer] the free soul, while representative of the individual, possessed no psychological attributes.” Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul*, 13-14.

We recognize a certain “truth” to Socrates’ story about Persephone, the transmigration of the soul, and the soul’s capacity for recollection (ἀνάμνησις), but it is not a matter of fact truth. It is a “hidden” truth, but not an esoteric one. Socrates speaks provocatively, seductively, and enticingly to Meno. And yet, if we examine *how* his speech might affect Meno in these ways, then we must recognize the inceptive character of this textual moment. This temptation leads us to consider the intimate link between being and coming to be—a connection with sweeping consequences for the persuasive power of this speech. Our reticence about the measure of truth governing this speech gestures towards the instability of Socrates’ “new beginning.” And yet, the foundation of every beginning lacks stability. As Warnek describes, “The myth as myth thus says something about how it is possible to address the beginning: every beginning is possible by virtue of a strange erasure of the past, the past that would deny the beginning as the beginning.”⁴¹⁴ Meno, too, has necessarily forgotten his own beginning, a beginning which set him on the path to become the kind of man he is now. Meno’s “beginning”—as a Thessalian, an aristocrat, and as a student of Gorgias—is never explicit (for Meno). Meno does not justify his contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) through an appeal to his teacher Gorgias, a man whom we could easily imagine using this sort of contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος). And yet, we have attempted to draw Meno’s beginning out of his speeches as much as possible. For example, Meno’s self-perception as a knower depended upon the erasure of his instruction from Gorgias, who taught him to answer *like* a knower. When Meno blames Socrates for his ἀπορία, we might interpret this gesture as a sign of the extent to which Meno’s beginning hides itself from him. Meno never expressed any doubt that he once knew about *arete* no matter how unsuccessfully he speaks about it with Socrates. And yet, when Socrates tells Meno this story (μῦθος), Socrates tempts Meno to abandon his prior beginning. Socrates’ presentation of his speech in a familiar way undoubtedly helps convince Meno to listen, and the promise of many familiar goods surely entices Meno as well. And yet, the condition, on which the promise of all these goods depends, obscures the foundational moment in Socrates’ speech. If Meno wants all of these goods, then Meno must abandon his contentious dialogical comportment and become a brave and tireless seeker. While this comportment might have broad benefits, we also ought to recognize its distinct value for inquiry

⁴¹⁴ Warnek, *Descent of Socrates: Self-Knowledge and Cryptic Nature in the Platonic Dialogues*, 133.

into *arete*. For we suspect that this comportment does not only secure human goods, but it may also help with the pursuit of the human good.

When it is extricated from its context, Socrates' account of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) creates more problems than it solves as an answer to Meno's contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) against the possibility of searching. However, when we interpret it as a part of a story (μῦθος) that Socrates tells Meno to persuade Meno to comport himself differently—both in this dialogue and, presumably, in his life moving forward—we can more easily see its contextual embeddedness, which undermines the impetus for the interpretation of it as an account of prenatal knowledge. According to Socrates' reasoning, insight into the originary kinship of all things and access to the omniscience of the soul depend upon one's comportment (being brave (ἀνδρεῖος) and tireless (ἀποκάμνη)) towards inquiry (searching (ζητῶν)). This orientation towards inquiry is foundational. We have focused our analysis on the relationship between *arete*, the human good, and the *polis*, and we have mostly found this relationship to be characterized by tension and ἀπορία about *arete*. Being a good person is quite difficult yet important. Because of its difficulty and importance, we might heed Socrates' account as an attempt to rehabilitate Meno's dialogical comportment, a comportment which has kept him outside of the ἀπορία about *arete* since the beginning of the dialogue. Furthermore, Meno's contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) also implies a problematic understanding of knowledge, when we consider it in relation to their inquiry into *arete*. This argument begged the question about the kind of thing *arete* is, assuming it be either perfectly secure when known or wholly unsettled when unknown; however, we insisted that these two options did not exhaust every possibility. With the insufficiency of Meno's argument in mind, we might understand the condition in Socrates' account as a subtle indication of another kind of inquiry. Inquiry into *arete* is a kind of inquiry which may not have an "answer," but there is value in this sort of inquiry nonetheless. Perhaps a part of being a good person involves falling into the ἀπορία about *arete*, and if so, then Meno's acquisitive orientation, an orientation whose signs we can see in his account of *arete* as the acquisition of gold and silver, restricts his share of the human good.⁴¹⁵ When Socrates' explains why he and Meno must not be persuaded by this contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος), he claims that it would make them "lazy (ἀργοί) and is pleasant only

⁴¹⁵ Cf. "The answer to the question about the possibility of learning is not a 'theory of knowledge' or an 'epistemology' but the very *effort* to learn. The answer is the deed, the ἔργον, the μελέτη of learning, which, in turn, may lead to the ἔξις of knowing." Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 172.

for fainthearted (μαλακοί) people to hear.”⁴¹⁶ It is unlikely that lazy person would allow the ἀπορία about *arete* to affect them. Similarly, the “fainthearted” (μαλακός) person, the person who is cowardly or weak-willed, would likely close him or herself off from this difficulty as well. By contrast, Socrates insists that his account “makes [them] both ready to work (ἐργατικούς) and seek (ζητητικούς).”⁴¹⁷ Does Socrates’ story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) and his supplementary reasoning not inspire a very distinct response to the prospect of a formidable problem, a response which differs considerably from what Meno’s contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) elicits? Let us answer this question by examining Meno’s response.

Conspicuously, Meno does not ask why one must be courageous and tireless, nor does he mention the inadequacy of Socrates’ account to speak in the terms of his contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος). Meno *does*, however, ask how it could be that learning is really recollection. “Yes, Socrates. But how do you mean this: that we do not learn, but that what we call learning (μάθησιν) is recollection (ἀνάμνησις)? Can you teach (διδάξαι) me how this can be?”⁴¹⁸ At first, Meno’s response might sound just as contentious as some of his prior comments. Socrates’s response implies that he thinks Meno is being contentious again as well. He laments, “And after I just now said, Meno, that you are a clever rogue (πανούργος), you ask me now if I can teach you—I who deny that teaching (διδασχῆν) is anything but recollection (ἀνάμνησιν)—in order that I may straightway be shown up to be contradicting myself.”⁴¹⁹ Socrates seems to think that Meno is acting like a know it all (πανούργος) again like in his torpedo fish speech. However, we can hear a marked difference in Meno’s response this time when he explains that he was, ironically, only speaking by habit (ἔθος). Of course, we have understood his entire dialogical comportment as a consequence of his habituation, but remarkably, when Meno becomes self-aware of his reliance on habit, he seems to deviate from his “habitual” comportment. “No, by Zeus, Socrates, I was not looking to that when I spoke, but it was just by habit (ἔθους). But if you somehow can point out (ἐνδείξασθαι) to me that it is as you say, point it out (ἔνδειξαι).”⁴²⁰ It would be difficult to determine the extent to which Meno recognizes the impact of his habits on his comportment towards others. However, startlingly, Meno speaks here with a simultaneous profundity and

⁴¹⁶ Plato, *Meno*, 81d.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 81e.

⁴¹⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 81e.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 82a.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

opacity about himself. Indeed, Meno does often answer questions according to certain habits, but in this moment, when he deviates from his habitual comportment, he acknowledges the effects of his habituation on his manner of speaking. Furthermore, we might also see something remarkable in Meno's deviation, namely, that he seems to have broken from his habits, even if only temporarily. We would never naively believe that Socrates so easily "cured" Meno, but Meno does seem to have abandoned his contentious and antagonistic dialogical comportment for now. Upon first glance, he seems earnest in his desire to "learn" (or rather, "be shown") how it could be that humans do not "learn" but rather "recollect."⁴²¹ Before we move on to Socrates' exhibition of recollection (ἀνάμνησις), let us review what we have covered in our analysis thus far.

In the prior section, we analyzed Meno's antagonistic speech in which he compared Socrates to a torpedo fish and warned him not to leave Athens. Socrates reciprocated with a particularly unflattering image of Meno, which compared Meno to someone who is not a knower. We interpreted this comparison as an insinuation that Meno not only does not know about *arete* now, but he also may not have ever known. Against this combative backdrop, we began our examination of Meno's response: his contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος). When we considered this argument, we found it unconvincing as an argument against their inquiry. It seemed to beg the question about the kind of thing *arete* is, and our analysis of *arete* thus far did not conform to the binary options which Meno posited in his argument. Consequently, we did not see Meno's contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) as a significant philosophical obstacle to our inquiry. Nevertheless, we attempted to understand it within the dialogical context of the *Meno*, and after comparing Meno's argument to a similar one in the *Euthydemus*, we concluded that an

⁴²¹ We might have some suspicion about Meno's ultimate motivations here. Does he want to "learn" this new "doctrine" of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) so that he can use it against a future adversary? Cf. Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 94. However, there are two reasons why we need not worry about this possibility. First, Meno does not behave contentiously for the remainder of the dialogue. Socrates may think he is over-eager or unfocused (e.g., Plato, *Meno*, 86d-e), but Meno comports himself noticeably less antagonistically throughout the remainder of the dialogue. The second reason is more subtle. If someone were to present Meno with his version of the contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος), then Meno could perhaps use Socrates' account of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) to undermine its force. However, Socrates' account does not have a lot of autonomous power. The power of his account comes from its attendance to Meno's susceptibilities. Socrates spoke about a certain subject-matter (divine matters), in a certain style (Gorgian), and on the basis of certain philosophical claims (Empedoclean). Each dimension is stylized particularly for Meno. Even contemporary scholars who privilege the account as an early appearance of prenatal knowledge must deviate from the text to make sense of the speech. Thus, we must wonder how Socrates' account of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) would be any easier for Meno to use? For many of us, transmigration (and the other speculative claims) seems easy enough to understand but difficult to "prove." Why should we not assume the same for ancient peoples, even if, we might assume, their cultural milieu disposes them to be more sympathetic?

important part of an inquiry into *arete*, the human good, and the *polis* involves dialogical comportment. Being a good person is not only a matter of doing “good things” and abstaining from “bad things,” but it also involves speaking with others in the right way. We read Meno’s contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) as a symptom of his indifference to the question of *arete* and so indifferent to the way he speaks to Socrates. Derailing their discourse has no consequence for Meno since he has assumed there to be no ἀπορία about *arete* despite finding himself led into it. Our subsequent analysis of Socrates’ response focused upon its responsiveness to Meno’s contentious dialogical comportment.

When we framed Socrates’ speech in this way, we did not see it as a grand assertion about prenatal knowledge, but rather, as an idiosyncratic response to Meno’s engagement in the inquiry. Socrates does not need to engage the terms of Meno’s argument directly because their inquiry does not concern the possibility of inquiry. It concerns *arete*. We have understood an inquiry into *arete* as an examination of the relationship between *arete*, the human good, and the *polis*. This relationship requires a constant confrontation between one’s effort to be a good person in the *polis* and the many challenges to this effort which emerge from life in the *polis*. This task, which we might broadly construe as the human purpose (or the human good or simply being a good person), is difficult and tiresome, and yet, it is urgent nonetheless. Being good, fortunate (εὐδαίμων), or blessed (μακάριος) is what all humans want even if humans often make mistakes about what will help them to reach this end. In a sense, we might hear Meno’s contentious argument as an objection to the zetetic orientation towards *arete* and the human good. Whence come the impetus to question the human good towards which many people in the *polis* strive? How can Socrates know that he does not know about *arete* if he does not know it? It is easy to see how an acceptance of Meno’s contentious argument could lead to an acceptance of the *polis*’ measure of *arete* and the human good. Why question the assumptions of the *polis*? However, throughout our analysis in Chapter I, we unpacked several serious challenges to common measures of *arete* that appear in the *polis*. The contentious argument would breed an unwarranted complacency, if it were accepted, and since Meno has now advanced this contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος), their prior reasoning through his accounts clearly did not persuade him entirely. Consequently, we can understand Socrates’ story (μῦθος) about recollection (ἀνάμνησις) as a second attempt to speak to Meno in a way that would persuade him to comport himself differently. Only lazy and fainthearted people

take pleasure in the complacent approach to inquiry into *arete*.⁴²² By contrast, Socrates insists that trusting (πιστεύων) his account will make them brave, tireless seekers, and ready to work. Because of our analysis of the dialogical dynamic between Socrates and Meno, we can see the consequence of a successful cultivation of this dialogical comportment in Meno. Inquiry into *arete* is as urgent as it is difficult, and being a brave and tireless seeker who is ready to work seems to be a minimum requirement for taking up the task.

Exhibition with the παῖς (82b-85b)

Meno quickly convinces Socrates to “exhibit” to him how “what we call learning is actually recollection.”⁴²³ Socrates remarks, “But it’s not easy (οὐ ῥάδιον), nevertheless I’m willing to make

⁴²² Plato, *Meno*, 81d.

⁴²³ Socrates has slightly modified the word which Meno initially used. Meno asked for Socrates to “point out” (ἐνδείξασθαι) that learning is recollection. Socrates, however, says that he will exhibit (ἐπιδείξωμαι) it to Meno. Socrates replaced the prefix “ἐν-” with “ἐπι-.” Cf. Ionescu, *Plato’s Meno*, 64. Playing off the legal register of “demonstration” (ἐνδειξις), Ionescu interprets Meno’s request juridically, as if Meno wants Socrates to offer a defense of his claim, which Meno will judge. In contrast, she claims, “Accordingly, Socrates takes his task to be that of displaying the philosophical meaning of recollection as an attempt to reveal that theory’s truth for its own sake. Meno’s persuasion will then be only a secondary effect of Socrates’ real aim. The situation alludes again to the contrast between eristic and dialectical approaches.” Ibid. While we also have paid attention to Socrates’ and Meno’s contrasting dialogical comportments, other parts of Ionescu’s interpretation raise some questions. First, not every pedant is a lawyer. Even though professions were not specialized to the degree they are now, it seems strangely out of character for Meno to take on a legal persona. Upon what (con)textual basis does this reading rest? It would be more compelling if Meno were Euthydemus or Dionysodorus, for example, because both of them *did* study law (a vocation which Socrates himself points out in the *Euthydemus*). By contrast, if we compare the contrast between these words (a “demonstration” (ἐνδειξις) and an “exhibition” (ἐπίδειξις)) to their use in the *Protagoras*, we can see a more germane difference between them. At 317d, Socrates says that “It looked to me that [Protagoras] wanted to show off (ἐνδείξασθαι) in front of Prodicos and Hippias...” Whereas at 346a, Socrates, explicating several verses of Simonides, explains his preceding interpretation by claiming that “Scoundrels in a similar situation are almost happy to see their parents’ or country’s trouble and viciously point it out (ἐπιδεικνύειν) and denounce it...” In both examples, the subjects put something on display for others to see. In the former, Socrates interprets Protagoras’ behavior as him wanting to point himself out, to “show off.” This sense of a demonstration (ἐνδειξις) (as showing off) sounds more like Meno than the juridical reading, especially if we consider the concern for personal advantage in showing off. By contrast, the “exhibition” (ἐπίδειξις) of the scoundrel actually shifts the focus away from the scoundrel (towards the trouble of the scoundrel’s parents or “country” (or, in our terms, the *polis*)). Similarly, Socrates’ exhibition in the *Meno* seems to point something out to Meno as well. We have no reason to think that Socrates would assert that learning is recollection for his personal advantage, but instead, he seems to participate in the exhibition for Meno’s benefit. In what way Meno might benefit, we will have to wait and see. Regarding Ionescu’s juridical reading, we might also have an ancillary concern about it because the juridical sense of this word tends to occur in a juridical context, e.g., Plato, *Laws*, 856c. However, insofar as we also recognize the way that semantic resonance operates outside of its “proper” domain, this objection does not carry as much weight as the other.

Another problem with Ionescu’s interpretation stems from her suggestion that Socrates will display “the philosophical meaning of recollection as an attempt to reveal the theory’s truth for its own sake.” In the first place, it is not clear what “the revelation of a theory’s truth for its own sake” entails. In our analysis, we drew out the contextual significance of Socrates’ response. We did not take Socrates’ account as true “in itself” because we have found ourselves troubled by Socrates’ opaque measure of truth. Concerning the “truth” of his story (μῦθος) about recollection (ἀνάμνησις), we only assumed that its truth must tie together with its beauty, as Socrates himself claimed in the beginning. Furthermore, we also understood Socrates’ presentation of this account as a response to Meno’s contentious

the effort (προθυμηθῆναι) for your sake. But call over one of these many followers of yours here for me, whichever you want, so that in him I'll be able to exhibit (ἐπιδείξωμαι) things for you.”⁴²⁴ Conspicuously, Socrates notes his willingness to “make the effort” (προθυμηθῆναι) for Meno. Socrates will put his “spirit” (θυμός) into the task. We recall, once again, Socrates’ prior remark about the worthiness of their inquiry, but we might also see Socrates’ comment as a subtle performance of the dialogical comportment which follows from trusting his story (μῦθος). Because of his trust in the account, Socrates has the requisite “spirit” (θυμός) to “make the effort” (προθυμηθῆναι) to exhibit his claim for Meno despite its difficulty (it is “not easy” (οὐ ῥάδιον) as he insists). Meno calls over one of his followers who speaks Greek and was “born in house” (οἰκογενής). Before we investigate Socrates’ exhibition for Meno, we should first consider who this follower is. For, as we supposed in the very beginning, the identity of Socrates’ interlocutor plays a considerable role in determining the character of the inquiry, and the identity of *this* interlocutor is both somewhat vague and also ironic given the subject of our inquiry (*arete*, the human good, and the *polis*).

In Socrates’ exhibition, does he interrogate a boy or a slave?⁴²⁵ The Greek is ambiguous, since the same word, *παῖς*, can signify both. Yet, it takes little imagination to recognize the impact of a demonstration on Meno if he were to witness it between Socrates and one of his kin versus one of his slaves. Nonetheless, Platonic scholars and commentators tend only to note this ambiguity and move beyond it without much concern. Ionescu’s remark illustrates the norm:

The slave in our dialogue need not be a boy; the fact that he is referred to as *παῖς* is not necessarily indicative of the slave’s youth. *παῖς* is rather the natural appellative used by the Greeks for slaves. For this reason, all the references to the slave as ‘boy’ throughout this

dialogical comportment. Meno’s contentious behavior obstructed his participation in the inquiry, and we saw Socrates’ response as a way of enticing him back into it. Similarly, Socrates’ exhibition will likely also serve this aim. Ionescu seems to take for granted that Socrates’ account of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) tells a truth whose persuasive power carries weight even outside of the dialogical context. This assumption is typical of the dominant Anglophone approach to the *Meno*. Even if one were not convinced by our analysis, it would still be unclear how an empirical demonstration could ever “reveal” a speculative claim (e.g., that humans have prenatal knowledge). Instead of understanding the “truth” of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) in this problematic way, would we not be better served by seeing in Socrates’ concern for the “truth” (a sense of truth which is, undoubtedly, less clear than it might seem) a more fundamental ethical concern—the same concern which led him to create an enticing story for Meno? This ethical concern speaks to a universal human problem: We do not know in advance how to live our lives. We must engage dialogically in the dialectical struggle to determine *arete* and the human good in the *polis*.

⁴²⁴ Plato, *Meno*, 82b.

⁴²⁵ *παῖς* can also simply refer to a child without reference to sex. While this ambiguity is interesting, we will assume that the *παῖς* is male throughout because it makes sense contextually and to avoid circumlocutious neutral language.

commentary are made out of stylistic reasons, to avoid repetition, and with no allusion to the slave's age.⁴²⁶

Ionescu assumes (with good reason) that “παῖς” in the *Meno* names one of Meno's followers who is a slave and not a boy.⁴²⁷ We need not take a strong position in either direction (despite the importance of a sensitivity to the identity of Socrates' interlocutors) because the ambiguity itself provides us with an opportunity to examine *arete* in a new way. The ambiguity between boy and slave in this signifier (παῖς) obscures an unresolved contradiction in the *polis*' measure of the human good. How does the same word signify a young man who can later pursue the human good (but who perhaps does not do so actively at his present stage of life) and also a person whom the *polis* marks out as someone who *cannot* pursue the human good—someone who is explicitly forbidden from doing so? The homonymy is not mere coincidence. “These words [e.g., παῖς, παιδίον, παιδάριον, and παιδίσκη] express paternalistic views of slaves and their equivalence to minors in the family, but the slaves thus described are not necessarily children (e.g., Lysias 1.12)...The παῖς-words, especially the vocative form, ‘παι,’ often have a demeaning shade.”⁴²⁸ Paternalism towards a boy (παῖς) ostensibly protects the boy (παῖς) from self-harm or harm to others. In the *polis*, the responsibility of the boy (παῖς) is suspended temporarily until some point after which the boy (παῖς) becomes a man. A man is responsible for many things—including, as we have insisted, trying to be a good person.⁴²⁹ However, the slave (παῖς) does not have the freedom for this type of responsibility. The slave (παῖς) is a human whom the constituents of a *polis* force to be like a “child” (παῖς) in relation to freedom and responsibility. Consequently, the slave (παῖς) loses the opportunity to pursue *arete* and the human good in the *polis* as well.

Another way to ask our question would be to ask why this person is called a “παῖς” rather than one of the many other Greek names for slaves, e.g., δοῦλος, ἀνδράποδον, ὑπηρέτης, σῶμα, οἰκέτης?⁴³⁰ It might help us to answer this question if we recollect why the παῖς was introduced

⁴²⁶ Ionescu, *Plato's Meno*, 97 n63.

⁴²⁷ Meno mentions that the παῖς is “born in house” (οἰκογενής) (82b), and Meno also knows that he has not been taught geometry (85e). While this evidence may be somewhat scant, it seems reasonable to assume the παῖς is a slave. Cf. Anastaplo and Berns, “Notes,” 62. Anastaplo and Berns think that Meno's relationship with the παῖς may be “quite complicated.”

⁴²⁸ Zelnick-Abramovitz, “Greek and Roman Terminologies of Slavery,” 4.

⁴²⁹ If we use Meno's first account of *arete* as a guide, we can see that a man has a clear purpose in the *polis*. “...[T]his is the *arete* of a man: to be sufficient to carry on the affairs of the *polis* and while carrying them on to do well by his friends and harm to his enemies and to take care that he not suffer any such thing himself.” Plato, *Meno*, 71e.

⁴³⁰ Vlassopoulos, “Greek Slavery: From Domination to Property and Back Again,” 117.

into the dialogue in the first place. Socrates requested one of Meno's followers so that he could exhibit to Meno that learning (μάθησις) is recollection (ἀνάμνησις). From our analysis of Socrates' speech, we came to the conclusion that this claim was a part of Socrates' effort to entice Meno into a new dialogical comportment. The goods promised by Socrates' story and reasoning about recollection (ἀνάμνησις) hinged upon a condition: Meno must be a brave and tireless seeker if he wants access to the omniscience of the soul. If we understood Socrates' speech in this way, then we can reasonably expect his exhibition to serve this same aim. In what way could Socrates' interrogation of a παῖς help him to persuade Meno to comport himself differently? In the ambiguity of the παῖς, we found a curious distinction between two separate members of a polis. The polis denies both the παῖς as boy and as slave their respective human responsibility for the human good. It is a conventional denial with existential consequences. In this ambiguity, we can see the uncanny power of the polis to affect a person's ability to exhibit arete and so have a share of the human good. While we may understand some reasons why a boy might need protection from his responsibility for his life, we may also find additional justification for Socratic philosophical practice when we reflect upon the slave's denial of the human good *a la* a boy. If the polis has the power to deny the slave (παῖς) his share of the human good outright, then does a fundamental suspicion towards the measure of arete and the human good in the polis not seem warranted? The slave (παῖς) is an obvious affront to the universality, inclusivity, and relationality of the human good, but might the polis not operate more subtly as well? In this sense, the παῖς is an especially poignant representative in an exhibition for Meno. Socrates' exhibition with the παῖς draws our attention both to the power of the polis to inhibit an individual's exhibition of arete and share of the human good but also the susceptibility of the power of the polis to Socratic philosophical practice. If Socrates' exhibition succeeds, then it will show Meno how even the weakest and most vulnerable member of a polis has the same access to the human goods of his story that Meno himself would have, if he trusts it.⁴³¹ If even a παῖς can be a brave and tireless seeker, then surely Meno, the wealthy, handsome, Thessalian aristocrat, also can comport himself in this way.

We might also understand the inclusion of the παῖς on an intertextual basis through an examination of parts of the *Laws* and the *Protagoras* which concern a person's comportment towards slaves and youths respectively. These dialogues offer us additional insight into the

⁴³¹ Would a successful exhibition with the παῖς not also imply a more universal measure, if even the most extremely disadvantaged member of the polis can share in it?

dialogical and behavioral norms in interactions between social superiors/inferiors. In the *Laws*, three characters, an anonymous Athenian, Clinias (from Crete) and Megillus (from Sparta), discuss laws and constitutions both descriptively and prescriptively. During their discussion, the problematic and contradictory treatment of/attitude towards slaves in the *polis* comes under consideration. After reviewing some opinions on the matter, the Athenian suggests the following policy towards slaves (δουλοῖ):

The best way to foster slaves (δουλεύσειν) is to refrain from arrogantly ill-treating (ὑβριν ὑβρίζειν) them, and to commit injustice (ἀδικεῖν) against them even less (assuming that's possible) than you would your equals. For the distinguished man (διάδηλος) shows his reverence (σέβων) for justice (δίκην) and not feigningly, hating (μισῶν) being unjust (ἄδικον), even among those humans against whom doing injustice (ἀδικεῖν) is easy (ῥάδιον) for him....If he is pure of any impiety (ἀνοσίου) and injustice (ἀδίκου) concerning his habits (ἥθη) towards his slave (δούλων) and his actions (πράξεις), he will beget most fittingly the sewing of *arete*. Just the same can be said of the way in which a master (δεσπότη) or tyrant (τυράννω) or any person in any position of authority deals with (πᾶσαν δυναστείαν δυναστεύοντι) someone weaker (ἀσθενέστερον) than himself.⁴³²

Throughout the Athenian's speech, he insists upon the importance of abstaining from injustice against slaves. In fact, he even claims that it is *more* important to avoid committing injustice against them, as much as possible, than against one's equals. Why? It is easy (ῥάδιος) to commit injustice against a slave because, we might assume, the *polis* allows such behavior. It is lawful.⁴³³ And yet, the Athenian insists that one ought not do it. This contradiction between the *polis*' permissiveness of an action and the Athenian's counsel against it highlights another site of tension between the measure of *arete* in the *polis* and the measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good. A good person—the person who “sews *arete*”—would not want to harm anyone (this person would “hate” (μισῶν) injustice), and the slave, again, highlights a superlative example of someone whom a good person would *especially* not want to harm. The *polis* seems to allow for its constituents to harm their slaves without reprisal. Just as in the *Meno*, the slave (δοῦλος) provides a concrete manifestation of the insufficiency of the *polis*' measure. Interestingly, if we examine the conclusion of the Athenian's recommendation, we can see also that an authoritative position

⁴³² Plato, *Laws*, 777d-e. Translation modified.

⁴³³ Its “lawfulness” may have been ambiguous even in Athens. We could examine Euthyphro's dilemma in the *Euthyphro* as an example of the ambiguous lawfulness with respect to slaves. Euthyphro's father accidentally killed one of his slaves after that slave killed one of the other slaves, and Socrates meets Euthyphro who is on his way to prosecute his father. According to Euthyphro, his father and his family are angry that Euthyphro would prosecute his own father on behalf of a murderer. Plato, *Euthyphro*, 4b-e.

carries an even greater responsibility for one's comportment lest the authority inflict self-harm and harm to the subordinate simultaneously.

Even the slave deserves just treatment, according to the Athenian, and abstention from harmful habits (ἥθη) and actions (πράξεις) towards slaves is a prerequisite of *arete*.⁴³⁴ We might read this condition as an indication of the gap between the *polis*' measure of *arete* and the *arete* sufficient for the human good. Being a good person requires one to recognize weaker people's equal share of the human good, and the importance of this sensitivity to unequal power extends to other hierarchical relationships. Not only the master, but also, the tyrant, or any authoritative person (πᾶσ δυναστεία) must comport themselves in this way towards those who are weaker (ἀσθενέστερος). While Meno does not mistreat the παῖς at any point in the *Meno*, his contentiousness towards Socrates raises some questions about his habits in general. We, of course, should not go so far as to conclude Meno is a bad man just because of his pedantic and antagonistic dialogically behavior, but his warning to Socrates about leaving Athens might carry quite ominous implications even beyond its irony.⁴³⁵ Meno is himself someone with political power, as the many allusions to his connections indicate, and so, Meno is the very sort of person who could be responsible for Socrates' arrest in his warning.⁴³⁶ Meno may be weaker than Socrates dialogically and less experienced as an inquirer about *arete*, but within the *polis* more broadly, Meno is more powerful. Consequently, his contentious dialogical comportment reflects poorly on him because his greater (political) authority demands a more diligent concern for his habits and actions towards those who are weaker (e.g., Socrates). Even though Meno has more political power, we can easily understand why he might overlook his superiority to Socrates since Socrates has his own special power and is an equally free man. However, the παῖς is clearly subordinate to both Meno and Socrates. For that reason, he serves as a perfect interlocutor for Socrates' exhibition. On the one hand, we recognize the παῖς as the site of contradiction in the *polis* (an adult with no share of the human good, like a child, because of the *polis*), but, on the other hand, we also see the subordination of the παῖς as a decisive element in Socrates' exhibition. In this latter sense, we can

⁴³⁴ Although this account does not arrive at the same troubling conclusion as Aristotle, we could hardly consider it an emancipatory one either. At best, the Athenian recognizes the obligation of a master to the slave with beneficial consequences for the slave. Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253b1-1280a34. See Millett's "Aristotle and Slavery in Athens" for an overview and analysis of Aristotle's argument.

⁴³⁵ Ironic because Socrates was not even safe in Athens either.

⁴³⁶ Meno has connections with the ruling class in Thessaly (Aristippus and the Aleudai), in the Achaemenid Empire (Artaxerxes II), and in Athens (Anytus). Plato, *Meno*, 70b, 78d, 90a-b.

understand Socrates' engagement with the παῖς as a model for the comportment between senior and subordinate.

The παῖς is obviously weaker than Meno and Socrates, and we have also acknowledged Meno's greater political power over Socrates. However, we can also infer from Socrates' story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) that there must be some respect in which Meno is inferior to Socrates. On what basis do we make that inference? We previously noted that elders customarily tells stories to youths, and we can find an example of this practice in the *Protagoras*. In the *Protagoras*, Protagoras himself asks Socrates, "But would you rather that I exhibit (ἐπιδείξω) by telling you a story (μῦθον λέγων), as an older man to a younger audience, or by developing an argument (λόγῳ διεξιελθῶν)?"⁴³⁷ Retrospectively, we can see that Socrates did not presume Meno's "immaturity," although we found some hints in Socrates' first speech in Chapter I. We could describe the parts of the text which we analyzed in Chapter I as Meno's attempts to "develop an argument" about *arete*. When Socrates and Meno engaged the problem of *arete* in this way, Meno found himself led into an ἀπορία about *arete*, which compelled him to compare Socrates to the torpedo fish. Meno previously saw no ἀπορία about *arete*, but after meeting Socrates, Meno found himself paralyzed with only Socrates to blame. This unflattering image was the first in a series of contentious gestures, which culminated with Meno's contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος). If we compare our insight from the *Laws* about the obligation of an authority to the subordinate, we can see yet another dimension of the introduction of the παῖς. When we analyzed Meno's image of Socrates as a torpedo fish, we drew out several implications of the image. One of the implications was that Socrates had done some harm to Meno. Meno knew (or at least *thought* he knew) what *arete* was, but now, he is unable to speak about it after meeting Socrates. We assumed that the "harm" Socrates had done to Meno was paralyzing his ability to speak about *arete*. Socrates doubted Meno's comparison, but he was not entirely forthcoming about the reasons for his doubt.⁴³⁸ In light of our analysis of the *Laws* and the *Protagoras*, we can now interpret another dimension of Socrates' doubt about the image. Socrates would not harm Meno for the

⁴³⁷ Plato, *Protagoras*, 320c. To find a cue which would signal the move from *logos* to *mythos*, Tarrant turns to *Protagoras* as well. Despite writing about a separate matter from our investigation, his conclusion is apropos: "The myth has supplied a framework within which excellence might be considered; the myth is used for such purposes by those with a fatherly point to make." Tarrant, "Literal and Deeper Meanings in Platonic Myths," 53. The deployment of myth always takes place against the backdrop of a vertical (that is, unequal) social dynamic.

⁴³⁸ Socrates claimed that he is only like the torpedo fish if the torpedo fish is itself paralyzed while also paralyzing others.

same reason that a superior would harm his or her subordinate. If Socrates harmed Meno, he would make both himself and Meno worse off. Despite the recent wisdom of Thessaly, Socrates is the wiser one when it comes to inquiring into *arete*. As the more authoritative figure, Socrates has no reason to harm Meno, and so a part of Socrates' exhibition will likely show Meno that Socrates does not harm his interlocutors. Our reading of Socrates' story and reasoning about recollection (*ἀνάμνησις*) emphasized its remedial role in persuading Meno away from his contentious dialogical comportment. The exhibition does show Meno *something* but perhaps not that learning is recollection. Let us consider now some of Socrates' comments about the exhibition, since these moments give us the best opportunity to hear Socrates talk about the exhibition with Meno openly.

Socrates begins the exhibition with the *παῖς* by (mis)leading him into a faulty conclusion. First, he leads the *παῖς* through a series of questions concerning the area of a two-by-two square, and then he asks the *παῖς* if such a figure exists which has all equal sides (like the two-by-two square) and which also has an area of eight. When the *παῖς* affirms that such a figure exists and concludes that it would have sides twice as long as the original one (since the new figure has an area twice as large as the original), Socrates pauses their discussion to make a comment to Meno. He asks, "Do you see, Meno, that I am not teaching him anything, but all that I do is ask questions? And now he supposes that he knows what sort of line it is from which the eight-foot area will come to be."⁴³⁹ Socrates claims that merely asking questions does not "teach" the *παῖς* anything, and something else is clearly needed since Socrates has led the *παῖς* to the wrong answer without him realizing. However, as Socrates insinuates here (and subsequently states explicitly), the *παῖς* is in a peculiar state. He asserted his answer confidently, thinking himself to be one who knows, and yet, as both Socrates and Meno can see, he does not know what he *thinks* he knows. Socrates then resumes the exhibition, showing the *παῖς* that he was mistaken about his initial conclusion.⁴⁴⁰ They consider the area of a three-by-three figure (since the length of its sides are halfway between those of a two-by-two figure and those of a four-by-four figure), and when this solution also does not find the square with an area of eight, the *παῖς* exclaims that he does not know which side-length would produce a square with an area of eight. At this point, Socrates turns again to Meno, asking:

⁴³⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 82e.

⁴⁴⁰ Socrates seems to draw the figures on the ground about which he asks the *παῖς*. Appendix B in Anastaplo and Berns' translation is a helpful supplement. See Anastaplo and Berns, "Appendix B: Geometrical Diagrams," 79-85.

Are you considering (ἐννοεῖς) again, Meno, how far it is that he has now gone in his recollecting (ἀναμνησκεισθαι)? That, at first, he did not know what the line of the eight-foot area is, just as now he does not yet know, but, however that may be, then he thought he knew it, and boldly (θαρραλέως) answered as one who knows (ὡς εἰδώς), and he was not being led into ἀπορεῖν. But now, at this time, he is being led into ἀπορεῖν already, and just as he does not know (ὥσπερ οὐκ οἶδεν), he does not think that he knows.

You speak the truth.

Then is he not better off (βέλτιον) now, about the thing which he did not know?

This too seems to me so.

Then by making him ἀπορεῖν and paralyzing him, just like the torpedo-fish, have we in any way harmed him (ἐβλάψαμεν)?

It does not seem so to me.

Then, at any rate, we have done something useful for the work at hand, as is fitting for discovering how things are. For now he, not knowing (οὐκ εἰδώς), can even carry on the search (ζητήσκειν) gladly (ἡδέως), whereas then he could easily (ῥαδίως) think that both before many people and many times (πρὸς πολλοὺς καὶ πολλάκις) he could speak well (εὖ λέγειν) about the double area, how it required having the line that was double in length.

It seems likely.

Well, do you think that before he would have tried to seek for (ζητεῖν) or to learn (μανθάνειν) that which he thought he knew while he did not know—before he fell down into ἀπορίαν and want and came to believe that he did not know, and longed to know?

It does not seem so to me, Socrates.

Did he benefit (ὠνήτο), then, from being paralyzed (ναρκήσας)?

It seems so to me.⁴⁴¹

In Socrates' comments about the exhibition, we find Socrates repeat many phrases and confrontations from prior parts of the dialogue, however, when Socrates repeats them, their repetition subverts their prior contentious and antagonistic valence. Socrates points out how the παῖς answered his questions boldly like someone who knows despite not knowing, which leads us to reflect back on Meno's own manner of answering and Gorgias' instruction which cultivated this habit in him. And yet, the παῖς seems better off (βέλτιον) after Socrates led him into ἀπορία. Socrates has shown Meno a παῖς with misplaced self-confidence (like Meno), who has been paralyzed, and yet the παῖς suffered no harm from the ἀπορία. According to Socrates, one benefit

⁴⁴¹ Plato, *Meno*, 84a-84c. Translation modified.

of this ἀπορία is its power to transform the παῖς from someone who answers boldly like a knower (ὡς εἰδώς) to someone who searches gladly (ζητήσειεν ἠδέως), but who does not know. Not knowing the answer to Socrates' geometrical problem has not prevented further inquiry, as Meno's contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) argued that it would, but the admission of the παῖς that he has fallen into ἀπορία has instead opened up the very possibility for inquiry at all. Was this possibility for inquiry opened by the revelation that "learning is really recollection (ἀνάμνησις)"? It does not appear that way. Not only did Socrates' exhibition do little to "show" how the παῖς recollected rather than learnt (or simply responded yes or no to Socrates' heavy-handed questions), but it does not even matter how either we or Meno perceive the παῖς activity (i.e., as learning or recollecting).⁴⁴² Socrates concludes (and Meno agrees) that the παῖς is better off, unharmed, and more fit to carry on his search. None of these conclusions depend upon an "exhibition" of "learning" as recollection (ἀνάμνησις), and they do not rely on such an exhibition because, as our analysis presumed, the exhibition did not serve that purpose. Socrates' provocative claim that "learning is really recollection (ἀνάμνησις)" enticed Meno to continue to participate in the dialogue.

From our prior analysis of the identity of the παῖς, we are aware of the polyvalent significance of the παῖς as an individual whom the *polis* has placed outside of the pursuit of the human good like a child. The exclusion is purely conventional, but it is extremely powerful nonetheless. Consequently, when Socrates leads the παῖς into ἀπορία, we can see that even the παῖς (that is, an adult made into a child in relation to the pursuit of the human good) was made better. Socrates' dialogical comportment towards the παῖς is more sensitive to the universal, inclusive, and relational measures of *arete*, and we may arrive at this conclusion through the recognition that Socrates has done "good" for the παῖς by leading him into ἀπορία (i.e., Socrates made him better). If Socrates' exhibition with the παῖς exhibits something, it is less likely that the ability of the παῖς to participate in geometrical inquiry implies the existence of a prenatal knowledge, and it is more likely that Socrates' improvement of the παῖς exhibits, on the one hand, the superiority of Socrates' dialogical comportment over Meno's, and, on the other hand, that even the weakest and most vulnerable member of the *polis* still have a share in inquiry. In this case, the

⁴⁴² Ebert goes so far as to call anamnesis "farfetched and implausible" as an explanation of the activity of the παῖς in the geometrical examination. See Ebert, "Plato's Theory of Recollection Reconsidered: An Interpretation of Meno 80a-86c," 166.

inquiry concerns geometry, but we can easily imagine how the *παῖς* would likely be eager to participate in an inquiry that concerns *arete* and the human good in the *polis*. Before we move on to the final section of our analysis in Chapter II, we should consider the significance of the geometrical example itself. Although this mathematical example may not “demonstrate” the existence of prenatal knowledge, Socrates’ use of a geometrical example mirrors his prior use of geometrical examples during his interrogation of Meno’s second attempt to say what *arete* is in Chapter I.⁴⁴³ Because we found significance in Socrates’ prior use of geometrical examples, we should also examine this one to see if it might also tell us something about *arete* as well.

What is the geometrical problem through which Socrates leads the *παῖς* in the exhibition? Socrates shows the *παῖς* a two-by-two square, and he counts that the “area” (*χωρίον*) is four.⁴⁴⁴ Given this precedent, Socrates asks what the length of the sides of a square would be whose area is twice as large (that is, a square with an area of eight)? We, who have at least a rudimentary understanding of geometry, can anticipate the problem that Socrates has created through his framing.⁴⁴⁵ It might *seem* that the sides of such a square should be twice as long, just as the area is twice as large, but a four-by-four square does not have an area of eight (as the *παῖς* realizes at 83b). The side lengths, which would be necessary to create squares with areas of four and eight respectively, are incommensurable (*ἄσύμμετρα*).⁴⁴⁶ To those without experience, it is easy to fail to recognize the complexity underlying this problem, whereas those who have experience with it or who have been educated about it would likely not fail to recognize the problem even if they do not know how to solve it.⁴⁴⁷ This situation sounds very similar to what we have seen in Meno’s and Socrates’ respective orientation to the problem of *arete*. Just as the *παῖς* thought there was no *ἀπορία* about finding the length of the sides of a square whose area is eight after seeing the length of the sides of a square whose area is four, so too did Meno think that there was no *ἀπορία* about

⁴⁴³ Socrates gives two accounts of shape (*σχῆμα*) and one of color (*χρῶμα*) during this “digression” from their search for *arete*. Plato, *Meno*, 75b-76d.

⁴⁴⁴ Plato, *Meno*, 82d.

⁴⁴⁵ Even if Socrates has primed the *παῖς* to make a mistake about the side lengths of a square with an area of eight, there is still a genuine geometrical problem. The problem is not artificial even if Socrates does not do the *παῖς* any favors with his framing.

⁴⁴⁶ Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, 100.

⁴⁴⁷ We can find an ancient, technical treatment of this question in Euclid. See especially, Euclid, *Elements*, X. This chapter covers “incommensurable magnitudes” specifically. Klein thinks that Socrates alludes subtly to this issue when Socrates uses the word “*πηλίκος*,” e.g., 82d, 85a. “In its ‘technical’ meaning, the work *pêlikos* refers mostly to continuous magnitudes (not to discrete units the assemblage of which form a ‘number’ and which we ‘count’ whenever we assign a ‘number’ to something) and implies, therefore, possible ‘incommensurability.’” Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, 100.

the measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good after seeing the *polis*' measure of *arete* (in Thessaly or abroad). By contrast, we have remarked upon Socrates' circumspection in relation to inquiry into *arete*, and we considered his experience with it to be a likely explanation. This parallel between *arete* and the geometrical problem highlights an obvious way in which someone might "know" and "not know" about something. The *παῖς* knows nothing at all about the geometrical problem (like Meno seems to know nothing at all about the *problem* of *arete*), whereas Socrates knows both the problem and the solution to the geometrical problem. However, in the case of *arete*, Socrates may very well know the problem without knowing the solution, and further, there may not even be a "solution" to this problem.

We have seen one way that the geometrical problem provides us an illustration of various degrees of experience or proficiency in the navigation of an ἀπορία. But how does Socrates help the *παῖς*, and might this example give us additional insight for our inquiry into *arete*? Socrates implores the *παῖς* to try to answer. "But from what sort of line [would you create a square with an area of eight]? Try (πειρῶ) to tell us precisely: and if you don't want to count (ἀριθμεῖν), point out (δείξον) to us rather, from what sort of line."⁴⁴⁸ Socrates hints at the solution to the problem, namely, the "diagonal" (διάμετρον), when he suggests for the *παῖς* to "point out" (δείξειν) the line rather than "count" (ἀριθμεῖν) it. Despite Socrates' subtle hint, he does eventually tell the *παῖς* the answer to this geometrical problem: the diagonal (διάμετρον).⁴⁴⁹ In order to understand this subtle suggestion, we should be aware of Euclid's account of commensurability. Euclid calls commensurate lines "rational" (ῥηταί), that is, expressible, whereas he calls incommensurate lines "irrational" (ἄλογοι), that is, that for which there is no account.⁴⁵⁰ The diagonal (διάμετρον) line of a two-by-two square is incommensurable (ἄσύμμετρα) with the length of a two-unit line. It cannot be expressed (ἄλογον) numerically—a measure (μέτρον) is lacking.⁴⁵¹ *Eppur si muove*. Just because the lines of a two-by-two square are incommensurable (ἄσύμμετρα) with the diagonal (διάμετρον) does not mean that the lines of a square with an area of eight do not exist. Or, in terms of our inquiry, just because the *polis*' measure of *arete* does not alone suffice as a measure of a good person does not mean that a measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good does not exist. According to Socrates, the *παῖς* can still "point out" the diagonal (διάμετρον), even if he cannot

⁴⁴⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 84a. Translation modified.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 85b. "The sophists (σοφισταί) call this line the diagonal (διάμετρον)...."

⁴⁵⁰ Euclid, *Elements*, X, definition 3.

⁴⁵¹ Because Greek mathematics only used whole numbers.

give an account of it (either “what it is” or how it resolves the problem of the commensurability of the lines), and so we might infer that the measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good can be pointed out even without knowing what it is or how it comes to be. *Arete* too is like the “irrational diagonal” (ἄλογον διάμετρον). And yet, despite the similarity that appears to us through a comparison of *arete* to the problem of incommensurable lines in geometry, the ἀπορία about *arete* is also not at all like the ἀπορία about the incommensurability of lines of a square with an area of four and eight respectively.

In order to recognize the problem of incommensurability between the problem of *arete* and this geometrical problem, let us consider a geometrical example. A square is a regular quadrilateral. It is “regular” because all of its sides and angles are equal, and it is a “quadrilateral” because it has four of them. Whenever we create an image to represent a polygon with these features, the representation is necessarily a regular quadrilateral (i.e., a square). This definition is simple, exclusive, and necessary—the kind of definition of which Socrates would likely approve, if we take his prior remark seriously.⁴⁵² Nevertheless, the representation is superfluous. We could reason through a geometrical problem adequately with definitions alone. The inclusion of diagrams in geometrical reasoning serves a heuristic purpose not an existential one. Can we thus conclude similarly about *arete*? Is any individual’s exhibition of *arete* similarly superfluous so long as the measure suffices? Of course not. Even though the geometrical problem of commensurability offered us a useful illustration of several dimensions of the problem of *arete*, geometry as an illustration of the problem of *arete* points towards another ἀπορία about *arete*. While the perfection of geometrical accounts provides an enticing paradigm for thinking about measures in other domains, *arete* can never reach this measure of perfection. Even though Socrates has insisted upon the priority of “knowing what *arete* is,” “knowing what *arete* is” as “being able to account for it” is not the point of inquiry into *arete*. As we concluded from our analysis of Meno’s and Socrates’ respective dialogical compartments, *how* one engages dialogically (one’s dialogical compartment) takes priority over *what* one says. The concern for *arete* does not arise from a “love of knowledge,” but rather, a concern for *arete* arises from the urgency of human existence.⁴⁵³ A measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good only matters insofar as humans want to be good people during their

⁴⁵² Socrates claimed that his previous accounts of shape were better than his final account of color in the Gorgian style. Plato *Meno*, 76e.

⁴⁵³ That is, simply living one’s life. We will consider this issue again later when we examine technical know-how (τέχνη).

lives. It is not an abstract concern. Consequently, a “perfect” account of the measure of *arete a la* the definition of a square is utterly worthless if no human ever lives according to such a measure. In contrast to geometry, the “representation” is necessary. With this distinction in mind, let us continue with our analysis.

Socrates implored the *παῖς* to “try” (*πείρειν*) to point out the line when he was struggling to answer the geometrical problem. We noticed Socrates’ use of this imperative also when he wanted Meno to practice answering about *arete*.⁴⁵⁴ Why does Socrates repeatedly insist that his interlocutors “try” to answer his questions? In Klein’s analysis of the significance of the *παῖς*’ answers, which he reduces to three types (yes, no, or something counted), Klein considers the extent to which Socrates has manipulated the *παῖς*, that is, whether it is limited to his words or also his mind as well.⁴⁵⁵ As we noted previously, Socrates asked a question which required experience and/or education to navigate well, so it was unlikely that the *παῖς* would recognize the problem on his own. We could reasonably assume that the *παῖς* would not even have found the diagonal (*διάμετρον*) without Socrates pointing it out to him, and so it also seems unlikely that “trying” requires one to answer correctly. What then does Socrates want when he implores his interlocutor to try? Klein’s differentiation of two ways of arriving at an answer may offer us a useful way to think about Socrates’ insistence on trying. One way of answering does not concern itself with the subject of the question alone. This way instead focuses on the “extracurricular” aspects, such as, what others have said, one’s contempt or regard for the questioner, the impression of the audience, etc. Meno seems to answer in this way. The other way of answering does the opposite and tries to address the question by finding what is “necessary” in it. With respect to this way of answering, Klein asks:

But how can we possibly find the necessity inherent in, or connected with, a given subject matter except through and in our thinking (*dianoesthai*) about it? The choice we have, so far as our answering is concerned, is thus the choice of submitting or of not submitting ourselves to the necessity revealed by our thinking. It is the only necessity that it is in our power to submit or not to submit to.⁴⁵⁶

For Klein, these two ways describe two ways of arriving at an opinion. When he speaks of “finding the necessity in a subject matter,” this process does nothing to guarantee that a person will conclude

⁴⁵⁴ “Try (*πειρῶ*) to say it, so that you can get some practice (*μελέτη*) for the answer about *arete*.” Plato, *Meno*, 75a.

⁴⁵⁵ Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, 103.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

something true about the subject. However, it does reveal something true about the person *thinking* through the subject like a Rorschach test for thinkerly disposition rather than psychological state. So which approach does the $\pi\alpha\tilde{\iota}\zeta$ use? Naturally, a bit of both. However, the humble position of the $\pi\alpha\tilde{\iota}\zeta$ together with his submission to social pressures is a part of what makes the exhibition compelling. For example, the $\pi\alpha\tilde{\iota}\zeta$, arrogantly yet mistakenly, claims that “it is clear, Socrates, that the line [of a square whose area is eight] is two times as large [as the line of a square whose area is four].”⁴⁵⁷ We pointed out previously that Socrates primed the $\pi\alpha\tilde{\iota}\zeta$ to make this error, and so we might see it as a contextual inevitability even if it is not a necessary conclusion. If the $\pi\alpha\tilde{\iota}\zeta$ had resisted the “extracurricular” forces, then he might have answered otherwise. The stakes are low in this example. A person could live a fine life without even knowing this problem of geometrical commensurability exists at all. However, if this exhibition is representative of a broader human tendency, then it implies a much more precarious situation for *arete* and the human good. For example, we can find some parallels between Socrates’ priming of the $\pi\alpha\tilde{\iota}\zeta$ and the *polis* priming its constituents to be certain kinds of people. If wealthy, beautiful, or powerful people are honored and praised in the *polis*, then it is easy to understand why the constituents of a *polis* might consider wealth, beauty, or power to be measures of the human good. This parallel susceptibility corresponds with the parallels between the $\pi\alpha\tilde{\iota}\zeta$ and Meno as well. On the basis of our prior analysis, we view Meno as someone deeply entrenched in conventional measures of *arete*, and his contentious dialogical comportment highlights just one way that this measure has failed him. We have read Socrates’ story of recollection and exhibition with the $\pi\alpha\tilde{\iota}\zeta$ as a response to this failure. Both the story and the exhibition emphasize the value of another dialogical comportments, namely, being a brave and tireless seeker. In order to comport oneself in this way, we would reasonably expect such a person to “try.” From the exhibition with the $\pi\alpha\tilde{\iota}\zeta$, we conclude once again that resolve for the inquiry is much more important than simply “knowing the answer.” If one “knows the answer” (no matter if the answer is right or wrong), then there is no more reason to continue to inquire. When it comes to *arete*, the consequence of falling into contentment is the potential loss of one’s share of the human good. The only way to avoid this catastrophic loss of one’s human purpose is to comport oneself towards the task of being a good person in the right way.

⁴⁵⁷ Plato, *Meno*, 82e.

Consequently, inquiry into *arete* might never come to an end (hence the necessity of bravery and tirelessness).

Why did the *παῖς* react more positively to Socratic philosophical practice than Meno. After Socrates implored the *παῖς* to try (πειρίειν), the *παῖς* admitted that he did not know.⁴⁵⁸ His submission to the necessity of the subject matter forced him to recognize that he had reached a dead end. His own thinking could not take him any further; however, this very encounter opened the possibility for him to understand that which he did not know. The *παῖς*' effort led him into *ἀπορία* and necessarily so. Even so, the *παῖς* has a quality that differentiates him from Meno in a crucial way. Whereas Meno is “educated,” the *παῖς* is not. Consequently, the *παῖς* has nothing to lose, should he abandon his prior answer. Furthermore, because of our analysis of the identity of the *παῖς*, we can see that the *παῖς* actually has even less to lose when we consider his place within the inquiry as a whole. As a *παῖς*, the *παῖς* has already been denied a share of the human good. A *παῖς* cannot be a good person *as* a *παῖς*. While this vulnerable position within the *polis* places the *παῖς* at greater existential risk, it also gives the *παῖς* a unique advantage in inquiry. The *παῖς* has nothing to hold on to—whether that be his mistaken answer about the geometrical problem or the broader assumptions about *arete* which the other constituents of his *polis* (like Meno) might hold. The *παῖς* does not know the answer to Socrates' question, and he is so far from being able to answer that he does not even know what he does not know. And yet, this thorough-going ignorance places him in a better position to continue with inquiry. On the other hand, Meno also does not know the answer to Socrates' question about *arete*, but he believes that he does know the answer, even if he cannot say currently. This assumption that he knows what *arete* is simultaneously protects his assumptions *and* prevents him from inquiry into *arete* as an urgent human problem. Meno enjoys many goods of the *polis*, and so he has a vested interest in avoiding serious inquiry which could cause him to lose these goods. For Meno to submit to the inquiry into *arete* like the *παῖς* submits to the geometrical problem would require bravery, tirelessness, and a willingness to work—the very qualities which Socrates' claims his story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) would instill. Ultimately, it is a matter of trust, as Socrates claims, but a trust which grows out of a submission to *ἀπορία* about *arete*. In this sense, the exhibition with the *παῖς* augments the prior story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις).

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 83e-84a.

Commentary on Recollection (ἀνάμνησις) (85c-86c)

Just as we observed during our analysis of the final section in Chapter I, Socrates once again begins to lead the conversation more firmly when he resumes speaking with Meno. In fact, thirteen of Meno's fifteen responses in this section are nothing more than some form of an affirmative answer. Only Meno's last two "complimentary" responses stand out because of his curious repetition of the phrase "you seem to me to speak well" (δοκεῖς μοι εὖ λέγειν), which we will consider when they appear later.⁴⁵⁹ In contrast to Meno's steadfast agreement, Socrates leads Meno through a dubious line of reasoning which synthesizes the story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) with the exhibition with the παῖς. Based on Socrates' reasoning alone, it would be difficult to justify Meno's willingness to agree with Socrates so easily; however, because of our prior contextual analysis, we have another framework for understanding Meno's submissive agreement throughout this section. While Socrates has surely not persuaded Meno so quickly, we might read Meno's passivity as a sign of transition away from his contentious dialogical comportment. We will continue to track this transformation throughout our analysis. For now, let us examine Socrates' reasoning.

Socrates begins by asking, "What does it seem to you, Meno? Is there any opinion (δόξαν) which he gave in his answers that was not his own?"⁴⁶⁰ We already considered the conditions for an opinion to be "one's own" in the prior section, and how it is not really a matter of answering "correctly." Nevertheless, the παῖς did not always answer with his own opinion in the sense of submission to the necessity of the subject matter either. Thus, when Meno unflinchingly answers this question affirmatively, his response suggests his failure to heed the question before responding to it. We might also remember that the παῖς answered confidently as if he knew before admitting that he could not answer, and insofar as Meno was trained to answer in this way, he might consider this type of response as a sufficient condition for "giving one's own opinion." After all, we have found many similarities between Socrates' exhibition with the παῖς and Socrates' prior discussion with Meno. However, Meno's acceptance of this condition would be strange as well, since Meno did not claim to *opine* about *arete* but to know it. Might there also be a hint of irony in Meno's agreement with Socrates? To our skepticism about Meno's claim that he did know *arete*, we might

⁴⁵⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 86b-c.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 85b.

also add a further suspicion about whether Meno has even considered the conditions for knowing anything at all. And what about us? Do we have a strong sense of the distinction between opinion and knowledge in this dialogue? We are currently halfway through the *Meno*, and only now has this distinction become a question for us despite analyzing various senses in which Socrates and Meno respectively “know” (or do not “know”) about *arete*. We should vigilantly track Socrates’ reasoning about knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and opinion (δόξα) with Meno here because it may provide us further insight into the meaning of “knowing about *arete*” but also because the distinction will reappear in an important way again during our analysis in Chapter V.

Socrates begins to review the exhibition quite slowly and conversationally. As Meno agreed, the παῖς gave his own opinions, and yet, the παῖς “did not know (οὐκ ᾔδει),” as Socrates points out.⁴⁶¹ Meno agrees with this claim as well, although we should wonder with what he agrees. What exactly did the παῖς “not know”? Did he not know geometry in general, or did he not know the answer to Socrates’ specific geometrical problem? Or, perhaps, the παῖς “did not know” in a broader sense, that is, the παῖς is an ignoramus. While it may not ultimately matter which sense Socrates means, the vagueness of this question draws our attention to the many layers of “knowing” something. This observation is noteworthy because we have maintained an ambivalent attitude towards Socrates’ own claim not to know about *arete*. On the one hand, we have noticed Socrates’ proficiency in navigating the discourse, from which we inferred his experience with inquiry into *arete*. Socrates does not relate to inquiry into *arete* in the same way that the παῖς related to his inquiry into the problem of incommensurable squares or like how Meno has navigated the inquiry into *arete*. On the other hand, our analysis of *arete* has led us to focus on various aspects of the ἀπορία about *arete*. We find many measures of *arete* in the *polis*, but these measures create obstacles to the search for an *arete* that would be sufficient for the human good. We might assume that knowing this latter measure would be the condition for “knowing about *arete*,” and yet, in our prior analysis of dialogical comportment, we also concluded that one’s orientation towards the inquiry takes priority over whatever insights one might have acquired. We understood Socrates’ story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) and his exhibition with the παῖς as attempts to persuade Meno to comport himself differently rather than as a new insight into the nature of human knowledge. In the present context, this conclusion sounds somewhat strange.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 85c.

Socrates does not point out that the *παῖς* comported himself towards the problem well but that he had “true opinions” in him despite “not knowing.” He says, “Then in someone who does not know (τῷ οὐκ εἰδότι) about that which he does not know (περὶ ὧν ἂν μὴ εἰδῆ), there are true opinions (ἀληθεῖς δόξαι) about those things which he does not know (περὶ τούτων ὧν οὐκ οἶδε)?”⁴⁶² Socrates’ repetition of the prepositional phrase “about that which he does not know” (“περὶ ὧν ἂν μὴ εἰδῆ”) draws our attention to the similarity between the condition of the *παῖς* and Meno’s own condition.⁴⁶³ The repetition makes the ignorance of the *παῖς* painfully clear.⁴⁶⁴ To the extent that Meno acknowledges the ignorance of the *παῖς* about “what he does not know,” we might expect Meno simultaneously to call into question the status of what he believes he knows as well. For, just as the *παῖς* exhibited, one can “unknowingly” speak true opinions.⁴⁶⁵ And yet, Meno shows no signs of self-awareness about his similarity to the *παῖς*. Instead, he simply agrees, and so Socrates continues his account of the transition from “unknowing” true opinion to knowledge.

Because these opinions have been “stirred up in him like a dream” (“ὥσπερ ὄναρ ἄρτι ἀνακεκίνηται”), Socrates claims that repeated questioning “many times and in different ways” (“πολλάκις τὰ αὐτὰ ταῦτα καὶ πολλαχῆ”) would lead the *παῖς* to “understand (ἐπιστήσεται) them no less precisely (ἀκριβῶς) than anyone else.”⁴⁶⁶ Perhaps this account does offer a plausible explanation of the repetitive process through which certain opinions become knowledge; however, the reason for the transformation, namely, that the true opinions have been stirred up in the *παῖς* like a dream, implies odd consequences for the status of these opinions—opinions which, allegedly, become knowledge. In what way are true opinions like dreams? Does this simile appear in other Platonic dialogues, and if so, how does it function in them? And ultimately, what is the implication about the condition of the *παῖς* (his relationship to “knowledge”) such that this image suitably illustrates the process of coming to know? The phrase “like a dream” (“ὥσπερ ὄναρ”) appears two other times in the Platonic corpus: in the *Symposium* and *Parmenides*.⁴⁶⁷ Let us

⁴⁶² Plato, *Meno*, 85c.

⁴⁶³ Cf. Ebert, “The Theory of Recollection in Plato’s *Meno*: Against a Myth of Platonic Scholarship,” 193.

⁴⁶⁴ “...[the *παῖς*] is able to multiply and to calculate and to compare the results of his calculations to one another. But this is a far cry from the claim that the specific proposition about the square’s diagonal was somehow in him.” Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ See later, Plato, *Meno*, 99c-d.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 85c. The referent of “them” is ambiguous. It could be either “the opinions” or “the questions.”

⁴⁶⁷ This is not to say that other comparisons to dreams are not made in other Platonic texts. The purview of this claim is limited to the precise phrase “like a dream” (ὥσπερ ὄναρ). The phrase also appears earlier in a fragment from the *Elegies of Theognis* in a very similar sense. See *Elegy and Iambus*, CURFRAG.tlg-0255.5.

consider these other instances so that we may better understand the sense of this phrase in the *Meno*, beginning first with the *Symposium*.

Upon arriving to Agathon's house, Socrates spends some time outside standing motionless before joining Aristodemus, with whom he travelled to Agathon's house, and the others inside. When he enters the room, Agathon invites Socrates to lie beside him, teasing him about his strange behavior and coyly suggesting that he wants to "catch" some of Socrates' wisdom (σοφία). Socrates rebuts the comment playfully, and he further claims that it is not he who has wisdom but Agathon. Concerning the status of their respective wisdom, Socrates claims, "My own may turn out to be a paltry (φαύλη) sort of wisdom, or disputable (ἀμφισβητήσιμος) like a dream (ὅσπερ ὄναρ οὖσα); but your own is brilliant (λαμπρά) and capable of much development (πολλὴν ἐπίδοσιν ἔχουσα)..."⁴⁶⁸ We learn Socrates' judgment about his own wisdom from his comparison of it to a dream *and* to his judgment about Agathon's wisdom. He calls Agathon's wisdom brilliant, λαμπρά, which is to say that it is extraordinary, magnificent, or otherwise illustrious. By contrast, we hear Socrates call his wisdom paltry (φαύλη) as something common, ordinary, and insignificant. He expands upon this distinction when he further compares his paltry (φαύλη) wisdom to the disputable or dubious (ἀμφισβητήσιμος) quality of a dream. In what sense is a dream "disputable" (ἀμφισβητήσιμος)? A dream is disputable insofar as a dream presents us with an "image based on the movement of sense impressions" while sleeping.⁴⁶⁹ We might describe a dream as an appearance of appearances (that which "appears" to the senses). Consequently, Socrates seems to suggest that his paltry (φαύλη) wisdom and a dream (ὄναρ) share this common feature: they are both disputable or dubious (ἀμφισβητήσιμος) as an appearance of appearances. A dream is disputable in relation to what we experience while awake, but in relation to what is Socrates' "paltry" (φαύλη) wisdom disputable? We can discern two possibilities. Socrates' "paltry" (φαύλη) wisdom is disputable either in relation to Agathon's brilliant (λαμπρά) wisdom (that is, paltry by comparison to the brilliance of Agathon's wisdom) *or* in relation to wisdom "as a whole" (paltry by comparison to all the things about which one might be wise). Socrates' comparison may imply that Agathon's wisdom is brilliant (λαμπρά) because of its proximity to the latter (everything about which someone can be wise), and yet, the ambivalence of Socrates' comparison suspends the possibility of a simple identity between Agathon's brilliant (λαμπρά)

⁴⁶⁸ Plato, *Symposium*, 175e. Translation modified.

⁴⁶⁹ Aristotle, *On Dreams*, 462 a30.

wisdom and the totality of human wisdom. We sense this tension manifest through the peculiarity of Socrates' judgment. After all, we suspect that even if Socrates correctly judges his own wisdom to be paltry (φάυλη), Agathon surely cannot be *that* much better off than Socrates. How can we address this suspicion?

At this point in our investigation, we readily recognize Socrates' tendency to speak subversively and how this tendency depends upon the play of words within their context. Thus, we must similarly analyze Socrates' playful speech with these dimensions in mind. As we noted initially, Socrates entered the scene after standing motionlessly outside on the neighbor's porch. While this behavior may seem bizarre and would likely not be responsible for any wisdom by itself, Agathon does mention it as the source of Socrates' wisdom which he would like "to catch." Aristodemus explains that this behavior is something of "a habit (ἔθος)" for him.⁴⁷⁰ It is ordinary or common for Socrates to engage in this behavior, namely, to find something so extraordinary that it paralyzes him. And so, in Socrates' very behavior, we find an indication of the reciprocal relationship between the paltry/ordinary (φάυλη) and the brilliant/extraordinary (λαμπρά). We might describe this relationship in another way: it is common for Socrates to behave uncommonly, and, seemingly, he finds something extraordinary in ordinary life. The combination of this behavior with his suspicious distinction in wisdom implies a more complicated relationship between the brilliant (λαμπρά) and the paltry (φάυλη) than Socrates' comparison superficially implies. What is "brilliant" (λαμπρά) about Agathon's wisdom is not that it approaches the full breadth and depth of human wisdom. Rather, Agathon's wisdom is "brilliant" (λαμπρά) because of its extraordinary appearance in the ordinary. In what sense? On the one hand, the man named "Agathon" was a famous Athenian playwright, whose victory at the Athenian festival was the reason for their celebration. One reason to praise a writer is for his or her ability "to show" profundity and complexity in ordinary situations. But, on the other hand, "Agathon" can also simply mean "good." And in this sense, we can hear Socrates make a profoundly subversive claim, one which resonates with our inquiry in the *Meno*. The "good one," or more syntactically, being a good person, is the most ordinary goal of a human life, and yet, the pursuit of this aim is extraordinarily difficult. Its remarkable difficulty is just one reason why we assumed that being a brave and tireless seeker was a crucial condition in Socrates' story (μῦθος) of recollection

⁴⁷⁰ Plato, *Symposium*, 175b.

(ἀνάμνησις). We can read Socrates' praise of Agathon's wisdom as a play on his name, a pun which partially implies the difficulty that we encounter in our investigation of the *Meno*.

The polyvalent play on Agathon's name highlights the subversive ambivalence upon which Socrates' comparison of his wisdom to Agathon's wisdom depends.⁴⁷¹ When we recognize the reciprocity of the brilliant (λαμπρά) and the paltry (φάυλη), we can account for our suspicion towards Socrates' judgment about their respective wisdoms and for his bizarre behavior prior to entering the room. While Socrates may indeed have a paltry (φάυλη) wisdom (about *arete*) in relation to the good man (ἀγαθός), there is nothing "paltry" (φάυλη) about Socrates' knack for finding the brilliant/extraordinary (λαμπρά) in Agathon (the playwright or the good man) or any other ordinary (φάυλη) encounter (e.g., star-gazing or speaking with his fellow citizens in Athens). Now that we have developed an analysis of the oddity in Socrates' judgment of his and Agathon's respective wisdoms, let us consider his comparison to a dream, which was the reason that we turned to the *Symposium* in the first place. Socrates called his wisdom "paltry" (φάυλη) in comparison to Agathon's wisdom, but he also called it disputable (ἀμφισβητήσιμος) like a dream (ὥσπερ ὄναρ οὔσα). In what way is a dream disputable (ἀμφισβητήσιμος), and in what way does Socrates' wisdom share a likeness with that disputable quality of a dream? Insofar as we previously understood a dream as an appearance of appearance, we can further conclude that a dream is disputable in relation to what we experience while being awake. In our analysis of Socrates' and Agathon's respective wisdoms, we understood Socrates' assessment of his wisdom as "paltry" (φάυλη) insofar as it failed to measure up to the wisdom of *arete* and the human good which the good man (ἀγαθόν) possesses. In this sense, we might understand Socrates' wisdom as disputable (ἀμφισβητήσιμος) like a dream (ὥσπερ ὄναρ) because his wisdom of *arete* and the human good is so modest that its proximity to the wisdom of the good man is similar to the proximity of a dream to being awake. While this interpretation is relatively straightforward, it might imply a problematic consequence. If a dream is disputable because of its mere likeness to being awake, and Socrates' wisdom is disputable because of its mere likeness to the wisdom of the good man, then in what

⁴⁷¹ Socrates speaks subversively insofar as, on one level, his speech appears to praise Agathon the Athenian playwright for his "brilliant wisdom," but we can also understand Socrates' assessment of his own paltry wisdom as a judgment of it in relation to the wisdom of the good man. On another level, we might hear Socrates' speech as subversive insofar as his modest assessment of his own wisdom speaks more to the immense difficulty of understanding the measure of a good man (*arete*) than to the poverty of his own condition. If this praise flatters Agathon, then he undermines its force by failing to recognize its limited worth.

way is “being awake” like the wisdom of the good man? We could understand “being awake” to mean something like “knowing *what arete* is,” but this would take us right back to the beginning of the *Meno*. Our primary critique of Meno’s attempt to navigate the discussion about *arete* concerned his orientation to the problem and not just *what* he says (although what he says is often problematic as well). We will suspend this issue for now and come back to it once we return to our analysis of the *Meno*. For now, let us turn to *Parmenides* to see how another comparison to a dream functions so that we might answer our initial questions about the *Meno*.

In the latter portion of *Parmenides*, we find the character Parmenides leading a boy named Aristotle, who is chosen from the group because he is youngest (and so most likely to “give the least trouble” and “to say what he thinks”), through a sort of “laborious game” (“πραγματειώδη παιδιᾶν”).⁴⁷² This “game” requires Parmenides to “hypothesize about the one itself and consider what the consequences must be, if it is one or if it is not one.”⁴⁷³ Parmenides’ reasoning leads him to consider the properties of “the others” (ἄλλα), e.g., largeness, smallness, equality, likeness, or difference, if one (ἓν) is not (that is, if “one” has no share in being). When Parmenides concludes that that to which “the others” relate must be each other (and not to “one”), he proceeds to hypothesize the following:

So they each are other (ἄλλα) than each other as multitudes (πλήθη); for they couldn’t be so as ones (ἓν), if one is not. But each mass (ὄγκος) of them, as it seems, is unlimited (ἄπειρός) in multitude (πλήθει), and if you take what seems to be smallest (σμικρότατον), in an instant, just as in a dream (ὡσπερ ὄναρ), instead of seeming to be one, it appears many, and instead of very small (σμικροτάτου), immense (παμμέγεθες) in relation to the bits chopped from it.⁴⁷⁴

Although Parmenides’ hypothesis ostensibly aims at an ontological conclusion, his description resonates with a pair of definitions found in Euclid’s *Elements*. In definition 1 of Book 7, a unit (μονάς) is “that according to which each existing (thing) (τῶν ὄντων) is said (to be) one (ἓν),” and, in definition 2, a number (ἀριθμός) is defined as “a multitude composed of units” (τὸ ἐκ μονάδων συγκείμενον πλῆθος).⁴⁷⁵ Parmenides’ description of the “others” (ἄλλα) is quite similar to Euclid’s definition of a number (ἀριθμός), calling them a mass (ὄγκος) which is unlimited (ἄπειρός) in

⁴⁷² Plato, *Parmenides*, 137b-c.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 164d.

⁴⁷⁵ Euclid, *Elements*, VII, definitions 1-2.

multitude (πλήθει). Whereas Euclid’s number (ἀριθμὸς) has some definite quantity of units (μονάδες)—units which are one (ἓν)—Parmenides’ “others” differ in so far as they are unlimited (ἄπειρος) in multitude (πλήθει). Parmenides’ “others” are explicitly *not* one at any level of their constitution (whole or parts). Furthermore, if one attempted to separate a mass (ὄγκος) into parts (which Euclid calls “units” (μονάδων)), then one could, theoretically, pick out a “part” which seems “smallest” (σμικρότατον). And yet, Parmenides remains consistent in his reasoning, recognizing that the absence of unity (one (ἓν)) in the “others” (ἄλλα) implies that, even if one were to pick out the smallest (σμικρότατον), the smallest (σμικρότατον) would still not be a unit (μονάδ). Even the smallest (σμικρότατον) would be a mass that is unlimited (ἄπειρος) in multitude (πλήθει) and not one (ἓν). While an interesting line of reasoning on its own, we consider this part of the *Parmenides* because it includes the same simile which we have found in the *Meno* and followed into the *Symposium*. How does the simile operate in the *Parmenides*?

In the first place, we ought to note Parmenides’ incessant, almost excessive, use of “seeming” and “appearance” in his speech. We begin with the observation of this repetition because we previously understood a dream as the appearance of an appearance, that is, the appearance in sleep of what appears to the senses while awake. Similarly, Parmenides describes the separation of the smallest (σμικρότατον) from a mass into an *apparent* unity (i.e., one (ἓν)) like the fleeting appearance of a dream. That is, just as the appearance of being awake in a dream disappears, appearing instead as “the appearance of an appearance” while awake, so too does the smallest’s appearance of unity as the “smallest unit” disappear, conforming with Parmenides’ prior reasoning and appearing immense (παμμέγεθες) rather than as the smallest (σμικρότατον).⁴⁷⁶ The smallest appears to be one like a dream appears to be a wakeful experience. In both cases, being recedes, showing itself instead as the *appearance* of being. The smallest *is* neither one nor the smallest. It only appeared to be. Similarly, dreaming *is* not being awake. It only appeared to be. The terms of the simile are clear, but how does it help us in our comparative analysis?

On the surface, the simile compares two cases in which appearance passes for being. The dream imitates experience by presenting familiar images and sensations to the dreamer, but the dreamer always wakes up (either literally or by becoming aware of the dream as a dream while dreaming). Similarly, the smallest (σμικρότατον) appears as the smallest unit (i.e., a unit (μονάδ)),

⁴⁷⁶ The smallest appears immense in relation to the parts which constitute it. The same reasoning applies ad infinitum.

one (ἓν)). However, the smallest (σμικρότατον) *appears* to be *one*—it does not appear *to be*. One reason that the smallest (σμικρότατον) is not *one* is because one “is” *not*, but the smallest (σμικρότατον), despite being a mass (ὄγκος) that is unlimited (ἄπειρός) in multitude (πλήθει), *is* in relation to the others (ἄλλα) and itself. We might expect the terms of the analogical relationship to line up in the following way: appearance: multitude: dream::being: one: wakefulness. However, as we just determined, a multitude only *appears* as “one,” but it otherwise simply “is” in relation to other multitudes and itself. To order the diadic terms according to our intuition, we would have to ignore the text, but doing so would completely undermine our analysis thus far. Thus, we must approach the problem differently. What else might the simile tell us? Another option is to understand the simile as a sort of “meta” commentary. The ontological “appearance” of the smallest as “one” is *not* what is like a dream, but rather, the errant judgment of the analyst who mistakes the smallest for a unit is like the errant judgment of the dreamer who mistakes the dream for wakefulness. When either individual realizes their error, what previously “was” instantaneously changes into appearance. Being recedes, and appearance appears. The simile does not compare the “what” but rather the “for whom.” This insight adds a twist to the problem which we faced at the end of our analysis of the simile in the *Symposium*. Whereas previously the implication that the content of the good man’s wisdom is brilliant troubled us because it seemed to affirm Meno’s orientation to the question of *arete* (and go against our own analysis), we now find the simile in *Parmenides* emphasizing neither “what” nor “how” but “for whom.” Let us return to the *Meno* and attempt to sort out our analysis.

We have closely considered two of the three instances of the phrase “like a dream” (“ὡσπερ ὄναρ”) in Platonic dialogues. In both cases, the simile functioned comparatively and subversively. In the *Symposium*, Socrates used the phrase as a part of his comparison of his and Agathon’s respective wisdom. When Socrates praises “Agathon” for his brilliant wisdom, his praise vacillates between its ambiguous referents: Agathon the Athenian playwright and the good man (ἀγαθός). While the more straightforward reading of Socrates’ praise errs towards the former referent (Agathon the Athenian playwright), the weight of the simile bears down upon the passage in an interesting way when we consider its meaning for the latter referent (the good man (ἀγαθός)). Socrates’ wisdom is paltry (φάυλη) and disputable (ἀμφοισβητήσιμος) like a dream (ὡσπερ ὄναρ) in comparison to that of the good man (ἀγαθός) because Socrates’ wisdom of *arete* and the human good is dialectical whereas the ideal wisdom of the ideal good man is complete. And yet, we must

understand this gesture of self-abasement (Socrates' lamentation of his paltry wisdom) ironically, since, as we found in our analysis of the diagonal, the measure of *arete* is not like the measure of geometrical figures. Being a good person in the *polis* (not in principle) takes axiological priority over an ideal measure of *arete*, and so a dialectical understanding of *arete* and the human good is exactly what is necessary (even if it is "paltry"). Being a good person involves searching for the measure of a good person, and this searching never ends despite (and perhaps even because of) the proliferation of measures of a good person throughout the *polis*. For that reason, dialogical comportment is important lest one grow complacent or lazy in relation to the search. Our analysis of the simile in the *Parmenides* arrived at a harmonious conclusion. The errant judgment of the analyst who considers the smallest (σμικρότατον) to be one (ἓν) disappears as suddenly as the errant judgment of the dreamer who considers the dream to be wakeful experience. Similarly, an individual's judgment about *arete* (e.g., Meno's attempts to say what *arete* is) disappears suddenly before Socratic philosophical practice. We saw an example of this sudden disappearance at the beginning of this chapter when Meno compared Socrates to the torpedo fish, accusing him of paralyzing him and leading him into ἀπορία. This simile, which emphasizes the likeness of something to a dream (ὥσπερ ὄναρ), seems to gesture towards a very particular facet of what is difficult in inquiry, namely, what is illusory about what humans "know." What one "knows" to be so can disappear suddenly like a dream (ὥσπερ ὄναρ) whether that be Socratic paltry (φαύλη) wisdom or the "oneness" of the smallest (σμικρότατον) in Parmenides' reasoning. What about in the *Meno*?

Let us return again to the *Meno*. Socrates says, "And now those very opinions [i.e., the true opinions (ἀληθεῖς δόξαι)] have just been stirred up in him, like a dream (ὥσπερ ὄναρ). But if someone were to ask him these same questions many times and in different ways (πολλάκις τὰ αὐτὰ ταῦτα καὶ πολλαχῆ), you know that he will finally understand (ἐπιστήσεται) them no less precisely (ἀκριβῶς) than anyone else."⁴⁷⁷ If we continue to follow the thread from the *Symposium* and the *Parmenides*, we can interpret Socrates' claim in the following way. The παῖς "knows" the (true) opinions about geometry like the dreamer "knows" the dream is wakeful experience. Just as the dream is liable to appear as a dream at any moment so too is the παῖς liable to "lose" what he "opines truly" about this geometrical problem. However, with some assistance (repeated

⁴⁷⁷ Plato, *Meno*, 85c.

questioning), the *παῖς* will understand (*ἐπιστήσεται*) the true opinions as precisely as anyone else. This interpretation is undoubtedly fragile. Why does Socrates mention plural “true opinions,” and what other “true opinion” has been stirred up in the *παῖς* besides the diagonal (*διάμετρον*) of the two-by-two square as the measure of the line of a square with an area eight? And how exactly does asking someone questions many times and in different ways (“πολλάκις τὰ αὐτὰ ταῦτα καὶ πολλαχῆ”) transform that person’s “true opinions” into knowledge? Moreover, we should also point out, in an anticipatory way, that a person can have true opinions without knowledge too.⁴⁷⁸ While these questions do create some difficulties for our attempts to navigate this part of the text, we should also keep two points in mind. First, our inquiry concerns *arete*, the human good, and the *polis*. Consequently, we have only a peripheral interest in the process by which true opinions become knowledge—in terms of geometry. We would go to much greater lengths to resolve these issues if Socrates were describing how true opinions about *arete* become knowledge about *arete*. Second, we have presumed throughout this chapter that Socrates speaks in a way that tends to Meno’s particular needs. Perhaps if we wanted to use Socrates’ claim to infer a Platonic epistemology, then we would need to resolve these issues. However, we have read this part of the text as an attempt to persuade Meno to comport himself differently towards the inquiry into *arete*. Given this assumption, it may be helpful if we look forward to the conclusion of Socrates’ commentary so that we can see the destination towards which this current step leads us.

It should come as no surprise to us that Socrates reaches a very similar conclusion about dialogical comportment to the conclusions that we found in the prior two sections of this chapter.⁴⁷⁹ Moreover, Socrates even undermines his preceding reasoning before he remarks:

And with respect to the other things (*ἄλλα*) I would not altogether rely on (*δυσχυρισαίμην*) my argument (*ὑπὲρ τοῦ λόγου*); but that in supposing one ought to seek (*ζητεῖν*) what one does not know (*οἶδεν*) we would be better (*βελτίους*), more able to be brave (*ἀνδρικώτεροι*) and less lazy (*ἥττον ἄργοι*) than if we supposed that which we do not know (*ἐπιστάμεθα*) we are neither capable of discovering (*δυνατὸν εἶναι εὔρεῖν*) nor ought to seek (*δεῖν ζητεῖν*)—on behalf of that I would surely battle (*διαμαχοίμην*), so far as I am able, both in word (*λόγῳ*) and in deed (*ἔργῳ*).⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 98a.

⁴⁷⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 70b, 84a.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 86b-c. Translation modified.

Perhaps we too should not rely too heavily on the details of Socrates' reasoning, focusing instead on the broader aim of the discussion. We developed a somewhat fragile interpretation of the process by which the true opinions of the $\pi\alpha\tilde{\iota}\zeta$ would become knowledge. However, by looking ahead to the conclusion, in which Socrates insists on the value of a certain dialogical comportment in relation to the inquiry into *arete*, namely, be better, braver, and less lazy, we can take solace in our uncertainty about some of the details in our interpretation. Even so, we can find a telling parallel between the $\pi\alpha\tilde{\iota}\zeta$ and Meno through their respective possession of fleetingly true opinions, which they "know" like the dreamer "knows" the dream is wakeful experience. In other words, neither the $\pi\alpha\tilde{\iota}\zeta$ nor Meno "knows" what they think they know—even if at times they do happen to say something true. The $\pi\alpha\tilde{\iota}\zeta$ says true things about Socrates' geometrical problem, which means he also holds some true opinions about geometry insofar as he remembers adequately in the future, but he clearly does not yet "know" geometry. Similarly, Meno may say some true things about *arete*, which means he holds some true opinions about *arete*, but he similarly does not know about *arete*. And it turns out that Meno occupies an even more dire position than the $\pi\alpha\tilde{\iota}\zeta$. For not only does he think he knows about *arete*, which has, ironically, led him to comport himself contentiously within the discourse, but knowing about *arete* differs from knowing about geometry, as we concluded at the end of our analysis of the diagonal and mentioned again during our analysis of the dream simile in the *Symposium*. In Socrates' effort to rehabilitate Meno's dialogical comportment, we see signs of the urgency of inquiry into *arete*. Being a good person concerns life in the *polis* every single day—both in word ($\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$) and in deed ($\xi\rho\gamma\omicron\nu$). And yet, despite the urgency of the inquiry, this particular inquiry which concerns the human good poses a substantial challenge. It is not sufficient to know about *arete* like one might know the diagonal ($\delta\acute{\iota}\alpha\mu\epsilon\tau\rho\nu$). It seems that there may not be an "answer" to this question about the purpose of human life which is why persuading Meno to comport himself differently takes on a more pressing urgency. To know about *arete* involves knowing how to navigate the dialectical tension between the *arete* sufficient for the human good and the *arete* sufficient to be good in the *polis*. It is not the case that the former takes place outside of a *polis*, but rather, it emerges through a confrontation with each *polis*' attempt to posit a measure of a good person. Being a brave and tireless seeker responds to the arduousness of this task.

Let us return to where we left off in Socrates' discourse about the exhibition. Meno agrees, perhaps too quickly, that repeated questioning will transform these recently stirred up true opinions

into knowledge, which leads Socrates also to claim that asking questions (ἐρωτήσαντος) is not teaching (διδάξαντος).⁴⁸¹ We could easily pass over this distinction without giving it a second thought; however, it takes us, in a way, to the very heart of what is at stake in our inquiry. The distinction between asking questions (ἐρωτήσαντος) and teaching (διδάξαντος) seems to hinge on the extent to which the recipient (that is, the one being asked the questions or the one being taught) is placed at risk in the learning encounter. We may not know exactly what Gorgias taught Meno about *arete*, but when Meno placed himself at risk by responding to Socrates' questioning, we found him lacking *arete*. He had no experience with this sort of inquiry. While it is not clear whether he is a bad man or just an average one, his inadequacy before the inquiry into *arete* is obvious, and this determination is problematic given his self-professed knowledge of *arete*. If, as Socrates claims and Meno agrees, questioning can draw true opinions out of a person and help to transform them into knowledge through repetition, then Meno's engagement with Socratic philosophical practice (Socratic questioning) reveals a conspicuous lack of true opinions about *arete* inside Meno. Meno may have spoken some truth at various points during his attempts to account for *arete*, but none of these sayings "stuck." They did not come from "the soul" so to speak, which is to say that they did not come from Meno's personal engagement with *arete* as an urgent human problem. Perhaps in this way "true opinions" become "knowledge" through repeated questioning, namely, through the experience of undergoing an idiosyncratic struggle with the problem of *arete*. On the other hand, teaching may simply involve the rote retention of what someone else says.⁴⁸² Even though we have primarily considered Socrates' story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) and the exhibition as an enticement to persuade Meno to comport himself differently towards the inquiry, our analysis of the distinction between teaching (διδάξαντος) and asking questions (ἐρωτήσαντος) has also drawn out a circumstance in which the story of "recollection" (ἀνάμνησις) harmonizes with the inward turn of questioning. We might call the process through which a person bears his or her soul during questioning "recollection" insofar as they "recall" their innermost beliefs during the encounter.⁴⁸³ We can hear our interpretation resonate in Socrates question: "And his taking up knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) again that is in himself,

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 85d.

⁴⁸² For example, Meno claimed, "...*arete* is just what the poet says, 'both to rejoice and to be capable in beautiful things.'" Ibid., 77b.

⁴⁸³ This interpretation is also problematic because it assumes good faith. The *παῖς* answers Socrates' questions earnestly (it seems), but some of his interlocutors do not. This weakness of Socratic philosophical practice (of questioning) highlights a limit of its power.

is this not recollecting (ἀναμνησθεσθαί)?⁴⁸⁴ This “knowledge” (ἐπιστήμη) is nothing other than the true opinions which the παῖς now “understands (ἐπιστήσεται) precisely (ἀκριβῶς)” because of repeated questioning. But whence come these true opinions turned into knowledge, if we can even call it knowledge? Socrates considers this question next.

Socrates considers two possibilities: either the παῖς always had the knowledge, or he acquired it. Accordingly, he reasons “then if he always had it, he was also always one who knows (ἀεὶ καὶ ἦν ἐπιστήμων)...”⁴⁸⁵ And yet, Socrates previously insisted that the παῖς did *not* know through a pointedly absurd repetition of the prepositional phrase “about that which he does not know (περὶ ὧν ἂν μὴ εἰδῆ).”⁴⁸⁶ While the logic of Socrates’ reasoning follows (i.e., if the παῖς always had knowledge, then he was always someone who knows), his overall argument does not. Socrates had just described a process through which true opinions can become knowledge (i.e., through repeated questioning many times and in different ways), and so if someone has knowledge, they need not *always* have had that knowledge. Moreover, Socrates seems to play fast and loose with his account of the παῖς—whether he “knows” or “opines truly.” First he claims that, in the παῖς, there are “...true opinions about those thing which he does not know,” but then he premises a subsequent conclusion on the claim “then concerning the knowledge which he now has....” Even if we assume that the παῖς did not know prior to the exhibition, but he does have knowledge after it, then Socrates’ condition for the transformation of true opinions into knowledge, namely, being questioned many times and in different way, becomes more dubious than it seemed initially. Is the implication that the exhibition itself demonstrated being questioned “many times and in different ways?” If this implication does follow, it still seems unlikely that the παῖς now “knows,” since we saw ourselves how heavy handedly Socrates led him through the exhibition. Again, we find ourselves in the midst of some very suspect reasoning.

What about the other possibility (i.e., that the παῖς acquired the knowledge)? Socrates considers it as well. “[B]ut, if [the παῖς] grasped (ἔλαβέν) [the knowledge] at some time, he could not have grasped (εἰληφώς) it in his present life (τῷ νῦν βίῳ).”⁴⁸⁷ Again, in light of Socrates’ prior reasoning, this claim sounds bizarre, but Socrates follows up this claim with some questions

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 85c.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 85d. Translation modified.

about the education of the *παῖς*. Did someone teach him geometry? Meno will answer this question earnestly, but his lack of critical engagement is troubling. In the beginning of this discussion, Socrates claimed that the *παῖς* gave his own opinions, which were true ones and which could become knowledge through questioning, but he never gave the *παῖς* credit for having knowledge before the exhibition. Why then does Socrates even need to ask if the *παῖς* had been educated in geometry? Socrates mixes two different kinds of claims, that is, one concerning the “facts” (how the *παῖς* was educated (or not educated)) and another hypothetical one (that is, if the *παῖς* acquired the knowledge at some time, he could not have acquired it in his present life (“τῷ νῦν βίῳ”). The juxtaposition of these claims presents us with a factual measure and a hypothetical one. While confusing for our attempts to interpret Socrates’ commentary on the exhibition, the confrontation of these measures (a factual and hypothetical) is germane to our broader interest in *arete* and the human good.

When Socrates asks Meno if anyone has taught the *παῖς* how to do geometry, Meno matter-of-factly responds, “But I know (οἶδα) that no one ever taught him.”⁴⁸⁸ While Meno’s confidence about his knowledge of *arete* may rest on a doubtful basis, we have no reason to question his knowledge about this matter. Meno has seen it.⁴⁸⁹ Throughout this part of the dialogue (Socrates’ reasoning about recollection after the exhibition), Meno does not respond to any of Socrates’ questions substantively, but this response stands out because of his outright assertion that he knows something to be the case.⁴⁹⁰ There is nothing remarkable about Meno saying that he knows no one taught the *παῖς* geometry by itself, but it could be instructive for the primary concern of our inquiry. Does Meno “know” *arete* like he “knows” that no one taught the *παῖς* geometry? Insofar as we understand the inquiry into *arete* to concern the *arete* sufficient for the human good, then surely not. However, we might understand Meno’s accounts of *arete* as the consequence of “what he has

⁴⁸⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 85e.

⁴⁸⁹ οἶδα means “to know,” but grammatically, it is the perfect aspect of the verb εἶδω, which means “to see.” In this case, Meno “knows” because he “has seen.” οἶδα need not function so literally, but its relation to its root verb seems noteworthy here.

⁴⁹⁰ A “substantive response” would entail more than a mere affirmation, but Meno may express some tacit reservation at a few points. He responds three times (once at 85c and twice at 86a) with “so it appears” (φαίνεται). See Ebert, “The Theory of Recollection in Plato’s *Meno*: Against a Myth of Platonic Scholarship,” 195. Ebert reads these responses as Meno’s subtle admission that he may suspect something strange about Socrates’ argument; however, Ebert also considers Meno’s response to follow from an acknowledgement of the argumentative necessity of his concession. This explanation is somewhat compelling insofar as it synthesizes the formal presentation (i.e., Meno’s word choice) with the contextual events (i.e., Socrates leading Meno through a dubious line of reasoning in a Gorgian style).

seen” (what he “knows”) in the *polis*. If Meno’s knowledge of *arete* is measured by the correspondence between what Meno says and what Meno has seen, then Meno may indeed “know” *arete* in the *polis*. However, as we drew out during our analysis in Chapter I, common measures of *arete* in the *polis* do not suffice for the human good. Even though Meno “has seen,” he does not “know,” and the insufficiency of the “empirical” in this case is understandably confusing. Why is it that the wealthy people, the beautiful people, the leaders, etc. do not exhibit an *arete* which suffices as a measure of the human good? In Chapter I, we considered some problems (e.g., these measures allow “good people” to do “bad things”), but we should not dismiss the peculiarity of this claim that what one has seen with respect to *arete* somehow does not suffice. From this claim, it does not follow that we ought, therefore, to turn to metaphysical speculation, but we can understand why Socrates may lead the discourse in this way. While the details of this account may not be “true” (i.e., they may not describe what “actually happens” after death), an effectively persuasive account could not only convince Meno to seek a universal, inclusive, and relational measure of the human good—one which exceeds any measure Meno might “have seen” in Thessaly or elsewhere.

Meno testifies that no one taught the *παῖς* geometry, and yet Meno also agrees that he has true opinions about it. Thus, Socrates reasons, “But if he did not grasp (*λαβών*) them in his present life (*ἐν τῷ νῦν βίῳ*), is this not now clear that he had them and learned them in some other time (*ἐν ἄλλῳ τινὶ χρόνῳ*)?”⁴⁹¹ Sceptically, Meno responds, “so it appears (*φαίνεται*).” It appears that the force of Socrates’ argument has begun to overwhelm him. Socrates continues, “Then was this the time when he was not a human being?”⁴⁹² Even if it were the case that the true opinions were in the *παῖς*, and he did not acquire them in this life, it *still* need not follow that he acquired them as a being other than a human being. Could the *παῖς* not have acquired them during a prior human incarnation? Meno simply agrees (“*ναί*”), and so Socrates draws nearer to the conclusion of his reasoning. On the basis of Meno’s concession that the *παῖς* must have learned the true opinions at a time when he was not a human being, Socrates further concludes that true opinions will exist in him regardless of his state of being (human or not), and consequently, that his soul will always be in a learned state.⁴⁹³ Many details in Socrates’ reasoning seem difficult to justify and even

⁴⁹¹ Plato, *Meno*, 86a.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*

sometimes at odds with his prior reasoning. While we raise many questions about Socrates' reasoning, we will not attempt to address them. In the first place, we looked ahead to the conclusion when we struggled to understand an earlier line of reasoning, and we found that Socrates undermines his argument at the conclusion of this section.⁴⁹⁴ If Socrates himself says that he would not rely on his argument, then why should we? Secondly, we also have understood this commentary as an extension of the gesture which began with Socrates' story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις). We do not know how fundamentally Socrates will affect Meno, but at least in this current line of reasoning, Meno's passive agreement with Socrates contrasts with his initial presentation of the contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος)

After Socrates claims that the soul will always be in a learned state, Meno again responds, "so it appears (φαίνεται)." It is ironic that Meno previously objected to search with Socrates for what *arete* is, but he now has no major reservation with agreeing that the soul is immortal, is reincarnated, and is omniscient. His willingness to go along here with Socrates' speech is reminiscent of his prior willingness to go along with Socrates' account of color in the Gorgian style.⁴⁹⁵ Meno maintains this amiableness into Socrates final two conclusions as well. First, Socrates claims, "If now of all things (τῶν ὄντων) the truth (ἀλήθεια) always (ἀεὶ) dwells (ἔστιν) in our soul (ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ), the immortal would be our soul, so that you should be of good cheer (θαροῦντα) and, whatever you do not happen to know at present (ἐπιστάμενος νῦν)—that is, what do you do not remember (μεμνημένος)—you must endeavor to search out (ζητεῖν) and recollect (ἀναμνησκεισθαι)."⁴⁹⁶ Ebert's translation of this passage emphasizes the "high-flown style of Gorgianic rhetoric." This "tragic style"—a deep sounding answer—harkens back to Socrates' remark about Meno's preference for this style of answering.⁴⁹⁷ It is no surprise that Meno responds, "you seem to me to speak well (εὖ μοι δοκεῖς λέγειν), Socrates, I don't know how."⁴⁹⁸ Nevertheless, we can see a conspicuous shift in Socrates' reasoning away from the more speculative, mythologically-grounded insight. Because the soul has all of the aforementioned qualities beyond this life, Socrates draws a very concrete conclusion. He says that Meno should

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 86b.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 76c-d.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 86b. This translation comes from Ebert, "The Theory of Recollection in Plato's Meno: Against a Myth of Platonic Scholarship," 197.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 76e.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 86b.

“be of good cheer” (θαρροῦντα) and search out for whatever he does not “know” at present, that is, what he does not “remember.” In the beginning of this chapter, we made an interpretive decision not to read Meno’s contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) as a serious philosophical challenge, and this decision determined the way that we have interpreted everything that followed. Now, we find yet another justification for this decision. Socrates’ repeatedly insists on the importance of Meno’s reorientation towards the inquiry. There is nothing shameful about him not knowing about *arete*, but not knowing is not an excuse not to try to know. We can read Socrates’ story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις), his exhibition with the παῖς, and his commentary about the exhibition as a sustained attempt to reassure, convince, and inspire Meno. In order for Socrates to persuade Meno, Meno must trust what Socrates is saying to him. While Socrates may not be able to guarantee that Meno will ever “know” *arete* as a result of the inquiry, he can easily persuade Meno of the more modest claim about how someone who wants to know about *arete* should approach the inquiry. Of course, we have understood this more modest claim as also a part of *arete* itself. The urgency of the task, that is, searching for *arete* as the measure of a good person, demands a certain comportment because of its difficulty and its importance.

We now approach the conclusion of what we have understood as a Socratic commentary on his exhibition with the παῖς. Socrates agrees with Meno that he has spoken well, but then he undermines his argument. Despite already looking ahead to this conclusion, let us consider this conclusion once more:

And so do I to myself, Meno. And with respect to the other things (ἄλλα) I would not altogether rely on (δυσχυρισαίμην) my argument (ὑπὲρ τοῦ λόγου); but that in supposing one ought to seek (ζητεῖν) what one does not know (οἶδεν) we would be better (βελτίους), more able to be brave (ἀνδρικώτεροι) and less lazy (ἥττον ἄργοι) than if we supposed that which we do not know (ἐπιστάμεθα) we are neither capable of discovering (δυνατὸν εἶναι εὔρεῖν) nor ought to seek (δεῖν ζητεῖν)—on behalf of that I would surely battle (διαμαχοίμην), so far as I am able, both in word (λόγῳ) and in deed (ἔργῳ).⁴⁹⁹

Socrates suggests that they should not rely on his argument, but the referent of “argument” is by no means obvious. We have understood it as a reference to the entirety of Socrates’ speculative reasoning about the state of the soul outside of this life, but it could perhaps refer to only one step of the reasoning. As we found during our analysis, many steps of his reasoning seem difficult to

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 86b-c. Translation modified.

follow and are even inconsistent. Even so, we can be confident about our own interpretation because it is the part of Socrates' account which he explicitly picks out as that which is worth fighting for (that for which he "would surely battle" ("διαμαχοίμην")). While we too recognize potential indications of the "prenatal-knowledge" reading of recollection (ἀνάμνησις), it seems to create more interpretative problems than it solves, and Socrates' concluding dismissal of his argument only adds another obstacle to that interpretation. On the other hand, our analysis throughout this chapter has emphasized the persuasive effect of Socrates' speeches on Meno's dialogical comportment, and Socrates' willingness to battle on behalf of the claims which we have placed within the purview of dialogical comportment supports our interpretation in *this* chapter but also our broader analysis. We approach the *Meno* with a concern for *arete*, the human good, and the *polis*, and we can understand Socrates' willingness to battle as a justification for our assumption of the urgency and axiological weight of the inquiry. Not just anything is worth fighting for, but an inquiry into *arete* as the measure of a good person in the *polis* is. When Meno hears this conclusion, Meno again compliments Socrates for speaking well. We also think that Socrates has spoken well, but we perhaps think so for different reasons than Meno. With that remark, we reach the end of our analysis in Chapter II.

Conclusion

We began our analysis in Chapter II on the foundation laid in Chapter I. Initially, we compared some similarities between the structure of the part of the text that we considered in Chapter I and the structure of the part that we considered in Chapter II. We noticed a foil between Socrates' opening speech and Meno's subsequent three attempts to say what *arete* is and Meno's opening speech and Socrates' subsequent three attempts to persuade him. Our observation of these similarities led us first to focus our analysis on Meno's warning to Socrates about leaving Athens. Whereas we understood the Socratic persona of the hypothetical Athenian as a way to open the inquiry to other possibilities (especially human obligations beyond what the *polis* demands), we interpreted Meno's warning about Socrates' hypothetical departure from Athens as a reinstatement of Meno's prior provincial claims about *arete*. Not only did we recognize Meno's tacit criticism of Athens for its toleration of Socrates' behavior, but we also heard the qualification of his warning with an allusion to Socrates being a foreigner (ξένος) in this hypothetical scenario as an indication of his contentment with the Thessalian (or otherwise conventional) measure of a good person.

Meno has a share of several human goods (e.g., beauty, wealth, and technical know-how at the very least), and he would have to risk losing these goods if he were to engage in the inquiry into *arete* as resolutely and thoroughly as Socrates. As we concluded in our analysis in Chapter I, these goods may be “good,” but their possession is not a sufficient condition for being a good person. Some other measure is needed.

We then examined Meno’s infamous image of Socrates as a torpedo fish (not a sting ray). We assumed that this moment reflected a sort of dialogical inevitability. If Meno believes that he knows about *arete*, which all the signs seem to suggest, then Meno at some point must become fed up with Socrates’ insistence on renewing the inquiry or else admit that he does not know. While not everyone would have resisted Socrates with the creation of a caustic image of him, Meno’s decision to do so conforms with his contentious orientation in relation to the inquiry. And yet, when we unpacked the image, using Aristotle’s and Theophrastus’ respective accounts of the torpedo fish, we concluded that Meno’s image did touch on some similarities between the tendencies of this fish and Socrates’ interaction with Meno. However, the similarities did not reflect poorly on Socrates but rather on Meno. From our analysis of the Aristotelian account, we recognized the independent receptivity of the prey to the paralysis of the torpedo fish. Within the purview of our inquiry, we understood Meno’s experience of ἀπορία as a consequence of his independent receptivity to the torpifying effect of Socratic philosophical practice. Meno’s arguments had no effect on Socrates, but Socrates paralyzed Meno. Socrates does not audaciously create troublesome problems for Meno, but he rather draws his attention to dimensions of the ἀπορία about *arete* which carry consequences for the pursuit of the human good.⁵⁰⁰ Furthermore, when we analyzed Theophrastus’ account of the torpedo fish, we found another similarity between Socrates and the fish. Whereas the Aristotelian account focused on the torpedo fish’s predatory habits, Theophrastus’ account highlighted the torpedo fish’s ability to paralyze defensively. Just as the torpedo fish uses the tools of the hunter to transmit its paralysis into the hunter so too does Socrates use Meno’s “tools” (his words and speeches) against him to paralyze him. In these ways and others, we found some truth in Meno’s image, although the “truth” of the image may not have been the one that he intended.

⁵⁰⁰ Cf. Plato, *Meno*, 76a.

Socrates responded strangely to Meno's image, contradicting his words with his deeds. Socrates claimed to know that Meno made an image of Socrates so that Socrates would make an image of Meno in return, and in speech, Socrates refused to participate in this exchange of images. However, upon closer consideration, we found that Socrates did make an image of Meno as one of those beautiful people who delights in images of themselves *and* as someone who does *not* know (about *arete*). We interpreted the confluence of these images through our prior analysis of the inadequacy of beauty as a measure of *arete* despite the propensity of others to submit to beautiful people. In Chapter I, Meno claimed that *arete* is ruling over others, and Socrates also pointed out the tendency of beautiful people to tyrannize others. From the pairing of these claims, we inferred the potential for someone (Meno, perhaps) to understand beauty as a measure of the human good; and yet, Meno's likeness to a beautiful man who delights in images of himself *and* to someone who does *not* know about *arete* draws attention to the inadequacy of this measure. Meno himself is beautiful and also does not know about *arete*, but he should know about it (at least in principle) if being beautiful were sufficient. Furthermore, being beautiful as a measure of the human good runs into the same problem as being wealthy. It allows a "good person" to do bad things in the name of the good. Despite the subversive implicature of Socrates' image of Meno, Socrates concluded his response with a cooperative gesture. He still wanted to search together with Meno for *arete*. Meno, however, had another idea.

In response to Socrates' suggestion that they search together for *arete*, Meno posed a contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) to Socrates in which he reasoned against the possibility of a successful search. We did not consider this argument as a philosophical problem concerned with the conditions of inquiry, but we instead read it as a sign of Meno's dialogical comportment. We began to develop this reading through an initial comparison of Socrates' response to Meno's presentation of the argument to Socrates' response to Dionysodorus' and Euthydemus' presentation of a very similar argument in the *Euthydemus*. In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates precisely laid out the equivocation upon which the argument hinges in order to trick the listener. The difference between Socrates' incisive response in the *Euthydemus* and his mythological response in the *Meno* suggested to us that the argument itself may not be most important. In order to glean what *is* important, we continued our comparison of the two texts. Towards the end of Socrates' encounter with the sophists, he offered some counsel to them, warning them not to speak their "wisdom" (σοφός) publicly lest their listeners learn it quickly and not realize that they are its

teachers. In this warning, we heard echoes of some parts of Socrates' reasoning in the *Apology*. Socrates speculated that the young men's imitation of his dialogical practice led many Athenians to believe that he corrupted the youth, and in this sense, we can hear the gravity of Socrates' warning to Dionysodorus and Euthydemus about their public performances. Moreover, we also understood this warning as an example of the private corrective gesture which Socrates claimed in the *Apology* was appropriate when a person "accidentally" harms others. Through our comparative analysis, we arrived at a decisive insight for our inquiry. We tend to separate "action" from "speech," giving the former a greater priority especially in ethical concerns; however, our comparative analysis led us to recognize the significance of dialogical comportment as an essential part of the inquiry into *arete*. Not only does the way that one speaks with others play a part in being a good person (the human good), but comporting oneself properly in relation to inquiry into *arete* is especially important because of what is required for inquiry into *arete*. The dialectical tension between the search for a measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good and the measure of *arete* which the *polis* uses to designate its "good people" demands a rigorous and exhausting engagement with the inquiry. Not only does the inquirer place his or her own life at risk (through the attempt to determine how to be a good person), but the inquirer must also place the goods of others at risk by calling into question the measure according to which they are regarded as good in the *polis*. This conclusion about the urgency of dialogical comportment framed our interpretation of the subsequent discourse on recollection (ἀνάμνησις).

Socrates did not see the beauty of Meno's contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος), and so he offered Meno a different account, one which he described as true and beautiful.⁵⁰¹ In his story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις), Socrates incorporated many familiar themes in a style with which Meno was also surely well acquainted. He quoted Pindar, referred to Empedoclean philosophical concepts (e.g., the immortality of the soul and transmigration), and used Gorgian stylistic devices (e.g., homoioteleuta, parisa, and hyperbata).⁵⁰² Furthermore, we also drew out some commonalities between dimensions of *arete* that we explored in Chapter I and the verses' implications about *arete*, the human good, and the *polis*. In the verses, the "holy heroes" (ἥρωες ἄγνοι) are like the "good men" (ἀγαθοί), whom people call "glorious kings" (βασιλῆες ἀγαθοί), or rulers (as Meno might say), with sweeping strength (σθένει κραταιοί) and greatest wisdom (σοφία

⁵⁰¹ Plato, *Meno*, 81a.

⁵⁰² Ebert, "The Theory of Recollection in Plato's *Meno*: Against a Myth of Platonic Scholarship," 187-188.

τε μέγιστοι). These verses implied a very conventional account of *arete* and the human good in the *polis* which contrasted with our analysis of the ἀπορία about *arete* but which harmonized with Meno's prior assumptions. We did not understand Socrates' presentation of these familiar concepts in a familiar style as an act of intentional deception (even if it may appear subversive when we view it as a part of the whole), but rather, in doing so, Socrates conformed with the dialogical comportment suitable for speaking with friends, which he mentioned previously.⁵⁰³ Even so, we did presume that Socrates presented this story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) and the subsequent reasoning about it to persuade Meno of *something*. It was not just idle pandering. We understood this story as an attempt to establish a new beginning for Meno—a different one than what Gorgias inculcated in him. As a new beginning, Socrates' story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) could entice Meno to take on a new dialogical comportment. We arrived at this conclusion when we noticed that the promise of access to the omniscience of the soul depended upon a certain condition: "...there is nothing to prevent someone who recollects (ἀναμνησθέντα) (which people call learning (μάθησιν)) one thing only from discovering all other things, *so long as he is brave (ἀνδρεῖος) and does not grow tired (ἀποκάμνη) of seeking (ζητῶν)*."⁵⁰⁴ This orientation towards inquiry (particularly the inquiry into *arete*) contrasted with the contentious orientation that culminated with Meno's articulation of the contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος). Not only did focusing on this condition in Socrates' story (μῦθος) about recollection (ἀνάμνησις) facilitate a more sensitive understanding of the significance of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) and Meno's contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) for our inquiry into *arete* within the *Meno*, but it also guided our subsequent interpretation of Socrates' exhibition with the παῖς and his commentary on recollection (ἀνάμνησις) with Meno.

From our analysis of Socrates' exhibition with the παῖς, we gleaned two unique insights that drew our attention to additional dimensions of our broader inquiry into *arete* and the human good in the *polis*. The first stemmed from our analysis of the identity of the παῖς. We acknowledged that παῖς can refer either to a boy or a slave. However, when we reflected on this ambiguity, we found the site of an unresolved contradiction in the *polis*' measure of the human good. The παῖς simultaneously designates someone who is temporarily absolved of responsibility for being a good person and also someone who is indefinitely denied that responsibility. An examination of the παῖς

⁵⁰³ Plato, *Meno*, 75d.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 81d. Emphasis mine.

as a boy showed us the awesome power of the *polis*, which permits the boy to suspend his human responsibilities during this transitional period of immaturity. By contrast, our examination of the *παῖς* as a slave drew out the awful power of the *polis* to deny the slave both freedom and responsibility. Without freedom or responsibility, the *polis* effectively strips the slave (*παῖς*) of the opportunity to pursue *arete* and the human good in the *polis*. Through an analysis of the similarity between the boy (*παῖς*) and the slave (*παῖς*), we found concrete ways in which the *polis* exercises its power to determine who is even allowed to *try* to be a good person in the *polis*. A *παῖς* is never a good person. Consequently, we recognized how perfectly fitting it is for Socrates' to question a *παῖς* in his exhibition. In Chapter I, we analyzed many conventionally grounded accounts of *arete* in Meno's various attempts to say what it is. We have maintained a suspicion that Meno does not see the same necessity of interrogating the *polis*' measure of the human good, even if he simultaneously acknowledged his experience of ἀπορία about *arete* after speaking with Socrates. An obvious reason that Meno may not want to question the *polis*' measure is because doing so would force Meno to risk losing the many goods that he enjoys already. While we have recognized the insufficiency of their possession as a measure of the human good, many people nonetheless desire them as goods. Even so, the introduction of the *παῖς* into the dialogue forced us to recognize the importance of Socratic philosophical practice. The establishment of a measure for good people in the *polis* always suffers some deficiency.

The second insight from our analysis of the exhibition with the *παῖς* came from the conclusion of the geometrical problem: the diagonal (διάμετρον). The diagonal (διάμετρον) of the two-by-two square named the line of the square whose area is twice the area of the two-by-two square. When we considered the properties of the diagonal (διάμετρον), we encountered an encouraging parallel between the incommensurable (ἀσύμμετρα) diagonal (διάμετρον) and our search for the *arete* sufficient for the human good. According to Euclid's account, incommensurable lines are "irrational" (ἄλογοι), which is to say, they are that for which there is no account. Incommensurable lines lack a common measure (μέτρον), and yet, Socrates implored the *παῖς* to point out the answer nonetheless. He implored the *παῖς* to do so because the lack of a common measure between the square with an area of four and the square with an area of eight did not preclude their discovery of a measure (μέτρον). From this geometrical encounter, we reasoned analogously about the measure with which our inquiry concerns itself. Just because the *polis*' measure of *arete* does not alone suffice as a measure of a good person does not mean that a measure

of *arete* sufficient for the human good does not exist. Although this insight may provide some encouragement for our inquiry, we also recognized the limits of geometrical reasoning for inquiry into *arete*. In geometry, the representation of a figure is heuristic. One need not ever represent a geometrical figure to reason through a geometrical problem, although it can be helpful to do so. On the other hand, the “representation” of *arete*, i.e., those who exhibit the measure of a good person, takes axiological priority over the account. Being able to say what *arete* is does not matter if the person with the account is not also a good person. In fact, a major part of Meno’s difficulty through the dialogue stems from his ostensive indifference to the urgency of trying to be a good person.

After completing the exhibition with the *παῖς*, Socrates led Meno through his reasoning about what they just witnessed. We noticed that Meno behaved with a conspicuous passivity throughout this section of the text in contrast to his prior contentiousness. Even so, we did not naively conclude that Socrates somehow “cured” Meno so quickly. But rather, we read Socrates’ heavy-handed leadership of the discussion as another temptation which might lead Meno to trust Socrates’ account of recollection (*ἀνάμνησις*) (the story, reasoning, exhibition, and commentary about it). Consequently, Meno would have to comport himself differently (as a brave and tireless seeker), if he wanted to learn/recollect Socrates’ “teaching.” Our analysis of Socrates’ commentary about the exhibition hinged upon interpreting a peculiar simile which Socrates used to compare stirred up (true) opinions to a dream. In order to understand the comparison with a greater sensitivity, we considered its appearance in the *Symposium* and the *Parmenides*. Our comparative analysis of this simile (“like a dream” (*ὡσπερ ὄναρ*)) in the Platonic corpus led us to a, perhaps, surprising conclusion. The *παῖς* “knows” the true opinions (*ἀληθεῖς δόξαι*) which the *παῖς* voiced during the exhibition (despite no one teaching the *παῖς* geometry) like the dreamer “knows” the dream is wakeful experience. Just as the dreamer is at risk of losing the truth of the dream (the immersion in it as if it were wakeful experience) so too is the *παῖς* at risk of losing the true opinions about geometry. The comparison draws our attention to something transitory and fragile but which feels simultaneously grave and certain.⁵⁰⁵ Even so, Socrates suggested that repeated questioning “many times and in different ways” (“πολλάκις τὰ αὐτὰ ταῦτα καὶ πολλαχῆ”) would lead the *παῖς* to understand (*ἐπίστασθαι*). We understood this account as one which spoke to a process particular

⁵⁰⁵ We should keep this tension in mind as we move forwards because Socrates will later speak on the relationship between knowledge and true opinion more directly. *Ibid.*, 97b.

to the exhibition (namely, the process through which the *παῖς* would “recollect” geometry), but we also acknowledged that the details of this account seemed hazy and difficult for us to follow. It was not clear whether it could help us with our inquiry into *arete*. In order for us to overcome this obstacle, we looked ahead to the conclusion of Socrates’ commentary.

At the end of Socrates’ commentary on the exhibition, Socrates said something that would have sounded strange, if we were not tracking the textual thread concerning Meno’s dialogical comportment already. Socrates claimed that he would not rely on his own argument (*λόγος*)! And yet, he did not cast this retrospective doubt indiscriminately. He insisted that he would still battle in word (*λόγος*) and in deed (*ἔργον*) on behalf of the supposition that whoever seeks for what one does not know would be better off (*βελτίων*), braver (*ἀνδρικώτερος*), and less lazy (*ἧττον ἀργός*) than someone who accepted Meno’s contentious argument (*ἐριστικός λόγος*).⁵⁰⁶ By turning to the conclusion in an anticipatory way, we became more sensitive to the overall thrust of Socrates’ reasoning. We found justification for accepting our prior uncertainty about some of the details in the account, but more importantly, we gleaned valuable insights for our broader inquiry. We understood Socrates’ concern for Meno’s dialogical comportment as a symptom of the urgency of inquiry into *arete*. To know about *arete* involves knowing how to navigate the dialectical tension between the *arete* sufficient for the human good and the *arete* sufficient to be good in the *polis*. Because of its dialectical character, there is not an analogous “answer” to the question concerning *arete a la* the diagonal (*διάμετρον*) in the exhibition with the *παῖς*. While our analysis of the diagonal (*διάμετρον*) drew our attention to the possibility of a measure even in the face of incommensurable (*ἀσύμμετρα*) lines or that for which there is no account (*ἄλογον*), we simultaneously recognized a difference between *arete* and geometrical objects. The search for the measure of the good person (which we might state otherwise as the inquiry into *arete*) does not end, and for that reason, we can retrospectively interpret the persistent reference to dialogical comportment as a means of addressing the needs particular to this sort of inquiry. Perhaps if Socrates can convince Meno to comport himself towards the inquiry differently, then he will help Meno to consider *arete* with the urgency due to that which intimately concerns the exhibition of the human good in the *polis*.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 86b-c.

Throughout our analysis in Chapter II, we have pointed out many ways that Socrates' speeches incorporate a style and content uniquely familiar to Meno. Meno is a Thessalian aristocrat and student of Gorgias. Especially because of the latter, he has the habit of answering boldly and fearlessly as is fitting for someone who knows. And yet, in an inquiry into *arete*, this habit has inhibited Meno from engaging in the search adequately. His prior proficiency in speaking about *arete* has vanished, leaving behind only the appearance of someone who knows—someone who “knows” *arete* like the dreamer “knows” the dream is a wakeful experience. Our attention to dialogical comportment has responded both to Meno's clever attempt to derail the inquiry (his contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος)) and a necessary component for the inquiry into *arete* as well. One must be brave and tireless to search for *arete*, and yet, doing so is worthy, since it is precisely what one must do, if one wants to become a good person. We interpreted the entire account of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) (the story (μῦθος), exhibition, and commentary) as a temptation which would persuade Meno to comport himself differently, if he should trust it. We might hear echoes of the *Republic*, in which Socrates suggests a “noble falsehood” (“γενναῖόν ψευδομένου”) to persuade (πείθειν) the rulers (ἄρχοντες).⁵⁰⁷ While Socrates never calls recollection (ἀνάμνησις) a falsehood (noble or otherwise), we ought to notice the power of persuasion to affect the people of the *polis* (even the rulers) in both cases. Even though it may be difficult to persuade “the rulers” (as we see through Socrates' interaction with Meno), our inquiry has assumed the possibility of doing so successfully. Why else would one search for *arete* through the dialectical tension between the measure of the good in the *polis* and the measure of the human good, if the rulers always simply determined what is good for humans? And yet, we also must admit that rulers do have considerable power to set measures (e.g., of who is a good person) in the *polis*. As we progress to Chapter III, let us keep an eye on the relationship between the rulers and our inquiry into *arete*, the human good, and the *polis*.

⁵⁰⁷ Plato, *Republic*, 414b-c. “How, then, could we devise one of those useful (τῶν ἐν δέοντι γιγνομένων) falsehoods (ψευδῶν) we were talking about a while ago, one noble (γενναῖόν) falsehood (ψευδομένου) that would, in the best case, persuade (πείσαι) even the rulers (ἄρχοντας), but if that's not possible, then the others in the *polis*?”

CHAPTER IV: SOCRATES REASONS FROM A FOUNDATIONAL SUPPOSITION: THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ANALOGICAL RELATION BETWEEN SOUL AND *POLIS*

Introduction

Let us review our findings from the prior two chapters in a concise way so that we may have a clearer vision of the pretext that informs our interpretation in Chapter III. In Chapter I, we developed the central problematic through which we have been interpreting the *Meno*. The *polis* provides a site for emergent measures of the human good. Our analysis of Meno's attempts to say what *arete* is examined several of these measures, e.g., being wealthy, beautiful, or simply the ruler. While we did not question *that* being wealthy, beautiful, or a ruler are human goods, we did recognize their respective inadequacies as measures of *the* human good. No matter whether someone is wealthy, beautiful, a ruler, or any combination of these three goods or others, the possession of goods never suffices as a sufficient condition for being a good person. And yet, we have been tracking a sense of *arete* which *does* serve as a sufficient condition for the human good (being a good person). From our examination of Meno's three attempts to say what *arete* is, we determined three conditions that an *arete* sufficient for the human good must satisfy. It must be universal, inclusive, and relational. Even so, our engagement with *arete* throughout Chapter I primarily emphasized its ἀπορία. We observed a tension between the *arete* that exemplifies a good person within a particular *polis* (e.g., Thessaly, Athens, etc.), on the one hand, and the philosophical practice that draws attention to the contradictions and inadequacies of the measure in each *polis*, on the other hand. As we progressed into Chapter II, we approached this tension from another direction. We began our analysis with some observations about Meno's increasingly contentious behavior, which culminated with his presentation of (what Socrates called) a contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος). During our effort to understand Socrates' response, we recognized an obvious yet pivotal insight. Not only did we interpret Socrates' three-part response (the story, exhibition, and commentary) as an attempt to persuade Meno to comport himself differently, but we also saw the broader importance of dialogical comportment for inquiry into *arete*. How a person speaks with others seems to fall within the purview of the human good, and so Meno's contentious style of speech, a style which we suppose developed from Gorgias' instruction, reflects a more fundamental negligence towards *arete* than one might suppose superficially. When Socrates spoke somewhat candidly about Meno's contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος), he did not criticize it for being "illogical" or "reductive," but rather, he claimed

that it would make them “lazy (ἀργοὺς) and is pleasant only for fainthearted (μαλακοῖς) people to hear...”⁵⁰⁸ In contrast, trusting Socrates’ account will make its believers brave and tireless seekers. Within each section, we found Socrates repeating *this* dialogical comportment as the benefit of heeding his speeches. Even recollection itself seemed to depend upon this condition (i.e., being a brave and tireless seeker). In light of our prior recognition of the dialectical tension between the emergent measures of *arete* and philosophical practice, we also found worthy justification for Socrates’ concern for Meno’s dialogical comportment. The navigation of this tension is difficult, and it can force a person to risk losing the value of their goods in the *polis*. Furthermore, the inquiry itself (the search for “what *arete* is”) might imply a conclusion, but its dialectical character suggests an endless engagement with *arete* as an ongoing problem in human life. Of course such a life-long engagement is exhausting, but the stakes of such an inquiry could not be any higher. It is the question that concerns, in part, the reason for a person to live at all.

In Chapter III, we will find a familiar beginning. Once again, Socrates will propose to begin the inquiry anew, and Meno similarly will refuse Socrates’ proposal. This time, however, Meno will agree to engage with *arete* albeit on his own terms. Meno will again request for Socrates to speak about the way *arete* comes to be in human beings, conspicuously omitting “practice” (ἀσκητόν) as one possibility this time. Socrates will comply with Meno’s demand, but he will request for Meno to grant him some leeway in their inquiry. Appealing again to geometry, Socrates will suggest imitating the geometrical method and examining *arete* “by laying a foundation” (“ἐξ ὑποθέσεως”), which involves taking for granted the “sort of thing” (ποῖόν) something is. By supposing *arete* to be some sort of thing, Socrates will be able to reason about *arete* from this provisional supposition. So what does he suppose? Socrates will suppose that *arete* is teachable (διδασκτόν), and upon this foundational supposition, he will examine the consequences for *arete* that follow from the assumption that it can be taught. If *arete* is teachable, then it must be some sort of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). We briefly examined knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) previously, when we struggled to follow Socrates’ reasoning about the transformation of true opinions (ἀληθεῖς δόξαι) into knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) in the *παῖς*.⁵⁰⁹ In that case, we did not tarry with the difficulty because the transformation concerned true opinions about geometry/a particular geometrical problem. When we coupled this consideration with Socrates’ concluding dismissal of his argument, we

⁵⁰⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 81d.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 85c-d.

found justification to move beyond some ambiguities about knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). However, when we encounter knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) this time, we will consider it explicitly in relation to *arete*. We will have to wait and see how knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) will appear to us when we consider *arete* as a kind of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). And yet, we ought to wonder about the tenacity of this supposition (i.e., that *arete* is teachable and so a kind of knowledge). For, in the first place, it does not seem to resonate well with the way that we have understood the ἀπορία about *arete* thus far. According to our analysis, there may not be an answer to the question concerning “what *arete* is” *a la* the diagonal (διάμετρον), which would present a challenge for understanding *arete* as a kind of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). Have we gone astray in our analysis? Perhaps not. While we must, of course, turn to the text itself, we also should make an anticipatory note of the conclusion towards which our analysis in this chapter leads. Despite reasoning about *arete* as a kind of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), Socrates will call into question their foundational supposition with a simple yet incisive question. Who are the teachers of *arete*, if it is teachable? Having gone through these introductory considerations, let us now begin our analysis of the text.

Laying a Foundational Supposition (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως) (86c-87c)

Socrates proposes that he and Meno start their inquiry anew and “seek in common” (“κοινῆ ζήτησιν”) for what *arete* is.⁵¹⁰ Despite our familiarity with this proposal, this iteration of their search begins from a very different starting point. When Socrates last suggested that they search together for *arete*, Meno responded with his contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος). This time, however, Meno will hear this suggestion after also having heard Socrates’ attempt to persuade him to comport himself differently. He heard Socrates’ story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις), watched the exhibition with the παῖς, and listened to Socrates’ commentary about it. Has this experience had any effect on Meno? While Meno does not respond as contentiously as the last time, he does not simply comply either. Meno assures Socrates that he would examine (σκέπτεσθαι) and hear (ἀκούειν) about how *arete* comes to be in humans with “most pleasure” (ἥδιστα).⁵¹¹ He resists renewing the inquiry into what *arete* is, but he at least will engage with an inquiry into its coming to be. We can hear echoes of Meno’s previous demand for gratification, when he asked Socrates to define color during their investigation of his second account of *arete*.⁵¹²

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 86c.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Ibid., 76b-c.

Although Socrates ultimately submitted, as he will in the present circumstance as well, we ought to note two aspects of the prior textual moment that could be relevant to this present one. First, when Socrates censured Meno for his imperious behavior in the part of the text that we analyzed in Chapter I, Socrates claimed that he would nevertheless submit to Meno’s demand because of his weakness for beautiful people.⁵¹³ Because of this comment (and others), we have become increasingly attentive to the role of beauty in *arete* as a measure of the human good in the *polis*. Even if being beautiful does not guarantee that a person will be a good person, being beautiful does have benefits especially for ruling. And yet, Socrates’ self-professed weakness for beautiful people sounded odd then as it does now too. If Meno’s demands were so out of line that it warranted reproach, then why does Socrates comply? Is there a limit to Socratic compliance with the demands of beautiful people? This question concerning the limits of Socratic compliance leads us to our second comparative remark. Despite Socrates’ technical compliance with Meno’s demand, Socrates accounted for color in the most unsatisfactory way when he did so in compliance with Meno’s demand.⁵¹⁴ Socrates would later call it a “tragical” (τραγική) answer—the kind of answer which, he also pointed out, Meno most prefers. In speech, Socrates invoked his weakness (ἥττων) for beautiful people (οἱ καλοὶ), but in deed, he did not submit to Meno’s desire to the extent which his speech seemed to imply. Socrates complied subversively. Let us turn now to Socrates’ response to this new “imperious demand” and see whether he behaves similarly.

Socrates responds to Meno’s counterproposal with a lengthy speech which we can analyze more easily if we break it into three parts. In the first part, Socrates reproaches Meno for his unruliness. In the next part, he proposes that they speak on the matter “by laying a foundation” (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως) as geometers do. Finally, he reasons about *arete* from the foundational supposition that it is teachable. Let us consider each part of his speech in turn, beginning with the first part first. Socrates laments:

Yet, Meno, if I were ruling (ἤρχων) not only myself, but you too, we would not first examine whether *arete* is something teachable (διδασκτὸν) or not teachable before we first sought what it itself is (πρὶν ὅτι ἐστὶν πρῶτον ἐζητήσαμεν αὐτό): but, since you don’t even

⁵¹³ “Because you do nothing but impose commands (ἐπιτάττεις) in your arguments (λόγοις), the very thing that spoiled people (τροφῶντες) do, so as to tyrannize (τυραννεύοντες) as long as they are in their prime. And at the same time it is likely that you’ve noticed about me, that I have a weakness (ἥττων) for beautiful people (τῶν καλῶν). So I will gratify (χαριοῦμαι) you and I will answer.” Ibid., 76c.

⁵¹⁴ “For color (χρῶμα) is an effluence of shapes (ἀπορροή σχημάτων) commensurate (σύμμετρος) with sight and perceptible.” Ibid., 76d.

try to rule (ἐπιχειρεῖς ἄρχειν) yourself, in order indeed that you might be free (ἐλεύθερος), you both try to rule (ἄρχειν) me and do rule (ἄρχεις) me, I will yield (συγχωρήσομαι) to you—for what can I do? It seems, then, that we must examine (σκεπτέον) what sort of thing (ποῖόν) something is (τί ἐστίν), something about which we don't yet know (ἴσμεν) what it is (ὅτι ἐστίν).⁵¹⁵

Superficially, Socrates appears to speak only to his counterfactual wish to “rule” (ἄρχον), i.e., “lead,” the dialogue in an idiosyncratically Socratic way. Socrates would lead their inquiry through an examination of what *arete* is (τί ἐστίν) before they considered what sort of thing it is (ποῖόν ἐστίν) (e.g., something teachable, natural, etc.). However, upon deeper analysis, we can see that there is more at stake here than a mere “difference of opinions” (i.e., different preferences). As we will see, it is feasible to consider the question about *arete* that Meno would prefer to consider without first giving an account of what *arete* is. Consequently, we can infer that Socrates’ preference for his way of “ruling” the inquiry must stem from a different basis. Socrates does make a comment that may be instructive. Meno does not try to rule himself, a consequence of which would be being free (ἐλεύθερος). Is Socrates’ implication that his approach to the inquiry is the freer one? By contrast, what might make Meno’s approach more oppressive? Even though the “freedom” of Socrates’ approach, which, ostensibly, follows from his self-rule, need not imply that Meno’s approach is oppressive, Socrates’ framing of the conflict does seem to imply it. He says that he will “yield” to Meno, and he asks what he can do, which we might hear as a Socratic expression of Meno’s coercive pressure on him to do something he does not think is best (i.e., consider what sort of thing *arete* is before inquiring into what *arete* is). This subtle dialogical conflict sounds quite bizarre, especially since we have maintained that Socrates exerts a more formidable power over Meno than Meno does over Socrates. And yet, in this case, it seems that Meno has the power. Why does this sudden disruption of the dialogical power dynamic take place immediately after Socrates’ impressive display which we analyzed throughout Chapter II? Furthermore, why has Socrates framed this conflict in terms of being free (ἐλεύθερος) and the ability to rule (ἄρχειν) oneself and others?

Both being free (ἐλεύθερος) and the ability to rule (ἄρχειν) have been recurrent themes throughout our analysis in both of the preceding chapters. We drew out of Socrates’ first response to Meno the performance of a subversive generosity (ἐλευθεριότητος) (liberality or freeness in

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 86d-e. Translation modified.

giving). We understood Socrates' performance of it as an inversion of the trope of Thessalian generosity, which Socrates criticizes in the *Crito* for its oppressive consequences. Those who accept Thessalian generosity must submit themselves to the whims of their host/benefactor. Those who accept such generosity become obliged to their "benefactors," which can quickly become quite detrimental to the recipient should a person become beholden to a harmful person. Similarly, Meno's eagerness to accept Socrates' generous praise of Thessaly (especially for its recent reputation for wisdom) quickly led him into a slew of difficulties as he naively accounted for *arete* as if he were someone who knows what it is. Socrates tempted Meno with generous praise to rule their inquiry into *arete*, but we found Meno inadequate to the task. In Chapter II, we considered the significance of being free again when we analyzed the identity of the *παῖς*. Our analysis focused upon the confluence of two separate kinds of humans in the name "*παῖς*" whose identity both stemmed from their restriction of freedom and responsibility in the *polis*. Their lack of freedom and responsibility inhibit their ability to rule themselves and others, which also restricts their claims on their respective shares of the human good. Our recognition of this power of the *polis* led us to esteem Socratic philosophical practice more highly as a counterforce against the *polis*, and it also drew our attention to the poignancy of the participation of the *παῖς* in the exhibition. If Socrates can convince Meno that his account improves even the weakest and most vulnerable member of the *polis* (a *παῖς*), then Meno too will likely benefit from comporting himself as a brave and tireless seeker. In our present context, we find being free (*ἐλεύθερος*) problematized in a different way, but it does not concern the question of ruling (oneself and others) any less than the prior instances. According to Socrates, Meno is not free (*ἐλεύθερος*) because he does not even try to rule (*ἄρχειν*) himself, but he does rule Socrates.⁵¹⁶ In what sense, then, is Meno not free (*ἐλεύθερος*)? We can hear in this question a question concerning the measure. In each case, a lack of freedom detracts from an individual's ability to pursue the human good. No matter whether we consider Meno as the recipient of Socrates' subversive generosity, the *παῖς*, or Meno as someone who does not try to rule himself, we find a failure of the individual to be free in the way that seems necessary for being a good person. But what does Meno's failure to rule himself even entail? To

⁵¹⁶ We considered avarice as one affliction of the soul to which Meno showed a susceptibility in Chapter I, but Klein, for example, considers ignorance (*ἄμαθια*) to be Meno's primary affliction of the soul. See Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 200-202.

help us answer this question, let us consider one of Socrates' remarks about "self-rule" ("ἑαυτοῦ ἄρχοντα") in the *Gorgias*.

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates engages three interlocutors: Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles. Socrates speaks with Gorgias first who engages in discussion with a conspicuous cordiality. By contrast, two of Gorgias' students (Polus and Callicles) exhibit a striking antagonism or contentiousness. Has this comportment, perhaps, been cultivated in them? After Callicles interrupts Socrates' conversation with Polus (who had previously interrupted Socrates' conversation with Gorgias), Socrates seizes the opportunity to test himself against Callicles, whose understanding of "what is just by nature" (τὸ δίκαιον κατὰ φύσιν) takes the following shape: "That the mightier (τὸν κρείττω) should take by force (βία) the things (τὰ) of the weaker (τῶν ἡττόνων), that the better (τὸν βελτίω) should rule (ἄρχειν) the worse (τῶν χειρόνων), and the superior (τὸν ἀμείνω) have more (πλέον) than the more ordinary (τοῦ φαυλοτέρου)."⁵¹⁷ The curious part of this account of what is just "by nature" is how easily it vacillates between convention and nature. While the mightiness of "the mightier" gives them the means of taking from the weaker, and the superiority of the superior implies their greater possession (of something indeterminate) than the more ordinary, they both nonetheless lack justification for either "taking" or "having." What is the measure that legitimizes their greater claim? Should a person always do whatever one is able to do? Furthermore, the circumstance concerning ruling raises additional complications. Do "the better" (τὸν βελτίω) rule because they are better, or do the rulers become known as "the better" because they happen to rule? If the latter, then the "weaker" (e.g., in bodily strength) can become the stronger because of political power. And would this circumstance also illustrate "what is just by nature"? While we raise our own questions about the confusing implications for what is just according to this account, Socrates also questions Callicles about the identity of such people. He asks, "Are mightier (τὸ κρείττον), better (τὸ βέλτιον), and stronger (τὸ ἰσχυρότερον) the same (ταὐτὸν) or are they different (ἕτερόν)?"⁵¹⁸ Callicles insists that they are the same, and with this agreement, we find ourselves confronted by a similar problem to the one which we track in the *Meno*. Here too we find a problematic, contradictory, and troubling measure of *arete*, which

⁵¹⁷ Plato, *Gorgias*, 488b. Translation modified. Socrates also claims that Pindar holds the same position.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 488d.

nonetheless marks out who is “good” in the *polis*. So then, who are the good people, and what makes them good?

Becoming increasingly exacerbated by Socrates’ inane and commonplace reasoning, Callicles insists that “it belongs” (προσῆκει) to those who are the “φρονίμους” and the courageous ones (ἀνδρείους) to rule (ἄρχειν) their *polis*, and “it is just” (τὸ δίκαιον ἐστίν) for them also to have more (πλέον) than the ruled.⁵¹⁹ Upon hearing this claim, Socrates asks a surprising question: “But what of themselves?” When Callicles claims not to understand what Socrates means by “ruling oneself,” Socrates explains: “Nothing very subtle (οὐδὲν ποικίλον). Just what the many (οἱ πολλοί) mean: being self-controlled (σώφρονα ὄντα) and master of oneself (ἐγκρατῆ αὐτὸν ἑαυτοῦ), ruling (ἄρχοντα) the pleasures (ἡδονῶν) and appetites (ἐπιθυμιῶν) within oneself.”⁵²⁰ Socrates prefaces his explanation of self-rule with the phrase “nothing very subtle” (οὐδὲν ποικίλον), a phrase which he also used in the *Meno* to insist upon the simplicity of the premise in his definition of shape.⁵²¹ That is, we might understand this phrase as a signal of Socratic earnestness.⁵²² And yet, just as *Meno* was not satisfied with Socrates’ simple account of shape, Callicles too is unsatisfied with Socrates’ simple account of self-rule, insisting instead that it befits only foolish people (οἱ ἡλίθιοι). When Callicles counters with a different measure of *arete* and fortune (εὐδαιμονία) than what Socrates proposed, Socrates summarizes his view in the following way:

Tell me: are you saying that if a person is to be the kind of person he should be (δεῖ εἶναι), he shouldn’t restrain (οὐ κολαστέον) his appetites (ἐπιθυμίας) but let them become as large (μεγίστας) as possible and then be prepared (ἐτοιμάζειν) to fulfill (πλήρωσιν) them from some source or other, and that this is *arete*.⁵²³

Callicles confirms Socrates’ review of his position. It should come as no surprise that our exploration of the *Gorgias* has taken us directly into another discourse on *arete*. Just as we have seen throughout our analysis in the *Meno*, inquiry into *arete* is inextricable from the *polis* especially with respect to the question of what or who should “rule” (ἄρχειν). We might understand

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 491d.

⁵²⁰ Plato, *Gorgias*, 491d-e. Many scholars readily recognize the connection between this part of the *Gorgias* and the *Meno*; however, consistently, scholars only point to it without any further commentary or attempt at integration. See Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, 205; Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, 137; Thompson, *The Meno of Plato*, 145; Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato’s Meno*, 127.

⁵²¹ Plato, *Meno*, 75e. “This is the sort of thing I want to say, nothing very subtle (οὐδὲν ποικίλον).”

⁵²² Although it often requires some tact to discern whether Socrates speaks earnestly or subversively in various contexts, it seems important to note textual cues, such as this one, which function as simple and clear textual guidelines especially during the integration of another text into our analysis of the *Meno*.

⁵²³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 492d-e.

Callicles' reasoning about what is "just by nature" in the terms of our own investigation, if we heed his account as an expression of an emergent measure of *arete* in the *polis*. If we follow the development of Callicles' reasoning, we can track the transformation of "the mightier (τὸν κρείττω), the better (τὸν βελτίω), and the superior (τὸν ἀμείνω)" into "the mightier (τὸ κρείττον), the better (τὸ βέλτιον), and the stronger (τὸ ισχυρότερον)," who then become "the 'φρόνιμοι' and brave (ἀνδρεῖοι) ones"—for whom ruling the *polis* is fitting and for whom it is just to have more (human goods, presumably).⁵²⁴ And then, in the final step, these individuals are identified as those who exhibit *arete* and fortune (εὐδαιμονία). In short, we find another instance of the argument that those who rule the *polis* set the measure of the human good. But, of course, Socrates resists this reasoning both in his discussion with Callicles and in his discussion with Meno. We initially turned to the *Gorgias* in order to develop a better understanding of self-rule, and now, we are better positioned to interpret its function in a discourse on *arete*.

Callicles' reasoning (and Meno's as well) represents a conventional approach to *arete*. Rulers *should* do whatever they have the power to do, and their exercise of power sets the measure for determining who is good (who exhibits *arete* and is fortunate (εὐδαιμονία)). We can state such a measure in the following way: a good person is someone who has the power to do whatever that person wants to do.⁵²⁵ A person's "wants" are their pleasures (ἡδοναί) and appetites (ἐπιθυμίας). However, we might understand Socrates' appeal to self-rule as a subversion of this measure which raises questions about their (i.e., pleasures (ἡδοναί) and appetites (ἐπιθυμίας)) "right" to rule the soul. And, at the same time, to question the rule of pleasures and appetites in the soul also entails a questioning of the rulers in the *polis* who may themselves be ruled by their pleasures and appetites.⁵²⁶ To raise questions about what should rule in the soul also carries political consequences for who should rule in the *polis*, and by beginning with the recognition of the relationship between the rulers and the human good in the *polis*, we also must acknowledge the

⁵²⁴ We leave "φρόνιμοις" untranslated here to avoid confusion later. We will address "φρόνησις" (i.e., that which the "φρόνιμοις" possess) at length later in this chapter.

⁵²⁵ Cf. Plato, *Meno*, 77b. Meno accounted for *arete* very similarly: "Well then, it seems to me, Socrates, that *arete* is just what the poet says, 'both to rejoice and to be capable in beautiful things (χαίρειν τε καλοῖσι καὶ δύνασθαι).' I too say that this is *arete*: to desire (ἐπιθυμοῦντα) beautiful things (τῶν καλῶν) and to be capable (δυνατὸν) of providing (πορίζεσθαι) them for oneself." See also Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, 52. "Like these other dialogues, the *Meno* begins with a series of failed attempts to define *arete* that disclose sometimes more, sometimes less, clearly that the sole reality behind moral conventions is the pursuit of power."

⁵²⁶ The juxtaposition of the image of the soul against an image of the city guides the *Republic* as well. Unsurprisingly, we find a similar image of the parts of the soul correlated with parts of the city. Cf. Plato, *Republic*, 439e-441a.

intertwinement of the soul and life in the *polis*. In this sense, our abiding concern for *arete* always remains entangled with the *polis* even if the *polis* also disrupts and inhibits a person's claim on to *arete* and the human good. Furthermore, the issue of self-rule raises questions about the measure of freedom as well. Which person is free? Is it the person with the power to fulfill their endless and insatiable pleasures and appetites, "wants" which ficklely guide a person's every decision toward their gratification? Or is it the person who "controls" and is "master" over their wants, an inhibition which could open the possibility for a "free" decision at all? This predicament sounds very similar to the conflict in the *Meno* which led us into the *Gorgias*. Meno would like to hear Socrates speak about how *arete* comes to be because it would be most pleasurable (ἡδίστα), and Meno's desire for gratification has, on multiple occasions, led the inquiry away from *arete*. In this case, Meno's desire does, at least, pertain to *arete* in a certain way, but inquiring into the way that *arete* comes to be in humans before inquiring into what *arete* is comes across quite foolish. To use a very Socratic style example, what use would there be in inquiring into how a person becomes a baker, if one does not even know the measure of a baker (what distinguishes the baker from everyone else)? Analogously, we can understand Socrates' insistence upon the search for what *arete* is before searching for how it comes to be. Nevertheless, Socrates will yield to Meno's demand. To satisfy the commands of an imperious ruler (of the dialogue and the *polis*), Socrates must use his cunning. Let us turn now to the second part of Socrates' speech and see how his adoption of the geometrical method might help him to gratify Meno.

It is difficult to determine why exactly Socrates agrees to follow Meno's command despite his inferiority as a leader of the inquiry into *arete*. Perhaps Socrates acknowledges that he must forego what is best and take a longer road to help Meno transition away from his prior orientation towards *arete*. Towards this end, we have seen Socrates use geometry previously as an effective means of subduing Meno when he became unruly.⁵²⁷ Here too Socrates proposes that they follow the method of the geometers who approach geometrical problems in a way that may be useful for their inquiry into how *arete* comes to be without knowing what it is. With noteworthy obscurity, Socrates explains the approach they will take in the following way:

⁵²⁷ Socrates also recommends the study of geometry in the *Republic*, claiming, "Then [geometry] draws the soul towards truth and produces philosophic thought by directing upwards what we now wrongly direct downwards." Plato, *Republic*, 527b.

(And) permit me to lay a foundation (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως) and then examine (σκοπεῖσθαι) whether it can be taught or should be interpreted in some other way. By the words “after laying a foundation” (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως) I mean the same thing that is often done by geometers (οἱ γεωμέτραι) when a question is put to them, e.g., in respect of an area-rectangle whether it is possible to inscribe triangularly in the circle here this area-rectangle. (Then) such a geometer would likely answer: “I do not know yet whether it has the required property (τοῦτο τοιοῦτον) but I think, if I may so put it, that I have a serviceable basis (τινα ὑπόθεσιν), on which to work, of the following sort (τοιάνθε): if the rectangle be such that when you extend it (in the circle) lengthwise along its given line, it is defective in height by another rectangle similar to the extended one, then, I believe, the result will be different from the result obtained when this cannot be done (i.e. when you cannot extend it in this manner and with this result). Having thus laid a foundation (ὑποθέμενος) I am prepared to tell you about inscribing it in a circle (whether or not this is possible).”⁵²⁸

During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, many scholars attempted to resolve the plethora of issues surrounding this passage, issues which range from its grammar to uncertainty about the very geometrical problem itself.⁵²⁹ Even in this translation, Heijboer has taken considerable translational liberty for the sake of greater clarity, clarity which he could only reach through his own resolution to the problems posed by this passage. Nevertheless, we will not concern ourselves with a needless addition to the already oversaturated attempts to address Socrates’ geometrical problem *as* a geometrical problem. As in the case of the prior geometrical problem, we will assume that its introduction into the dialogue facilitates Socrates’ inquiry into *arete* with Meno. Thus, we place ourselves in the best position to progress our analysis of *arete* in the *Meno*, if we defer to Klein’s account of the problem posed by Socrates’ example. Klein frames the problem in the following way:

...[T]he inscription, the possibility of which is in question, has to be considered as “done” so that a sufficient condition for its being feasible can be inferred as a *consequence*. It turns out that one way to formulate such a condition is precisely this: two rectangular areas, the applied one and the other one by which the first is “deficient,” must be “like” each other, must be “similar.” In fact, to know that the “inscription” is feasible means to recognize the “similarity” of those two areas.⁵³⁰

Taking our lead from both Socrates’ speech in the *Meno* itself and Klein’s account of this problem of “inscription,” we can see the repetition of a prior thematic which we considered also in Chapter

⁵²⁸ Translation of Plato, *Meno*, 86e-87b in Heijboer, “Plato ‘Meno’ 86e-87a,” 122. Translation modified.

⁵²⁹ Heijboer reviews the problems posed by this passage (especially grammatical and historical ones) and the scholarly attempts to resolve them. Heijboer, “Plato ‘Meno’ 86e-87a,” 90-102. See also Bluck, *Plato’s Meno*, 441-461. Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, 206-207.

⁵³⁰ Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, 207.

II. Just as we noted the simultaneous establishment and erasure of foundational suppositions in Socrates' story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις), i.e., the erasure of Meno's foundational suppositions about dialogical comportment which Gorgias cultivated in him and Socrates' assertion of a mythological basis for a new dialogical comportment, so too can we see the resolution of the problem of inscription as a repetition of the double gesture of erasure/establishment. In order to determine whether one rectangular area may be inscribed within a circle, one must take for granted an assumption, that is, lay a certain "foundation," about that rectangular area in order to determine subsequently whether or not such an inscription would be possible. The rectangular area's prior status as unknown must be erased, even if only tentatively, and, in its place, a new foundation must be taken for granted. The assumption of a foundational supposition both in the case of the geometrical problem of inscription and in Socrates' story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) provides a basis for subsequent reasoning. The analogical relationship between the foundational assumption in the geometrical problem of inscription and the foundational assumption in Socrates' story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) also facilitates discovery and justification. We discover something about the function of Socrates' story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) through our analogical reasoning about its likeness to the problem of inscription. Moreover, insofar as the similarity between the parts of the analogy remain intact, we also find justification for our interpretation of its dialogical power. This nebulous sense of a similitude between parts carries a lot of weight in analogical reasoning, and we ought to bear this burden in mind as we consider Socrates' guidance in this part of the discourse.⁵³¹

⁵³¹ Surprisingly, the pervasive use of analogical reasoning in the Platonic text is an underdeveloped area of Platonic scholarship. One of the most valuable resources on the topic is Holly Moore's dissertation "Plato's analogical thought." Therein, she writes, "what is important about this feature of analogy [i.e., that analogy relates the terms' relations to each other] is that it achieves a level of abstraction from the content of the expression in so far as its formal structure displays the relations as related. Although explicit analogies are not needed in order perceive [sic] the sense of an image, simile, or metaphor, they nevertheless do represent the structure of the thought that moves among relations of likeness and similarity." Moore, "Plato's analogical thought," 25-26. Indeed, we find expressions of analogical "relations as related" throughout the *Meno*, and an analogical relation will undergird a crucial insight in our own analysis within this chapter, i.e., the analogical relation between what leads the soul and who leads the *polis*. It would go beyond the scope of our analysis to develop a robust account of the use of analogical thought in the *Meno*, but we do acknowledge its foundational importance in our analysis. Furthermore, many useful examinations of this topic appear in French scholarship, which also falls outside of the purview of our inquiry. Some other insightful scholarship on analogy in the Platonic text include: Anderson, "Analogy in Plato," 111-128. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy: Two Types of Argumentation in Early Greek Thought*. Preus, "The continuous Analogy: The Uses of Continuous Proportions in Plato and Aristotle," 21-42. Strang, "Plato's Analogy of the Cave," 19-34.

In the case of the geometrical problem of inscription, the determination of the possibility of a rectangular area's inscription relies entirely on the assumption of a proportionality (a quantitative similitude) between the areas of two separate rectangles. In other words, we must assume the transferability of claims about one rectangular area to another—or, more abstractly, about one part of an analogical relationship to another part. The similitude between the two rectangular areas justifies subsequent claims about the primary rectangular area's potential for inscription. Analogously, Socrates proposes that he and Meno inquire into the way that *arete* comes to be by taking for granted something about *arete* upon which their subsequent reasoning will be based. On the one hand, we can understand Socrates' point easily enough. He must take for granted an assumption about *arete*, just as geometers do when attempting to answer a geometrical problem, to reason subsequently about how *arete* comes to be without “knowing” *what* it is.⁵³² On the other hand, there is something unruly about the application of this analogical reasoning. In the geometrical problem of inscription, the proportionality of the rectangular areas (e.g., a rectangle with an area of three's proportional similitude with a rectangle whose area is nine) justifies the geometrical practice. However, the problem of geometrical inscription and the problem posed by Meno's questions about *arete* do not share a similitude in this way. For example, we cannot “measure” the proportionality between *arete* and teachability *a la* the proportionality of the rectangular areas in the problem of inscription. But rather, the relationship of proportionality which unifies the parts of the analogical reasoning depends upon a qualitative similitude. It is the common necessity of a foundational supposition in order to allow for subsequent reasoning that justifies Socrates' suggestion to use the method of the geometers in their inquiry into *arete*. When we recognize this function of the analogical reasoning, then we see another dimension of the fragile power of persuasion. Meno will grant Socrates' proposal, which we suspect he would only do insofar as he recognizes the similarity between the parts of Socrates' comparison (the necessity of a foundational assumption in geometrical reasoning and in their present reasoning about *arete*). There is something persuasive about the comparison of these two problems. And yet, as we pointed out in our analysis, the similitude is concentrated on a very specific aspect and so always susceptible to objection. The quantitative proportionality that justifies the geometrical approach to the problem of inscription shares *no* likeness to the proportionality between *arete* and teachability. This precarity is quintessential to persuasive speech. For now, Meno follows Socrates (even if

⁵³² Socrates will assume *arete* to be teachable for the sake of his subsequent reasoning.

Socrates leads Meno according to Meno's demand), but Socrates also always risks losing him. This risk bespeaks both the urgency and difficulty of inquiry into *arete*. If *arete* is the sort of subject-matter with which one must engage dialectically, then apophantic discourse about it will always struggle to “keep up” with the evolving tension between the measure of *arete* in the *polis* and the philosophical practice that challenges it. By contrast, persuasive speech seduces the listener into continued dialogical engagement. In this sense, we can recognize its usefulness for inquiry which may require a life-long commitment regardless of its susceptibility. Despite interpreting Socrates' speech throughout Chapter II as speech which might persuade Meno to comport himself differently, we still begin our analysis in Chapter III with Meno's resistance to Socrates' exhortation to renew inquiry into *arete* (even if Meno resists more amicably this time).

Socrates concludes his speech by returning to the question which Meno has implored him to answer. He suggests:

In this way then, about *arete* too—since we know neither what it is (ὅτι ἐστὶν), nor what sort of thing it is (ὅποιόν τι)—let us look at (σκοπῶμεν) it by laying a foundation (ὑποθέμενοι), whether it is teachable (διδασκτὸν) or not teachable, speaking in the following way: If *arete* is some sort of thing among those things that have regard to the soul (εἰ ποῖόν τι ἐστὶν τῶν περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ὄντων ἀρετή), would it be teachable or not teachable? First, then, if it's the kind of thing that is different (ἄλλοῖον) from, or like (οἶον), knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), is it teachable or not, or, as we were just now saying, is it recollectable (ἀναμνηστὸν)—let it make no difference to us about whatever name we use—but is it teachable? Or is this, at any rate, clear to everyone, that a human being is taught nothing else than knowledge (ἐπιστήμην)?⁵³³

Socrates proposes that they begin their inquiry into *arete*'s coming to be with the foundational supposition that *arete* is teachable (διδασκτὸν). Having begun in this way, Socrates proceeds to assert two noteworthy claims about *arete*. First, he asks, “If *arete* is some sort of thing among those things that have regard to the soul (εἰ ποῖόν τι ἐστὶν τῶν περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ὄντων ἀρετή), would it be teachable (διδασκτὸν) or not teachable?” On the one hand, we must recognize that Socrates only asks this question because he laid a foundation (ὑποθέμενοι), namely, that *arete* is teachable. But, on the other hand, we cannot overlook the significance of the antecedent. Even if we have not explicitly thematized “the things that have regard to the soul” (τά περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ὄντα), we nonetheless have considered them since the beginning of our analysis. For example, we have dealt

⁵³³ Plato, *Meno*, 87b-c.

with specific *aretai* (such as justice, moderation, wisdom, etc.), knowledge, opinions, memory, habits, pleasure/appetites.⁵³⁴ It seems that the antecedent of the condition only follows from the foundational supposition that *arete* is teachable, but its appearance throughout our analysis might imply its dependence on a more basic supposition about *arete*.⁵³⁵ This suspicion is further justified by Socrates' indifference to the distinction between something teachable (διδακτὸν) and something recollectable (ἀναμνηστὸν). If the two terms can be used interchangeably (as Socrates seems to imply), then it does not seem likely that *arete*'s identification with "the things that have regard to the soul" (τά περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ὄντα) depends solely on the supposition of *arete*'s teachability.

The second noteworthy claim in the conclusion of Socrates' speech is the interrogation of *arete* as something "different (ἀλλοῖον) from or like (οἶον) knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), if it is teachable." The logic of this claim follows intuitively. Knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is what is taught. If *arete* is teachable, then it must be some kind of knowledge. This reasoning highlights the power of Socrates' proposal to use the method of the geometers. Because of the foundational supposition about *arete*, Socrates has a starting point from which his reasoning about *arete* may continue. But, of course, this further reasoning also leads to new difficulties. In the first place, do we even know what knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is? During our analysis in Chapter II, we admitted that we did not have a strong sense about knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) especially in relation to *arete*. A second difficulty, which we have already pointed out in an anticipatory way, concerns the transmission of this knowledge. If *arete* is a kind of knowledge, then who teaches this knowledge of *arete*? While we may be tempted to hear this question as a trivially empirical one, the question raises a problem unique to the supposition of *arete* as a kind of knowledge (which can be taught). We have understood *arete* throughout our analysis as the measure sufficient for the human good in the *polis*, a measure which is in tension with the philosophical practice that interrogates it. Insofar as the exhibition of *arete* sufficiently indicates who is a "good person," *arete* represents something which all humans want, even if humans may make mistakes concerning which things are good and bad

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 71a, 80d, 88a. Also, Plato, *Republic*, 618d. "[The human being who is most concerned to seek out and learn those subject matters that will enable him to distinguish the good life from the bad] will know the effects of high or low birth (εὐγένεια καὶ δυσγένεια), private life or ruling office (ιδιωτεῖα καὶ ἀρχαί), physical strength or weakness (ισχύες καὶ ἀσθένεια), ease or difficulty in learning (εὐμαθία καὶ δυσμαθία), and all the things that are either naturally part of the soul (ψυχὴν) or are acquired, and he will know what they achieve when mixed with one another."

⁵³⁵ The antecedent is "If *arete* is some sort of thing among those things that have regard to the soul (εἰ ποῖόν τι ἔστιν τῶν περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ὄντων ἀρετή)...." The condition is "If *arete* is some sort of thing among those things that have regard to the soul (εἰ ποῖόν τι ἔστιν τῶν περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ὄντων ἀρετή), would it be teachable (διδακτὸν) or not teachable?"

or what makes a life good or bad.⁵³⁶ Because humans want to live good lives (whatever that might mean), humans care about *arete*, and yet, humans also must live in the *polis*. The *polis* provides a site for emergent measures of the human good. We have considered several examples of such measures during our analyses in Chapters I and II. Wealthy people, beautiful people, and the rulers of the *polis* are just a few examples, whose problematic consequences as measures of the human good we also considered. However, let us consider another consequence in light of the recent supposition of *arete*'s teachability. If being a ruler of the *polis* is the measure of *arete* (and so a "good person"), then the teachers of *arete* would also be responsible for teaching rulers how to rule. But, again, are the rulers of the *polis* good because they are good people who also are the rulers, or are the rulers of the *polis* good because they are the rulers? If the former, then they are good independent of being rulers, and so it would be useless to someone who wants to be a good person to learn how to be a ruler. If the latter, then it is not even possible for most of the constituents of the *polis* to be good, and so the so-called "teachers of *arete*" really only teach a person how to be a ruler. Such a measure is relative, exclusive, and selfish, which makes it a dubious measure of the human good.

The question concerning the teachability of *arete* bears directly on Meno himself and on the Greek way of life more broadly. If *arete* is teachable, and so there are teachers of *arete*, then the sophists, who travel throughout Greece and charge fees for instruction in *arete*, must be examined.⁵³⁷ Should we include Meno's teacher Gorgias amongst the sophists despite Meno's insistence that Gorgias does not promise to teach *arete*?⁵³⁸ Even if Gorgias does not explicitly teach *arete*, we can see in Meno's engagement throughout the dialogue that Gorgias' instruction has practical effects on his students' approach to inquiry into *arete*. Moreover, even beyond the immanent concerns in Meno's and Socrates' discussion, the assertion of *arete*'s teachability also implies a group of people with potentially dangerous and powerful knowledge. Even if the sophists do not possess such knowledge, Socrates' reasoning from *arete*'s teachability to its identity with a kind of knowledge implies that *someone* does (or at least could). Such individuals would have the

⁵³⁶ Cf. Plato, *Meno*, 73c, 77c-78a.

⁵³⁷ Plato, *Apology*, 20b; *Euthydemus*, 273d; *Gorgias*, 519e, cf. in a more vicious sense 451d, 452d; *Greater Hippias*, 283c; *Meno*, 91b, 95b; *Protagoras*, 319a.

⁵³⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 95c. While Socrates does not accuse Gorgias of claiming to teach *arete*, he does name him as someone who charges a fee for instruction before telling a story about Callias who paid more money to sophists to teach his sons about *arete* than anyone. Plato, *Apology*, 19d-20c.

power to create or destroy a *polis*. Whoever possesses this knowledge would know which habits and practices lead to a good life. If, for example, being a good equestrian were a quintessential part of *arete*, then the *polis* with such a knowledge would obviously value instruction in horsemanship highly. While this example may be trivial, we could easily imagine much more nefarious measures of *arete* (e.g., Xenophon's account of Meno). In this sense, Socrates leads Meno into very treacherous territory. On the one hand, the supposition of *arete*'s teachability leads to questions concerning power in the *polis* for which Meno may not yet be prepared. Because humans must live in the *polis*, inquiry into *arete* and the human good also concerns power and rule, a precarious connection which we have noted since the beginning of our inquiry. But, on the other hand, if Socrates were to suppose that *arete* cannot be taught, then he would deny humans the power of a uniquely human gift—technical know-how (τέχνη). Let us begin our development of this new term (i.e., technical know-how (τέχνη)) by analyzing Protagoras' story in the *Protagoras*, which gives an account of the origin of technical know-how (τέχνη) as a part of a broader discourse on the teachability of *arete*.

At the beginning of the *Protagoras*, Socrates raises some of his doubts about the teachability of *arete*. After Socrates implores Protagoras to exhibit (ἐπιδείξει) how *arete* is teachable (διδασκτόν), Protagoras tells Socrates and the rest of his audience a story (μῦθος) of creation.⁵³⁹ In Protagoras' story, Prometheus agreed to let Epimetheus assign abilities to all of the creatures, but once Epimetheus did so, Prometheus found that Epimetheus had left humans without any powers (αἱ δυνάμεις). And so, Protagoras explains:

Then, Prometheus, being held in ἀπορία as to what security (σωτηρίαν) he could devise for a human being, stole from Hephaestus and Athena wisdom (σοφίαν) in technical know-how (ἔντεχνον) together with fire—without which this kind of wisdom is effectively useless—and gave them outright to a human being. Now, a human being possessed the wisdom (σοφίαν) concerning livelihood (τὸν βίον) in this way, but [a human] did not possess political (πολιτικὴν) [wisdom] because that was in the keeping of Zeus. Prometheus no longer had free access to the acropolis (ἄκρόπολιν) that is the house of Zeus—and besides this, the guards were terrifying—but he did sneak into the building that Athena and Hephaestus shared to practice their technical know-how (ἐφιλοτεχνεῖτην), and he stole from Hephaestus the technical know-how used at the fire (τὴν τε ἔμπτυρον τέχνην)

⁵³⁹ Plato, *Protagoras*, 320b-c.

and the other (τὴν ἄλλην τὴν) [technical know-how] from Athena and he gave them to humans. And from this, facility (εὐπορία) of livelihood (τοῦ βίου) came to be in a human.⁵⁴⁰

We would, of course, be foolish to think that we could use Protagoras' story (μῦθος) as a "factual" account of the origin of technical know-how (τέχνη) in human life *a la* the pre-natalist interpretation of recollection in the *Meno*. We have no interest in accounting for the origin of technical know-how (τέχνη) anyway. However, if we look at this story through the lens of our concern for *arete*, the human good, and the *polis* in the *Meno*, then we might find a persuasive justification for Socrates' cautious consideration of the possibility for *arete* to be teachable. Because of the carelessness of Epimetheus (or "Afterthought"), Prometheus (or "Forethought") must find a way to save human beings. Humans are vulnerable compared to the other creatures without any power of their own. And so, Prometheus steals "wisdom (σοφίαν) in technical know-how (ἔντεχνον) together with fire" from Athena and Hephaestus respectively so that humans have a facility (εὐπορία) for livelihood (βίος). In Protagoras' story, technical know-how (τέχνη) is given a heavy axiological weight. It is both a saving power for human beings and a gift from Prometheus, who suffers eternally for this gift according to other accounts.⁵⁴¹ If the esteem for technical know-how (τέχνη) in Protagoras' story is indicative of a broader confidence in the power of such wisdom (σοφίαν), then, of course, it makes sense to examine a wisdom of this kind for *arete*. And yet, interestingly, even in Protagoras' story, we find political (πολιτική) wisdom explicitly omitted. Prometheus' gift of technical know-how (τέχνη) does not provide humans with the wisdom that would facilitate living together in the *polis*.⁵⁴² In other words, according to Protagoras' story, technical know-how (τέχνη) provides humans with a means to live, but it does not guarantee that humans will live *well*. This latter question, which falls within the purview of the human good, is precisely what is at the heart of our inquiry into *arete*. Protagoras' story does nothing to answer the question concerning the teachability of *arete* definitively. We still must examine it in the *Meno*. However, his story does help us to appreciate the gravity of this particular foundational supposition. Technical know-how (τέχνη) is a unique, human power—something teachable—and

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 321d-322a. Translation modified.

⁵⁴¹ For example, in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*.

⁵⁴² Protagoras accounts for the political question and the question of *arete* later in the story, explaining that Zeus distributed justice and shame to all humans (in contrast to the distribution of specialized forms of technical know-how, which some people know and others do not). Plato, *Protagoras*, 322c-323c.

so, if *arete* can be taught, then it would be quite advantageous for every person to learn the technical know-how (τέχνη) of *arete*.⁵⁴³

We can see the recurrent introduction of the question of the teachability of *arete* throughout the *Meno*, e.g., in Meno's initial questions, in its assumption as a foundational supposition, in Socrates' discussion with Anytus, in Socrates' recitation of contradictory passages on the question of teachability in Theognis, as a symptom of the desire "to know" *how* to live a good life.⁵⁴⁴ Socrates' circumspect approach to inquiry into *arete* stands out by contrast. Socrates will only go so far as to assume *arete*'s teachability as a foundational supposition, but even so, Socrates still will examine it with the same meticulous concern with which he examined what *arete* is. Even so, such scrutiny places Socrates in a dangerous position. We previously noted the connection between the question concerning the teachers of *arete*, if it is teachable, and those who have considerable power in the *polis*. Socrates' examination of *arete*'s teachability places him in opposition to those who have tangible political power. This examination of *arete*, even in the manner which Meno proposed, places Socrates' life at risk. On the one hand, it places his life at risk because it has consequences for the way that he lives his life. If *arete* turns out to be something teachable, and if Socrates genuinely cares about *arete* as much as he claims, then he would likely give up his prior way of living and commit himself to those who teach *arete*. An inquiry into *arete* requires one to "risk one's life" in pursuit of the human good.⁵⁴⁵ But, on the other hand, this inquiry could place Socrates at odds with many powerful people. This risk encroaches from many directions. For example, Meno, whose political power we have already acknowledged, threatened Socrates once already in the *Meno*.⁵⁴⁶ Moreover, the sophists, who purport to teach *arete*, tend to attract the sons of the political elite, and if Socrates's examination of *arete* and its teachability called into question the legitimacy of their practice, then Socrates would likely become "unpopular" with such

⁵⁴³ Socrates also approaches the question concerning *arete*'s teachability ambivalently in the *Protagoras*. In the conclusion, Socrates gives their discussion a voice, and he imagines it would mock Socrates and Protagoras, saying, "...Socrates, you said earlier that *arete* cannot be taught, but now you are arguing the very opposite and have attempted to show that everything (πάντα χρήματά) is knowledge (ἐπιστήμη)—justice (ἡ δικαιοσύνη), moderation (σωφροσύνη), courage (ἡ ἀνδρεία)—in which case, *arete* would appear to be eminently teachable (διδασκτὸν)." Plato, *Protagoras*, 361b-c. And yet, earlier in the dialogue, Socrates inferred that *arete* cannot be taught because of Athenian political practice. The Athenians permit anyone (not just the "educated") to speak on *polis* management (πόλεως διοικήσεως), and further, in private (ἰδίᾳ), the wisest and best (οἱ σοφώτατοι καὶ ἄριστοι) of the citizens (τῶν πολιτῶν) cannot transmit (παραδιδόναι) their *arete* to others. Ibid., 319d.

⁵⁴⁴ Plato, *Meno*, 70a; 87b; 91a-95a; 95d-96a.

⁵⁴⁵ Plato, *Apology*, 21b-23b, 28b-c; Plato, *Gorgias*, 500c, in a more indirect way, Ibid., 485e.

⁵⁴⁶ Plato, *Meno*, 80b.

individuals. Or, as we will see later when Anytus enters the dialogue, if the teachers of *arete* are simply the constituents of the *polis*, then Socrates might incite the anger of his fellow Athenians.⁵⁴⁷ This multifaceted risk exemplifies the challenge of an inquiry that must take place within, what we will call, a “communal horizon.” The search for the measure of the human good is simultaneously an individual task *and* a communal one, and the *polis*, while a necessary site, is never a “neutral” site. The *polis* has always already staked out some claim on the human good in relation to which the individual strives to stake his or her own claim. The ongoing pursuit of *arete*—a pursuit which takes place in both word and deed—defines and is defined by the *polis*. It is communal because it is a pursuit that requires the other (whether the “others” are cooperative or combative); and yet, the community does not determine the pursuit entirely. The relationship between the individual and community is dialectical.⁵⁴⁸

From the very beginning of our inquiry into the *Meno*, we have analyzed the relationship between *arete*, the human good, and the *polis*. The focus of the current stage of our analysis does not differ, but we nonetheless have already begun to consider this relationship in a new way. *Meno*

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 92e.

⁵⁴⁸ Gadamer’s analysis of horizons for his theory of hermeneutic experience informs our own concept of the “communal horizon,” and we owe a great debt to Gadamer insofar as he articulated the sense of “horizon” in our own concept, when he wrote: “The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth. Since Nietzsche and Husserl, the word has been used in philosophy to characterize the way in which thought is tied to its finite determinacy, and the way one’s range of vision is gradually expanded. A person who has no horizon does not see far enough and hence over-values what is nearest to him. On the other hand, ‘to have a horizon’ means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it. A person who has an horizon knows the relative significance of everything within the horizon, whether it is near or far, great or small.” Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 301-302. Furthermore, Gadamer does not naively assert that a person could have a “closed” horizon without others, noting: “Just as the individual is never simply an individual because he is always in understanding with others, so too the closed horizon that is supposed to enclose culture is an abstraction.” Ibid., 303. Gadamer even acknowledged the interdependence between the “horizon of the present” and “historical horizons” for the understanding of hermeneutic experience. “In fact the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. *Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves*....In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for the old and new are always combining into something of living value, without either being explicitly foregrounded from the other.” Ibid., 305. Having reviewed Gadamer’s examination of “horizons” in *Truth and Method*, we might appear to create a redundant term for the fusion of the horizon of the present with the (Athenian) historical horizon. Gadamer is careful in his analysis to emphasize the inextricability of the other for one’s horizon as well, but his analysis focuses on the hermeneutic experience of the individual, even if that experience cannot occur without others or ahistorically. We do not note this framework as a criticism of his analysis, but it is a difference. In our analysis, we are not concerned with the communal horizon insofar as it is a horizon for Socrates, *Meno*, Anytus, or the *παῖς*, even if it does inform their respective pursuits of *arete*. The communal horizon is a “communal” phenomenon, one which undoubtedly needs individuals but which does not take place within the embodied experience of any one individual.

refused Socrates' exhortation to renew their search for what *arete* is, and he implored Socrates to tell him instead about how *arete* comes to be as Meno asked of him in the beginning. Socrates agreed to comply with Meno but with considerable protestation. Our analysis of Socrates' response has led us to consider the relationship between *arete*, the human good, and the *polis* as they appear alongside questions concerning power and rule in the soul and in the *polis*. Because of Meno's submission to his pleasures, Socrates now must examine *arete* in a way which he does not think is best. This sequence of events together with a peripheral remark about Meno's lack of freedom forced us to confront the intertwinement of what "rules" in the soul and *who* rules the dialogue/in the *polis*. While we previously pointed out that the rulers of a *polis* have the power to set the measure of *arete* insofar as they are the rulers, we also see a more fundamental relationship which may inform this emergent measure. The measure of *arete* bears upon the soul of an individual, an individual who may also be a ruler in the *polis*. Our analysis of Callicles' speech in the *Gorgias* together with Meno's prior claims about *arete* emphasized a part of the danger in letting the gratification of pleasure guide one's actions. In part, it is a question concerning the measure of freedom. Is being free the power to fulfill whatever one happens to desire, or is it the restraint which precedes the possibility of making a decision at all? Just as Socrates and Meno dialogue with one another, so too are the soul of the *polis* and the soul of the individual in dialogue with one another.

When we turned to Socrates' proposal that they address the question concerning how *arete* comes to be by imitating the approach of the geometers, we took the opportunity to reflect upon the power of analogical reasoning in another way. Socrates' proposal depended upon the likeness between the geometrical approach to answering the problem of inscription and the attempt to say how *arete* comes to be by laying a foundation. Although this approach exerts a certain persuasive power insofar as the likeness between the two parts of the analogy holds, we simultaneously recognized how easily the analogy can fall apart, if the many differences overwhelm the fleeting identity. The fragile potency of analogical reasoning shares a likeness with the fragile potency of Socratic persuasion. We interpreted Socrates' story of recollection, the exhibition, and his commentary as a sort of seductive speech which might persuade Meno to comport himself differently towards inquiry into *arete*. This foundational supposition (i.e., that "learning is really recollection") followed a similar logic to the geometrical approach that Socrates proposed to address the question concerning *arete*'s coming to be. And yet, neither discursive approach

guarantees a transformation of the soul. In fact, the foundational supposition about *arete* from which Socrates began the inquiry emphasized a predicament with which an inquiry into *arete* must reckon. If *arete* can be taught, then it must be some sort of knowledge (since knowledge is what is taught). But if it can be taught, then who are the teachers of *arete*? Again, we saw this question in relation to questions concerning who has power/who rules in the *polis*. Whoever teaches *arete* is the keeper of a “knowledge” with considerable influence over the constitution of the *polis*. Consequently, genuine inquiry into *arete*’s teachability carries considerable danger as well. Doing so places Socrates at odds with an array of people with political power throughout Greece, and yet, not examining this supposition risks losing the human good, if everyone were to share a common faulty assumption. In particular, we began to develop the issues concerning technical know-how (τέχνη), since, as we inferred from Protagoras’ story about the creation of human beings, there seems to be a ubiquitous confidence in the awesome, saving power of technical know-how (τέχνη). But is there/can there be a technical know-how (τέχνη) of *arete*? Let us bear this question in mind as we follow Socrates’ reasoning about *arete* based upon the foundational supposition that it is teachable.

Knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), Beneficence (ὠφέλιμος), and Dialectical Reasoning (φρόνησις) (87c-89b)

Socrates begins his reasoning with a simple pair of premises: knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is what is taught, and so if *arete* is teachable (διδασκτὸν), then *arete* must be some sort of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη τις).⁵⁴⁹ Consequently, Socrates proposes that they examine whether *arete* is, in fact, knowledge so that they may determine whether it is teachable. First, Socrates questions their assumptions about the relationship between *arete* and “the good” (ἀγαθός), asking, “Do we not affirm that *arete* is good itself (ἀγαθὸν αὐτό), and does this same foundational supposition (ὑπόθεσις) remain with us, that it is good itself (ἀγαθὸν αὐτὸ εἶναι)?”⁵⁵⁰ As the measure of a good person, *arete* and the human good are inseparable. The nebulous reflexive “itself” (αὐτό) need not throw us off, leading us into metaphysical, otherworldly musings. Whosoever exhibits *arete* must be a good person, since we have understood *arete* as the measure sufficient for the human good.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 87c.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 87d. Translation modified.

⁵⁵¹ Cf. Ibid., 73c. Socrates also repeats a similar claim at 87e. Klein reads the claim tautologically: a good person exhibits *arete*, and an *aretaic* human exhibits goodness. Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, 212. Klein also thinks no such supposition has been stated, either not acknowledging the connection to 73c or not finding it adequately

This sufficiency abides even when the measure leads to suspect consequences—some of which we have examined already (e.g., being beautiful, wealthy, or simply the ruler of the *polis* as measures of *arete*). Naturally, *arete* must be good itself if its exhibition suffices as a condition for being a good person. Conspicuously, however, Socrates calls this claim a foundational supposition (ὑπόθεσις), even though the primary foundational supposition from which this part of the inquiry began was that *arete* is teachable. This remark, which we could so easily overlook, attests to the dialectical tension that is quintessential to inquiry into *arete*. The *polis* makes a claim on *arete* and the human good based upon a foundational supposition—one whose suppositional character must partially be erased in order to secure it as a foundation. And yet, we simultaneously recognize that Socratic philosophical practice too depends upon its own foundational suppositions, which both allow for Socrates to examine the claims of the *polis* on *arete* and the human good as suppositions and also to develop responses to these claims based upon other foundational suppositions. We first noticed this process when Socrates told Meno the story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις), which we analyzed in Chapter II. We have described the tension between the individual (here exemplified by Socrates) and the *polis* as dialectical throughout, and one reason to interpret inquiry into *arete* as dialectical is that it vacillates between the subjective and the objective. Inquiry into *arete* does not search for an “objective” measure of *arete* or an “objective” human good, to which the individuals of the *polis* fail to measure up. But neither does it search for a “subjective” measure of *arete* or a “subjective” human good, one which each individual develops for oneself “in private.” Thus, we can see another reason for Socrates’ prior insistence on a particular dialogical comportment (i.e., being a brave and tireless seeker). The navigation of the dialectical tension is as important for securing *arete* and the human good in the *polis* as it is difficult.

Meno agrees that *arete* is good itself (ἀγαθὸν αὐτό), and since the inquiry concerns what sort of knowledge *arete* might be (based upon the foundational supposition that it is teachable), Socrates next examines the consequences of this supposition for the relationship between knowledge and the good. Socrates reasons:

Then, if there is something good (τί ἐστὶν ἀγαθόν), and it is something else separated (χωριζόμενον) from knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), it may be that *arete* would not be some sort of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη τις); but if there is nothing good (ἀγαθόν) which knowledge does

similar. Nevertheless, his reading of this part of Socrates’ speech carries a fundamentally subversive slant as well, playing off the homophony between “supposition” and “suspicion.” Our interpretation harmonizes with Klein’s but in a different key.

not encompass (οὐκ ἐπιστήμη περιέχει), then we would suspect (ὑποπτεύοιμεν) rightly (ὀρθῶς) what we were suspecting (ὑποπτεύοντες), that it is some sort of knowledge (ἐπιστήμην).⁵⁵²

Because they have agreed that *arete* is good, and because they have also agreed that *arete* is some sort of knowledge (if it is teachable), Socrates considers a conclusion with sweeping consequences. We can reframe Socrates' conclusion into the following question: Does knowledge “encompass” (“περιέχει”) everything good, or is there anything good “apart” (“χωριζόμενον”) from knowledge? If the former, then perhaps *arete* is a sort of knowledge, since *arete* is good. But if the latter holds, then *arete* need not be a sort of knowledge. In this disjunction, we are confronted with a decisive question for our inquiry. If it is possible for humans to know about everything that is good, then surely *arete* too must be something knowable, i.e., a sort of knowledge.⁵⁵³ And yet, at no point in our inquiry thus far have we assumed *arete* to be a sort of knowledge despite understanding it as the sufficient measure of the human good. To put the question plainly: can a good person, someone who exhibits *arete*, be good/exhibit *arete* in the *polis* unknowingly? The supposition that *arete* is itself good seems sound, when we understand *arete* as the sufficient measure of the human good. Wherever we would find *arete*, we would also find a good person. However, need we also assume that such a person exhibits *arete* knowingly, i.e., with a sort of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη τις) of *arete*? This question takes us back to the exhibition with the παῖς. When we analyzed Socrates' commentary on the exhibition, we found a difficult distinction between true opinions (ἀληθεῖς δόξαι) and knowledge.⁵⁵⁴ Moreover, if we look ahead in an anticipatory way to the text which we will analyze in Chapter V, we will find a sustained tension between true opinion and knowledge.⁵⁵⁵ Despite Socrates' insistence that true opinion and knowledge are not the same, he will nonetheless admit that they both can lead a person “correctly.” This question concerning the relationship between knowledge and *arete*, which, of course, carries implications for the good/good things/good people, will persist throughout the remainder of the dialogue. It may be useful to

⁵⁵² Ibid., 87d. Translation modified.

⁵⁵³ The word for “encompass,” περιέχει, presents some interpretive challenges. When describing physical phenomena, its sense seems relatively clear. For example, “wind and air encompass the whole cosmos” (...καὶ ὅλον τὸν κόσμον πνεῦμα καὶ ἀήρ περιέχει). Anaximenes, DK13 B2. We can easily imagine wind and air surrounding the “cosmos” on all sides. But how does this spatial metaphor govern the relationship between “knowledge” and everything good? Does Socrates describe a part/whole relation in which all good things constitute the parts of knowledge as a whole? But, of course, this question is exactly what is *in* question—that is, whether there is anything good about which humans cannot have knowledge.

⁵⁵⁴ Plato, *Meno*, 85c-d.

⁵⁵⁵ On their difference, Plato, *Meno*, 98b. On their equal power to lead in the right direction, *ibid.*, 97b.

consider this concern in relation to our analysis of Protagoras' story about technical know-how (τέχνη) in the *Protagoras*. The livelihood of human beings was saved by the gift of a sort of knowledge, and we interpreted the events of this story as a sign of the desire to know how to be good (to live a good life)—especially through technical know-how (τέχνη), if possible. Socrates' disjunctive reasoning concerning the domain of knowledge may bespeak the supposition of this desire. What is the reason for this supposition/suspicion? Must humans have some sort of “knowledge” of *arete*, if humans are to have any hope of being good people in the *polis*?

After establishing this disjunction concerning the domain of knowledge, Socrates sets out on a separate path, one on which he (and Meno) will consider “the good” more specifically. He asks, “and are we not good (ἀγαθοί) by *arete*?”⁵⁵⁶ While this question does not tell us anything entirely new about *arete*, the good, or their connection with one another, we note it because of its conspicuous and explicit application to concrete human beings. Socrates unmistakably asks about his and Meno's status as “good” (at least their potential to be so). As we have assumed since the beginning, our inquiry does not concern “the good” in an abstract and detached way, but it concerns the human good, which is to say, being a good person in the *polis* during this life. Socrates follows up this claim with another powerfully revealing assertion. “And if [we are] good (ἀγαθοί), [we are] beneficent (ὠφέλιμοι): for all good things are beneficial (πάντα γὰρ τὰγαθὰ ὠφέλιμα).”⁵⁵⁷ We ought to note here the conventionally justified rendering of “τὰγαθὰ” as “good things.” Contextually, it makes some sense to supply “things” as the substantive because Socrates will go on to mention particular human goods, but convention also permits us to supply “ones” as well. Thus, we might translate Socrates' claim differently as “And if we are good (ἀγαθοί), we are beneficent (ὠφέλιμοι): for all good ones [i.e., people] are beneficial (πάντα γὰρ τὰγαθὰ ὠφέλιμα).” We cannot understate the significance of this claim when we translate it in this way. Since the beginning of our inquiry, we have sought for the measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good in the *polis*. Might being beneficent (ὠφέλιμος) function as such a measure? Is this measure not universal, inclusive, and relational? Socrates will even continue his reasoning by asking, “Now

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 87e.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid. Translation modified. Anastaplo and Berns' translation presents some interpretative difficulties. They do not bracket “we are” in their translation, neither of which appear in the Greek but which can reasonably be supplied based upon the prior sentence (i.e., “and are we not good (ἀγαθοί) by *arete*?”). But if Anastaplo and Berns think it is appropriate to supply “we are,” then why do they render “τὰγαθὰ” as “good things” and not “good people?”

arete, too, is beneficial (ὠφέλιμόν)?”⁵⁵⁸ The assertion of this identity between being good and being beneficial seems to resolve many problems concerning the measure of *arete* with which we have grappled throughout our analysis. For example, no beneficial person would do “bad things” (i.e., “harmful things”) in the name of the good, since doing so would undermine that person’s claim to being good as being beneficial. Moreover, beneficence enhances the “goodness” of human goods. The beauty of a beautiful person is intensified when coupled with beneficence. And yet, perhaps surprisingly, the assertion of identity between being good and beneficial does not mark the end of the inquiry. It is somehow insufficient. In what way?

We touched upon this issue briefly during our analysis of Socrates’ response to the first half of Meno’s third account of *arete*.⁵⁵⁹ In our analysis, we noted a preliminary connection between what is beneficial and what is good. However, the issue at that part of the text, which still remains an issue for our current analysis, concerns the human ability to discern between what is good and bad. As Socrates pointed out to Meno then, some people do indeed desire “bad things,” but they do not desire them *as* bad things (τά κακά) but as good things (τάγαθά), which is to say, beneficial things (ὠφελουμένοι).⁵⁶⁰ Thus, even if one strives to be a beneficial person in their pursuit of the human good, such a person still might err insofar as the person errs about which things benefit or harm humans. In Socrates’ subsequent reasoning, we can see an attempt to overcome this challenge. He asserts that health (ὕγεια), strength (ισχύς), beauty (κάλλος), and wealth (πλοῦτος) are beneficial (ὠφέλιμα) to humans. Unsurprisingly, these goods are the same ones which we have tracked since the beginning of our analysis. For example, in Socrates’ opening speech, he concluded by asking Meno if someone who had no “cognizance” (γινώσκειν) of him could know (εἰδέναι) whether he is beautiful (κάλος), rich (πλούσιος), or well-born (γενναῖός).⁵⁶¹ Socrates included health (ὕγεια) and strength (ισχύς) among his examples, when asking Meno whether the same *eidos* (e.g., of *arete* but also of health (ὕγεια), stature (μέγεθος), and strength (ισχύς)) persists across sexual difference.⁵⁶² And finally, Socrates specified health (ὕγεια) and wealth (πλοῦτος) as the “good things” which *arete* gives one the power to provide for oneself in

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 77b-78b.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 77e.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., 71b.

⁵⁶² Ibid., 71d.

Meno's third account of *arete*.⁵⁶³ Socrates does not dispute *that* any of these things are good, but he does remark upon their conditional goodness/benefit. He asks: "Now examine (σκόπει), what leads (ἡγῆται) each of these things whenever it benefits (ὠφελεῖ) us and whenever it harms (βλάπτει)? Then is it not that whenever right usage (ὀρθή χρῆσις) [leads], it benefits (ὠφελεῖ); but when not, it harms (βλάπτει)?"⁵⁶⁴ The question concerning the measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good in the *polis* does not simply culminate in knowing *that* (i.e., knowing that we must be beneficial in order to be good) but also knowing *how* to do so. Precisely here we witness the temptation to turn to technical know-how (τέχνη), since this way of knowing teaches people how to produce works reliably. We also ought to recall our differentiation between the geometrical problem with the *παῖς* and inquiry into *arete*. The "representation" of *arete*, i.e., being a good/beneficial person, is not redundant/heuristic like in geometry, but rather, it is responsible for the urgency and gravity of the entire inquiry. If "right usage" (ὀρθή χρῆσις) leads (ἡγῆται) goods (τάγαθὰ) to benefit (ὠφελεῖν) humans, then whence come a knowledge of "right usage" (ὀρθή χρῆσις)? *What* should lead, and also, as we noted in our analysis at the beginning of this chapter, this question also ties together with the question concerning *who* should lead?

We might expect Socrates to examine what is involved in "right usage" (ὀρθή χρῆσις), or how humans come to know "right usage" (ὀρθή χρῆσις). However, he does not do so immediately.⁵⁶⁵ Instead, Socrates proposes that they examine "those things that pertain to the soul" (τὰ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν).⁵⁶⁶ But why? How do these "things that pertain to the soul" (τὰ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν) relate to the question concerning "right usage" (ὀρθή χρῆσις)? Let us follow Socrates' reasoning. Socrates names the following as those things that pertain to the soul (τὰ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν): moderation (σωφροσύνη), justice (δικαιοσύνη), courage (ἀνδρεία), readiness-to-learn (εὐμαθία), memory (μνήμη), magnificence (μεγαλοπρέπεια), and "all such kinds of things" (πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα).⁵⁶⁷ What is the significance of this list? It may be useful for our inquiry if we understand this list of things that pertain to the soul (τὰ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν) as a foil to the prior list of human goods (health (ὕγεια), strength (ἰσχύς), beauty (κάλλος), and wealth (πλοῦτος)). In a

⁵⁶³ Ibid., 78c.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 88a. Translation modified

⁵⁶⁵ Socrates' reasoning will culminate with an explanation of using (χρωμένη) and leading (ἡγουμένη) things rightly (ὀρθῶς). Ibid., 88d.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., 88a.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

sense, these goods are goods of the *polis*, i.e., goods whose realization the *polis* provides the site for. Because they are “good,” we have noted at various points in our analysis how they can become emergent measures of the human good in the *polis*. However, in light of our recent analysis, we see now that these human goods are only conditionally good/beneficial.⁵⁶⁸ They require right usage (ὀρθή χρῆσις) in order for them to benefit humans. Similarly, Socrates seems to lead Meno through a line of reasoning about what makes “the things that pertain to the soul” (τὰ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν) beneficial. And the development of this argument really should not come as a surprise to us. Our analysis throughout this chapter has tracked the analogical reasoning that supposes a likeness between what leads in the soul and what leads in the *polis*. In this sense, we can anticipate the direction in which the dialogues is headed. This turn to “the things that pertain to the soul” (τὰ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν) imminently concerns the everyday dealings in the *polis*—especially who should lead it. Whatever “governs” (leads rightly) these things of the soul will account for the uncertain status of what gives human goods their benefit, which, furthermore, will partially account for the kind of leadership that benefits a *polis*.

Our attunement to the subversive character of Socratic philosophical practice also brings to light the irony of the seemingly “innocent” list of “the things that pertain to the soul” (τὰ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν).⁵⁶⁹ Among the things that pertain to the soul, Socrates includes readiness-to-learn (εὐμαθία), memory (μνήμη), magnificence (μεγαλοπρέπεια), which stand out from the other three (moderation (σωφροσύνη), justice (δικαιοσύνη), courage (ἀνδρεία)) because of their pertinence to Meno’s unique shortcomings. In Chapter II, our analysis tracked Socrates’ concern for Meno’s dialogical comportment through each step of his reasoning (i.e., in his story, exhibition, and commentary on recollection (ἀνάμνησις)). If Meno were persuaded to trust Socrates’ reasoning, then he would also become a brave and tireless seeker (especially in inquiry into *arete*). In light of Socrates’ recent terminological shift, we might retrospectively interpret readiness-to-learn (εὐμαθία) as the antipodal dialogical comportment to being contentious (ἐριστικός).⁵⁷⁰ We also

⁵⁶⁸ We saw hints of this point earlier in our analysis, when Socrates asked if they should add “justly” and “piously” to Meno’s account of *arete* as the provision of gold and silver. Plato, *Meno*, 78d.

⁵⁶⁹ “Innocent” in the sense that these examples could appear not to have any special significance if they were considered independently from the context of the *Meno*.

⁵⁷⁰ Socrates’ defense of the philosophical nature in the *Republic* may also be worth noting here. Explaining why philosophy itself does not make its practitioners vicious, Socrates exhorts Adeimantus, “Remember (μémνησαι) that courage (ἀνδρεία), magnificence (μεγαλοπρέπεια), readiness-to-learn (εὐμάθεια), and a good memory (μνήμη) all belong to [the philosophic nature (τῆς φιλοσόφου φύσεως)].” He also mentioned a “healthy (ὕγιες) and just (δίκαιον) character (ἦθος), with moderation (σωφροσύνην) following it.” Plato, *Republic*, 490c.

encountered both memory (μνήμη) and magnificence (μεγαλοπρέπεια) during our analysis in Chapter I. We noticed a common root between Meno's name (Μένων) and memory (μνήμη), but at the time, we were not quite sure what to make of this connection. Meno seems as capable as anyone else at remembering things that he has learnt, but he uses his memory of arguments and poetry in a rigid way. Meno can recite arguments and verses from memory, but when Socrates implores Meno to engage dialectically in their common search for *arete*, Meno consistently falters. His memory does not serve him well in this regard. By contrast, Socrates, who claimed to be a bad rememberer, shows himself extraordinarily capable of both remembering arguments and verses and incorporating them into his reasoning. And finally, of course, the repetition of magnificence (μεγαλοπρέπεια) reminds us of the beginning, when Socrates described the habits which Gorgias inculcates into his students, namely, answering fearlessly and magnificently (“ἀφόβως τε καὶ μεγαλοπρεπῶς ἀποκρίνεσθαι”) as is fitting for those who know (ὥσπερ εἰκὸς τοὺς εἰδότας).⁵⁷¹ Initially, Meno did answer “what *arete* is” like someone who knows what it is, but as we have made our way through the dialogue, the distance between the image of Meno as a knower and Meno's ability to navigate the inquiry into *arete* has confronted us and made us suspicious of the tenuous likeness. But what of the other three things that pertain to the soul: moderation (σωφροσύνη), justice (δικαιοσύνη), and courage (ἀνδρεία)?

Moderation (σωφροσύνη), justice (δικαιοσύνη), and courage (ἀνδρεία) differ from readiness-to-learn (εὐμαθία), memory (μνήμη), and magnificence (μεγαλοπρέπεια) notably because the former frequently appear together in this dialogue and others as “parts” of *arete* in addition to being things that pertain to the soul.⁵⁷² We have previously understood them (or at least moderation (σωφροσύνη) and justice (δικαιοσύνη)) as necessary but not sufficient measures of the human good. Now, however, Socrates seems to call this supposition into question when he questions the unconditional “goodness” (benefit) of courage. He asks:

Now examine (σκόπει) whether any of these things seem to you to be not knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), but something other than knowledge (ἄλλο ἐπιστήμης); whether they don't sometimes harm (βλάπτει) and sometimes benefit (ὠφελεῖ)? For example, courage (ἀνδρεία), if the courage is not dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις), but some sort of boldness (θάρρος)—is it not the case that when a human being is mindlessly bold (ἄνευ νοῦ θαρρῆ),

⁵⁷¹ Plato, *Meno*, 70b.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, 74a, 79a. Magnificence (μεγαλοπρέπεια) is notably named as an *arete*.

[that person] is harmed (βλάπτεται) and whenever mindfully (σὺν νῶ), benefited (ὠφελεῖται)?⁵⁷³

Socrates appears to introduce many new details into this step of his reasoning, but it all follows from their foundational supposition (i.e., that *arete* is teachable). In the first place, he raises the question concerning the status of the things that pertain to the soul *as* knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), but he does not do so in a general way. Rather, he asks about the status of the thing pertaining to the soul/part of *arete* called “courage” (ἀνδρεία). What presupposition must Socrates make in order to conclude that courage (ἀνδρεία) is knowledge (ἐπιστήμη)? Socrates has already said: That *arete* itself is some sort of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη τις).⁵⁷⁴ Socrates appears to adhere quite rigidly to the geometrical procedure, but this part of his reasoning stands out as a vague consequence of the foundational supposition. While this conclusion does follow from the foundation, our uncertainty about “dialectical reasoning” (φρόνησις) makes it unclear what Socrates implies with his claim. Socrates has introduced “dialectical reasoning” (φρόνησις) quite suddenly. Nevertheless, Socrates continues his search for what rightly leads the things that pertain to the soul when they are beneficial. He does so in two steps. First, he presents a disjunctive account of courage. Courage (ἀνδρεία) is either dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) or it is some sort of boldness (θάρρος). Just as we observed with readiness-to-learn (εὐμαθία), memory (μνήμη), and magnificence (μεγαλοπρέπεια), we ought to recognize the ways in which this account of courage (ἀνδρεία) seems curated to the context of the *Meno*. Socrates noted the folly of boldness also when he spoke to Meno about the παῖς.⁵⁷⁵ However, we ought to tarry with Socrates’ distinction here, since we could easily overlook how unconventional his claim is. For example, during Socrates’ discussion with the two distinguished Athenian generals, Nicias and Laches, about courage in *Laches*, Nicias claims:

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 88b. Translation modified. We translate the prepositional phrases “ἄνευ νοῦ” and “σὺν νῶ” as “mindlessly” and “mindfully” respectively, and we will follow a similar practice moving forward. The payoff of this decision will become clearer in later stages of our analysis. As we see for the first time in this passage, mind (νοῦς) is constitutive of the soul with dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις), and it is useful to our analysis if we preserve a common root (mind/νοῦς) as it appears throughout.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 87c.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 84a. “...but, however that may be, then he thought he knew it, and boldly answered as one who knows, and he did not believe that he was unprovided and perplexed.” As we remarked during our analysis of this moment in Chapter II, this description of the παῖς sounds reminiscent of Socrates’ initial description of the way Gorgias’ students answer questions. “And in particular, this is the habit to which he has habituated you, namely, of answering both fearlessly and magnificently whenever anyone asks you anything, as is fitting for those who know...” Ibid., 70b-c. Both the παῖς and Meno answered their respective questions boldly yet mindlessly (ἄνευ νοῦ).

My view is that very few have a share of courage (ἀνδρείας) and foresight (προμηθίας), but that a great many, men and women and children and wild animals, partake in boldness (θρασύτητος) and recklessness (τόλμη) and fearlessness (ἀφόβου) and lack of foresight (ἀπρομηθίας). These cases, which you and the man in the street call courageous (ἀνδρεῖα), I call rash (θρασεῖα), whereas courageous (ἀνδρεῖα) are the φρόνιμα about whom I was talking.⁵⁷⁶

If we trust Nicias' account of what "a great many" think about courage, then we should recognize a development of the inquiry through the introduction of courage. Meno's approach to dialogue (answering fearlessly and magnificently like someone who knows) relies upon a common, thoughtless measure of courage (ἀνδρεία). According to this measure, wild beasts (θηρία) and children (παιδία) also act courageously, even while lacking any sense of what one should fear.⁵⁷⁷ The establishment of this distinction with respect to courage is crucial because, as we found during our analysis in Chapter II, being brave is an essential part of the requisite dialogical comportment for inquiry into *arete*.⁵⁷⁸ We interpreted being a brave and tireless seeker as the crux of Socrates' reasoning about recollection—a dialogical comportment which departed drastically from Meno's contentious dialogical comportment. Retrospectively, we might interpret this prior reasoning in light of this more recent development. The dialogical comportment which we privileged so highly previously must relate in some way to the dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) that "is" courage (ἀνδρεία).

In the second step of Socrates' reasoning about courage (ἀνδρεία), he posits a pair of conditionals which account for harm and benefit respectively. The person who behaves mindlessly bold ("ἄνευ νοῦ θαρρῆ") is harmed, whereas the person who behaves mindfully (σὺν νῷ) is benefited. Why? We might rearticulate Socrates' reasoning about courage (and the things that pertain to the soul more broadly) in this way: The things that pertain to the soul—like the goods of the *polis*—sometimes harm and sometimes benefit human beings. Courage (ἀνδρεία) is a part

⁵⁷⁶ Plato, *Laches*, 197b-c. Translation modified.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., 197a.

⁵⁷⁸ We might see an indication of this claim also in the *Laches*. As they attempt to work their way towards a definition of courage as a whole, Socrates asks Nicias, "And do you regard that man as lacking in moderation (σωφροσύνης) or justice (δικαιοσύνης) and holiness (οσιότητος) to whom alone belongs the ability to deal circumspectly (ἐξευλαβεῖσθαι) with both gods and men with respect to both the fearful (τὰ δεινὰ) and its opposite, and to provide himself with good things (τάγαθὰ πορίζεσθαι) through his knowledge (ἐπισταμένῳ) of how to associate with them correctly (ὀρθῶς)?" Socrates goes on to claim that if they were to speak in that way, they would not be talking about "a part of *arete* (μόριον ἀρετῆς) but *arete* entire (σύμπασα ἀρετή)." Plato, *Laches*, 199d-e. And yet, Socrates claims in the *Meno* not to know at all what *arete* is.

of *arete*, which he and Meno have supposed to be a sort of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη τις), and courage is also a thing that pertains to the soul. If *arete* is some sort of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη τις), then so too must courage (ἀνδρεία) be some sort of knowledge. Dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) is a sort of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη τις), but boldness (θάρρος) is not. Dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) involves acting mindfully (σὺν νῶ), and since knowledge encompasses everything good (i.e., beneficial), courage (understood as dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις)) benefits the person who acts mindfully (σὺν νῶ). By contrast, the person who acts mindlessly bold (“ἄνευ νοῦ θαρρή”) is harmed, since such a person acts without any sort of knowledge, knowledge which encompasses everything good/beneficial. While Socrates does clearly add some new terms into his account, which we will explore in what follows, the reasoning follows straightforwardly from the prior suppositions. But, of course, one question imposes itself forcefully on the current stage of our analysis: what exactly is “dialectical reasoning” (φρόνησις)?

Our translation of “φρόνησις” as “dialectical reasoning” signals an important decision in our inquiry. Anastaplo and Berns translate “φρόνησις” as “prudence,” and they justify the decision in the following way:

“Prudence” translates *phronesis*, the virtue of practical thoughtfulness, good practical judgment, practical intelligence, practical wisdom. (“Prudence” comes from the Latin *prudens*, short for *providens*, “looking ahead”.) In some contexts, especially ethical and political contexts, “prudence” seems to be indistinguishable from *sophia* (which, in this translation, is rendered as “wisdom”)—more in the sense of theoretical wisdom.⁵⁷⁹

We also, of course, cannot overlook the influence of Aristotle’s account of “φρόνησις” in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, a source whose proximity to the Platonic text bolsters its authority but also perhaps obscures what is distinct about each respectively.⁵⁸⁰ The *Meno* itself demands that we make some decision concerning “φρόνησις,” and yet, we simultaneously find ourselves embedded in a tradition which already makes a claim about the meaning of “φρόνησις.” Is it the “practical wisdom” which stands in opposition to “theoretical wisdom”? But Anastaplo and Berns even recognize that sometimes “φρόνησις” cannot be distinguished from σοφία as “theoretical wisdom,” hence a part of the difficulty of our position. How then do we justify our decision to interpret “φρόνησις” as dialectical reasoning? From the very beginning, we have approached the

⁵⁷⁹ Anastaplo and Berns, “Notes” in *Plato: Meno*, 66.

⁵⁸⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a-1140b.

Meno with a concern for *arete*, the human good, and the *polis*. As we have progressed through the *Meno*, we have considered various dimensions of this relationship. We have come to understand the issue as a dialectical search for a measure, one in which the individual search for a measure of *arete* sufficient to secure the human good for oneself must confront the emergent measures of *arete* that determine a person's share of the good in the *polis*. We understood Socrates' reasoning about dialogical comportment throughout Chapter II as a response to the dialectical character of this inquiry. The inquiry into *arete* unlike other sorts of inquiry might never find a resolution, which offers one explanation for the value of being a brave and tireless seeker. Even so, the question of knowledge and what is known has sprouted up persistently. Currently, knowledge appears as a consequence of the foundational supposition that *arete* is teachable. This supposition led us to reflect on technical know-how (τέχνη), which humans use for reliable production. If the exhibition of *arete* suffices as a measure of being a good person in the *polis*, and if technical know-how (τέχνη) is responsible for the "goodness" of the technician in his or her craft, then perhaps there is a technical know-how (τέχνη) for being a good person. And yet, where we might expect technical know-how (τέχνη), we find instead dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις). To help us better understand the difference between these kinds of knowledge, let us consider the analyses of two interpreters who also analyze the tension between technical know-how (τέχνη) and dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) in the Platonic and Aristotelian texts: Heidegger and Gadamer.

During his investigation of *Plato's Sophist*, Heidegger begins with an introductory analysis of Aristotle, in which he differentiates five modes of ἀληθεύειν ("disclosure"). "φρόνησις" is one of the five. In his analysis of "φρόνησις," Heidegger claims:

The object of φρόνησις is hence determined as something which can also be otherwise, but from the very outset it has a relation to the deliberator himself. On the other hand, the deliberation of τέχνη relates simply to what contributes to the production of something else, namely, the ἔργον, e.g., a house. The deliberation of φρόνησις, however, relates to this ἔργον insofar as it contributes to the deliberator himself. The ἀληθεύειν of φρόνησις therefore contains a referential direction to the ἀληθεύων himself. Yet we do not designate as a φρόνιμος the one who deliberates in the correct way κατὰ μέρος, i.e., in relation to particular advantages, e.g., health or bodily strength, which promote Dasein in a particular regard. Instead, we call φρόνιμος the one who deliberates in the right way ποῖα πρὸς τὸ εὖ ζῆν ὅλως, regarding "what is conducive to the right mode of Being of Dasein as such and

as a whole.” The βουλευέσθαι of the φρόνιμος concerns the being of Dasein itself, the εἶ ζῆν, i.e., the right and proper way to be Dasein.⁵⁸¹

Heidegger’s preparatory analysis of “φρόνησις” in Aristotle gives us three useful insights for understanding “φρόνησις” as a unique way of knowing in relation to inquiry into *arete*. In the first place, “φρόνησις” concerns matters which can be otherwise, and specifically the “contingent” matters that intimately affect the inquirer. Even if we did not have the terminology to comment on this feature previously, we have nonetheless noticed Meno’s lack of resolve for the inquiry. Meno has behaved like someone who has nothing at stake in the search for *arete* despite our sense that this search poses the gravest and most existential challenge to an individual’s pursuit of the human good. Furthermore, the deliberator’s intertwinement with the “ἔργον” (work) of “φρόνησις” is its constitutive feature. The conventional translation of “φρόνησις” as “practical wisdom” draws our attention to the importance of the “work” or “deed” (ἔργον) in φρόνησις (i.e., the “practical” part of it). However, this “work” is not productive in the same way that technical know-how (τέχνη) produces some discrete work (e.g., a house), a distinction which, if left acknowledged, might lead a person to suppose that there is a τέχνη of *arete*. And finally, the particular character of the “work” unique to “φρόνησις” is Heidegger’s third insight, which we find useful for our own inquiry. “φρόνησις,” which we interpret as “dialectical reasoning,” “deliberates” (βουλευέσθαι) about living one’s life “as a whole” (in contrast to a part of one’s life such as being strong, wealthy, beautiful, etc.). Furthermore, this deliberation does not concern one’s life as a whole simply, but “φρόνησις” deliberates about how to live one’s life as a whole *well*. We have understood this end of a human life through various phrases: the securement of the human good/being a good person, *arete*, being fortunate (εὐδαίμων), blessed (μακάριός), or as Heidegger borrows from Aristotle, “πρὸς τὸ εἶ ζῆν ὅλως.” Heidegger’s analysis of “φρόνησις” help us to recognize what is distinct about this particular way of knowing, and further, *that* it is a way of knowing. “φρόνησις” is not the sort of knowing that the παῖς used in the exhibition, nor is “φρόνησις” the kind of knowing that Meno used when he claimed to know *arete* and gave his accounts of it. Gorgias did not teach Meno “φρόνησις.” “φρόνησις,” rather, seems to name a sort of knowing uniquely suited for inquiry into *arete* and other issues related to living a good human life. These distinctions might lead us to wonder: Does Socrates have “φρόνησις”?

⁵⁸¹ Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 34.

While Heidegger's analysis of "φρόνησις" harmonizes in many ways with the findings of our own inquiry into *arete* in the *Meno*, Heidegger offers us little guidance in the difficulty of translation, preferring instead to leave the term in its Greek form. We consult his authority only with respect to the status of "φρόνησις" as a sort of knowledge (a claim which Socrates implied also in the *Meno*) that bears directly on the kind of inquiry at stake in our analysis of the *Meno*. Gadamer, on the other hand, bridges the gap between Heidegger's analysis of Aristotelian "φρόνησις" as a sort of knowledge proper to inquiry into *arete* and our decision to render "φρόνησις" as "dialectical reasoning." Gadamer comments:

But things look very different in respect to the exercise of practical reason. Here one cannot rely upon previously acquired general knowledge, and yet one still claims to reach a judgment by one's own weighing of the pros and cons and to decide reasonably in each case. Whoever deliberates with himself and with others about what would be the right thing to do in a particular practical situation is plainly prepared to support his decision with nothing other than good reasons, and he who always behaves this reasonably possesses the virtue of reasonableness, of "well-advised-ness." (*Euboulia* was a political slogan of the new *paideia* of that time.) Now it strikes me as significant that Plato holds fast to this characteristic of practical knowledge, and that he distances himself from technical knowledge. *Dialectic is not general and teachable knowledge, even if Plato often follows customary language usage and also speaks of it as technē or epistēmē. It is not in the least surprising, however, that he can call dialectic "phronēsis" too. Dialectic is not something that one can simply learn. It is more than that. It is "reasonableness."*

Plainly, in calling dialectic "phronēsis," Plato is again following a language usage in which it is perfectly natural to give that name to the *aretē* proper to human dealings.⁵⁸²

Initially, Gadamer might appear to adhere to the conventional distinction between "practical and theoretical" reasoning, but as he continues his analysis, he clarifies that his interpretation of "φρόνησις" depends upon a particular conception of Socratic philosophical practice, i.e., "dialectic." Dialectic, which, for Gadamer, involves the give and take of reasons in deliberation with oneself *and* with others, concerns the "practical" in a similar sense to the one which Heidegger uses in his analysis of the "work" (ἔργον) of "φρόνησις." It is "practical" without aiming to accomplish some discrete task. Throughout our analysis, we have described the tension between the emergent measures of *arete* in the *polis* and philosophical practices' confrontation with them as a "dialectical tension." We call the sort of "knowledge" that deals with this tension "dialectical reasoning" (φρόνησις). It is more than "something that one can simply learn." Might this other sort

⁵⁸² Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, 35-37. Emphasis mine.

of “knowledge,” which cannot be taught, offer partial justification for Socrates’ recourse to recollection (ἀνάμνησις) as well, which allegedly differs from learning?⁵⁸³ Dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) concerns deliberation about the right way to live one’s life, which is to say, deliberation about *arete* and being a good person in the *polis*. It requires a particular comportment towards that question, which places a person in dialogue with oneself and with others. It is risky and dangerous, forcing one to confront one’s own life and the lives of others in the *polis*, but it is also a necessary part of one’s pursuit of the human good. We have seen this danger play out at various points in Socrates’ engagement with Meno, even if Meno does not seem to acknowledge the danger.⁵⁸⁴ Might this way of interpreting “dialectical reasoning” (φρόνησις) help us to navigate the conflict of the *Meno*, which includes unpacking Socrates’ claim not to know “at all” about *arete* despite showing a masterful proficiency in navigating the inquiry?⁵⁸⁵ In light of Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s respective analyses, we now have a better sense for this strange new turn. Let us return now to the *Meno* and see how Socrates’ reasoning develops.

After superficially comparing moderation (σωφροσύνη) and readiness-to-learn (εὐμαθία) to the precedent of courage (ἀνδρεία), Socrates concludes, “Then, in sum, all the things undertaken (ἐπιχειρήματα) and endured (καρτερήματα) by the soul when led (ἡγουμένης) by dialectical reasoning (φρονήσεως) come to end in fortune (εἰς εὐδαιμονίαν τελευτᾷ), but when led by immoderation (ἀφροσύνης) in the opposite?”⁵⁸⁶ Socrates’ reasoning from the foundational supposition culminates in this conclusion. Dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) leads (ἡγῆται) the soul

⁵⁸³ Socrates does not seem overly vested in the distinction. Plato *Meno*, 87b-c.

⁵⁸⁴ Meno is not the only one. See also Plato, *Symposium*, 215e-216a. Alcibiades speaks beautifully in a moving speech about his experience of this very sort of existential interrogation. In contrast to his experience of the speeches of Pericles and other orators, Alcibiades describes Socrates’ speech in the following way: “...they never upset me so deeply that my very own soul started protesting that my life—*my* life—was no better than the most miserable slave’s. And yet that is exactly how this Marsyas here at my side makes me feel all the time: he makes it seem that my life isn’t worth living!” Remarkably, Socrates made Alcibiades feel ugly/ashamed (αἰσχρός)! Alcibiades suffers because he simultaneously finds himself persuaded by Socrates yet unwilling to risk himself (his honor, beauty, *arete*, etc.) in the eyes of others. By contrast, Meno seems to struggle to recognize the gravity of the problem at all.

⁵⁸⁵ Plato, *Meno*, 71a. Meno’s contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) also seems to prey upon this claim. *Ibid.*, 80d. Self-reflectively, Socrates summarizes his wisdom in the *Apology* in the following way: “I am wiser (σοφώτερός) than this person; it is likely that neither of us knows (εἰδέναι) anything beautiful and good (καλὸν κάγαθόν), but he thinks (οἶεταί) he knows (εἰδέναι) something when he does not (οὐκ εἰδώς), whereas when I do not know (οὐκ οἶδα), neither do I think I know (οὐδὲ οἶομαι); so I am likely to be wiser than he to this small extent, that I do not think (μὴ οἶδα) I know (εἰδέναι) what I do not know (μὴ οἶδα).” Plato, *Apology*, 21d. Translation modified. But, of course, *if* Socrates has dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις), then his claim not to know anything beautiful and good (καλὸν κάγαθόν) would not be disingenuous. At least with respect to what is beautiful and good (καλὸν κάγαθόν) for humans, this matter does not fall within the purview of “knowledge” (ἐπιστήμη) simply.

⁵⁸⁶ Plato, *Meno*, 88c. Translation modified

that comes to an end in fortune (εὐδαιμονία). Or, to put it otherwise, dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) leads (ἡγῆται) the soul of the good person—the person who exhibits *arete*. Dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) appears to be a sufficient measure of *arete*, but is it necessary?⁵⁸⁷ We will defer this question until a later point in our analysis. For now, we ought to examine a different question, namely, the opposition of dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) to immoderation (ἀφροσύνης). Intuitively, we would expect the antithesis of immoderation (ἀφροσύνης) to be moderation (σωφροσύνη), but it seems that even moderation (σωφροσύνη) requires mind (μετὰ νοῦ), which accompanies dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις), in order to be beneficial (ὠφέλιμα).⁵⁸⁸ Why? We might find a clue to this predicament in our earlier analysis of one of Socrates' peripheral reproaches of Meno. Socrates lamented "...since you don't even try to rule (ἐπιχειρεῖς ἄρχειν) yourself, in order indeed that you might be free (ἐλεύθερος), you both try to rule (ἄρχειν) me and do rule (ἄρχεις) me..."⁵⁸⁹ In order to better understand the connection between being free (ἐλεύθερος) and rule (ἄρχειν), we turned to the *Gorgias*, in which Socrates explained what he meant by "self-rule" ("ἑαυτοῦ ἄρχοντα"). He explained his meaning in the following way: "Just what the many (οἱ πολλοί) mean: being self-controlled (σώφρονα ὄντα) and master of oneself (ἐγκρατῆ αὐτὸν ἑαυτοῦ), ruling (ἄρχοντα) the pleasures (ἡδονῶν) and appetites (ἐπιθυμιῶν) within oneself."⁵⁹⁰ From all of this evidence, we can place together the following constellation of terms: the person who is free (ἐλεύθερος) rules him or herself ("ἑαυτοῦ ἄρχοντα"), which entails being self-controlled (σώφρονα ὄντα), master of oneself ("ἐγκρατῆ αὐτὸν ἑαυτοῦ"), and ruling (ἄρχοντα) the pleasures (ἡδονῶν) and appetites (ἐπιθυμιῶν) within oneself. By contrast, what would give Meno the "most pleasure" (ἥδιστα) guides his soul, or at least, he mentioned his predilection for pleasure previously.⁵⁹¹ Meno seems to lack dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις), a conclusion which we can infer from our prior analysis, so then what rules him instead? We suspect his pleasures (ἡδοναί) and appetites (ἐπιθυμίαι) "rule" him, which is to say, they lead his decision-making, but also, they set the measure of what is good and bad for him. For, as we have remarked throughout, the leader/ruler always has this power to establish him/herself as the measure of "the good."

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 97a. Dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) will not be necessary, but we will consider Socrates' reasoning when the necessity of dialectical reasoning appears in the part of the text which we will analyze in Chapter V.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 88b. Socrates introduced mind (νοῦς, σὺν νοῦ, μετὰ νοῦ) during the same step of his reasoning in which he introduced dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις).

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 86d.

⁵⁹⁰ Plato, *Gorgias*, 491d-e.

⁵⁹¹ Plato, *Meno*, 86c.

Whatever, or whoever, “rules” (ἄρχει) also leads (ἡγῆται), and in this connection, we have found an intertwinement of the concern for what rules/leads the soul and *who* rules/leads the *polis*. The intertwinement of the soul and the *polis* is a crucial reason why the inquiry into *arete* and the human good is rooted in the *polis*, and it is also why the tension between the governance of the soul and *polis* is dialectical, i.e., the forces “governing” the soul (and so leading the individual) contend with the forces (both the people and the customs) governing the *polis* and vice versa. Furthermore, when Socrates summarizes the consequences of his reasoning about the benefit of dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις), we can find additional evidence for the connection between the soul and the *polis* through his analogical reasoning about the things that pertain to the soul and the human goods of the *polis*.⁵⁹² Our recognition of a likeness between them offers a partial justification for the transferability of claims about the former to the latter. Before we consider those remarks, let us first examine the distinction between dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) in other Platonic dialogues, since the relationship between dialectical reasoning and knowledge tacitly seems to justify the former’s introduction into the *Meno* as what leads the things pertaining to the soul when they are beneficial.

Dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) appear together in a variety of contexts throughout the Platonic corpus. While we can confidently differentiate the specificity of the former from the broader scope of the latter based upon our analysis of the *Meno*, we can develop a more nuanced sense of the distinction between them, if we examine their appearance together in other dialogues. Towards that end, we will analyze some passages from the *Phaedo*, *Protagoras*, and the *Laws*.

Let us begin our consideration with the *Phaedo*. In this dialogue, Socrates defends a different account of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) before Simmias, Cebes, and Socrates’ other comrades. During his reasoning about the existence of the soul prior to birth, Socrates claims that souls “acquire” (λαβοῦσαι) knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) before birth, but also that souls “have dialectical reasoning” (“φρόνησιν εἶχον”) even apart from the body (“χωρὶς σωμάτων”) in its human form (“ἐν ἀνθρώπου εἶδει”).⁵⁹³ In this case, Socrates differentiates acquisitive knowledge (ἐπιστήμη)

⁵⁹² Ibid., 88d.

⁵⁹³ Plato, *Phaedo*, 76c.

from a latent dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) that transcends human incarnation.⁵⁹⁴ So then does dialectical reasoning come to be by nature? What can we infer from this distinction? Due to the limits of our inquiry, we cannot explore the full depths of Socrates' reasoning about the soul's disincarnate existence in the *Phaedo*. Nevertheless, even if we suspend that dimension of the argument, we can find an important difference between knowledge and dialectical reasoning. Prior to this distinction, Socrates asks Simmias, “a man (ἄνθρωπος) who has knowledge (ἐπίσταται ἔχει) would be able to give an account (δοῦναι λόγον) of what he knows (ἐπιστάμενος), would he not?”⁵⁹⁵ The measure of knowledge is a person's ability to give an account of what the person “knows,” and in this way, it is acquisitive. If a person learns the account (λόγος), then one has knowledge (“ἐπίσταται ἔχει”). Knowledge can be taught because it can be “acquired” in this way. But, it can be forgotten as well. By contrast, a person does not learn (or “recollect”) dialectical reasoning. Dialectical reasoning does not concern this or that particular account, but it nonetheless plays some part in a more basic “knowing” orientation of the soul. In our analysis of the *Meno*, we have avoided the justifications for a pre-natalist reading of recollection, but this part of the *Phaedo* seems to lead in that direction, which *could* problematize our interpretation of dialectical reasoning. We must, however, remember that Socrates tends to speak to the sensibilities of his interlocutors (Simmias and Cebes), who in this case, are well known Pythagoreans.⁵⁹⁶ With this dimension in mind, let us heed Socrates' follow up question. He asks, “Is this the position, that there is an equal necessity (ἴση ἀνάγκη) for those things to exist (ταῦτά τε εἶναι) [i.e., the beautiful and the good and all that kind of being (καλόν τέ τι καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ πᾶσα ἢ τοιαύτη οὐσία)], and for our souls to exist before we were born? If the former do not exist, then neither do the latter?”⁵⁹⁷ The necessity of the argument for disincarnate souls depends upon the necessity (ἀνάγκη) of the pre-existence of the beautiful (κάλος), good (ἀγαθός), and other such things. In our interpretation of the *Meno*, we have interpreted such matters (the beautiful (κάλος), good (ἀγαθός), etc.) as worldly phenomena on a textual basis, and so we also interpret dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) as a knowing orientation that entails a dialectical engagement with these very matters during a human's life in the *polis*. Consequently, even in the *Phaedo*, we find a familiar division, namely,

⁵⁹⁴ Cf. Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 130-131, especially FN 65 for the appearance of “φρόνησις” throughout the *Phaedo*.

⁵⁹⁵ Plato, *Phaedo*, 76b.

⁵⁹⁶ That is, as Pythagoreans they might be more easily persuaded to believe Socrates' account about the soul on the basis of other assumptions (e.g., the independent existence of intelligible objects, transmigration, etc.).

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 76e.

knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) concerns that about which one can give an account (δοῦναι λόγος), whereas dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) involves a certain knowing orientation towards the beautiful (κάλος), good (ἀγαθός), and other matters which also relate to them—most notably for our inquiry, *arete*.

Let us compare how dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) contrasts with knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) in the *Phaedo*, when Socrates must persuade Simmias, Cebes, and his other friends while on the threshold of death, to its appearance in the *Protagoras*, in which Socrates discusses similar matters with the sophist Protagoras before an audience of influential (and impressionable) youths and other sophists. After struggling to come to an agreement about the unity of *arete* (whether wisdom, moderation, courage, justice, and piety name one thing or each something unique), Socrates asks Protagoras “to reveal his mind” about knowledge:

What do you think about knowledge (ἐπιστήμην)? Do you go along with the majority (τοῖς πολλοῖς ἀνθρώποις) or not? Most people think this way about it, that it is not a strong thing (οὐκ ἰσχυρόν), neither a leader (ἡγεμονικόν) nor a ruler (ἄρχικόν). They do not think (διανοοῦνται) of it in that way at all; but rather in this way: while knowledge is often present in a person, what rules (ἄρχειν) that one is not knowledge (ἐπιστήμην) but rather anything else—sometimes anger (θυμόν), sometimes pleasure (ἡδονήν), sometimes pain (λύπην), at other times love (ἔρωτα), often fear (φόβον); they think of knowledge (ἐπιστήμης) as being utterly dragged around by all these other things as if it were a slave (ὥσπερ περὶ ἀνδραπόδου). Now, does the matter seem like that to you, or does it seem to you that knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is a fine thing (καλόν) capable of ruling (ἄρχειν) a person, and if someone were to know (γιγνώσκειν) what is good and bad (τὰγαθὰ καὶ τὰ κακά), then [the person] would not be forced (κρατηθῆναι) by anything to act otherwise than knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) commands (κελεύει), and dialectical reasoning (φρόνησιν) would be sufficient to save (βοηθεῖν) a person?⁵⁹⁸

In the first place, we must note Socrates’ familiar framing. Socrates asks Protagoras about knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) in terms of what should lead or rule a human (not the soul as in the *Meno*). Does Protagoras agree with the many who do not believe in the power of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) to be a worthy leader (ἡγεμών) or ruler (ἄρχων) of a person? We can hear subversive implicature in Socrates’ framing of the question. How could Protagoras the sophist, who teaches the technical know-how of citizenship (πολιτική τέχνη) and how to make men good citizens (ἄνδρες ἀγαθοὶ πολίτας), *not* value knowledge?⁵⁹⁹ After all, his livelihood depends upon the value (perceived or

⁵⁹⁸ Plato, *Protagoras*, 352b-c. Translation modified.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 319a.

real) of a certain sort of knowledge. And yet, the conclusion of Socrates' questioning (i.e., knowledge commands and dialectical reasoning "saves") marks the split between Socrates and Protagoras. "Knowledge" (ἐπιστήμη) may broadly encompass a certain knowing orientation of human beings towards their world, but dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) names a more specific orientation, which is nonetheless some sort of knowledge (or at least involves mind).⁶⁰⁰ If a person lived his or her life led by knowledge (especially of good and bad things (τὰγαθὰ καὶ τὰ κακά), then that person would live a fine (κάλος) life. But what does it mean for knowledge to "lead" or "rule" a person? Socrates' final remark seems instructive. When knowledge "leads" or "rules" a person, it "commands" the person. If knowledge were the leader, then knowledge would tell the person what to do. It would be authoritative, i.e., trustworthy and reliable, but also instructive, i.e., informative and useful.⁶⁰¹ And yet, Socrates concludes with the claim that dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) has the power to save (βοηθεῖν). What does dialectical reasoning offer a person that distinguishes it from knowledge? If a person followed the commands of knowledge concerning good and bad things (τὰγαθὰ καὶ τὰ κακά), then why would such a person need to be saved? We should hear the subversive insinuation underlying this contrast. That is, even if knowledge has more power to lead a person through his or her life than "the many" suppose, knowledge alone may not be sufficient for a fine (κάλος) ("good") life. As we consider this tension, we should also bear in mind our prior analysis of Protagoras' story (μῦθος) about Prometheus in this same dialogue. In that story, Prometheus' gift of technical know-how (τέχνη) saved human beings, but now, Socrates attributes the saving power to dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) not technical know-how (τέχνη). What is at stake in this subtle dispute over knowledge (broadly speaking) between Socrates and Protagoras?

⁶⁰⁰ Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, 35. "The heritage of Socrates and his art of dialogue lives on in [dialectic]. Accordingly, Plato often applies the word *phronēsis*—which for Aristotle characterizes the virtue of practical reasonableness—in a wide sense. And he can also use it as synonymous with both *technē* and *epistēmē*. This usage is never meant to imply that knowledge of the good is really the kind of knowledge that *technē* is. [Rather, it shows that] the knowledge of the handworker plays such a paradigmatic role in any kind of knowing at all that language usage conforms to it."

⁶⁰¹ "The verb ἡγεῖσθαι recurs throughout the dialogues, at decisive moments, and plays an especially important role in the dialogical movement of the *Republic*. It conveys the sense of an *anticipatory* grasp that allows for the following of the persuasive and disclosive movement of the λόγος. It can have both the sense of 'to believe,' in the sense in which one might hold an opinion, and also the meaning 'to lead' and even 'to rule,' or 'to give guidance.' It is significant, then, that the sense of the ἡγεῖσθαι of the correct or true opinion is introduced by means of the image of a journey (Meno 97a-b)." Warnek, *Descent of Socrates: Self-Knowledge and Cryptic Nature in the Platonic Dialogues*, 137.

When Protagoras responds to Socrates, he shifts the terminology in a noteworthy way. He maintains, "...it would be shameful (αἰσχρόν) indeed for me above all people to say that wisdom (σοφίαν) and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) are anything but the most powerful forces (κράτιστον) in human affairs (τῶν ἀνθρωπείων πραγμάτων)."⁶⁰² Protagoras agrees that knowledge is powerful, but Protagoras pairs knowledge with wisdom (σοφίαν) rather than dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις). Wisdom (σοφία) names the knowledge of the technician, the one proficient in some sort of technical know-how (τέχνη). Protagoras himself, as the title "sophist" (σοφιστής) so aptly names, is someone wise, clever, and skilled (σοφός) in his craft. He makes his living by teaching a certain skill, and despite our sympathy for Socratic philosophical practice, Protagoras' participation in this craft need not imply that he somehow "scams" his students.⁶⁰³ Nevertheless, in our analysis of the *Meno*, we have begun to develop an interpretation of dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) as a certain knowing orientation towards the good of a human life as a whole, especially the pursuit of the measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good. Accordingly, at the present stage of our analysis of the *Meno*, dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) is sufficient for being a good person, although this conclusion tentatively depends upon the foundational supposition that *arete* is teachable. And yet, even in our focused consideration of the *Protagoras*, we find dissent about its *necessity*. Protagoras plainly recognizes that this question about what should "rule" a person has broader consequences for human affairs (τά ἀνθρωπεῖα πράγματα) in the *polis*. And insofar as we acknowledge his students as the sons of political rulers, then we ought to infer that Protagoras speaks with some authority when he insists on the superlative power of wisdom (σοφία) and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) in the *polis*. But, at the same time, insofar as these people are Protagoras' students, do their inadequacies (as both rulers and human beings) not also contradict Protagoras' claim? In other words, perhaps Protagoras rightly recognizes the power of wisdom (κρατός σοφία), but he may not see its limit especially concerning the question of the human good. Might Socrates' perception of the limit of wisdom (σοφία)/technical know-how (τέχνη) be one reason why he attributes the saving power to dialectical reasoning? Let us turn now to the *Laws* and see what the Athenian's account might add to our analysis.

In his exposition of the way that he would prefer to hear the laws justified, the Athenian, speaking in a hypothetical discourse to Clinias, outlines a list of the goods that the laws produce

⁶⁰² Ibid., 352d. Translation modified.

⁶⁰³ Plato, *Meno*, 91d-92a.

for the Cretans. He maintains that these “goods” (τάγαθὰ) fall into two classes: human (τὰ μὲν ἀνθρώπινα) and divine (τὰ δὲ θεῖα). In the former class, the Athenian’s hypothetical interlocutor lists the very same goods which Socrates lists as human goods in the *Meno*, namely, health (ὕγεια), beauty (κάλλος), strength (ἰσχύς), and wealth (πλοῦτος).⁶⁰⁴ Regarding wealth, the interlocutor claims:

Wealth (πλοῦτος) is fourth—not ‘blind’ (τυφλός), but the clear-sighted (ὄξυ βλέπων) kind whenever it is accompanied (ἔπιηται) by dialectical reasoning (φρονήσει)—which is foremost again, leading (ἡγεμονοῦν) the ‘divine’ goods (τῶν θεῖων ἀγαθῶν); second [is] the mindful (μετὰ νοῦ), self-controlled habit of the soul (σώφρων ψυχῆς ἔξις). From mixing (κραθέντων) these two with courage (ἀνδρείας), justice (δικαιοσύνη) is third; and courage (ἀνδρεία) is fourth.⁶⁰⁵

We must acknowledge in the first place that knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is missing from this account. Insofar as we have ventured beyond the *Meno* in order to facilitate our differentiation of knowledge from dialectical reasoning, the *Laws* may superficially appear not to be especially useful. However, we must heed what is at stake in this discussion in order to recognize the poignancy of this passage for our analysis. The hypothetical interlocutor prefaces his enumeration of the human and divine goods with praise for the Cretan laws, which “bring to competition (ἀποτελοῦντες) fortune (εὐδαίμονας) for those who observe them (τοὺς αὐτοῖς χρωμένους).”⁶⁰⁶ That is, the Athenian’s hypothetical interlocutor considers the Cretan measure of the human good, which is to say, of *arete*.⁶⁰⁷ However, he also comments on what is responsible for making good Cretans good in Crete. The laws (νομοί) make the Cretans good, and the laws are exactly the sort of thing about which a person could have knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). By contrast, the laws (i.e., knowing what they are) are not the sort of thing which requires dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις), even if dialectical

⁶⁰⁴ Plato, *Laws*, 631b-c. The order differs between the *Laws* and the *Meno*. The Athenian’s hypothetical interlocutor places “beauty” second and “strength” third, whereas Socrates lists “strength” second and “beauty” third. The implication is not clear, although the deviation seems worth noting especially because of the claim that “all these take a natural precedence over the others, and the lawgiver must of course rank them in the same order.” Does the hypothetical interlocutor simply mean that the divine goods take precedence over the human goods, or does he also mean that the order of the respective goods (human and divine) matters as well? It is difficult to determine, since the syntax itself is ambiguous, but also, the order of the divine goods seems to harmonize with a tacit order in the *Meno* (i.e., the descending axiological weight of certain things pertaining to the soul: dialectical reasoning, moderation, justice, and courage). In that case, the different order of “human goods” between the *Laws* and the *Meno* would imply a broader difference in the respective treatments of the human good. While an analysis of the descending axiological weight of human goods could be fruitful, it goes beyond the scope of our present inquiry into the *Meno*, and so we only note the difference and move on.

⁶⁰⁵ Plato, *Laws*, 631c-d. Translation modified.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 631b.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 632e.

reasoning is the foremost good of both the human and divine goods. Once again, we find dialectical reasoning associated with “practical matters” (i.e., the use of human goods) without the precision of technical know-how (τέχνη). Furthermore, this speech also gives us a new perspective on the relation of dialectical reasoning to the other goods. The Athenian’s hypothetical interlocutor claims, on the one hand, that wealth is a human good when it “is accompanied” (ἔπηται) by dialectical reasoning, but, on the other hand, he also claims that dialectical reasoning “leads” (“ἡγεμονοῦν”) the divine goods. We ought to note the verbiage in this case as it may guide us in our interpretation of the relationship between dialectical reasoning, the soul, and the *polis* in the *Meno*. When it comes to the human goods (e.g., health (ὕγεια), beauty (κάλλος), strength (ἰσχὺς), and wealth (πλοῦτος)), dialectical reasoning “accompanies” (“ἔπεισι”) them, when they are good, i.e., beneficial. It augments them. However, when it comes to the divine goods, dialectical reasoning “leads” them in the sense that it comes first. Derivatively, dialectical reasoning seems to be a part of the other divine goods, although the account of courage is sparse. Even so, our recognition of the sense in which dialectical reasoning leads the other divine goods seems important for our primary analysis of the *Meno*, since we will need to interpret the sense in which dialectical reasoning “leads” the soul.⁶⁰⁸ Thus, in this case, we see that dialectical reasoning “leads” the divine goods in the sense that it comes first, is most primary, and is responsible for what follows it.

Our intertextual analysis of the *Phaedo*, *Protagoras*, and the *Laws* has helped us in our effort to interpret Socrates’ movement from knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) to dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) in the *Meno* and also what it means for something to “lead.” Let us briefly review the key insights from our analysis before we return to the *Meno*. In the *Phaedo*, we drew out the most straightforward differentiation of knowledge from dialectical reasoning. Knowledge involves giving an account about that which one knows. For this reason, we understood knowledge as acquisitive. By contrast, we understood dialectical reasoning as a knowing orientation towards what is good and beautiful in human life. It did not involve knowing good and beautiful things as individual objects, but rather, a broader orientation of the soul towards them. In the *Protagoras*, we found another dimension of their difference emphasized. Socrates spoke about the power of knowledge to lead a person well, and we analyzed the sense in which knowledge might lead a

⁶⁰⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 88d.

person. If knowledge were to “lead” or “rule” a person, then it would instruct a person on what to do in a trustworthy and useful way. If knowledge were allowed to rule a person, then such a person would live a fine life. And yet, we noticed that Socrates concluded his speech with the introduction of dialectical reasoning as something which could save a person. When we analyzed this claim through Protagoras’ response, we found a decisive difference in Protagoras’ and Socrates’ respective assumptions about human life. While they both hold knowledge in high regard, Protagoras appeared to assume that a person can have wisdom and knowledge about all human affairs. Even though we understood a reason why he might make such an assumption (given his profession as a sophist), we nonetheless understood why Socrates suggested dialectical reasoning as the sort of knowledge with the power to save humans. Wisdom (σοφία) and technical know-how (τέχνη) may guide the actions of their practitioners such that they exercise mastery in their task, but can there be such expertise in one’s pursuit of the human good, which concerns living one’s life as a whole? If not, then it may be in this regard that dialectical reasoning can save a person.⁶⁰⁹ Finally, in the *Laws*, we inferred a useful implication about the relationship between knowledge and dialectical reasoning, and we also developed additional valences of the sense in which dialectical reasoning “leads.” In the first place, the Cretan laws “brought to competition (ἀποτελοῦντες) fortune (εὐδαίμονας) for those who observe them (τοὺς αὐτοῖς χρωμένους),” and we understood this claim in terms of the human good. That is, a compliance with the Cretan laws made a person good in Crete, and, of course, to comply with the laws, a person must “know” the laws. However, when we moved on to the goods which the good Cretan would enjoy, we found dialectical reasoning as the foremost good among the human and divine goods. For the human goods to be good (i.e., beneficial), they required the addition of (“ἔπεισι”) dialectical reasoning. We understood this claim to mean that the human goods become beneficial when accompanied by dialectical reasoning. On the other hand, dialectical reasoning led the divine goods in the sense that it comes first. Dialectical reasoning played a derivative role in all of the other divine goods while also being the first among them. Dialectical reasoning leads the divine goods by going first and, in some way, being responsible for what follows.

We are now better positioned to resume our analysis of the *Meno*. Let us briefly remind ourselves of two key moments in Socrates’ reasoning that led us to this point. In the first place,

⁶⁰⁹ We will consider this point again in the following chapter.

Socrates laid a foundational supposition that *arete* is teachable, and from this supposition, Socrates further reasoned that *arete* must be some sort of knowledge. Second, given that *arete* is some sort of knowledge, Socrates implored Meno to consider the things that pertain to the soul (as the cause of the benefit of human goods) and discern whether they are knowledge or something other than knowledge. Socrates introduced courage as one such thing pertaining to the soul which requires some sort of knowledge for it to be beneficial, namely, dialectical reasoning and mind. From the paradigmatic case of courage, Socrates further reasoned that all the things that pertain to the soul require dialectical reasoning for them to be beneficial. Along this line of reasoning, Socrates substituted dialectical reasoning for knowledge. He then concludes:

If then *arete* is something (τί) of the things in the soul (τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ) and is itself necessarily (ἀναγκαῖον) beneficial (ὠφελίμω), it must (δεῖ) be dialectical reasoning (φρόνησιν): since, indeed all things that pertain to the soul (πάντα τὰ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν) are themselves in themselves (αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτὰ) neither beneficial (ὠφέλιμα) nor harmful (βλαβερὰ), but when dialectical reasoning (φρονήσεως) or immoderation (ἀφροσύνης) is attached (προσγενομένης) to them, they become harmful (βλαβερὰ) or beneficial (ὠφέλιμα). According to this account (κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον), indeed, *arete* being beneficial, it must be some kind of dialectical reasoning (φρόνησιν δεῖ τιν' εἶναι).⁶¹⁰

Let us break down Socrates' reasoning into a series of simpler propositions so that we may follow his reasoning more easily. *Arete* is something of the things pertaining to the soul, and it is also itself good/beneficial.⁶¹¹ All things that pertain to the soul (πάντα τὰ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν) are neither beneficial nor harmful in themselves. Whenever dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) is attached to (προσγενομένης) the things pertaining to the soul (τὰ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν), they become beneficial (ὠφέλιμα) (to that person). Whenever immoderation (ἀφροσύνης) is attached to (προσγενομένης) the things pertaining to the soul (τὰ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν), they become harmful (βλαβερὰ) (to that person). If *arete* is a thing pertaining to the soul and is beneficial, and if all things pertaining to the soul are beneficial when attached to dialectical reasoning, then *arete* must be some kind of dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις). Overall, Socrates reasons in a straightforward way, but there is one obvious issue during his move from the first claim to the second. We previously accepted his claim that *arete* is itself good/beneficial, and yet, Socrates now calls *arete* something of the things

⁶¹⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 88c-d. Translation modified.

⁶¹¹ The connection between what is good and what is beneficial is asserted at *ibid.*, 87e. The connection also follows intuitively. When something is “good for you,” it “benefits” you. It improves your “well-being” in some way. Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 215.

pertaining to the soul. But, he also asserts that all the things pertaining to the soul are neither beneficial nor harmful in themselves. Consequently, we must conclude either that *arete* is not itself good/beneficial, or not all of the things pertaining to the soul are neither beneficial nor harmful in themselves. This seeming contradiction bears more broadly upon another concern in the background of our analysis, which is the dual-power of a ruler either to use him or herself as the measure or to proclaim a measure (e.g., through laws or decrees). Insofar as we have understood *arete* as a measure of the human good, we cannot *just* understand it as a thing pertaining to the soul. The measure, like the decree, is no “thing” in particular, but that against which we mete a thing. It is a standard or a touchstone. And yet, at the same time, just as the ruler can exhibit the measure by living in this or that way, so too does the exhibition of *arete* suffice as the measure of a good person, and insofar as it is not strictly bodily, it must be some thing pertaining to the soul. The very act of setting a measure always harbors some ἀπορία. Can the measure “measure” itself? Even though Socrates proposes that dialectical reasoning makes the things that pertain to the soul good/beneficial, we can still raise the same issue about dialectical reasoning that we just raised about *arete*, i.e., if it is a thing pertaining to the soul, then what makes it good/beneficial; and if nothing makes it good/beneficial, then not every thing pertaining to the soul is neither beneficial nor harmful on its own. Naturally, Meno passively agrees and allows Socrates to continue.

From his conclusion that *arete* must be some kind of dialectical reasoning (“φρόνησιν δεῖ τιν’ εἶναι”), Socrates further reasons about the human goods, whose beneficence and harm he had momentarily suspended.⁶¹² He claims:

And plainly also the other things we were just now talking about, wealth (πλοῦτόν) and those kinds of things (τὰ τοιαῦτα), are sometimes good (ἀγαθὰ) and sometimes harmful (βλαβερά). Then just as dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) leading (ἡγουμένη) the rest of the soul (τῆ ἄλλῃ ψυχῇ) makes (ἐποίει) the things of the soul (τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς) beneficial (ὠφέλιμα) and immoderation (ἀφροσύνη) [makes them] harmful (βλαβερά), in this way again does not the soul, by rightly using and directing (ὀρθῶς χρωμένη καὶ ἡγουμένη) these things too, make them beneficial (ὠφέλιμα αὐτὰ ποιεῖ), but if not rightly (μὴ ὀρθῶς) [makes them] harmful (βλαβερά).⁶¹³

Human goods, like the things pertaining to the soul, are neither beneficial nor harmful in themselves. In the soul, the things pertaining to the soul become beneficial with dialectical

⁶¹² Ibid., 88a.

⁶¹³ Ibid., 88d. Translation modified.

reasoning leading (ἡγουμένη) them. Because of our prior analysis, we have a better sense of what this leading might entail. The “leading” (ἡγουμένη), which dialectical reasoning does when the things that pertain to the soul are beneficial, may imply that it is foremost of the things pertaining to the soul, and also that it is derivatively responsible for their benefit by being constitutive of them.⁶¹⁴ Moreover, it likely also instructs authoritatively and usefully about what to do. Perhaps in these ways, we can understand what it means for dialectical reasoning to “lead” the soul. As Socrates continues, he also adds greater specificity to the connection between the “goods” of the soul and the “goods” of the *polis*. In the *polis*, human goods become beneficial when a human uses them rightly. A person uses something rightly when the person is led rightly, which is to say, when the soul “leads” (i.e., compels, directs, commands, etc.) a person on what to do in a beneficial way. Dialectical reasoning is responsible for the benefit of the things that pertain to the soul, and so a person will use human goods rightly (i.e., to his or her benefit) whenever there is a harmony between the soul that is accompanied by dialectical reasoning and human activity. In short, according to the present argument, everything done with dialectical reasoning benefits a person, whereas anything done without it harms a person.

Socrates reiterates his claim about the consequences of what leads rightly (ἡγεῖται ὀρθῶς), substituting a new diad instead of mindful/mindless or dialectical reasoning/immoderation. He asks, “And does the sensible (ἔμφορον) [soul] lead (ἡγεῖται) rightly (ὀρθῶς), but the senseless (ἄφορον) [soul leads] mistakenly (ἡμαρτημένως)?”⁶¹⁵ Insofar as we recognize the interrelatedness between “mindful” (σὺν νῷ or μετὰ νοῦ), “dialectical reasoning” (φρόνησις), and “sensible” (ἔμφορον) (and the same of their respective diads), this question reiterates the same point that we have analyzed for some time now. However, if we examine this word “sensible” (ἔμφορον) more closely, then it might lead us in a surprising new direction. This word “ἔμφορον,” which we translate as “sensible,” is derivative of the root “φρήν,” which refers to the midriff as both “the seat of the passions” and as the “seat of thought.”⁶¹⁶ Perhaps because of a Platonistic prejudice, we might consider the passions and thought as standing in opposition with one another, and so their

⁶¹⁴ Socrates does not spend much time developing this line of reasoning in the *Meno*, however, he does basically claim that courage (ἀνδρεία) needs dialectical reasoning for it to be beneficial. Immediately after that example, he also seems to imply that the same reasoning which he used with courage could also apply to the other things pertaining to the soul, two of which he names explicitly, i.e., moderation (σωφροσύνην) and readiness-to-learn (εὐμαθίαν). Ibid., 88b.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 88d. Translation modified.

⁶¹⁶ Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 871.

common site (i.e., the midriff or heart) might strike us as strange. And yet, our awareness of this common locus does offer an explanation the opposition of dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) to immoderation (ἀφροσύνη), which we noted previously. With dialectical reasoning, a person benefits from the mindful power over the passions and desires in the soul, which is called moderation (σωφροσύνη). In this phenomenon, we can see the intermingling of the seats of passion and thought. By contrast, when the passions and desires have control over the soul, the contradiction between the common locus appears more starkly. When the passions and desires lead the soul, they subsume the seat of thought, leaving only immoderation (ἀφροσύνη) which we might understand otherwise as a lack of dialectical reasoning. In the sensible (ἔμφρων) /senseless (ἄφρων) diad, we can recognize a similar logic. However, we can find the root of these terms (i.e., “φρήν”) appear in another context with consequences for our analysis. Let us turn momentarily to the *Odyssey* and analyze one usage of this term therein.

Before Odysseus leaves Circe’s island, Circe offers him guidance about the path of his journey. A part of his journey requires him to travel to Hades where he will speak with the soul of Teiresias. Circe foretells:

But first there is another journey you must accomplish and reach the house of Hades and of revered Persephone, there to consult with the soul of Teiresias the Theban, the blind prophet, whose senses (φρένες) stay unshaken within him, to whom Persephone has granted mind (νόον) even after death, whom alone is in full possession of his faculties (πεπνῦσθαι), but the rest of them are fluttering shadows.⁶¹⁷

We do not haphazardly choose this passage for our consideration. We choose it not only to develop our sensitivity to Socrates’ introduction of the sensible (ἔμφρων) /senseless (ἄφρων) diad but also because this very passage appears in the *Meno*.⁶¹⁸ We will defer our intertextual analysis of the passage in the *Meno* until we approach Socrates’ recitation of the passage, and for now, we will only consider what the passage can tell us about the sensible (ἔμφρων). The soul of Teiresias stands out from the other souls in Hades, which Circes dismisses as “fluttering shadows,” because his senses (φρένες) stay unshaken within him, Persephone has granted mind (νοός) to him even after death, and he alone is in full possession of his faculties (πεπνῦσθαι). These three iterations seem to bespeak dimensions of a single characteristic that the soul of Teiresias retained. Might we say

⁶¹⁷ Homer, *Odyssey*, 10.492-495. Translation modified. We will use the conventional translation of “πεπνῦσθαι” for now, but we will reexamine it more thoughtfully when it appears in the *Meno*.

⁶¹⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 100a.

that Teiresias' soul possesses dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) even after death? Of course, such a claim never appears in the *Odyssey* itself, but in light of our own analysis of dialectical reasoning, Teiresias' soul does seem to exhibit many of the signs which we have found often associated with dialectical reasoning. His retention of his senses (φρένες) does not allude to the so-called "empirical senses," but rather, to his judiciousness, shrewdness, and discernment in relation to the human affairs which Odysseus will face. He offers his counsel, guidance, and prophecy about the course of Odysseus' life as a whole (and what would help him to end it well). By contrast, the other shades with whom Odysseus converses while in Hades only speak about matters related to their own lives.⁶¹⁹ That Teiresias' soul has mind (νοός) and is in full possession of its faculties (πεπνῦσθαι) reinforces our supposition that he may have dialectical reasoning especially because Socrates often mentions the involvement of mind (νοός) in dialectical reasoning. If we take this supposition for granted (i.e., that Teiresias' soul has dialectical reasoning), then it raises an important, anticipatory question for our inquiry of the *Meno*. If Teiresias' soul has dialectical reasoning even in Hades, it is because of Persephone's gift—which we, who examine the *Meno*, might understand as a sort of divine allotment (θεία μοίρα). Consequently, we ought to wonder whether Teiresias' soul is remarkable because it has dialectical reasoning at all *or* because it has dialectical reasoning after death. If the former, then this account of dialectical reasoning could have consequences for our inquiry in the *Meno*. If Teiresias' gift is paradigmatic of the way dialectical reasoning comes to be in any soul, and if *arete* is dialectical reasoning, a conclusion to which Socrates' reasoning seems to lead, then *arete* would not be teachable. The supposition of *arete*'s teachability, however, was the very starting point which Socrates assumed in order to lead Meno through his account of dialectical reasoning. Before we return to the *Meno*, let us further consider the relevance of this passage for our interpretation of Socrates' reasoning in the *Meno*.

We conjectured that Teiresias' soul seemed to share some common qualities with our understanding of dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) in the *Meno*. On the basis of the *Odyssey* alone, we might question our assumption of Teiresias' dialectical reasoning, but we may find validation for our assumption in a different text: Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. In the scene between Oedipus and Teiresias especially, we see a very familiar diction appear in a starkly different context. Oedipus summons Teiresias during his search (ζήτημα) for the murderer of King Laius. How is

⁶¹⁹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 11. 235-605

Teiresias introduced? The chorus calls Teiresias the “prosecutor” (οὐξελέγγων) and “the godly prophet” (τὸν θεῖον μάντιν) “in whom alone of human beings the truth comes to be by nature” (“ὅτι τάλιθές ἐμπέφυκεν ἀνθρώπων μόνῳ”).⁶²⁰ Oedipus also speaks highly of Teiresias (before they converse with one another), announcing:

Teiresias, observing everything (πάντα νομῶν) / that can be taught (διδασκτά) and all things that defy / expression (ἄρρητά), what is in the skies above/ or walks upon the earth! You cannot see, / and yet your being intelligent (φρονεῖς) shows you our *polis*, / and the plague afflicting it. My lord (ὄναξ), / we are discovering that only you can be her savior (σωτήρᾱ), champion (προστάτην), and spokesman. . . . Don’t grudge us what the auspices have said, / or any other pathway that you have / which yields prophetic insight (μαντικῆς), and protect / yourself, the *polis*—and protect me too / from all the blight this dead man brings on us. / For we are in your power. To benefit (ὠφελεῖν) a man (ἄνδρα) / with all your might (ὅν ἔχοι τε καὶ δύναιτο) is the most beautiful work (κάλλιστος πόνων).⁶²¹

We must draw out the contextual significance of Oedipus’ speech. He is the current ruler (the tyrant) of Thebes, and yet he entreats Teiresias to be the savior (σωτήρᾱ) of both himself and his *polis*, going so far as to call Teiresias “my lord” (ὄναξ). Moreover, Oedipus bases his confidence in Teiresias upon Teiresias’ ability to observe everything (πάντα νομῶν) despite being blind, and apparently this perspicacious vision comes from “being intelligent” (“φρονεῖς”) and also his prophetic insight (“μαντικῆς”). Even though the verb “φρονεῖν” appears explicitly here (whereas we interjected our suspicions about Teiresias’s possession of dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) in the *Odyssey*), we still only compare “fictional” accounts. That is, neither the *Odyssey* nor *Oedipus Tyrannis* (nor even the *Meno* for that matter) are strictly speaking bound by the limits of human possibility. Consequently, it would be legitimate for Teiresias to have a superhuman clairvoyance in any of these texts, in a way which may captivate our interest but which tells us nothing insightful about human life (or more specifically, the human good). Our inquiry into *arete* in the *Meno* has supposed that we will learn something germane to our common human experience about the pursuit of the human good, and if, hypothetically, we concluded that *arete* involves some nebulously grounded possession of prophetic truth (i.e., certainty about the future), then our inquiry would likely be quite disappointing. Fortunately, we need not understand the events of

⁶²⁰ Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 297-299. The word “prosecutor” (οὐξελέγγων), which we might render otherwise as “the one who will cross-question and refute” shares a common root with *elenchus*, which is also well-known for its association with Socratic philosophical practice. Ahl, “Oedipus and Teiresias,” 113.

⁶²¹ Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 300-315. Translation modified. We will defer to a more conventional translation of “φρονεῖν” as “being intelligent” throughout our foray into *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

Oedipus Tyrannis in that way. Our recognition of Socrates' and Teiresias' common proficiency in the navigation of dialogue might lead us to examine the sense in which the truth comes to be by nature (τάληθές ἐμπέφυκεν) in Teiresias. And through an examination of Teiresias' relationship with truth and discourse, we might also learn something about Socrates' own relation to them, which will help us to interpret his reasoning about dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) with Meno. With this goal in mind, let us continue our analysis of Teiresias' interrogation of Oedipus (tyrannis).

After hearing Oedipus' high esteem for Teiresias and his potential to save Thebes, Teiresias laments his position.⁶²² Notably, he does not lament his gift of prophecy, but he mentions "being intelligent" as the cause of his grief. He laments, "Alas, how terrible (δεινὸν) is being intelligent (φρονεῖν) when/ it brings no profit (μὴ τέλη λύη) to the intelligent man (φρονοῦντι)! / This I knew well (καλῶς ἐγὼ εἰδὼς), but had forgotten it (διώλεσ'), / else I would not have come."⁶²³ We have strategically preserved the translation of "φρονεῖν" and "φρονοῦντι" as "being intelligent" (φρονεῖν) and "to the intelligent man" (φρονοῦντος) respectively in order to highlight a crucial dimension of "dialectical reasoning" (φρόνησις) which our otherwise rigid adherence to this phrase in our analysis of the *Meno* might obscure. In the *Meno*, Socrates introduced dialectical reasoning based upon the foundational supposition that *arete* is teachable and so some sort of knowledge. In light of our analysis and our translational decision, the connection between knowledge and dialectical reasoning may sometimes be difficult to see. However, the allusions to Teiresias "being intelligent" (φρονεῖν) might help us to hear the broader resonance of "dialectical reasoning" (φρόνησις) in contrast to Socrates' idiosyncratic use of it in the *Meno*.⁶²⁴ Indeed, Teiresias may be an "intelligent man" (φρονοῦντος)—certainly in a very different way than the sophist (σοφιστής) Protagoras—and yet, he nonetheless bemoans the futility of "being intelligent" (φρονεῖν) in a way which, to us, sounds somewhat Socratic.⁶²⁵ Typically, the so-called "intelligence" of Teiresias is

⁶²² The soteriological diction is noteworthy considering our analysis of Socrates' remark in the *Protagoras*. We might also read Teiresias as lamenting *Oedipus*' own "intelligence" and not his own, which sounds reminiscent of Socrates' remarks in the *Apology*.

⁶²³ Ibid., 316-318.

⁶²⁴ Both Gadamer and Heidegger made this point in their analyses, but we repeat it again here because of its significance. We should note as well that Oedipus began his praise by noting Teiresias' ability to observe "...everything (πάντα νομῶν) / that can be taught (διδακτά) and all things that defy / expression (ἄρρητά), what is in the skies above/ or walks upon the earth!" The point being that there seems to be some connection between the things that can be taught (διδακτά) and what Teiresias "sees" about Thebes by being intelligent (φρονεῖν).

⁶²⁵ Sophocles' texts precede Plato's, and so it is likely that the former influenced the latter.

understood as a power of prophetic clairvoyance, but what if Teiresias instead possessed an even greater power—the power to persuade his interlocutor to act such that Teiresias’ words retrospectively appear as prophetic/clairvoyant?⁶²⁶ That is, what if Teiresias uses his “intelligence” to cause the truth come to be?

Frederick Ahl develops a compelling interpretation of the exchange between Teiresias and Oedipus that reads Teiresias’ “intelligence” in this way. He implores his readers to consider the following alternative explanation of Teiresias’ intelligence:

The counter explanation [to the general assumption that Teiresias is objectively clairvoyant] is not particularly hard to grasp: that Oedipus’ behavior, based on prior observation, is predictable. He will respond to a given stimulus in a given and predictable way. It is not only the biologist but the witch doctor and the psychologist who understand this principle...Teiresias is trying to persuade *the accused* [i.e., Oedipus] of his guilt, not the jury.⁶²⁷

This interpretation of Teiresias’ practice resonates powerfully with the reading of Socrates’ philosophical practice in the *Meno*. Just as we might read Teiresias as a cunning rhetorician who intentionally provokes Oedipus’ anger in order to force him into a weaker position in their dialogue, so too have we read Socrates as someone who speaks carefully to Meno’s assumptions and predilections in order to persuade him. We saw in Oedipus’ introduction of Teiresias that Oedipus does seem to hold Teiresias’ authority in high regard (perhaps too high), and even though Teiresias angers Oedipus, compelling Oedipus to lash out and accuse Teiresias of conspiracy, Oedipus nonetheless remains beholden to Teiresias’ speech throughout. For example, even when Oedipus accuses Teiresias of “speaking foolishly (μῶρα φωνήσοντ’),” Teiresias convinces Oedipus to recognize his authority by penetrating directly into Oedipus’ greatest vulnerability. “I am a fool then, as it seems to you—but to the parents who begot you, sensible (ἔμφορονες).”⁶²⁸ Teiresias effectively forces Oedipus into submission, since the question of Oedipus’ parents’ identity is the very concern “leading” Oedipus through his life. Analogously, Socrates too seems to compel Meno to accept his reasoning because of Meno’s own assumptions about what ought to lead his life. And in the end, Teiresias attributes his insight to his “mantic intelligence” (μαντικῆ

⁶²⁶ “[Teiresias’ only prophetic statement in the play] immediately prompts the question that should always arise when prophecies are addressed to believers in prophecy: is prophecy in such cases proof of the seer’s foreknowledge of subsequent actions, or is it the *cause* of what follows?” Ahl, “Oedipus and Teiresias,” 125.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, 125-126.

⁶²⁸ Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 433-436. Translation Modified

φρονεῖν): “Go within, / reckon (λογίζου) that out, and if you catch me lying (ἐψευσμένον), / say (φάσκειν) I’m devoid of mantic intelligence (μαντικῆ μηδὲν φρονεῖν).”⁶²⁹ Now, of course, Socrates does not proclaim his own proficiency in “mantic intelligence” (μαντικῆ μηδὲν φρονεῖν), but the likeness between Socrates in Athens and Teiresias in Hades is strongly implied at the end of the *Meno*.⁶³⁰ In light of this analysis of Teiresias’ exchange with Oedipus, we ought to ask ourselves about what Socrates might be persuading Meno in the *Meno*. Let us return now to the *Meno*.

In our attempt to interpret Socrates’ addition of the sensible (ἔμφρων) /senseless (ἄφρων) diad, we turned our attention to the association of these words with the blind prophet Teiresias. Superficially, Teiresias seemed to possess a prophetic clairvoyance about the truth, which, in the *Odyssey*, came as a consequence of his gift of mind from Persephone, and, in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, seemed to come from some inexplicable natural kinship with the truth (τάληθές ἐμπέφυκεν). However, when we analyzed Teiresias’ “intelligence” more closely in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, we found a compelling parallel between Teiresias and Socrates. We might better understand Teiresias’ apparent clairvoyance more powerfully as a sort of rhetorical gift which he uses to “create” the truth through persuasion. With this sense in mind, we briefly examined his ability to compel Oedipus by touching on his most sensitive vulnerabilities (e.g., his quickness to anger, the identity of his parents, his claim to rule based upon the resolution of the sphynx’s riddle) and so compel him to recognize his authority (i.e., his “mantic intelligence” (μαντικῆ μηδὲν φρονεῖν)). While we may recognize certain parallels between Teiresias’ interaction with Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Socrates’ interaction with Meno in *Meno*, we ought to emphasize a very decisive difference. It is disputable whether Teiresias ultimately benefited Oedipus or Thebes as a result of his dialogue with Oedipus or whether he even cared to do so.⁶³¹ By contrast, we do not have the same doubts about Socrates, and this assumption conforms with the very subject-matter with which we concern ourselves in our examination of the *Meno*, i.e., *arete* and the human good in the *polis*. Thus, as we approach the conclusion of our investigation of Socrates’ reasoning about dialectical reasoning, we ought to ask ourselves in what way Socrates may be persuading Meno and of what? For even

⁶²⁹ Ibid., 460-462. Translation modified.

⁶³⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 99e-100a.

⁶³¹ It is genuinely ambiguous whether Teiresias counsels beneficially, but it is also worth noting that Oedipus concluded his introduction with the following claim: “To benefit (ὠφελεῖν) a man (ἄνδρα) / with all your might (ὄν ἔχοι τε καὶ δύναιτο) is the most beautiful work (κάλλιστος πόνων).” Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 314-315.

if our understanding of the sense in which the “sensible soul leads rightly” (and vice versa) may be less precise than we would prefer, we may nonetheless interpret this claim as a part of a broader account that Socrates puts force to persuade Meno to think differently about *arete* and the human good than Meno believed prior to their meeting. That is, how might Meno benefit from believing dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) should lead *his* soul?

In the penultimate step of Socrates’ reasoning about dialectical reasoning, Socrates repeats many of the same claims which he had already stated previously, but he does add one new term, “to depend upon” (ἀνηρτῆσθαι):

Then is it possible to speak in just this way about everything, that for a human being (τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ) all other things (τὰ μὲν ἄλλα πάντα) depend upon (ἀνηρτῆσθαι) the soul (εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν), but the things of the soul itself (τὰ δὲ τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτῆς) [depend upon] dialectical reasoning (εἰς φρόνησιν), if they are going to be good (ἀγαθὰ): and by this argument the beneficial (τὸ ὠφέλιμον) would be dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις): and do we affirm that *arete* is beneficial (ὠφέλιμον)?⁶³²

All other things (τὰ μὲν ἄλλα πάντα) for a human being (τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ), which we might abbreviate into simply “human goods,” “depend upon” (ἀνηρτῆσθαι) the soul, while the soul itself “depends upon” dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις). That which “depends upon” something “hangs upon” it.⁶³³ Consequently, the latter must be more “stable” than the former. Its stability likely comes from its priority especially axiologically. Something comes first and so becomes important because everything after hangs upon it. By being first, it is a part of everything subsequent. This sense of priority harmonizes with the priority of dialectical reasoning which we have understood as a fundamental reason for the propriety of its leadership in the soul. And Socrates strongly implies it here as well, even if the verb “depend upon” (ἀνηρτῆσθαι) is only supplied syntactically.⁶³⁴ On the one hand, Socrates does not add anything radical to this step of his reasoning. Broadly, it is reiterative. But, on the other hand, if we ask ourselves how Socrates directs this speech to Meno’s soul, we can sense the gravity of this step more intensely. Throughout our analysis in Chapter I, we analyzed Meno’s repeated assumption of human goods as measures of *arete*. No matter which

⁶³² Ibid., 88d-89a.

⁶³³ See entry on “ἀναρτάω.” Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 61.

⁶³⁴ We have noted this syntactical ambiguity on prior occasions when it appeared at decisive points in the text. It is standard to supply the governing verb from the “μὲν” clause to the “δὲ” clause within a μὲν / δὲ construction, but we should make note of the fact that “literally” Socrates does not say that the things of the soul “depend upon” dialectical reasoning, even if this reading is most likely.

human good Meno proposed, it never sufficed. With this problematic assumption in mind—a problematic assumption particular to Meno—we should heed this otherwise repetitious step in Socrates’ reasoning as an account that touches upon one of Meno’s ownmost truths, namely, that he overvalues the benefit of human goods. Consequently, we might heed this step of Socrates’ reasoning as the culmination of his subversion of Meno’s psychic order. Human goods do not make the soul good, but a good soul makes human goods good.⁶³⁵ And insofar as we have understood dialectical reasoning as a knowing orientation towards the things that concern the good and beautiful in human life, then we find ourselves well positioned to recognize the potency of Socrates’ reasoning for Meno given his interest in *arete* no matter whether it is a nominal or real interest. We are tracking an account of *arete* as dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) that Socrates presents to/for Meno.⁶³⁶

Because we acknowledge that Socrates presents this account of *arete* as dialectical reasoning for Meno, we can reckon with Socrates’ conclusion more easily. He asks, “Therefore, do we affirm that dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) is *arete*, either *arete* altogether (σύμπασαν) or some part of it (μέρος τι)?”⁶³⁷ What is strange about this concluding question is that Socrates, seemingly out of nowhere, has raised the question concerning the exhaustivity of dialectical reasoning in relation to *arete*. That is, according to all of Socrates’ prior reasoning, there does not seem to be any reason to assume dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) is only a part (μέρος) of *arete*. While it is strange (even if Meno does not acknowledge it), it is not a surprising conclusion. For as we noted previously, dialectical reasoning may be a sufficient measure of *arete*, but it will not be necessary. And if it is not necessary, then it surely cannot be *arete* altogether (σύμπασαν).⁶³⁸

⁶³⁵ Cf. “Not from money (χρημάτων) does *arete* come to be, but from *arete* comes money (χρήματα) and all other public and private goods (τὰ ἄλλα ἀγαθὰ) for humans (τοῖς ἀνθρώποις).” Plato, *Apology*, 30b. Translation modified.

⁶³⁶ This claim stands in contrast with Aristotle’s unqualified claim about Socrates in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In that text, he claims: “...some people say that all *arete* (πάσας τὰς ἀρετὰς) is dialectical reasoning (φρονήσεις), and Socrates searched for it rightly (ὀρθῶς) in one sense, though in another sense he erred: for he erred in thinking that all *arete* (πάσας τὰς ἀρετὰς) is dialectical reasoning (φρονήσεις), but he spoke beautifully (καλῶς ἔλεγεν) that [there is no *arete*] without dialectical reasoning (ἄνευ φρονήσεως). A sign of this is that even now all people, when they define *arete*, after stating the sort of active condition it is and what things it is related to, add “in accordance with the right account (τὴν κατὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον),” and what is right (ὀρθός) is what is in accord with dialectical reasoning (ὁ κατὰ τὴν φρόνησιν)...So Socrates believed that the *aretai* are accounts (λόγους) (for [he believed them] all (πάσας) to be knowledge (ἐπιστήμας)), but we [believe they involve] an account (μετὰ λόγου).” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144b15-25. Translation modified. In relation to our own inquiry into the *Meno*, we must wonder why Aristotle claims that Socrates believed the *aretai* are accounts (λόγους), when we have not found Socrates arguing in this way.

⁶³⁷ Plato, *Meno*, 89a.

⁶³⁸ Again, a Socratic conclusion that contrasts with what Aristotle claimed about Socrates in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Nevertheless, no matter whether “dialectical reasoning (φρόνησιν) is *arete* altogether (σύμπασαν) or some part of it (μέρος τι),” Meno would be better off if dialectical reasoning led his soul, and in order for that ever to be a possibility, Meno must be persuaded that the benefit of human goods depends upon the soul. At the same time, the valuation of dialectical reasoning as that which makes human goods good/beneficial offers no resolution to Meno’s question concerning the genesis of *arete*. If “dialectical reasoning (φρόνησιν) is *arete* altogether (σύμπασαν) or some part of it (μέρος τι),” then Socrates has arrived at a tautological conclusion. Unless Meno knows how dialectical reasoning comes to be, then he knows no more about how *arete* comes to be than he did when he started. And in a sense, Socrates does lead the discourse towards this absurd conclusion. Immediately after Socrates arrives at the conclusion that dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) is *arete*, he reasons, “Then if this is how it is, the good (οἱ ἀγαθοί) could not be by nature (φύσει).”⁶³⁹ What exactly does Socrates mean by this claim? Of what “good” (οἱ ἀγαθοί) does he speak?

As we have noted many times now, it is customary to supply substantive nouns where the Greek does not do so. We have persistently pointed out this translational practice because it often has significant consequences for the meaning of a claim about “the good” (οἱ ἀγαθοί). In this case, Socrates “literally” says “...the good could not be by nature” (...οὐκ ἂν εἶεν φύσει οἱ ἀγαθοί). But to what or whom does “the good” (οἱ ἀγαθοί) refer? On the one hand, Socrates could refer to the good things, i.e., the human goods such as health, strength, beauty, and wealth. If Socrates means those “good things,” then clearly “the goods” are not “good” by nature, since, as Socrates claimed, they are themselves neither beneficial nor harmful. Only when a person uses these goods “rightly” are they good/beneficial i.e., when the person with dialectical reasoning leading his or her soul uses them. Such a claim would be *somewhat* controversial, since many people (including Meno) desire the aforementioned human goods as choice-worthy in themselves. However, the relative benefit of human goods for people is not a uniquely Socratic insight.⁶⁴⁰ But, on the other hand, “the goods” (οἱ ἀγαθοί) could also refer to “the good ones” as “the good people.” With respect to the question concerning the human good, i.e., whether good people are born good, this claim does assert a new conclusion, but it also raises an important retrospective question about Socrates’ prior reasoning. Does dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) come to be by nature? In fact, insofar as dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) is either *arete* altogether or a part of *arete*, such a question about

⁶³⁹ Ibid. Translation modified

⁶⁴⁰ For example, Plato, *Republic*, 338c-d; *Protagoras*, 334a-c.

dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) is nothing more than a reiteration of the opening question about how *arete* comes to be. But, at the same time, we must also acknowledge a difference. Socrates began his inquiry from the foundational supposition that *arete* is teachable, and so a sort of knowledge, which was the supposition that allowed for the introduction of dialectical reasoning. The implication, then, seems to be that *arete*, which is the measure of a good person, cannot come to be by nature, since they have assumed throughout Socrates' reasoning that it is teachable. But, of course, in our analysis, we have abstained from making a definite determination about the origin of dialectical reasoning, i.e., we have noted reasons why it seems *not* to be teachable *nor* to come to be by nature. Might this ambiguity about the origin of dialectical reasoning be one explanation for why Socrates goes on to make a very strange remark about how the good (οἱ ἀγαθοί) would be treated in the *polis*, if they were good by nature?

In Socrates prior remark, we noted the ambiguity of the referent in the Greek phrase “the good” (οἱ ἀγαθοί). However, in his following remark, the referent seems to tilt more explicitly towards “the good ones” than “the good things.” And, in a sense, we should expect that Socrates' and Meno's discussion would lead in this way, since we have assumed from the beginning that the dialogue concerns *arete* and the human good in the *polis*. Our inquiry in the *Meno* concerns how people become good not how human goods become good. And even though Socrates' comment will raise many questions, we might also see it as a sign of reassurance that our concern overlaps with Socrates' concern. Socrates does make peculiar claims about how the *polis* would treat its constituents who are born good, if good people came to be by nature, but it is nonetheless clear that he is talking about the good (οἱ ἀγαθοί) as “good people.” Socrates muses:

For even if this somehow were so [i.e., if the good came to be by nature], this too would follow: if the good (οἱ ἀγαθοί) were to become so by nature (φύσει), we would, I guess, have ones who (οἱ) recognized (ἐγίνωσκον) those among the youth with good natures (τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς τὰς φύσεις), whom, after we took them from those who had revealed them, we would guard (ἐφυλάττομεν) on the Acropolis (ἐν ἀκροπόλει), setting our seal (κατασημνῶμενοι) on them much more than we do with gold (τὸ χρυσίον), so that no one could corrupt (διέφθειρεν) them, and that when they should come of age, they could become useful (χρήσιμοι) to their πόλεσι.⁶⁴¹

Even if “the good ones” (οἱ ἀγαθοί) came to be by nature, we have no reason to think that a *polis* would organize itself in the way Socrates describes. The fact that this political organization does

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., 89b.

not follow as a necessary consequence of the antecedent claim about those who are good by nature means that it carries little justificatory force. Nothing prevents the good (οἱ ἀγαθοί) from coming to be by nature *and* society not being organized in this way at the same time. In other words, the absence of this political organization tells us nothing about the way that “good people” come to be. Furthermore, the logistics of a *polis* organized in this way sound impossible to determine. Who would oversee recognizing these good youths, and how would such people be appointed? The proper appointment of individuals for this task seems just as important as recognizing the good youth, yet Socrates passes over it quickly as if it were a trivial matter. Would these “recognizers” be a subset of those who are good by nature, or would they come from those without such an endowment? And if they came from the latter group, how would they know what to look for without themselves having a share in this natural goodness, especially if the difference between the naturally endowed and everyone else were as stark as this hypothetical political organization implies?⁶⁴² Would the “recognizers” have to learn to do so? Furthermore, who would corrupt the good people, and how would they do so?⁶⁴³ Would the good ones be at risk of corruption from their fellow citizenry, who are benefited by these good people and so without a clear motive to do so intentionally? Or would the risk come from people outside the *polis*, and if so, for what reason would they leave their own *polis* with its own good people to corrupt the good people in another *polis*? Why does Socrates conjecture in this way? What purpose does it serve in the dialogue?

Not only should we consider Socrates’ claim immanently, but we also should consider it contextually. We just arrived at the culmination of Socrates reasoning, in which Socrates concluded that “dialectical reasoning (φρόνησιν) is *arete* altogether (σύμπασαν) or some part of it (μέρος τι).” If *arete* suffices as a measure of the human good, then, obviously, good people exhibit *arete*. And if good people exhibit *arete*, then according to Socrates’ reasoning, they must also have dialectical reasoning. Consequently, we should also hear in Socrates’ strange remark about this hypothetical *polis* a commentary about what a *polis* would be like if an abundance of people with dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) were born into it. Understood in this way, Socrates’ claim resonates in a somewhat different tenor. If people were born with dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις), then a *polis* would likely go to great lengths to identify those who were born with it, since they would be “useful” (χρήσιμοι) to the *polis*. Because of our prior analysis, we can anticipate what

⁶⁴² Ionescu, *Plato’s Meno*, 120.

⁶⁴³ Cf. Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, 220.

this usefulness might entail.⁶⁴⁴ People born with dialectical reasoning would benefit their *polis* because they would lead the *polis* in the “right way” *a la* the leadership of dialectical reasoning in the soul and its benefit for the individual. While our analysis has taken for granted that the leadership/rule of the soul has consequences for the leadership/rule of the *polis*, this comment affirms this connection albeit with some odd assumptions mixed in. Nevertheless, we ought not overlook the significance of this claim as another sign of the entwinement of inquiry into *arete* and the human good with the *polis*. While we may dispute the details about the consequences of Socrates’ account of *arete* as dialectical reasoning on the *polis*, we do not question *that* there are consequences of this account of *arete* for the constitution of the *polis*. Furthermore, insofar as we have followed Socrates’ reasoning about the identification of *arete* with dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις), we can also infer the logic of his imagery about gold, which deserves special attention because of Meno’s prior account of *arete* as the procurement of gold and silver.

Meno previously affirmed that *arete* is the provision of gold and silver for oneself, and we analyzed what was problematic about such an account of *arete*.⁶⁴⁵ Now, however, Socrates seems to play off this sensibility, likening the people who were born with dialectical reasoning to gold, whose value is marked and protected on the acropolis. The comparison to gold, especially in the sense of humans with a “golden nature,” appears also in the *Republic* and the *Cratylus*.⁶⁴⁶ In the *Meno*, as in the *Republic* and *Cratylus*, Socrates likens the souls of some people to gold to emphasize those who have something quite valuable to the *polis*. What makes such people so valuable? Good people (οἱ ἀγαθοί), i.e., those who have dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) or who are likened to gold/have gold mixed into their souls, make things “good,” that is, beneficial (ὠφέλιμα). We must hear this claim in its dual register. When good people (οἱ ἀγαθοί) use goods

⁶⁴⁴ “Now examine (σκόπει), what leads (ἡγῆται) each of these things whenever it benefits (ὠφελεῖ) us and whenever it harms (βλάπτει)? Then is it not that whenever right usage (ὀρθή χρῆσις) [leads], it benefits (ὠφελεῖ); but when not, it harms (βλάπτει)?” Plato, *Meno*, 88a. Whereas the question of “right usage” (ὀρθή χρῆσις) was introduced because of the concern for the benefit of human goods for human beings, we now find the question of “use” appear in relation to the benefit of good people to their *polis*.

⁶⁴⁵ Plato, *Meno*, 78d. Meno’s inordinate regard for money may be representative of a broader issue in Greek society, see Plato, *Apology*, 29d-30b, 41e.

⁶⁴⁶ In *Cratylus*, Socrates speaks of the first humans as the “golden race” (τὸ χρυσοῦν γένος) whereas present humans belong to a “race of iron” (σιδηροῦν γένος). However, he quickly modifies the account, which he borrowed from Hesiod, insisting that if someone were good in the present, then they also would belong to the golden race. These good ones (οἱ ἀγαθοί) are the “φρόνιμοι.” Plato, *Cratylus*, 398a. In the *Republic*, Socrates proposes that he, Adeimantus, and Glaucon fabricate a similar story about the citizenry, whose natures are iron, bronze, silver, or gold. Those with gold mixed into their nature, according to the story, are “most valuable” (τιμιώτατοι) and most fit to rule (ικανοὶ ἄρχειν). Plato, *Republic*, 415a. See also *Ibid.*, 468e, 547a.

(ἀγαθὰ) rightly, those goods (ἀγαθὰ) benefit them. For example, good people use their wealth in a way that benefits themselves and others. If we believe Socrates that dialectical reasoning benefits people so much, then we would have to agree with his insistence that such people should be guarded on the Acropolis as the site of what is most valuable to the *polis*.⁶⁴⁷ Furthermore, when good people (οἱ ἀγαθοί) lead the *polis* rightly, they improve their *polis* and its constituents, i.e., they benefit them. This latter claim, which seems to follow from Socrates' prior reasoning, also draws our attention to a curious paradox. If the people who have dialectical reasoning benefit everyone in the *polis* when they lead the *polis*, then do those people, who lack dialectical reasoning but who are benefited by their rulers, become good themselves? And if so, then would they not be "good people" who lack dialectical reasoning? We have already taken anticipatory note of this paradox, when we mentioned that dialectical reasoning may not be a necessary measure of a good person. And yet, despite all of Socrates' reasoning about dialectical reasoning, we are nonetheless led to the conclusion that people can become good without themselves having it.⁶⁴⁸ But, even stranger is the fact that this conclusion follows from a counterfactual assertion about how a *polis* would be organized if the good people of a *polis* were born with dialectical reasoning, even though, according to the foundational supposition of *arete*'s teachability, *arete*/dialectical reasoning does not come to be by nature. Let us take a moment to review what we have unpacked in this section before we move on to the next one, in which Socrates undermines this foundational supposition.

We arrived at the conclusion that good people, i.e., those who exhibit *arete*/those who have dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις), cannot come to be by nature based upon the foundational

⁶⁴⁷ Cf. Thompson, *The Meno of Plato*, 162. Thompson sees the signification of the Acropolis as simply "the treasury of the city," but, of course, there were temples and monuments on the Acropolis as well. Moreover, the Acropolis did not come into existence *ex nihilo*, but the Athenians built it over several centuries. Prior to Pericles' political ascension, an older Parthenon stood in the Acropolis among the temples as a monument to the Athenian victory over the Achaemenid Empire at Marathon. The Achaemenid Empire's destruction of the Acropolis led to its later reconstruction and reorganization under Pericles. Rhodes, *Architecture and Meaning on the Athenian Acropolis*, 30-31, 42-43. The buildings of the Acropolis stood as much in affirmation of Athenian values as they did in defiance of the Achaemenid Empire's transgressions against Athens. In this sense, Socrates too seems to speak in affirmation of *arete* and in defiance of Meno. Meno likely would agree with Thompson's reduction of the Acropolis to the site of the treasury, since Meno values the procurement of gold so highly. And yet, ironically, the good people who would be protected in the Acropolis like gold are the ones who have the power to make gold valuable in the first place. Socrates makes a strange image in which good people are likened to something extremely valuable (gold) but which is only valuable *because of* the leadership of good people.

⁶⁴⁸ It would still be necessary for *someone* in the *polis* to have it.

supposition that *arete* is teachable (διδασκτὸν).⁶⁴⁹ After taking this supposition for granted, Socrates further reasoned that *arete* must be some sort of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη τις), since knowledge is what is taught. Furthermore, *arete* is itself good, which implies also that it is beneficial (ὠφέλιμόν). We understand the inherent goodness of *arete* as a consequence of its status as a measure of the human good in the *polis*. It is what determines who is good. Of course, good people exhibit *arete* (and so it is not some abstract standard), but it also is that against which the constituents of the *polis* are meted. Nevertheless, Socrates leads Meno through a different path of reasoning, one which is germane to Meno’s personal struggle with *arete*, if we take his prior accounts of *arete* as signs of his orientation towards it. Socrates first considered human “goods” (τὰγαθὰ) (e.g., health (ὕγεια), strength (ἰσχὺς), beauty (κάλλος), and wealth (πλοῦτος)), and, perhaps curiously, he claimed that these so-called “goods” do not always benefit humans. They only do so when “right usage” (ὀρθή χρῆσις) leads (ἡγῆται) a person, but, of course, for a person to use human goods rightly, the soul of that person must itself be led rightly as well. The dependency of right usage on right leadership in the soul led Socrates further to ask about what leads the soul—and specifically “the things that pertain to the soul” (“τὰ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν”)—rightly. Socrates’ examination of the things that pertain to the soul led him to conclude that their benefit depended upon the leadership of dialectical reasoning, which involves being mindful (σὺν νοῷ or μετὰ νοῦ). In fact, Socrates goes so far as to assert that “...all the things undertaken (ἐπιχειρήματα) and endured (καρτερήματα) by the soul when led (ἡγουμένης) by dialectical reasoning (φρονήσεως) come to end in fortune (εἰς εὐδαιμονίαν τελευτᾷ)...”⁶⁵⁰ Thus, according to Socrates’ reasoning, when dialectical reasoning leads the things that pertain to the soul, the things that pertain to the soul benefit the soul, and furthermore, when a soul is organized beneficially in this way, it leads a person to use human goods rightly as well. The dependency of “the things that pertain to the soul” (“τὰ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν”) on dialectical reasoning and of human goods on the soul led Socrates to conclude that dialectical reasoning itself is beneficial *a la arete*. Furthermore, dialectical reasoning must be either *arete* altogether (σύμπασαν) or some part of it (μέρος τι), and if they have reasoned rightly to this conclusion, then, Socrates claimed, the good, i.e., those who have dialectical reasoning,

⁶⁴⁹ Socrates seems to take for granted the mutual exclusivity of that which comes to be by nature and that which comes to be through instruction, and although this assumption seems reductive, it ultimately does not matter because Socrates will reject both ways of becoming as adequate accounts of *arete*.

⁶⁵⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 88c. Translation modified.

cannot be so by nature. Broadly speaking, Socrates reasoned in this way. And what of our own analysis?

We focused our attention on two aspects of Socrates' reasoning: his introduction of dialectical reasoning and the interdependency of dialectical reasoning's leadership of the soul, the soul's leadership of a person, and a person's leadership of the *polis*. Our translation of "φρόνησις" as "dialectical reasoning" signals a decisive point in our inquiry. Through a consideration of Heidegger's analysis, Gadamer's analysis, and our own analysis of other Platonic texts, we made this decision to name a certain knowing orientation of the soul that reckons with what is good and beautiful in human life. It is somewhat "practical" insofar as it concerns the affairs of human life, but also distinct from the productive practicality of technical know-how (τέχνη). It is "dialectical" in the sense that it involves a give-and-take, which we find so powerfully exemplified by dialogue. It does not fall exclusively within the purview of dialogue, but its employment in dialogue emphasizes its power. Early in our analysis, we supposed that Socrates possessed considerable power but a power very different from the political power of Meno. As we have progressed through our inquiry, we have considered this power in terms of Socrates' proficiency in dialogical engagement, and in our analysis of Teiresias' engagement with Oedipus, we found a likeness between Teiresias and Socrates. We departed from a more conventional interpretation of Teiresias—who himself possesses dialectical reasoning and in whom alone truth comes to be by nature—as a clairvoyant in favor of an interpretation of him as a master rhetorician with an acute sensitivity to human "psychology." He does not know the future with certainty, but rather, he makes the truth come to be by persuading his interlocutor (Oedipus) to fulfill his prophecy. This reading of Teiresias captivated our attention because we have interpreted Socrates' arguments throughout the *Meno* as ways of speaking to Meno's sensibilities which could persuade him to change. Thus, if Teiresias has dialectical reasoning, a knowing orientation of the soul that reckons with what is good and beautiful in human life, whose usefulness appears conspicuously through dialogue, and if we find Teiresias and Socrates similar, then we ought to wonder whether Socrates too possesses dialectical reasoning. We did not formally arrive at such a conclusion, but we ought to keep it in mind as we move forward. For, according to Socrates' reasoning throughout this section, *he* would be a good person.

As we analyzed dialectical reasoning, we found it frequently appear in tandem with the question of what (or who) leads. It did not surprise us that they appeared together, since we recognized the interconnectedness between *arete* (with which Socrates identified dialectical reasoning in this section), the human good, and the leaders of the *polis* very early in our analysis. But what does it mean for something to “lead” the soul? We developed a greater sensitivity to the meaning of “leading” during our analysis of dialectical reasoning in the *Protagoras* and the *Laws*. In the *Protagoras*, Socrates asked Protagoras whether knowledge can lead a person, and we inferred the sense of this “leadership” to mean the instruction of what to do in a trustworthy and useful way. This sense of “leading” partially explained what it means for dialectical reasoning to lead the soul, but our analysis of the *Laws* added another important dimension. The hypothetical interlocutor, to whom the Athenian gave voice in the *Laws*, also spoke of dialectical reasoning as leading. Dialectical reasoning played a derivative role in all of the other divine goods while also being the first among them. It leads in the sense of its primacy and by being responsible for what follows. We synthesized these dimensions of leadership into our analysis of Socrates’ claim that “...for a human being (τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ) all other things (τὰ μὲν ἄλλα πάντα) depend upon (ἀνηρτῆσθαι) the soul (εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν), but the things of the soul itself (τὰ δὲ τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτῆς) [depend upon] dialectical reasoning (εἰς φρόνησιν), if they are going to be good (ἀγαθὰ)...”⁶⁵¹ We drew out a connection between that which “depends upon” something and that which “hangs upon” something. In both cases, the latter must be more “stable” than the former. In the case of dialectical reasoning, its “stability” stems from its axiological priority—it is that which makes everything else good/beneficial. Consequently, dialectical reasoning “leads” the soul in the sense that it instructs in a trustworthy and useful way, but it also the origin of the goodness/benefit of everything else. It is primary (i.e., it “leads”) in these ways. If we extrapolate the justification for dialectical reasoning’s primacy in the soul (as the cause of everything good and beneficial), then we can see a direct connection to the concern for *who* leads. Dialectical reasoning makes the things that pertain to the soul good/beneficial, and when the soul is led in this way, a person uses human goods beneficially, and further, the person who uses human goods to his or her private benefit would also know how to use human goods to benefit the *polis* as a whole. In this way, the question concerning what leads the soul becomes a bluntly political one concerning who knows how to benefit the *polis* (through proper leadership). And yet, not only will Socrates question the foundational supposition

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., 88d-89a.

that led them to this conclusion, but Socrates will also introduce a new character in the dialogue, Anytus, who is himself a political leader of Athens. In a concrete way, we will witness Socratic reasoning put to the test.

The Missing Teachers of *Arete* and Anytus' Patrimony (89c- 90b)

Upon hearing the culmination of Socrates' account, Meno, whose presence in the dialogue has been merely token since he ordered Socrates to lead them down this path, restates Socrates' foundational supposition in its most rudimentary form. "It now seems to me to be necessary (ἀναγκαῖον): and it is clear, Socrates, according to the foundational supposition (κατὰ τὴν ὑπόθεσιν), that if *arete* is indeed knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), it is teachable (διδασκτόν)."⁶⁵² In terms of the question concerning the human good, Meno's reiteration would take the following form: the good ones (οἱ ἀγαθοί), those who exhibit *arete* and who have dialectical reasoning, cannot be good by nature, and so they must become good by being taught. Despite knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) undergoing a transformation into dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) during Socrates' reasoning, Meno repeats Socrates' introductory formulation without any additional qualification. Does Meno not acknowledge a difference between knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις)?⁶⁵³ Might Meno's behavior be representative of the way Meno "remembers" what his teachers say? After hearing Meno's reiteration, Socrates interjects some doubt, adding temporal criteria to the worthiness of their account. "But it ought not to seem to have been said beautifully (καλῶς) only just now (ἐν τῷ ἄρτι μόνον), but also in the present time (ἐν τῷ νῦν) and in the time to come (ἐν τῷ ἔπειτα), if there's going to be some soundness (ὕγιες) about it."⁶⁵⁴ What distinction does Socrates make here, and why does he make it? Socrates insists that that about which they speak must be "sound" or healthy (ὕγιες).⁶⁵⁵ We could hear Socrates' stipulation abstractly as an elementary remark on the conditions of "sound reasoning," but such an interpretation would be out of character with our approach to the dialogue thus far. It would be better if we considered how this remark speaks to Meno in particular. In light of the prior reasoning, we can hear Socrates'

⁶⁵² Plato, *Meno*, 89c. Translation modified.

⁶⁵³ While we recognize something amiss in Meno's reductive reiteration because it comes after the entirety of Socrates' reasoning, we should also acknowledge that the possibility of reducing dialectical reasoning to knowledge must imply something about the sort of thing that dialectical reasoning is. They must share something in common. This potential reducibility likely also explains Socrates' subtle introduction of dialectical reasoning without explicitly accounting for the transition.

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 89c.

⁶⁵⁵ On the "health" of an account like that of a body, soul, or *polis*, see Plato, *Phaedrus*, 264c.

concern for the “soundness” ,i.e., the health (ὕγιες), of the account as an extension of the concern for what will benefit Meno in particular. Socrates claims that they must speak “beautifully” (καλῶς), and we noted previously that Meno described Socrates’ speech in this way when it pleased him.⁶⁵⁶ Even though Socrates insisted that they must assert that *arete* is teachable as a foundational supposition in order to reason further, such a foundational supposition is dangerous for Meno because he would like Socrates to teach him.⁶⁵⁷ That is, Meno comes to the dialogue already partial to such a supposition. Thus, it should not surprise us when Meno reduces Socrates’ argument to the conditional: “if *arete* is indeed knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), it is teachable (διδασκτόν).” Such a foundational supposition served Socrates’ present dialogical needs, i.e., the gratification of Meno, which sustained Meno’s interest in inquiry into *arete*, but Socrates’ account would likely not benefit Meno beyond their conversation. Why not?

Socrates affirms their supposition that knowledge is what is teachable, but he raises his doubts about whether *arete* is knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), adopting Meno’s formulation even though his reasoning primarily focused on dialectical reasoning. With an inquisitive undertone, Socrates asks, “...[B]ut that [arete] may not be knowledge, see whether I seem to you to be reasonable in my doubt about that. For tell me this: if anything whatever (ὅτιοῦν πρᾶγμα) is teachable (διδασκτόν), and not only *arete*, are there not necessarily also teachers (διδασκάλους) and learners (μαθητὰς) of it?”⁶⁵⁸ Meno responds to Socrates’ question with surprise. Does Socrates really think that there are no teachers of *arete*? Regardless of Socrates’ view on the matter, the absence of teachers presents a formidable obstacle to the claim that *arete* is teachable. This ostensibly empirical question would likely present challenges for Meno in the future, if he were to repeat Socrates’ reasoning about *arete*.

At this very moment, Socrates introduces a new character: Anytus. As was the case previously, we will need to find out about this person named Anytus, who speaks in many ways on behalf of the Athenian *polis*. But we will not consider the testimony about him now, saving it instead for the beginning of the next chapter. For now, let us only consider *how* Socrates introduces

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., 86b-c. Cf. Benardete, “The Right, the True and the Beautiful,” 55-56. Benardete claims that speakers frequently use “καλῶς” to signal a simplification of an argument for the sake of easier passage. In that case, we may also see Socrates’ use of it here as an additional justification for our suspicion about the preceding argument.

⁶⁵⁷ Plato, *Meno*, 81e-82a. Meno’s questioning at 70a and 86c may also imply such a desire, although he does not say so explicitly.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid., 89d.

Anytus in this speech and how these claims emphasize a new dimension of our inquiry into *arete*. Socrates remarks:

I've sought (ζητῶν), surely, many times (πολλάκις), whether there might be some teachers (διδάσκαλοι) of it and, doing (ποιῶν) everything, I'm not able to find out (οὐ δύναμαι εὑρεῖν). And yet I search with many [people] (πολλῶν), and especially those whom I suppose to be most experienced (ἐμπειροτάτους) in this matter (τοῦ πράγματος). And now indeed, Meno, just at the right moment, Anytus here has sat down beside us, to whom we should give a share in the search. And it would be fitting (εἰκότως) for us to give him a share: for Anytus here, first of all, is the son of a father both wealthy (πλουσίου) and wise (σοφοῦ), Anthemion, who became wealthy not by accident (ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου), nor from some gift (δόντος τινός), like the one who has just recently received Polycrates' money (χρήματα), Ismenias the Theban, but acquired (κτησάμενος) it by his own wisdom (τῇ αὐτοῦ σοφίᾳ) and diligence (ἐπιμελείᾳ). Then, in other respects too, he did not seem to be a haughty (ὑπερήφανος) citizen (πολίτης), nor puffed-up (ὀγκώδης) and offensive (ἐπαχθής), but an orderly (κόσμιος) and well-mannered (εὐσταλῆς) man (άνηρ). Then he brought up (ἔθρεψεν) and educated (ἐπαίδευσεν) our man here well (εὖ), as the majority of Athenians believe (ὡς δοκεῖ Ἀθηναίων τῷ πλήθει); they elect him, at any rate, to the highest offices (μεγίστας ἀρχάς). Now it is only just (δίκαιον) to search (ζητεῖν) for teachers of *arete* with such men, whether there are or are not any and whoever they might be.⁶⁵⁹

Humbly, Socrates testifies first about his own experience with this question concerning the teachers of *arete*. While Socrates can, in one sense, claim genuine ignorance about *arete* insofar as he has not “found an answer” (either to the question concerning the teachers of *arete* or about “what *arete* is”), Socratic ignorance about *arete* differs from, for example, the ignorance of the παῖς. Whereas the παῖς was ignorant because he did not know the answer to the problem and had neither education nor experience in geometry, Socratic ignorance about *arete* does not imply the same elementary starting point. His experience in this search also likely implies his experience in other parts of the inquiry into *arete*, since it would be difficult for Socrates to determine that he has not found that for which he searches without having some measure against which to mete his success or failure. We have suspected all along that Socrates “knows” more than he claims, and he confirms our suspicion about his proficiency in the inquiry. Furthermore, Socrates adds an interesting wrinkle to the question concerning the *character* of this search. Whereas we might suppose the pursuit of the human good (*arete* and being a good person) to be an individualistic endeavor, Socrates speaks here of it as one which he shares with others within a communal horizon. That is, he claims to search with many people, whom he considers “most experienced”

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., 89e-90b. Translation modified.

(ἐμπειροτάτοι) in this matter. Many people, himself included, would like to be taught how to be a good person, if it were possible to learn how to be one. According to Socrates, his concern for *arete* and the human good is not idiosyncratic. And yet, despite the communal effort to determine who teaches *arete*/how to be a good person, no one seems to know who teaches it. Against this backdrop, Socrates introduces Anytus into the conversation, an introduction whose irony could not go unnoticed.

Anytus' participation in the prosecution of Socrates explains one dimension of his ironic inclusion, but we can draw out other dimensions as well, if we heed Socrates' introduction prior to their subsequent discussion. Socrates does not speak to the character of Anytus himself initially, but rather, he comments instead about Anytus' father. Socrates seems to laud Anytus' father, Anthemion, first for his wealth (πλούσιος) and wisdom (σοφός). These goods have appeared regularly throughout our analysis, and they are, notably, two of the three goods for which Socrates "praised" Thessaly in the beginning of the dialogue.⁶⁶⁰ Of course, at this point, we readily recognize the insufficiency of wealth and wisdom as measures of *arete*, and so we cannot hear this praise naively at face value. Next, Socrates remarks upon the way that Anthemion secured his wealth. Socrates points out that he used his wisdom (σοφία) and diligence (ἐπιμελεία) to acquire his wealth, which he contrasts with someone who became wealthy by accident (ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου) or from some gift (δόντος τινός)—"like the one who has just recently received Polycrates' money (χρήματα), Ismenias the Theban." Besides Socrates' description of him here, we have sparse testimony or records about Anthemion I of Euonymon other than his occupation as a hide-tanner and his rise from the thetes class to the hippeus class.⁶⁶¹ Especially in contrast to the other Athenians whom Socrates will list during his conversation with Anytus, Anthemion occupies a very humble reputation in posterity. Were it not for Anytus, Anthemion may not have been remembered at all! Comparatively, both Ismenias the Theban and Anytus himself come to us with speckles of controversy surrounding their respective tenures in office. What might we infer from the contrast between the reputation of Anthemion, on the one hand, and Anytus and Ismenias, on the other hand? Socrates' third comment about Anthemion might offer us some guidance. He insists that Anthemion was not a haughty (ὑπερήφανος), puffed-up (ὄγκώδης), nor offensive

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., 70a.

⁶⁶¹ See Nails, *The People of Plato*, 332. Nails indicates record of Anthemion in Davies' *Athenian Propertied Families*, Osborne and Byrne's *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names Vol. 2*, and Kirchner's *Prosopographia Attica*.

(ἐπαχθής) citizen (πολίτης) but rather an orderly (κόσμιος) and well-mannered (εὐσταλής) man (άνήρ). In this distinction, we may find Socrates reference a tension which we have tracked since the very beginning of our inquiry.⁶⁶² Socrates distinguishes Anthemion as a man (άνήρ) from Anthemion as a citizen (πολίτης), a distinction that parallels our own distinction between Socratic philosophical practice and the emergent *arete* of the *polis*. We will develop this tension more in Chapter IV, but we nonetheless ought to make an anticipatory note of one key difference between these men: Anthemion abstained from politics (i.e., leadership of the *polis*) whereas both Ismenias the Theban and Anytus were active politicians in their respective *poleis*. We will adhere to our plan of analyzing Anytus in the next chapter, but, in the meantime, let us explore the identity of Ismenias the Theban, since Socrates chooses his procurement of wealth as the foil to that of Anthemion.

In addition to the *Meno*, Ismenias' name appears also in Xenophon's *Hellenica* and Plato's *Republic*.⁶⁶³ According to Xenophon's account in *Hellenica*, Ismenias is one of three Thebans to whom Timocrates, a Rhodian messenger who acted on behalf of the Achaemenid Empire, gave money (χρήματα) for war against the Lacedaemonians.⁶⁶⁴ While the accusation of bribery paints an unflattering picture, the implicit accusation of medism would likely have resonated more strongly.⁶⁶⁵ According to such logic, a politically expedient alignment of interests with the Achaemenid Empire amounted to a violation of one's claim to being Greek at all, even if, retrospectively, this sense of Pan-Hellenic purity seems naïve. Xenophobic prejudices aside, Thebes (and the other Greek *poleis*) did have legitimate reasons for opposing Lacedaemonian hegemony and occupation as well. Nevertheless, we still have a broad sense of Ismenias from

⁶⁶² Cf. *Ibid.*, 71e-73c. We interpreted Socrates' objection to Meno's first account of *arete*, in which Meno differentiated the *arete* of a man from that of a woman, child, elder, freeman, and slave, along similar lines. That is, according to a distinction between a "universal" human *arete* and an emergent measure of *arete* in the *polis*. While the Socrates did not object to Meno's account on this basis, we can retrospectively distinguish the measures as a confrontation between human *arete* and "political" *arete* (i.e., the *arete* of the citizen).

⁶⁶³ Nails, *The People of Plato*, 339. Thompson, *The Meno of Plato*, 171-172.

⁶⁶⁴ According to Xenophon's account, Leontiades, who was the leader of the political party in Thebes that sympathized with the Lacedaemonians, detained Ismenias "as an instigator of war" (πολεμοποιούντα), for which he was later put to death. The charges against Ismenias were that "...he was a supporter of the barbarians, that he had become a guest-friend (ξένος) of the Persian satrap to the hurt of Greece (ἐπ' οὐδενὶ ἀγαθῷ τῆς Ἑλλάδος γεγενημένος), that he had received a share of the money (χρημάτων) which came from the King, and that he and Androcleidas were chiefly responsible for (αἰτιώτατοι) all the disorder (ταραχῆς) in Greece." Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 5.2.30-36.

⁶⁶⁵ For some helpful insight into Theban medism and the Theban struggle to overcome this accusation in the eyes of other Greek *poleis* (especially Lacedaemon and Athens), see Cartledge, *Thebes: The Forgotten City of Ancient Greece*, 66-69. Rockwell, *Thebes: A History*, 69, 117-132.

Xenophon's account: Ismenias was an influential leader in the democratic faction of Thebes who was either bribed by Timocrates, an Achaemenid messenger, to the detriment of Greece, or who simply received money from him to support Theban opposition to Lacedaemonian rule.⁶⁶⁶ For our sake, it does not matter why Ismenias took the money, but when we couple this report together with Socrates' remarks about Ismenias in the *Republic* and the *Meno*, we can develop an even more nuanced sense of the kind of man Ismenias might have been.

While speaking to Polemarchus in the *Republic*, Socrates claims, "I think [the saying that it is just to benefit friends and harm enemies] belongs to Periander, or Perdiccas, or Xerxes, or Ismenias of Thebes, or some other wealthy man (πλούσιος ἀνὴρ) who believed himself to have great power (μέγα οἰομένου δύνασθαι)."⁶⁶⁷ Socrates attributes the saying that it is just to benefit friends and harm enemies to Ismenias (and others) at the conclusion of his reasoning with Polemarchus that no wise person (e.g., Simonides, Bias, Pittacus) would claim it is ever just to harm another person. Perhaps no wise person would, but a wealthy and powerful person might according to Socrates. From our analysis of the *Meno*, we have a ready explanation for why Socrates might attribute the claim to these men. It is possible for wealthy men to become leaders of the *polis*, and if wealthy men (like Ismenias) become leaders of the *polis*, then they are in a position to set the measure of the human good. They are "responsible" for what (and who) is good in the *polis*, and they are responsible because what they say and do becomes the *de facto* good. Even in this problematic scenario, we can see evidence of the communal horizon in which inquiry into the human good takes place. For, not only do the leaders of a *polis* have the means (material and the influence) to determine the good, but Socratic philosophical practice also shows us the limits of their contingent power. Their political influence ultimately does not give them any greater claim to the human good. Even the humble Socrates—a man of no means and little political influence—can decisively subvert the conventional measures of the human good, i.e., the emergent measures that align with the interests of the leaders of the *polis*. While we do not know a lot about Ismenias, we can infer a few conclusions about him that bear upon our consideration of the dialectical engagement with *arete* and the human good in the *polis*.

⁶⁶⁶ The orthographic proximity of "Timocrates" to "Polycrates" is noteworthy. Also, opposition to Lacedaemonian rule was a tenet of the Theban democratic party, and so, Ismenias could act against the interest of Lacedaemon without being corrupt, which the accusation of bribery/medism connotes.

⁶⁶⁷ Plato, *Republic*, 336a.

Just as in Xenophon's *Hellenica*, Socrates corroborates two distinct characteristics of Ismenias in the *Republic*. According to both accounts, Ismenias was a noteworthy Theban leader, and he was a leader/politician who possessed wealth because of his power (i.e., his influence and authority in the *polis*). He comes across like an expedient man who would do whatever is necessary to accomplish his ends. Whereas his expediency in the *Hellenica* shows itself more conspicuously through his willingness to temporarily align his interests with the Achaemenid Empire (who sought to colonize Greece), his expediency appears more subtly in the *Republic*. According to the wealthy and powerful leader, it is "just" to benefit friends and harm enemies. Being "just" is a necessary part of being good, and so this claim which Socrates attributes to men like Ismenias tells us something about their claim on the human good. However, we need only briefly consider our modest glimpse into the life of Ismenias to see how inadequate this measure of the human good is. The Achaemenid Empire sought to colonize Greece, which every Greek *poleis* opposed as far as they were able. Insofar as being colonized represented an affront to the good of any Greek, the Achaemenid Empire was an enemy, and yet, in the *Hellenica*, Ismenias collaborates with the "enemy" of all of Greece. Even if accepting money from Timocrates did not make Ismenias his friend, insofar as the money contributed to a mutual interest of Ismenias' faction in Thebes and the Achaemenid Empire (i.e., weakening Lacedemonian hegemony), Ismenias "benefited" Xerxes and his empire. But was it "good" (i.e., just) for Ismenias to do so? The brief anecdote from the *Hellenica* highlights the haziness of the distinction between friend and enemy especially in the political sphere, and it is but one dimension of the problematic account of the just. This story also provides an example of the transience of political "power." Although Ismenias seemed to have considerable influence in Thebes (a status which we infer from the multiple accounts of people "giving" him money (χρήματα)), his "power" did not save him from political violence. Leontiades, who led another Theban faction with Lacedemonian sympathies, had Ismenias executed. Thus, not only did Ismenias possess a dubious share of the human good during his political tenure in Thebes but the conclusion of his life also raises questions about the value of his position. His so-called "power" seems to be a primary factor in his unfortunate demise, and further, if his power were so great, then why could he not prevent his political execution? And yet, worse than the uselessness of his power is that he sacrificed his pursuit of the human good for it. His assumptions about the human good (no matter whether they were reflective or inherited) led him to pursue an unfortunate life, one in which he engaged in questionable behavior for the sake of an impotent power! Before

returning to the *Meno*, let us briefly consider Polycrates who allegedly gave money (χρήματα) to Ismenias.

There are three possible identities for Polycrates: Timocrates the Rhodian messenger, Polycrates the tyrant of Samos, or Polycrates the Athenian democrat. The former possibility assumes a textual corruption in the manuscript, and it alludes to the same story from Xenophon's *Hellenica* that we have just considered.⁶⁶⁸ Herodotus' *The Histories* provides us with an account of the life Polycrates the tyrant of Samos, which is of passing interest to our analysis of the *Meno* because of the confluence of themes in the story.⁶⁶⁹ Nonetheless, to read the reference to Polycrates as a reference to Polycrates of Samos, we would have to assume Ismenias received his money in a proverbial way, which is a reading only Thompson posits.⁶⁷⁰ The third option, which has the most scholarly support, assumes Polycrates to be the Athenian democrat. The primary consequence of reading the reference to "Polycrates" as a reference to the Athenian Polycrates seems to be the historical connection between that Polycrates and Ismenias. Syntactically, the interpretation of "Polycrates" as the Athenian Polycrates assumes the dependency of the clause "like the one who has just recently received Polycrates' money (χρήματα), Ismenias the Theban" on the latter disjunct of the two seemingly inferior ways of becoming wealthy, i.e., "from some gift" ("δόντος τινός"). In addition to syntactical justification, it is also reasonable contextually, even if it might imply on its own that Ismenias dubiously became wealthy from Polycrates' gift alone. But of course, from Xenophon's account, we are aware that Ismenias may have received "financial gifts" of this nature on multiple occasions. Furthermore, Morrison's overview of the historical circumstance supposes that the Athenian Polycrates would have given money to Ismenias to help restore Athenian democracy during the reign of the Thirty, which corroborates the anti-Lacedaemonian sentiment in Xenophon.⁶⁷¹ Even if a part of Polycrates' gift went to

⁶⁶⁸ Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, 169. Thompson, *The Meno of Plato*, 171. However, Sharples explicitly and Thompson implicitly doubt this possibility because of their assumptions about the dating of the manuscripts (the *Meno* and *Hellenica*). The reference to Timocrates would be anachronistic.

⁶⁶⁹ Nails, *The People of Plato*, 253. Thompson, *The Meno of Plato*, 171. Herodotus, *The Histories*, 3.39. For more recent scholarship, see Carty, *Polycrates, Tyrant of Samos: New Light on Archaic Greece*; Shipley, *A History of Samos 800-188 BC*; Mitchell, "Herodotus and Samos," 75-91.

⁶⁷⁰ Thompson, *The Meno of Plato*, 171. Aside from the lack of scholarly support, the proverbial reading creates many interpretive issues without much payoff.

⁶⁷¹ Morrison, "Meno of Pharsalus, Polycrates, and Ismenias," 77-78. Any scholar after Morrison who addresses the identity of Polycrates refers to Morrison's account, which is circumstantial but quite compelling. Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, 3. "It is more likely that the reference [to Polycrates] is to [Polycrates, the leading Athenian democrat,] than to the sixth-century tyrant of Samos, even if the expression 'the wealth of Polycrates' referring to the latter was

Ismenias personally, it seems much more likely that Ismenias would become wealthy by receiving contributions *like* the one Polycrates gave and not from Polycrates' gift alone. Consequently, we should understand Socrates in the following way: Anthemion became wealthy from his wisdom and diligence and not by chance nor from some gift, like the kind of gift that Ismenias often received, for example, from the Athenian Polycrates. Now that we have accumulated accounts of the many moving parts in this reference, let us put them all together and infer the consequences of Socrates' comparison of Anthemion to Ismenias.

Superficially, Socrates appears to praise Anthemion for becoming wealthy through his own efforts; however, only our own biases could justify a reading in which Socrates praises a “self-made man” for being “self-made.” While Socrates' comments about Anthemion himself do not betray any scorn, they sound much more “back-handed” in relation to Anytus. Anthemion did well in life—for a hide tanner (a craftsman).⁶⁷² Anthemion did not think himself cleverer than he was. He had wisdom (σοφία) about his craft, and he worked with diligence (ἐπιμελεία). In this sense, he was an “orderly (κόσμιος) and well-mannered (εὐσταλής) man (άνήρ).” This comportment contrasts with that of the haughty (ὑπερήφανος), puffed-up (ὀγκώδης) and offensive (ἐπαχθής) citizen (πολίτης). Ismenias exemplifies such a person. He became wealthy, which we infer from our prior analysis, from accepting political “gifts,” which required him to act with political expediency. This way of becoming wealthy forced him to compromise his share of the human good in such a way that he lived a life of questionable integrity, which was propped up by an overinflated assessment of his power. And yet, this “power” proved itself impotent when his political opponent brought him to task for his political expediency. Ismenias was powerless to stop his death, which we infer came as a consequence of his anti-Lacedemonian orientation more than anything else. The comparison of Ismenias to Anthemion could seem irrelevant were it not for our awareness of Anytus' participation in Athenian politics, which Socrates mentions immediately

proverbial, which is uncertain...The reference may rather be to an attempt by the Athenian Polycrates to bribe Ismenias to restore the Athenian democracy in place of the Thirty Tyrants (so Morrison 58 and 77-8).” Ibid., 169.

⁶⁷² Consider what Socrates recounts about his encounter with the craftsmen: “...they knew things I did not know, and to that extent they were wiser than I. But, men of Athens, the good craftsmen seemed to me to have the same fault as the poets: each of them, because of his success at his craft, thought himself very wise in other most important pursuits, and this error of theirs overshadowed the wisdom they had....” Plato, *Apology* 22d-e. Also, Plato, *Republic*, 374a-376e. When Glaucon asks why citizens cannot serve adequately in the military, Socrates responds, “They won't be [adequate], if the agreement you and the rest of us made when we were founding the city was a good one, for surely we agreed, if you remember, that it's impossible for a single person to practice many crafts or professions well.” Socrates goes on to apply the same “agreement” to those who will be lead their *polis*. In addition to our analysis of the *Meno*, the reason for Socrates' suspicion towards Anytus likely stems from a similar basis.

after the comparison. “Then [Anthemion] brought up (ἔθρεψεν) and educated (ἐπαίδευσεν) our man here well (εὖ), as the majority of the Athenians judge; they elect him, at any rate, to the highest offices (μεγίστας ἀρχάς).”⁶⁷³ We ought to notice here how Socrates repeats a rhetorical move from his opening speech. In Chapter I, Socrates mentioned the Thessalians’ reputation among the Greeks who admired them for horsemanship, wealth, and recently wisdom as well.⁶⁷⁴ We suspected that the distance between Socrates’ omission of his own admiration and his explicit acknowledgement of the Greek’s admiration more generally implied that Socrates may not share in the broader sentiment. As an elected official to the highest offices in Athens, Anytus occupies an important position in the leadership of the Athenian *polis*. Consequently, Anytus’ introduction represents a culmination of the issues surrounding leadership (of the soul and the *polis*) with which we have dealt throughout this chapter. We have drawn out political consequences of Socrates’ reasoning about the leadership of dialectical reasoning in the soul, and now, Socrates confronts Anytus who manifests the political reality of leadership in Athens. With all of these factors swirling in the background, we have a keen sense of what is at stake when Socrates claims “...it is only just (δίκαιον) to search for teachers of *arete* with such men [as Anytus]....”⁶⁷⁵ Both the teachers of *arete* and the leaders of the *polis* make separate but related claims on *arete*, and insofar as Anytus represents the latter, he ought to have some insight into the former.

Conclusion

We began our analysis in this chapter from the same assumption which has informed our analysis throughout. We assume that Socrates speaks to sensibilities particular to Meno’s soul, which we retrospectively understand as an ongoing synthesis of Meno’s unique experience and his life in Thessaly. Meno is both an aristocratic student of Gorgias with a penchant for the acquisition of wealth and honor *and* a Thessalian. Thus, when Meno refused Socrates’ exhortation to renew the inquiry into *arete* again, insisting instead that Socrates answer his initial question about *arete*’s coming to be, Socrates did acquiesce, but the details of his acquiescence still spoke to Meno’s soul. Socrates remarked on Meno’s unruliness, but he nonetheless agreed to proceed according to Meno’s wishes. Socrates’ comment led us to examine what it might mean for Meno *not* to be free, and after we explored a similar line of reasoning in the *Gorgias*, we found ourselves confronted

⁶⁷³ Plato, *Meno*, 90b.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 70a-b.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 90b.

by some uncertainty about the measure of being free. Is being free the power to fulfill whatever one happens to desire, or is it the restraint which precedes the possibility of making a decision at all? For men like Meno and Callicles, freedom seems to involve the former, but Socrates persistently suggests otherwise. This question of freedom has loomed in the background of our analysis throughout this chapter especially as we have considered the connection between what leads in the soul and who leads in the *polis*. If wants and desires lead the soul in their pursuit, and people who are led by their wants and desires lead the *polis*, then what sort of people will come to be in such a *polis*? This sort of logic informs the analogy that connects the leadership of the soul to the leadership of the *polis*. We have interpreted Socrates' response to Meno as a way of redressing this issue in Meno while continuing to examine *arete* and the human good in the *polis*. As a part of the development of this issue, we tracked Socrates' reasoning about an alternative "leader" of the soul. In order to reach this point without knowing "what *arete* is," Socrates proposed that they borrow the method of geometers, who reason about something based upon a foundational supposition (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως). We found this approach persuasive albeit fragile, since its persuasiveness always depends upon the transient identity (the "likeness") of the parts of the analogy. Despite its vulnerability, this reasoning opened the conversation to an examination of the consequences for the soul and the *polis*, if they suppose that *arete* is something teachable (διδασκτόν).

By taking this assumption for granted, Socrates reasoned about what sort of thing *arete* would be if it could be taught. If *arete* is teachable, then it would have to be some sort of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη τις), since knowledge is what is taught. This assumption provided the basis for Socrates to introduce dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) into their inquiry because it too relates to what is known in some indeterminate way. The introduction of this term posed considerable challenges for us translationally and interpretively. In fact, the translational problem and interpretive problem relate to one another. The ubiquitous acknowledgement of its axiological weight in Greek philosophy (especially in Platonic and Aristotelian texts) informs our interpretation of it even prior to its development in the *Meno*. We briefly considered Anastaplo and Berns' note on "φρόνησις" as "prudence" for some indication. They described it as "the virtue of practical thoughtfulness, good practical judgment, practical intelligence, practical wisdom."⁶⁷⁶ From this description, the

⁶⁷⁶ Anastaplo and Berns, "Notes" in *Plato: Meno*, 66.

“practical” dimension of “φρόνησις” is evident, but we also must be mindful about this very distinction between the “practical” and “theoretical.” Their concomitance has shown up at previous points in our analysis (especially during Chapter II), and this quality seems decisive to our interpretation/translation of “φρόνησις” in this chapter as well. Through a comparative analysis of “φρόνησις” in other Greek texts and the *Meno* itself, we marked out certain characteristics which we used to justify our translation of “φρόνησις” as “dialectical reasoning.” We interpreted it as a certain knowing orientation of the soul that reckons with what is good and beautiful in human life. It is somewhat “practical” insofar as it concerns the affairs of human life, but it is also distinct from the productive practicality of technical know-how (τέχνη). It is “dialectical” in the sense that it involves a give-and-take, which we find powerfully exemplified in dialogue. It, of course, does not fall exclusively within the purview of dialogue, but its employment in Socratic dialogue emphasizes its “benefit.” Through our analysis, we concluded that the *benefit* of dialectical reasoning distinguished Socrates’ use/incorporation of it from another exemplar of its potency, Teiresias. When we explored the *Odyssey* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*, we drew a connection between Teiresias, whose possession of dialectical reasoning distinguished him from other humans, and Socrates, whose possession of it we considered because of some similarities between him and Teiresias. And yet, Socrates differed from Teiresias insofar as his use (as a term in his reasoning *and* in his philosophical engagement) of dialectical reasoning was beneficial whereas Teiresias’ was more ambiguous (e.g., with Oedipus). In fact, Socrates reasoned that the benefit of dialectical reasoning justified its leadership of the soul, a soul which would lead a person rightly, who would, in turn, lead a *polis* rightly as well. In this conclusion, we find a culmination of a Socratic reasoning *for* Meno, whose soul lacked authoritative and trustworthy leadership, which, as we see now, also impacts his future leadership of the *polis*.

It came as no surprise, then, when another “leader” entered the dialogue: Anytus. Our analysis of *arete* in the *Meno* has highlighted the communal horizon in which inquiry into *arete* and the human good necessarily takes place. The question of *arete* and being a good person always emerge within the confines of a *polis*, which both informs and is informed by its constituents. We have seen the consequences of this dialectical tension in Meno through his engagement with Socrates throughout the dialogue. Nevertheless, Socrates, whom we have taken as a fundamentally *unconventional* thinker, must also manifest certain assumptions which underlie the Athenian concern for *arete* and the human good as well. In the next chapter, we will examine the

confrontation between Socratic philosophical practice and the conventional, Athenian beliefs of Anytus. Even so, as a preparation for this confrontation, we analyzed Socrates' commentary on Anytus' patrimony. We examined the sense of Socrates' "praise" for Anytus' father, Anthemion, about whom Socrates appeared to speak somewhat fondly. However, we found that Socrates' fondness for Anthemion required qualification. Anthemion was a modest, yet successful hide tanner who did not allow his wisdom in his craft to convince him that he was more capable or clever than he was. We drew this "back-handed" compliment out of Socrates' comparison of Anthemion to Ismenias the Theban, to whom Anytus may be more similar than to his father. Ismenias exemplified for us the haughty (ὑπερήφανος), puffed-up (ὄγκώδης) and offensive (ἐπαχθής) citizen (πολίτης) that Anthemion resisted becoming. From our intertextual analysis, we found Ismenias to be an expedient democratic leader, who used his power as a leader to become wealthy. And yet, as we studied his life more meticulously, we recognized the way that his commitment to being this sort of person betrayed him in the end. Not only did he earn a disreputable reputation which reflected his unreflective concern for *arete* and the human good, but his own tenuous claim on the good as a wealthy and powerful, Theban leader appeared worthless and fool-hardy when his political enemy had him executed. Socrates' introduction of Anytus seems to foretell the fate of Ismenias, and not Anthemion, for this "well-reputed" Athenian leader. Let us turn now to Socrates' dialogue with Anytus so that we might see whether our anticipatory skepticism towards Anytus is justified.

CHAPTER V: ANYTUS SHARES IN THE SEARCH FOR THE TEACHERS OF *ARETE*: A GLIMPSE INTO THE CRISIS OVER THE QUESTION CONCERNING *WHO* IS GOOD IN/FOR ATHENS

Introduction

In Chapter III, a considerable portion of our analysis focused on the question of leadership in the soul and its consequences for the *polis*. When Meno told Socrates that it would be most pleasing (ἡδίστα) to him to hear Socrates account for the way that *arete* comes to be in humans, we took this remark (together with our sense of Meno from our prior analysis) as an indication of what leads Meno's soul.⁶⁷⁷ His pleasures (ἡδοναί) lead him. In response, Socrates presented an account to Meno of something else which might lead his soul more reliably towards the human good: dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις). Of course, Socrates himself did not frame his reasoning in this way, but we took our cues from a confluence of assumptions about the text. One of these assumptions is that Socrates caters his speech to his interlocutors. And yet, our analysis also led us into a problematic conclusion. Socrates assumed that *arete* could be taught in order to provide a foundation for his subsequent reasoning about dialectical reasoning, but we concluded our analysis in Chapter III with a suspicion that *arete*—and so dialectical reasoning (which Socrates identified with *arete*)—may *not* be teachable. If *arete* is dialectical reasoning, and Meno does not have dialectical reasoning, and if dialectical reasoning cannot be taught, then what use is Socrates' account of dialectical reasoning to Meno? Even if Meno found Socrates' reasoning persuasive, he would still have no way to acquire dialectical reasoning, since he was neither born with it nor could he learn it. Consequently, Meno could never be a good person. While all these consequences could follow, we might find some momentary consolation in the fact that Socrates only raises his suspicion about the teachability of *arete* because of the absence of teachers. We must not take this observation—or rather, this judgment—lightly, since it carries implications about *who*, if anyone, is good in the *polis*. Serendipitously, a powerful and influential Athenian shows up at this very moment, someone who, as a leader of the *polis*, should know something about how to make people good according to Socrates' reasoning.⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷⁷ Plato, *Meno*, 86c.

⁶⁷⁸ We ought to acknowledge that Socrates has an unconventional view about the purpose of governance. He seems to assume that the leaders/rulers are responsible for making their constituents good, which does deviate from the more conventional view that the rulers act in their own self-interest.

In Chapter IV, we will analyze Socrates' discussion with Anytus about the teachers of *arete* in Athens. On the one hand, the Athenian people elected Anytus to public office, and so the people of Athens have vested him with the power to act on behalf of the *polis*. Because of his position in Athenian governance, there is a sense in which Anytus represents the (Athenian) *polis* in dialogue with Socrates. On the other hand, Anytus, as a private Athenian citizen, also represents Athens by living the life of an "ordinary" Athenian, i.e., an adult male who is not enslaved (institutionally). And yet, we should recognize that the lives of men like Anytus had undergone a recent transformation. In Chapter I, we drew out the implicature behind Socrates' invocation of Meno's guest-friendship with the Great King.⁶⁷⁹ The reference to Artaxerxes did not just condemn Meno for consorting with an enemy of Athens (an "enemy" who was also, at times, an "ally"), nor did we understand it as an ironic reference to Meno's eventual death at the king's hands. Although these aspects certainly came into play, the aspect of the reference most germane to our current concern deals with the political enfranchisement of a part of the Athenian population who were given a new opportunity to enhance their wealth and status. This political enfranchisement came as a result of the efforts of democratic/populist leaders (similar to Anytus), and Pericles' thirty-year rule marked the culmination of this democratically oriented, political lineage.⁶⁸⁰ Thus, Anytus represents an empowered swath of the population, who, generally speaking, have only recently been given access to the material benefits (wealth and connections abroad) from which they had been previously excluded. Now, Anytus *could* differ from some of his peers, since, as Socrates pointed out, his father made their family quite wealthy. The question, which we will only be able to answer once we have analyzed Anytus' interaction with Socrates, is whether Anytus is the kind of leader who is responsible for the improvement of Athens (*a la* dialectical reasoning in the soul) or if he is the kind of leader who uses his position to his own benefit (e.g., the gratification of his desires). Before we begin our analysis of the *Meno*, let us consider some testimony about this Athenian man named Anytus.

Anytus

Ancient testimony about Anytus does not paint a uniformly negative picture. For example, in Xenophon's *Hellenica*, Theramenes names Anytus alongside Thrasybulus and Alcibiades as

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., 78d. Socrates will also note Meno and Anytus' guest-friendship momentarily at 90b.

⁶⁸⁰ We mark out Pericles here both because of his impact on Athenian society but also because of his subsequent role in the *Meno*. Ibid., 94b.

capable democratic leaders (ἡγεμόνες ἰκανοί) whose banishment would likely strengthen the cause of the opposition.⁶⁸¹ In his defense against the accusation of his infringement of the decree of Isotimides, Andocides names Anytus as one witness to testify on his behalf, citing his outstanding patriotism as a qualification for the value of his endorsement.⁶⁸² Isocrates speaks highly of him as well, citing Anytus and Thrasybulus as greatly capable men (μέγιστοι δυνάμενοι) who were robbed of their money (χρήματα) yet who sought no restitution.⁶⁸³ On the other hand, Pseudo-Aristotle accuses Anytus of being the first to introduce the practice of bribing the jury during his prosecution for his failure to defend Pylos.⁶⁸⁴ Moreover, Xenophon's Socrates paints a strikingly unflattering picture of Anytus, calling him vicious (μοχθηρός) and implying that his negligence towards his son will lead to his son's misfortune.⁶⁸⁵ Other references to Anytus contribute little additional insight besides attesting to Anytus' influence in Athenian politics.⁶⁸⁶ Conspicuously, Pseudo-Aristotle and Xenophon, whose political sympathies tend more aristocratic than democratic, speak most negatively about Anytus, and the references to him in the *Meno* and the *Apology* follow this trend. However, Socrates does not speak with notable scorn about Anytus in Plato's *Apology*, especially compared to the Socrates of Xenophon's *Apologia*. Most relevantly, Socrates simply observes that "...Anytus [is vexed] on behalf of the artisans (δημιουργῶν) and the politicians (πολιτικῶν)..."⁶⁸⁷ Otherwise, any negative impression of Anytus (in Plato's *Apology*) stems only from our sense that the accusers of Socrates, among whom Anytus is included, err in their

⁶⁸¹ Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 2.3.42.

⁶⁸² Andocides, *On the Mysteries*, 150. Andocides was accused of affiliation with two impious acts: the mutilation of a statue of Hermes and profanation of the Mysteries. The decree of Isotimides prevented individuals who were convicted for impious behavior from entering the *agora*. MacDowell, "Introduction," 95-97.

⁶⁸³ Isocrates, *Special Plea Against Calimachus*, 18.23-24.

⁶⁸⁴ Aristotle, *Constitution of Athens*, 27. Scholars do not consider Aristotle to be the author of this source, although it is frequently included in the Aristotelian corpus. Pseudo-Aristotle mentions Anytus' bribery at the conclusion of his discussion of the political climate in Athens under Pericles. His account seems generally unsympathetic, describing the concomitant democratization of the *polis* with the deterioration of its institutions (including, especially, the jury system). Nails describes some accounts of Socrates' accusers as participating in a "hagiographic tradition" and so concerned with accounting for the unfortunate demise of Socrates' accusers (e.g., Diodorus Siculus and Diogenes Laertius). Nails, *People of Plato*, 38. We might wonder whether Pseudo-Aristotle engages in a lighter version of this practice with respect to the growing democratization of Athens, which neither Socrates nor Pseudo-Aristotle would likely consider a change for the better. Diodorus Siculus reports the same story about Anytus' bribery, although his source may also be Pseudo-Aristotle. Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History*, 13.64-66.

⁶⁸⁵ Xenophon, *Apologia*, 29-31.

⁶⁸⁶ Archippus, Fishes fr. 31 (*Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta*, 30); Aristophanes, *Women at the Thesmophoria*, 809; *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*, 6.2; Lysias, *Against Agoratus*, 13.78-9; Theopompus, *Stratiotides*, Fr. 58 (*Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta*, 57). For various presentations of the testimony, see Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 223-224; Nails, *People of Plato*, 37-38; Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, 169.

⁶⁸⁷ Plato, *Apology*, 23e. Anytus' name appears several times throughout the *Apology* but in passing.

prosecution of him as a “corruptor of the youth.” In light of this mixed testimony, how should we judge Anytus’ place in the *Meno* and our sense of Socrates’ suspicion towards him, which we began to develop at the end of Chapter III through an analysis of his father Anthemion?

Anytus represents a democratic Athens both in terms of his position within the *polis* and the constitution of his soul. He manifests a conventional Athenian who stands antithetically to the most unconventional Athenian, Socrates. The combination of ancient testimony about his political exploits and Socrates’ brief remark on the Athenians’ election of him to office sufficiently ground our sense of his status and influence in Athens and throughout Greece. Yet these remarks do little to explain Socrates’ attitude towards him. If we divorce ourselves from Socrates’ seemingly negative judgment of him, then Anytus seems like a well-to-do citizen who was, perhaps, a bit misguided at times. Surely even the person who is “most fit” for politics would make mistakes occasionally, so Anytus’ misguided behavior cannot alone validate Socrates’ suspicion towards him. But what about the constitution of his soul? Especially in light of our analysis in Chapter III, we readily acknowledge the reasoning that connects the condition of an individual’s soul to the benefit of that person’s leadership in the *polis*. We will wait until Anytus and Socrates interact directly in the *Meno* before we draw any substantive conclusions; however, in the meantime, we might benefit from a consideration of Socrates’ remarks about the soul of the democratic man in the *Republic* so that we have a pattern against which to compare Anytus.

In a part of his discussion of justice in the *polis* and the soul, Socrates describes to Adeimantus the transformation of various political constitutions and the souls of the citizens who inhabit such *poleis*. He supposes that a *polis* changes from an oligarchy to a democracy “...because of its insatiable desire (ἀπληστίαν) to attain what it has set before itself as the good (ἀγαθῶ), namely, the need (δεῖν) to become as wealthy (πλουσιώτατον) as possible.”⁶⁸⁸ When the poor successfully rebel against greedy oligarchs, they establish a democracy. We might interpret their esteem for freedom and equality as a reaction to the oppressive valuation of wealth in an oligarchy, and the measures of freedom and equality would give license to whatever sort of life the citizenry desire for themselves because they are part and parcel of the human good in such a *polis*. According to such reasoning, just as the measures of freedom and equality guide the organization of the

⁶⁸⁸ Plato, *Republic*, 555b. Note here that the transformation from an oligarchical constitution to a democratic one involves a confrontation over the measure of the good.

democratic *polis* so too do they guide the organization of the democratic soul. However, Socrates maintains that numerous and strong desires (“πολλαί τε καὶ ἰσχυραὶ ἐπιθυμῖαι”) are allowed to grow in the souls of democratic people, which, we might assume, happens because of the permissive quality of these measures. Socrates claims:

And, seeing the acropolis (ἀκρόπολιν) of the young man’s soul empty of instruction (μαθημάτων), fine ways of living (ἐπιτηδευμάτων καλῶν), and accounts of truth (λόγων ἀληθῶν) (which are the best (ἄριστοι) watchmen and guardians of the thoughts (διανοίαις) of those men whom the gods love (θεοφιλῶν)), [the desires] finally occupy that acropolis themselves.⁶⁸⁹

Whereas in the *Meno* the leadership of the soul has consequences for the leaders of the *polis*, we find images of the *polis* (e.g., guardians and the acropolis) transposed back into the soul in the *Republic*. It would take us too far outside of the purview of our inquiry to examine the full contextual significance of Socrates’ account in the *Republic*; however, we can still glean some instructive insights from this speech if we analyze it in terms of our analysis of leadership in the soul from Chapter III. Without instruction, a good example, or accounts of truth, the democratic soul only has democratic measures (freedom and equality) to guide it. These measures make the soul vulnerable to the power of strong desires because every “thing pertaining to the soul” is given equal weight. They all have an equal claim “to rule” the soul. Although the permissiveness of freedom and equality allows for the citizens of a democratic polis to live a “divine and pleasant way of life (θεσπεσία καὶ ἡδεῖα διαγωγή)” without obligation to participate in governance, this permissiveness also creates the problematic conditions which can undermine the *polis*, the soul, and the very pursuit of *arete* and the human good.⁶⁹⁰

As we saw in Socrates’ image of the democratic soul, the vacancy of the “soul’s acropolis” allows any desire to take the lead of the soul and fill the acropolis with its “goods,” i.e., the things pertaining to the soul which are “good for” that desire. Such a desire, and what may be good for that desire, carries the potential either to harm *or* benefit a person both immediately and in the

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid., 560b. Translation modified.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., 557e-558a. Socrates asks, “Isn’t that a divine (θεσπεσία) and pleasant (ἡδεῖα) life, while it lasts?” The qualification “while it lasts” hints at the issue which we confront presently in the soul of the individual. Namely, the permissive freedom of a democracy allows anyone to rule, and so what will happen to this way of life when an unruly person (whose soul is led by unruly desires) leads the *polis*? Cf. Ibid., 496d-e. The lawlessness of the other members of the hostile polis drive the philosopher into a quiet life, which is the only way to remain free from injustice and impious acts.

person's life as a whole, since desires, as things pertaining to the soul, are neither beneficial nor harmful in themselves. A desire might lead a person rightly or erringly.⁶⁹¹ Furthermore, leadership of the democratic soul fluctuates frequently. "And so [the democratic man] lives, always surrendering rule over himself to whichever desire (ἡδονὰς) comes along, as if it were chosen by lot. And when that is satisfied, he surrenders the rule (ἀρχὴν) to another, not disdaining (ἀτιμάζων) any but satisfying (τρέφων) them all equally (ἐξ ἴσου)."⁶⁹² Due to the two measures of the good in the democratic soul, there is no reason to discriminate between its various "parts" assuming the leadership role.⁶⁹³ In fact, "[the democratic man] declares that all [desires (ἡδοναί)] are same (ὁμοίως) and must be honored (τιμητέως) equally (ἐξ ἴσου)."⁶⁹⁴ We have primarily focused our attention on the risk posed by equality and freedom as measures of the good; however, there is also an unexpected benefit as well. The same measures of the good that allow potentially detrimental desires to lead the soul of the democratic individual also justify the claim to rule of any of the other "things pertaining to the soul." We can easily imagine a soul born into a democratic *polis* which just so happens (because of the democratic esteem for freedom and equality) to possess dialectical reasoning and then, in the name of equality, allow dialectical reasoning to rule. But then, because dialectical reasoning deliberates about the good and the beautiful, it raises questions about the very measures of the good that allowed it to lead the soul in the first place. Consequently, dialectical reasoning could permanently usurp the rule of the soul through its own power to adjudicate on the good and beautiful, but such a usurpation of rule would greatly benefit that person (according to Socrates' prior reasoning). And, in fact, the benefit of this event *could*, at least in

⁶⁹¹ The ambivalent leadership of other things pertaining to the soul (besides dialectical reasoning) was implied by the part of Socrates' reasoning that we analyzed in Chapter III. The point of differentiation between dialectical reasoning and the other things pertaining to the soul was that dialectical reasoning alone made everything else good/beneficial. The implicit ambivalence of the other things pertaining to the soul anticipates a later issue in the dialogue, i.e., whether dialectical reasoning is the only thing that leads rightly. Plato, *Meno*, 97a.

⁶⁹² Plato, *Republic*, 561b.

⁶⁹³ Socrates comments on the peculiarity of this way of speaking about "parts" of the soul. He asks, "Yet isn't the expression 'self-control' (κρείττω αὐτοῦ) ridiculous? The stronger self (ἑαυτοῦ κρείττων) that does the controlling is the same (αὐτοῦ) as the weaker (ἥττων) self that gets controlled, so that only one person is referred to in all such expressions." But he continues, "Nonetheless, the expression is apparently trying to indicate that, in the soul of that very person, there is a better part and worse one and that, whenever the naturally better part is in control of the worse, this is expressed by saying that the person is self-controlled (κρείττω αὐτοῦ) or master of himself." Ibid., 430e-431a. Socrates does little to explicate his normative measures for determining the "better" or "worse" parts of the soul, but we may infer what he might mean from what we have found in the *Meno*. The "better" part of the soul is "better" at leading the soul because its addition to everything else in the soul, individual, and *polis* good/beneficial, i.e., dialectical reasoning and whatever is done mindfully. By contrast, desires (ἡδοναί), as one example, are "worse" at leading the soul, since they lead unreliably.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid., 561c.

principle, have sweeping effects on the *polis*. Of course, such reasoning depends upon many assumptions; however, we need not assume that a person with dialectical reasoning *could* appear in a democratic *polis*. Might this situation plausibly describe the appearance of Socrates in Athens according to the terms which Socrates used to account for leadership of the soul and the democratic *polis*? In other words, Socrates, just as much as Anytus, is a byproduct of a democratic Athens.

Socrates does not address what is responsible for his own Athenian origin directly, but we can draw inferences from a comparative analysis of his reasoning in the *Republic* and the *Meno*. Prior to his account of political constitutions and the constitutions of the souls within them, Socrates creates an image to explain why people consider philosophers useless to the *polis*. In his image, we witness a scene of people fighting to captain a ship without knowing how to navigate it. Socrates suggests that this image approximates the affairs of a *polis*, in which many people fight to rule the *polis* while not knowing how to lead it nor realizing that they do not know.⁶⁹⁵ For an analogous reason, the philosopher is not honored in the *polis* according to Socrates. We may lack the measure to determine who is a philosopher/has a philosophical nature broadly speaking, but we do have at least *one* example of a philosopher/someone with a philosophical nature: Socrates. Socrates claims that there is only a small group who “consort with philosophy in a way that’s worthy (ἀξίαν) of her,” and also that *he* is a part of this small group who have tasted “how sweet and blessed (ἡδὺν καὶ μακάριον)” the possession of philosophy is and seen the “madness of the majority (τὴν μανίαν τῶν πολλῶν).”⁶⁹⁶ Socrates’ daemonic sign has kept him out of politics and so able to consort with philosophy worthily, a part of which involves “bearing [something] worthy of genuine dialectical reasoning” (φρονήσεως ἄξιον ἀληθινῆς ἐχόμενον).⁶⁹⁷ If a philosopher has dialectical reasoning, and Socrates is a philosopher, then we find additional validation for our prior suspicion. Socrates must have dialectical reasoning! If Socrates does indeed have dialectical reasoning, then his soul is led by that which makes everything else good/beneficial. According to the account of dialectical reasoning in the *Meno*, *Socrates* should be the ruler of Athens (or at least one of them), if the objective of governance were to make the *polis* and its constituents as good as possible.⁶⁹⁸ By contrast, Anytus, who actively shares in the leadership of Athens, may or may not

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., 488a-e.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., 496a-c. Socrates attributes his position to his divine sign: “Finally, my own case is hardly worth mentioning—my daemonic sign (τὸ δαιμόνιον σημεῖον)—because it has happened to no one before me, or to only a very few.”

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., 496a.

⁶⁹⁸ Plato, *Protagoras*, 319a-b; *Gorgias*, 502e, 514a.

have dialectical reasoning. We do not yet know what leads Anytus' soul, although we can reasonably doubt that dialectical reasoning does. Nevertheless, this difference between the organizations of Socrates' and Anytus' respective souls would explain a crucial reason for Socrates' suspicion towards Anytus. According to Socrates' reasoning in the *Meno*, Anytus lacks that which is responsible for the benefit of "human goods," and so potentially, he poses an imminent threat to the well-being of Athens, a threat which always persists in a democratic *polis*. By contrast, Socrates' soul appears to be led by that which is responsible for the good/benefit of everything in the soul *and* the *polis*: dialectical reasoning.

The conclusion that "Socrates is a philosopher" or that "Socrates has dialectical reasoning" would likely surprise no one, but the significance of these attributions might. From the beginning of the dialogue, we have examined Meno's encounter with Socratic philosophical practice. A central assumption informing our analysis is that Socratic philosophical practice interrogates the emergent measures of *arete* in the *polis*. Its interrogation does not stem from a contrarian impulse, but rather, a dialectical one, which is to say, that Socratic philosophical practice questions the emergent measures of *arete* in the *polis* through the give-and-take of dialogue *for the sake of the human good*. It would be naïve to infer that Socrates "knows" how to be a good person, but he simply behaves coyly with all his interlocutors. On the contrary, the very possibility for Socrates to realize the human good, i.e., to be a good person, depends upon his engagement in the communal horizon in which he was born. Socrates, Meno, the *παῖς*, and now Anytus each exemplify this necessity in their own way. Their lives signify separate yet interconnected claims on the human good (even a negative claim in the case of the *παῖς*), and although we may resist a definitive judgment about their success, their respective engagement in the discourse highlights the central problematic of inquiry into *arete*. Nothing guarantees that a person will become good, but each person must engage with others in the *polis* in order to have any hope to share in *arete* and the human good. Socrates "the philosopher" may incite others to engage in the inquiry, but this practice is not a symptom of some sort of unique, benevolent, or altruistic impulse. Socrates needs others so that he can be a good person just as much as they need him so that they can be good people. The inquiry into *arete* and the human good is not a solitary pursuit. And so, Socrates may have significant reservations about the Athenian people's decision to elect Anytus to office, and he may be justified in having those reservations because of the potential threat that someone like Anytus poses to the "good" of Athens. However, as an Athenian himself, he needs to engage with

Anytus—for the sake of Anytus, Athens, and especially himself. Now that we have painted the background of their discussion, let us examine how Socrates engages with Anytus directly.

Do the Sophists Teach *Arete*? (90b-92b)

Anytus' lineage and his reputation precede his introduction into the discourse, but once he appears, Socrates addresses Anytus himself in the following way: “You, then, Anytus, do search (συζήτησον) along with us, both with me and your guest-friend (ξένῳ), Meno, here, whether in this matter there might be any teachers.”⁶⁹⁹ Just as Socrates implored Meno to search along with him for *arete*, Socrates now implores Anytus to search with him and Meno for any teachers of *arete*. In both cases, Socrates, notably, does not even consider searching for *arete* alone but instead implores others to engage alongside him. Because of our prior analyses, we recognize many ways that Anytus' earnest engagement in this search is urgent both for Anytus himself and for Athens. The teachers of *arete*, if they exist, would teach a “knowledge” that has consequences for the organization of the *polis*.⁷⁰⁰ Insofar as Anytus has a role in the leadership of Athens, he also has a partial share in decisions concerning the organization of the *polis*. Broadly, the question concerning the teachers of *arete* concerns everyone, since the human good is a question for all humans. However, for Anytus in particular, who is a leader in Athens, the question concerning the teachers of *arete* immanently affects a part of his responsibility as a leader, namely, to benefit the constituents of the *polis*. Of course, we recognize this objective of governance as an idiosyncratically Socratic view, and we might read Socrates' reference to Anytus' guest-friend (ξένος) Meno as a subtle indication of the conflict between his view of governance and the customary practice of it. Because we previously developed our sensitivity to the functions and obligations of the guest-friend (ξένος) relationship when it first appeared in Chapter I, we have some sense of the intense obligations which this relationship entails.⁷⁰¹ The guest-friendship (ξένια) between Anytus and Meno brings certain advantages to each of them personally, but its benefit to Athens (and Thessaly) is questionable. Anytus *could* use this relationship to benefit

⁶⁹⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 90b.

⁷⁰⁰ We noticed an absurd illustration of this point, when Socrates counterfactually described the bizarre constitution of a *polis* in which people with dialectical reasoning were born. *Ibid.*, 89b.

⁷⁰¹ For reference, the following obligations fell within the purview of the relationship: solving family affairs; avenging personal grievances; money lending; offering shelter, refuge, or asylum; providing ransom from captivity; achieving political power; subverting governments; and overthrowing empires. Hermann, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City*, 128.

Athens, but it depends on the way that he uses it. If we harken back to our analysis in Chapter III, which examined Socrates' reasoning about "right usage" and the leadership of dialectical reasoning in the soul, then we can see another reason why this sort of union between Anytus and Meno could disconcert Socrates especially because Socrates lives in the *polis* that Anytus has a share in leading. Although these issues may linger in the background, Socrates begins his inquiry with Anytus through a different path—one which nonetheless relates to Socrates' prior foundational supposition about *arete*, namely, that it is teachable.

In the first place, Socrates asks Anytus whom he thinks are the ones with the expertise in *arete* like the expertise of those who have a technical know-how (τέχνη) (e.g., doctors, shoemakers, and flute players).⁷⁰² We ought to note a deviation here. Socrates does not ask Anytus about knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) nor does he ask about dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις). When Socrates renews the inquiry with Anytus, he inquires about *arete* as a sort of technical know-how (τέχνη). Is Socrates right to assume that *arete*, which we understand as the measure of a good person, is some sort of technical know-how (τέχνη), which is the type of knowledge which makes the doctor, shoemaker, and flute-player all "good"? Or perhaps a better question would be: *why* does Socrates frame the question in this way when speaking with Anytus? What might it imply about Anytus' understanding of *arete*—both what it is and how it comes to be in humans? We must keep a close eye on our conventional representative of Athens. Socrates' introductory reasoning culminates in the following hypothetical suggestion:

It's very foolish (ἄνοια) of those who want to make someone a flute-player to be unwilling to send him to those who undertake to teach the technical know-how (διδάξειν τὴν τέχνην) and who charge a fee for it (μισθὸν παραπομένους), but who make trouble (πράγματα παρέχειν) by having the student seek to learn from those who neither pretend to be teachers nor have any student in that very subject which we consider the one for which we would send someone to learn from them. Does this not seem very unreasonable (ἄλογία) to you?⁷⁰³

Socrates speaks strangely in this passage just as he does in other passages which pass into a "hypothetical" discourse. Not only does Socrates use complicated and awkward grammar, but the content of his claim raises some questions as well.⁷⁰⁴ First, why does Socrates switch from foolish

⁷⁰² Plato, *Meno*, 90c-90e.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, 90e.

⁷⁰⁴ Concerning the grammatical problems in this passage, see Berns and Anastaplo, "Notes," 69; Bluck, *Plato's Meno*, 351-353; Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, 170; Thompson, *The Meno of Plato*, 175-178.

(ἄνοια) to unreasonable (ἄλογία)?⁷⁰⁵ Second, why has Socrates specified technical know-how (τέχνη) as that which teachers teach instead of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) as he did previously?⁷⁰⁶ And finally, if we assume that the education of a good flute-player stands in an analogical relation to the education of the good person, then to whom does Socrates refer when he speaks about those who “neither pretend to be teachers nor have any student[s]”? Let us begin with a consideration of the first question about the distinction between what is foolish (ἄνοια) and what is unreasonable (ἄλογία).

When Socrates’ claims that “it’s very foolish (ἄνοια),” he describes the behavior of a person whom anyone, in principle, could be, namely, a fool, a person lacking in understanding or prone to folly.⁷⁰⁷ In the *Meno*, Socrates insists that only someone foolish would attempt to train a good flute-player but not wish to send the prospective flute-player to those who both profess to teach the technical know-how of flute-playing and charge a fee for it. This sort of foolish behavior does not seem to pose a very severe threat. We might reasonably suppose that becoming a good flute-player is not necessary for living a good life nor is the presence of good flute-players necessary for a good *polis*. But what kind of threat does this foolish behavior pose if the stakes are higher, a higher stakes situation which we suspect because of our recognition that Socrates surely is not *just* asking about the training of a good flute-player? In our preparation to read Socrates’ interaction with Anytus, we paid careful attention to the relationship between what rules or leads in the soul and who rules or leads in the *polis*. In the *Laws*, we can find a parallel discourse on foolish behavior in the *polis* that carries consequences for the pursuit of *arete* and the human good. The Athenian presents to Clinias a hypothetical address for the citizens of a colony whose rulers serve the law (rather than a colony whose laws serve the rulers). In the address, he describes the foolish person in this way:

The man who means to live in fortune (εὐδαιμονήσειν) follows (συνέπεται) [justice (δίκη)], having humility (ταπεινός) and orderly behavior (κεκοσμημένος). But he who bursts with pride (μεγαλαυχίας), elated by money (χρήμασιν) or honors (τιμαῖς) or by physical beauty (σώματος εὐμορφία) when young (νεότητι) and foolish (ἄνοια), whose soul (ψυχὴν) is afire with the arrogance (ὑβρεως) that so far from needing someone to rule (ἄρχοντος) and lead

⁷⁰⁵ The importance of this question will reveal itself through Anytus’ response.

⁷⁰⁶ Plato, *Meno*, 89d.

⁷⁰⁷ Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 73.

(ἡγεμόνος) him, he is fit (ἰκανός) to lead (ἡγεῖσθαι) others—he is left (καταλείπεται) desolate (ἔρημος) by the god (θεοῦ).⁷⁰⁸

When we juxtapose the foolish person of the Athenian’s speech against the “foolish” behavior that Socrates describes, we are led to wonder whether such “foolish” (ἄνοια) behavior might describe Anytus himself. We cannot confidently determine whether Anytus “bursts with pride” for money, honors, or physical beauty; however, the final condemnation of the folly of the young and foolish (ἄνοια) man, whose arrogance (ὑβρεως) leads him to think himself fit (ἰκανός) to lead (ἡγεῖσθαι) others could easily describe Anytus (or even Meno as well). We can hear echoes of Socrates’ account of Anytus’ father, Anthemion, in the Athenian’s speech. Socrates “praised” Anthemion for being an orderly (κόσμιος) and well-mannered (εὐσταλῆς) man (ἄνθρωπος)—someone who was not such a haughty (ὑπερήφανος), puffed-up (ὀγκώδης) and offensive (ἐπαχθής) citizen (πολίτης) that he considered himself fit to rule. We interpreted the opposition between Anthemion and Ismenias the Theban in terms of this issue, i.e., their respective abstention and participation in governance, and we suspected that Anytus shared more in common with Ismenias than his father in this regard. Now, again, we can infer Socrates’ skepticism and doubt about the propriety of Anytus’ participation in governance. What makes Anytus fit (ἰκανός) to lead (ἡγεῖσθαι) Athens? Or, is he just as foolish as the person who would refuse to send a prospective flute-player to a teacher of flute-players? In any case, Anytus, of course, is completely tone-deaf to Socrates’ insinuation. He chimes in, “Yes, by Zeus, to me it does, and stupid (ἄμαθία) as well.”⁷⁰⁹ The irony in his speech sounds almost Oedipal. This irony will intensify further when we consider our third question concerning Socrates’ reference to those who “neither pretend to be teachers nor have any student[s].” For now, let us further develop the transition from unreasonable (ἄλογία) to foolish (ἄνοια).

A foolish person behaves with a certain naïve self-confidence—an arrogance (ὑβρεως). The arrogant fool, who acts to his or her own detriment, is a laughingstock; but the arrogant fool, who shares directly in the responsibility for his or her *polis* and acts to the detriment of his or her *polis* because of this foolish arrogance, is a danger. Such a person actively inhibits others from their pursuit of the human good. The failure of a foolish leader is twofold. On the one hand, the foolish leader does not benefit his or her *polis* knowingly, and so this person is “good for nothing”

⁷⁰⁸ Plato, *Laws*, 716a. Translation modified.

⁷⁰⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 90e.

in a very practical way. The foolish and arrogant leader is equally liable to benefit or harm the *polis*, and so they offer unreliable leadership to the *polis*. On the other hand, the leader, whose unique position in the *polis* we have often noted, sets the measure of the good for the *polis* through some combination of word and deed. But how can a leader be both “good for nothing” in one sense and set the measure of the good in another sense? This sort of leader manifests an incommensurability for which we cannot account (ἄλογία). Presently, Socrates frames the issue in terms of the education of a flute player: the best way to educate a flute player so that a person will become a good flute player is to send the person to the teachers of the flute players, and doing otherwise would be foolish. Specifically, to send a prospective flute player to those who do not even proclaim themselves to be teachers of flute-playing would be outright “unreasonable” (ἄλογία). There would be no way to account for such behavior. We have seen an iteration of the word “ἄλογία,” which we here render as “unreasonable,” in a previous decisive moment of our analysis. In Chapter II, we discerned an insight about *arete* from Socrates’ exhibition of the geometrical problem of commensurability with the *παῖς*. Our analysis highlighted the analogical relationship between the unaccountable diagonal (ἄλογον διάμετρον) and *arete* as a measure of the human good: Just because the lines of a two-by-two square are incommensurable (ἄσύμμετρα) with the diagonal (διάμετρον) does not mean that the lines of a square with an area of eight do not exist. Similarly, just because the emergent measures of *arete* in the *polis* do not suffice as measures of a good person does not mean that a measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good does not exist. We find a similar iteration of the prior problem of (in)commensurability repeat itself here in Socrates’ discussion with Anytus. Anytus, who is a leader of Athens, agrees with Socrates about the best way to make a person “good” at something, and yet, he will *not* agree when Socrates subsequently asks him if the same reasoning should apply to teaching *arete*. Anytus does not think Meno should seek those who profess to teach *arete* and charge a fee for it, i.e., the sophists.⁷¹⁰ In fact, he *does* think that Meno should seek instruction from those who neither pretend to be teachers nor have any students in the subject, namely, “noble and good Athenians” (Ἀθηναίων τῶν καλῶν καγαθῶν).⁷¹¹ In this tension, we find a distinctive problem with human *arete*: the best way to make a person good at something is to send the person to the teachers of that activity so that the person can learn the technical know-how about the task, but when it comes to teaching *arete* (which would

⁷¹⁰ Ibid., 91c.

⁷¹¹ Ibid., 92e.

make the person good), it is neither clear *what* the person should learn nor *from whom* the person should learn. Is this situation not “unreasonable” (ἀλογία), or better, is it not an ἀπορία about *arete*?

Not only do we see Anytus as potentially foolish, but we also might see him as “unreasonable” (ἀλογία) insofar as he agrees with Socrates about the value of education in technical know-how now but subsequently disagrees when it comes to *arete*. And yet, perhaps we ought not judge Anytus so harshly. We can recognize how Anytus shares some similarities with the foolish person who arrogantly thinks himself fit to rule others, and we can also agree with Socrates and Anytus that it *would* be unreasonable (ἀλογία) to send someone who wants to be good at some activity to a “teacher” who does not even profess to be one, especially when teachers of the technical know-how about that activity exist. And yet, Anytus might be right that it is not best to follow this approach when it comes to teaching a person *arete*, even if he may lack a persuasive account to justify his seemingly “unreasonable” position. Does Socrates not make a crucial assumption about the kind of thing *arete* is in order to present Anytus with this hypothetical question, namely, that there is a technical know-how of *arete*? Even though we first broached the subject of technical know-how during the early stages of our analysis in Chapter III, we only now find it explicitly at stake in the *Meno*. If we harken back to the basis upon which we introduced technical know-how in Chapter III, then we will recall that we introduced it in relation to the foundational supposition that *arete* is teachable. We introduced technical know-how *because* we understood it as a sort of knowledge that is taught. Notably, Socrates introduced a different sort of “knowledge” when he reasoned about *arete* with Meno, i.e., dialectical reasoning. In contrast to Socrates’ examination of *arete* with Meno, Socrates now considers *arete* differently with Anytus. Socrates does not seem to reevaluate the assumption about *arete* as something teachable, but rather, he reexamines *arete* as a different sort of knowledge than the one which he previously considered. What might be responsible for this difference?

We ought to note in the first place that Socrates only implies that there may be a technical know-how (τέχνη) of *arete*. He never makes this claim explicitly. Instead, he simply asks about *arete* immediately after his presentation of several activities (doctoring, shoe-making, and flute-playing) and those who teach the various sorts of technical know-how about them. We understand Socrates’ insinuation about *arete* as a sort of technical know-how (τέχνη) because we steep

ourselves in the contextual resonance of the inquiry. Socrates' current assumptions about *arete* and its teachability mirror his reasoning from Chapter III, in which he considered whether *arete* is a sort of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη τις) based upon the foundational supposition of its teachability. During that part of the inquiry, the assumption of *arete*'s teachability justified the examination of *arete* as some sort of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη τις), and now, we interpret Socrates' insinuation about a technical know-how of *arete* again on the basis of its assumed teachability. This assumed teachability differs slightly, since the teachability of a subject now depends upon the existence of teachers. That there are teachers of the other sorts of technical know-how (τέχνη) undergirds Socrates' interest in the question concerning teachers of *arete*. We are led to make the connection between the other sorts of technical know-how and a potential technical know-how of *arete* despite an obvious difference between them. When we speak about the other sorts of technical know-how, we say that they make a person good *at* something, i.e., being good *at* shoe-making or being good *at* flute-playing. By contrast, when we speak about *arete*, "knowing" it would not make a person "good at" anything in particular. Those who exhibit *arete* are just good without need of further qualification. In addition to the assumption that *arete* is teachable, this way of speaking seems to guide the search for a technical know-how of *arete*. If technical know-how makes the good doctor "good," then perhaps a technical know-how of *arete* also makes a good person "good." Furthermore, an additional facet of Anytus' identity (besides being a leader in Athens) makes him the perfect person with whom Socrates can examine this possibility. Let us briefly consider Socrates' speech in the *Apology* so that we can expound on this point.

We must recall what Socrates said about Anytus during his trial in the *Apology*: Anytus is vexed on behalf of the artisans *and* the politicians.⁷¹² He represents both insofar as he is both a hide tanner *and* a leader of Athens. Thus, when Socrates speaks to Anytus in the *Meno*, we ought also to notice how his change in diction reflects the change in interlocutor. Of course, this observation raises a question too. We interpreted Socrates reasoning about dialectical reasoning as an account of the soul and the *polis* which would benefit Meno in particular to hear. But would such an account not also benefit Anytus who is already a leader of Athens? Why does Socrates not reproduce a similar account of the beneficence of dialectical reasoning for Anytus? One explanation could be that Athens differs from Thessaly. What might move the democratic soul of

⁷¹² Plato, *Apology*, 23e.

Anytus likely differs from what would move the aristocratic soul of Meno. Our prior analysis of Socrates' reasoning about the democratic soul in the *Republic* gives us some guidance in our analysis of Socrates' interaction with Anytus, and the addition of Socrates' account of his inquiry with the artisans in the *Apology* might also be instructive to us about our current issue with technical know-how (τέχνη). Reflecting on his encounters, Socrates comments:

“...each one of [the good artisans (ἀγαθοί δημιουργοί)], completing their work (ἐξεργάζεσθαι) beautifully (καλῶς) due to technical know-how (διὰ τὴν τέχνην), deemed (ἡξίου) [himself] to be very wise (σοφώτατος) in other, most important matters (τᾶλλα τὰ μέγιστα), and this error (πλημμέλεια) of theirs concealed (ἀποκρύπτειν) that wisdom (σοφίαν)...”⁷¹³

In Socrates' commentary, we find another dimension of ἀπορία about *arete*. The good artisans (ἀγαθοί δημιουργοί) excel at their work because they have a certain sort of knowledge, namely, technical know-how (τέχνη). They are, indeed, wisest (σοφώτατος) at their respective crafts, which also implies that they are good at them. And yet, their wisdom in their craft does not give them any greater insight into other most important matters (τᾶλλα τὰ μέγιστα), which, we can reasonably assume, includes *arete* and the human good. The wisdom (σοφία) that makes the artisan (δημιουργός) wise (σοφός) does not also make the artisan a good person (ἀγαθός) or any more knowledgeable about how to make others good either. In contrast to dialectical reasoning, we can infer that technical know-how lacks something which affects the “goodness” of human life *as a whole*. But how might we understand this difference between technical know-how and dialectical reasoning?

Perhaps Heidegger's analysis of these concepts might, again, offer us some guidance, since Heidegger considers this distinction as well. During his analysis of the five modes of ἀληθεύειν (“disclosure”) in Aristotle, Heidegger compares “τέχνη” (“technical know-how”) to “φρόνησις” (“dialectical reasoning”) explicitly:

For φρόνησις there is no τελείωσις. How are we to understand that for τέχνη an ἀρετή is possible? In the deliberation of know-how there are various degrees of development. τέχνη can presume things and concede them. Trial and error are proper to it. Through τέχνη, one discovers whether something works or not. The more τέχνη risks failure, the more secure it will be in its procedure. It is precisely through failure that certitude is formed.... The possibility of failure is constitutive for the development of τέχνη. But in the case of

⁷¹³ Ibid., 22d-e. Translation modified.

φρόνησις, on the contrary, where it is a matter of a deliberation whose theme is the proper Being of Dasein, every mistake is a personal shortcoming. This shortcoming with regard to oneself is not a higher possibility, not the τελείωσις of φρόνησις, but precisely its corruption. Other than failure the only possibility open to φρόνησις is to genuinely hit the mark. φρόνησις is not oriented toward trial and error; in moral action I cannot experiment with myself. The deliberation of φρόνησις is ruled by the either-or. φρόνησις is by its very sense στοχαστική; it has a permanent orientation, it pursues the goal, and specifically the μεσότης. With φρόνησις, unlike τέχνη, there is no more or less, no “this as well as that,” but only the seriousness of the definite decision, success or failure, either-or. Insofar as φρόνησις is στοχαστική, it is impossible for it to be more complete. Thus it has no ἀρετή but is in itself ἀρετή.⁷¹⁴

Heidegger’s comparative analysis of “φρόνησις” and “τέχνη” highlights an issue at the heart of Socrates’ question about the hypothetical instruction of a flute-player. Technical know-how (τέχνη) is constitutive of a wisdom (σοφία) with a clearly defined purview. The application of “trial and error” as a means of understanding only makes sense when it is applied to a discrete task that can be repeated. It applies to a “practice” (an activity) which can be practiced. While practicing, a person might fail, for example, at being a good flute-player, but this failure only represents a momentary obstacle with no broader consequences beyond one’s ability to play the flute. We can see the absurdity of Socrates’ analogy (between the good flute-player and the good person) when we try to apply the same reasoning to being a good person. If one “fails” to be a good person, then this failure *does* have broader consequences. It *does* imply something about the person who fails and about their life as a whole. *Arete* and the human good give weight to the “work” of living, whereas the activities about which one can learn a technical know-how are just parts of living. As Protagoras put it in his story about Prometheus, technical know-how gives facility of livelihood (“ἐὐπορία τοῦ βίου”) to humans. By contrast, being a good person does not concern merely living but living well. We may now turn to our final question concerning the referent of those who “neither pretend to be teachers nor have any student[s].”

When Socrates asks Anytus the counterfactual example about the instruction of a flute-player, Anytus quickly and emphatically points out the stupidity (ἄμαθία) of thinking those who neither pretend to be teachers nor have any students would be the best teachers. And, of course, Anytus reacts appropriately. Because flute-playing is a discrete task about which there is a technical know-how, it would be foolish *not* to seek instruction from a teacher of flute-playing, if

⁷¹⁴ Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 37-38.

one wished to be a good flute player. And yet, we hear in Socrates' question what Anytus apparently does not, namely, that Socrates only cares about the training of a flute player insofar as it might provide a paradigm for their inquiry into *arete*. Anytus should realize this point as well, since Socrates invited Anytus to search with him and Meno for the teachers of *arete*. Nevertheless, Socrates' presentation of this absurd analogy highlights what is unique about inquiry into *arete*. Despite the morphological similarity between the phrases being a "good person" and being a good doctor, shoe-maker, or flute player, what is responsible for making a person good in the former case differs from what is responsible for making the artisan good in the latter case. At least according to Socrates' reasoning which we analyzed in Chapter III, *arete* as dialectical reasoning is responsible for the good person being good, whereas our analysis in this chapter has focused on the role of technical know-how in making the good artisan good. This conclusion, however, leads us into a predicament. If dialectical reasoning makes the good person good, and if it cannot be taught, then we would have to conclude there are no teachers of *arete*. Retrospectively, we might identify such reasoning as the justification for Socrates' objection to his account of dialectical reasoning with Meno. And yet, if there are "good people," i.e., people who have dialectical reasoning, then they *would* be people who "neither pretend to be teachers nor have any students." Anytus appears to fall victim to the same fatal error that Socrates described in the *Apology*—the error which obscures the wisdom Anytus genuinely has (about his craft). Anytus does not seem to appreciate the extent to which *arete* and the human good pose a special problem for human life.

When Socrates hears Anytus' judgment that such behavior as he described seemed "stupid" (ἀμαθία), Socrates responds with condescending praise: "Finely spoken (καλῶς λέγεις)."⁷¹⁵ Because we have developed the ἀπορία about *arete* in relation to the use of technical know-how, we can hear the suspect character of this "praise." To whatever degree Anytus appears to speak beautifully now, that beauty will disappear as Socrates develops the inquiry into *arete* more explicitly. He implores Anytus to deliberate in common (κοινῇ βουλευέσθαι) with him about what to do with Meno, since "...[Meno] desires (ἐπιθυμεῖ) that wisdom (σοφίας) and *arete* by which

⁷¹⁵ Ibid., 90e. Klein thinks that Socrates speaks sarcastically, but Socrates seems more than just sarcastic here. There is a sense in which Socrates expresses his superiority to Anytus, and for that reason, he seems more condescending. This distinction may seem pedantic, but we need to hear this sense in which Socrates expresses his superiority to Anytus because we understand what underlies it. If we are persuaded by Socrates that a concern for one's soul (and so *arete*) is most important in human life, then he is indeed superior to Anytus to the extent that he has lived a life in accord with what is most important. Cf. Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 226-227. Plato, *Apology*, 30d.

people manage (διοικοῦσι) both households (οικίας) and *poleis* finely (καλῶς), and take care of (θεραπεύουσι) their own parents, and know how to receive and to send off both citizens (πολίτας) and foreigners (ξένους) hospitably, in a way worthy (ἀξίως) of a good man (ἀνδρὸς ἀγαθοῦ).⁷¹⁶ Naturally, it is fitting for Socrates to call upon Anytus to deliberate in common (κοινῇ βουλευέσθαι) with him, since the councilmen (οἱ ἄνδρες βουλῆς) deliberate (βουλευέσθαι) on the matters of the *polis*. The subversive invocation of Anytus' office, to which Socrates' exhortation "to deliberate in common" (κοινῇ βουλευέσθαι) seems to allude, colors the entire exchange. After all, anyone could reasonably expect a leader of Athens to be proficient in sound deliberation about important matters. Nevertheless, in a surprising gesture, Socrates appears to change the object of their "deliberation." Socrates *claims* that Meno desires a certain wisdom (σοφία) and *arete* in matters which we might broadly describe as political despite the dubious agreement of this claim with what Meno said at any previous point in the dialogue.⁷¹⁷ We might understand the effect of this revision in two ways. First, it places *arete* within a framework about which a technical know-how could exist, namely, "politics." Being a "good politician" seems like the sort of task with discrete boundaries like being a doctor, shoe-maker, or flute-player. Second, and relatedly, there *are* people who profess to teach this technical know-how, and in this regard, we might read Socrates' revision as segue into their consideration of the sophists as teachers of *arete* (especially Protagoras). In the *Protagoras*, Protagoras claims to teach his students the technical know-how of citizenship (πολιτική τέχνη), which surprises Socrates because the Athenians allow anyone to offer their counsel on the management of the *polis* with or without formal instruction.⁷¹⁸ Let us pause for a moment and unpack the consequences of Socrates' revision of their object of inquiry.

⁷¹⁶ Plato, *Meno*, 91a.

⁷¹⁷ Contrary to Socrates' claims here, Meno does not himself claim that he would like to know how to do all these activities. Loosely, Meno refers to the management of households and the affairs of the *polis* in his first account of *arete*, but he separated these two activities as the *arete* of men and women respectively. "...[T]his is the *arete* of a man to be sufficient (ικανὸν) to carry on the affairs of the *polis* (τὰ τῆς πόλεως πράττειν)... And if it's the *arete* of a woman you want... she needs to manage (οικεῖν) the household (οικίαν) well (εὖ)... " Ibid., 71e. Concerning a care for one's parents, the proper reception and dispatch of citizens and foreigners, and generally being a good man, Meno has said nothing.

⁷¹⁸ Protagoras claims, "What I teach is sound deliberation (εὐβουλία) both in domestic matters (περὶ τῶν οικείων)—how to best (ἄριστα) manage one's household (οικίαν διοικοῖ), and in public affairs (περὶ τῶν τῆς πόλεως)—how to realize one's maximum potential for success in political (τὰ τῆς πόλεως δυνατώτατος) debate (λέγειν) and action (πράττειν)." Socrates responds, "You appear to be talking about the technical know-how of citizenship (πολιτικὴν τέχνην), and to be promising to make men (ποιεῖν ἄνδρας) good citizens (ἀγαθοὺς πολίτας)." Plato, *Protagoras*, 318e-319a.

Protagoras, whom Socrates will explicitly introduce into the *Meno* momentarily, claims in the *Protagoras* to be able to make men (ποιεῖν ἀνδρες) into good citizens (ἀγαθοὶ πολίτας), and it does seem likely that Meno would want to learn to be a good citizen if it means proficiency in the matters which Protagoras outlines (i.e., sound deliberation (εὐβουλία) both in domestic matters (περὶ τῶν οἰκείων) and in public affairs (περὶ τῶν τῆς πόλεως)).⁷¹⁹ And yet, we cannot ignore that Socrates has changed the object of inquiry from the measure of *arete* that makes humans good to the measure of *arete* that makes men good citizens. From this distinction, we infer that the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) differs from the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός). The confrontation of these measures adds a wrinkle to a tension with which we have grappled throughout our analysis. We have remarked on the power of the leaders to affect the measure of *arete*. The very existence of the leader/ruler establishes a measure of the human good, even if that measure excludes all of the other constituents from their share of the human good. Even the most mild scrutiny would draw out the contradictions of such an exclusive measure, but this distinction between the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) and the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός) disambiguates two dimensions of human being. A consequence of this disambiguation includes a subversion of the power of the leader to set a measure of *arete* for the human good. If the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) differs from the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός), then the ambiguity between the good ruler/politician and the good person upon which the power of the ruler to set the measure of *arete* depended would no longer have its persuasive force. The leader/ruler could set a measure for being a good politician insofar as such a person succeeds or fails within the purview of political activity, but it would have no bearing on either the leaders' or the constituents' respective claims on the human good just as the proficiency of a doctor, shoe-maker, or flute-player in doctoring, shoe-making, or flute-playing has no bearing on their claim to the human good. Furthermore, the wisdom and *arete* which make a person excel in political activity is the sort of thing about which a technical know-how can be taught. This conclusion carries consequences for the leadership of the *polis* as well. If the technical know-how of citizenship (πολιτική τέχνη) teaches a person the wisdom and *arete* that make a person a good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης), then it becomes a prerequisite knowledge for anyone who wants to make a reasonable claim to rule (at least if the Athenians are consistent with their esteem for those who know a

⁷¹⁹ Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 654. “Πολιτικός” names both that which relates to the citizen (πολίτης) and that which belongs to the “state” and its administration (and so the politician/politician).

technical know-how). Of course, it would only be necessary to know this technical know-how if the Athenians cared to be consistent with their esteem for those who know a technical know-how. It seems that Anytus may have dug himself into a hole when he agreed so emphatically with Socrates about the best way to train a flute-player.

Socrates asks Anytus if it is clear from his prior reasoning about training a good flute player that, in order to learn *this arete* (which we understand as the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης)), they must send Meno “to those who undertake to be teachers of *arete* and have professed themselves publicly to any Greek who wants to learn, and have fixed fees that they charge for it.”⁷²⁰ Even though this conclusion follows from Socrates’ prior reasoning, with which Anytus himself agreed, Anytus surely cannot accept such a conclusion. If he did, then he would call into question the basis for his own claim to share in the leadership of Athens. We might ask, in the spirit of Socrates, how can a man who knows first-hand the usefulness of technical know-how not learn the technical know-how of citizenship (πολιτική τέχνη) which makes men good citizens good citizens (ἀγαθοί πολίτας)? Anytus may not grasp the profundity of the distinction between the two measures of *arete* as clearly as we have distinguished them in our own analysis, but he must recognize the personal threat implied by Socrates’ assertion. According to Anytus’ own reasoning, he should not be a leader in Athens!

With a keener sense of the personal impact of Socrates’ reasoning, we can better understand the severity of Anytus’ reaction. After Socrates suggests that the sophists are the people who profess themselves to be the teachers of (this) *arete* and charge a fee for it, Anytus exclaims:

By Heracles, watch what you’re saying, Socrates. May such madness (μανία) not seize any of my own people, neither my family (οἰκείων) nor my friends (φίλων), neither fellow-citizen (ἄστων) nor foreigner (ξένων), so as to be disgraced (λωβηθῆναι) by going to them, since it is evident that these men are the disgrace (λώβη) and corruption (διαφθορά) of those who associate (συγγιγνομένων) with them.⁷²¹

We can easily understand how Anytus’ personal interest in the preservation of his status within Athens might lead him to reject Socrates’ reasoning so vehemently, even if it is “logically” inconsistent for him to do so. However, the way that Anytus objects to Socrates’ assertion gestures

⁷²⁰ Ibid., 91b. We should note that Socrates almost obsessively mentions the sophists’ acceptance of payment for their service in this part of the dialogue, referring to it four times in short succession (90d, 90e, 91b, 91d). Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, 171.

⁷²¹ Plato, *Meno*, 91c. Translation modified.

towards a more deeply entrenched ambiguity than our differentiation of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) from the good person (ἀγαθός) might have implied. We saw in Socrates' reasoning the assertion of a distinction between the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) and the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός), and we drew out some of the political consequences of this distinction. And yet, when Anytus responds, Socrates' distinction becomes much hazier. For example, in what sense do the sophists cause the disgrace (λώβη) and corruption (διαφθορά) of their students? Do the sophists' students become disgraceful and corrupt politicians/citizens, or do they become disgraceful and corrupt people? Both possibilities make sense, but the broad scope of Anytus' concern tilts the sense more towards the latter. That is, Anytus expresses his concern for the well-being of his family (οἰκεῖτοι), his friends (φίλοι), any fellow-citizen (ἄστος), or even any foreigner (ξένος), and surely not *every* person will become a politician (or even a citizen, if Anytus has even one female family member). Thus, it seems that Anytus takes "this *arete*" as the *arete* sufficient for the human good and *not* the *arete* that Socrates just described, namely, the *arete* "by which people manage (διοικοῦσι) both households (οἰκίας) and *poleis* finely (καλῶς), and take care of (θεραπεύουσι) their own parents, and know how to receive and to send off both citizens (πολίτας) and foreigners (ξένους) hospitably, in a way worthy (ἄξιως) of a good man (ἀνδρὸς ἀγαθοῦ)." ⁷²² And in *that* sense, Anytus speaks reasonably when he objects to the sophists' claim to teach *that arete*. For Anytus to respond in this way, he either has missed the subtlety of Socrates' distinction, disagrees with the distinction, or else he has divisively shifted the sense of *arete*.

The diction with which Anytus objects to Socrates' assertion carries an ironic, intertextual resonance as well. Anytus' comment echoes the later accusation against Socrates that he is guilty of "corrupting the youth (νέους διαφθείροντα)." ⁷²³ We might read Anytus' objection alongside Socrates' prior hypothetical remark on the way that a *polis* would be organized if good people, i.e., people with dialectical reasoning, were born good. Socrates imagined that the good people

⁷²² Ibid., 91a.

⁷²³ Plato, *Apology*, 24b. Moreover, when Socrates talks with Crito after the trial in his cell, the laws claim, "For he who is corruptor of the laws (νόμων διαφθορεύς) might certainly be regarded as a corrupter (διαφθορεύς) of young (νέων) and thoughtless people (ἀνοήτων ἀνθρώπων). Will you then avoid the well-governed (εὐνομουμένης) *poleis* and the most orderly (κοσμιωτάτους) men (ἀνδρῶν)? And if you do this, will your life be worth (ἄξιόν) living?" Plato, *Crito*, 53c. Translation modified. A concern for corruption always ties in with a concern for the order of the *polis*, which presumes the benefit of the *polis* to its constituents. However, the personified laws raise an important question: how can someone live a worthy life in a "bad" *polis*? Can humans be good in a *polis* whose laws and institutions do not benefit the constituents, and if so, how?

would have to be protected on the acropolis “so that no one could corrupt (διέφθειρεν) them.”⁷²⁴ This fear of “corruption” which persists across each instance bespeaks a certain understanding of “the good” that carries implications for both the “good *polis*” and the “good person.” For Anytus’ fear about the corruptive influence of the sophists to be justified, we would have to presume that the sophists’ students were “good” prior to the sophists’ instruction *a la* those who were born good in Socrates’ hypothetical. And yet, such an assumption would be strange. Why would people who are already “good” seek instruction from the sophists? If the sophists teach their students the technical know-how of citizenship (πολιτική τέχνη), which makes men into good citizens (ἀγαθοί πολίτας), then we would at least have an explanation for why their students would seek out their instruction. The students want to become good at a specific task (political activity). And yet, we pointed out previously that Anytus does not seem to be concerned about the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης)! Thus, we are led back into our prior question: if the sophists’ students were good (people) already, then why would they seek out the sophists’ instruction in the first place? Surely only someone who wants to *become* good (and so is not good currently) would seek out instruction from someone who professes to make people good. But who would profess themselves capable of doing such a thing?⁷²⁵ The logic that Anytus uses to justify his concern for the well-being of Athens and its constituents conveys an unreflective orientation towards the question of the human good. Might we conclude that he lacks experience in this sort of inquiry, i.e., inquiry into *arete* and the human good? And might he lack experience in inquiry into *arete* because he has occupied his time on other matters—matters which might have made him wealthy and earned him a good reputation but which give him little insight into *arete* and the human good? Anytus seems to “represent” Athens well, and insofar as he exemplifies the typical Athenian, he may also be ironically justified in his concern for the good of his comrades and his *polis*. Unfortunately, Anytus fails to recognize what poses the more fundamental threat to Athens than the sophists.

Socrates acts surprised by Anytus’ response, although it seems difficult to believe he would be *that* surprised. Nevertheless, Socrates does not ask what the sophists do to corrupt their students. Instead, he entertains Anytus’ assumption, asking how the sophists could even get away with corrupting their students. Do they deceive everyone, or do they corrupt their students

⁷²⁴ Plato, *Meno*, 89b.

⁷²⁵ According to *Meno*, Gorgias laughs at those who profess to be able to teach people *arete*. *Ibid.*, 95c.

unknowingly? In Socrates' response, we find a profound exhibition of his philosophical practice. Socrates questions the foundational supposition which supports Anytus' claim, namely, that the sophists are responsible for the corruption of their students, and through the simplicity of Socrates' response, we see the tenuousness of Anytus' claim. Furthermore, as Anytus' assumptions begin to crumble, new questions arise for us about the relationship between humans and their *polis*: What if the sophists do not corrupt their students, but the students are already "corrupt" before they seek instruction from the sophists? Or what if the students themselves are not corrupt, but the corruption lies in the *polis*, whose preservation requires its constituents to "harm" themselves and others by cutting them off from their pursuit of the human good? Let us examine Socrates' response to Anytus' charge of corruption against the sophists:

How do you mean that, Anytus? Then do these alone of those who claim to know (ἐπίστασθαι) some way of doing good (εὐεργετεῖν) differ by so much from the others, that they not only do not benefit (ὠφελούσιν) whatever one hands over to them, but even, on the contrary, corrupt (διαφθείρουσιν) it? And for these services they openly consider themselves entitled (ἀξιοῦσι) to demand money (χρήματα)? Now I cannot believe (πιστεύσω) you: for I know (οἶδα) one man, Protagoras, who acquired (κτησάμενον) more money (χρήματα) from this wisdom (σοφίας) of his than Phidias, who produced such manifestly beautiful works (καλὰ ἔργα), and any ten other sculptors. And yet how portentous (τέρας) what you say is, considering that those who work on old shoes and mend clothes would not be able to get away, for thirty days, with giving back the clothes and shoes in more miserable condition than they received them, but if they ever did such things, they would soon die of hunger. And yet Protagoras hid it from the whole of Greece for forty years that he was corrupting (διαφθείρων) his associates and sending them back more miserable (μοχθηροτέρους) than he received them. For I think when he died he was nearly seventy years old, after being [a teacher] in his technical know-how (τέχνη) for forty years. And in all this time, up to this very day, he has not ceased to be well thought of (εὐδοκιμῶν); and not only Protagoras, but very many others as well, some born before him and others still alive now. Then, indeed, should we declare, according to your account (κατὰ τὸν σὸν λόγον), that they knowingly deceived (εἰδότας αὐτοὺς ἐξαπατᾶν) and ruined (λωβᾶσθαι) the youth (τοὺς νέους), or that it had been hidden (λεληθέναι) from themselves too? And shall we deem (ἀξιόσομεν) those whom some declare to be the wisest (σοφωτάτους) of human beings to be so mad (μαίνεσθαι)?⁷²⁶

In anticipation of this moment, we already introduced Protagoras into our analysis, noting especially the technical know-how (τέχνη) which he professed to teach in the dialogue *Protagoras*, namely, the technical know-how of citizenship (πολιτική τέχνη). But what else do we know of this

⁷²⁶ Plato, *Meno*, 91c-92a. Translation modified.

man? Why has Socrates named Protagoras as the *de-facto* representative of the sophists, when he might have just as easily mentioned another famous sophist (such as Gorgias, for example)?

Protagoras appears many times throughout the Platonic dialogues, and his famous maxim frequently accompanies his introduction. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates presents it in the following form: “The human being is the measure of all things (πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄνθρωπον εἶναι): of the things which are (τῶν μὲν ὄντων), that they are (ὡς ἔστι), and of the things which are not (τῶν δὲ μὴ ὄντων), that they are not (ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν).”⁷²⁷ Protagoras is also noted as someone who believed in the use of good diction.⁷²⁸ He instructed privately and was fervently loved by his disciples.⁷²⁹ And finally, he wrote manuals on various subjects which gave ordinary people the tools to contradict the experts.⁷³⁰ In *Protagoras*, we catch a glimpse of his students’ fondness for him, students which notably include Pericles’ sons Paralus and Xanthippus.⁷³¹ Consequently, it seems reasonable to infer that Protagoras exercised considerable influence in Athens and throughout Greece and as well.⁷³² Nevertheless, many sophists enjoyed considerable success and fame throughout posterity, and so Protagoras’ fame alone offers a meager explanation for his introduction at this point in the *Meno*. We have considered Protagoras on multiple occasions during our analysis, e.g., in the *Protagoras*, his story of Prometheus and his claim to teach the technical know-how of citizenship (πολιτική τέχνη), and we might interpret his persistent, peripheral reappearance throughout the *Meno* as a sign of his impact on the Athenian discourse about *arete* and the human good. What is it about Protagoras’ practice that might speak to both *arete* and Anytus? As we have already pointed out, Protagoras teaches a technical know-how that could be quite useful to Anytus insofar as he is an Athenian politician/leader. Moreover, Anytus even agrees that the best way to become good at some task is to learn the technical know-how from the self-professed teachers of it. And yet, we have also pointed out an ambiguity in the discourse with

⁷²⁷ Socrates recites the maxim in its entirety in Plato, *Theaetetus*, 152a. Translation modified. It also appears in varying degrees of explicitness in the following dialogues: *Cratylus*, 386a; *Euthydemus*, 286c; *Laws*, 716c.

⁷²⁸ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 267c.

⁷²⁹ Plato, *Republic*, 600c. Socrates mentions here as well that Protagoras instructs in the management of the household and *polis* just as in the dialogue *Protagoras*.

⁷³⁰ Plato, *Sophist*, 232e. In the *Sophist*, Theaetetus refers to his writing on wrestling (περί πάλης), but Diogenes Laertius mentions ten additional works which survived to his time. Two noteworthy titles include: The Technical Know-how of Controversy (τέχνη ἐριστικῶν) and Concerning *Arete* (περί ἀρετῶν). Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 9.55.

⁷³¹ Plato, *Protagoras*, 315a. Pericles’ sons will appear again later when Socrates considers why men who allegedly exhibit *arete* themselves seem unable to pass it on to their sons. Plato, *Meno*, 94b.

⁷³² For other sources beyond the Platonic corpus on Protagoras, see Nails, *The People of Plato*, 256-257.

which both Socrates' and Anytus' respective speeches have played. Tacitly, both of their speeches assume some overlap between the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) and the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός). This ambiguity partially informs Anytus' objection to Socrates' suggestion that the sophists teach *arete*. How does Protagoras' practice (both generally as a sophist and the practice unique to Protagoras) impact the ambiguity about *arete* upon which the disagreement between Anytus and Socrates hinges? And further, could it be that Socrates mentions the sophist Protagoras as a foil to Anytus himself, or more generally, a likeness between the sophist and the politician?⁷³³

Protagoras earned a lot of money (χρήματα) for his wisdom (σοφία), parts of which he taught as various forms of technical know-how (τέχνη). Socrates goes so far as to claim that Protagoras earned more money as a sophist than Phidias and ten other sculptors earned combined!⁷³⁴ And yet, according to Anytus' claim about the danger of the sophists to their students' pursuit of *arete* and the human good, Protagoras managed to acquire both wealth and honors despite doing his work badly, unlike any other artisan, whose value/esteem (ἀξιός) comes from their creation of beautiful works through technical know-how (τέχνη).⁷³⁵ Anytus surely must recognize the improbability of this claim especially because he himself is an artisan, but even if he does not, the irony is not lost on us. Furthermore, Protagoras, like Anytus, concerns himself with the leadership of the *polis*, but unlike Anytus, Protagoras teaches others how to lead the *polis* instead of leading it himself. The contrast between their respective relationships to leadership of the *polis* raises questions about the content of Protagoras' instruction. Whence come the technical know-how that Protagoras teaches his students about being a good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης)? If he

⁷³³ The connection between politicians and sophists is not conjectural. Socrates outright relates them to one another in *Gorgias*. Plato, *Gorgias*, 519b-520b.

⁷³⁴ Phidias was a sculptor and associate of Pericles who oversaw parts of Pericles' project to restore the Acropolis after the armies of the Achaemenid Empire destroyed it. According to Plutarch, Phidias came under attack from some of Pericles' political opponents, who charged him with embezzlement and impiety. The former charge concerned misappropriation of the gold used in his sculpture on the Acropolis and the latter with his use of himself and Pericles as models for Athena's shield (one of his creations included a giant, golden sculpture of Athena). Phidias is also credited with the construction of the statue of Zeus at Olympia (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world). Nails, *The People of Plato*, 237. Plutarch, *Pericles*, 31. Perhaps Socrates refers to Phidias as one example of a well-known, masterful sculptor, but his proximity to an Athenian political dispute does pose a potentially unexpected challenge to Anytus' claim that the sophists corrupt their students. It can be difficult for us to determine the legitimacy of the charges against Phidias and Pericles, but in either case, they appear as symptoms of a *polis* that is not entirely healthy, since we can identify both unlawful behavior and illegitimate charges as symptoms of an underlying discord. And so, we might wonder: Does Anytus condemn the sophists because they corrupt the youth, or has Anytus merely selected the sophists as scapegoats? Anytus indicates his (explicitly) unjustified prejudice against them later (92b-92d).

⁷³⁵ Cf. Plato, *Apology*, 22d-e.

has never been a politician (ὁ πολιτικός) himself, then he has no direct experience in the matter about which he teaches. If Protagoras lacks direct experience, then there are only two ways that he could “know” how to lead a *polis* well. Someone else could have taught Protagoras the technical know-how which he now teaches others, or Protagoras could have dialectical reasoning, whose benefit to the soul causes its possessor to benefit the *polis* as well. The former option is reasonable, although too many generations of second hand “knowledge” about leadership of the *polis* could lead to ineffective instruction. The latter option would explain the basis for Protagoras’ instruction, but it would also lead us back into the problem of the teachability of *arete*, i.e., if Protagoras can teach others how to lead the *polis* because he has dialectical reasoning, but dialectical reasoning cannot be taught, then Protagoras cannot really teach his students anything useful for their participation in the leadership of the *polis*.

In a way, the uncertain origin of Protagoras’ technical know-how could validate Anytus’ skepticism about the technical know-how that the sophists teach, but this question concerning the uncertain origin of their knowledge does little to justify Anytus’ primary claim that the sophists corrupt their students. The sophists could teach an impotent knowledge, but then they would likely beget impotent students. However, there is another possibility. Protagoras (and other sophists) *may* understand what the *polis* and its constituents value, which would manifest through their assumptions about *arete* and the human good. Thus, they *could* teach their students what to do in order to receive wealth and honors in the *polis*, which would help their student develop a good reputation. In other words, the sophists may teach their students how to *appear* good in the *polis*. Now, if the constituents of a *polis*, and so the *polis* itself, were good, and then a bunch of sophists came into the *polis* and taught people how to *appear* good (certain people who, somehow, were not already good despite living in a good *polis*), then it would be conceivable that the sophists are responsible for the corruption of the *polis* and its constituents. But such an understanding of the relationship between *arete*, the human good, and the *polis* is clearly quite naïve. Our analysis of the *Meno* has repeatedly drawn out the difficulty in determining a measure of *arete* and the human good, and so the supposition of a good *polis* filled with good people prior to the spontaneous appearance of the sophists seems utterly improbable.

We might also point out the irony of Anytus’ objection to Protagoras’ instruction in the technical know-how of citizenship (πολιτική τέχνη), when Anytus himself has at least as modest

a claim to “know” how to lead. We can reduce Anytus’ qualifications for leadership down to a (misplaced) self-confidence in his ability, which we might link with his overestimation of his wisdom (σοφία), and to his desire to lead the *polis*. While Anytus *may* have noble intentions underlying his desire to lead the *polis*, there is no reason to believe that he is any more likely to benefit the *polis* than to harm it. As we reasoned during prior stages of our analysis, Anytus seems to err in the same way as many other artisans. Could such overzealous self-confidence be the cause of Anytus’ blindness to the similarity between himself and Protagoras like the blindness that prevented Meno from seeing the similarity between the παῖς and himself? If Anytus lacks the clarity to analyze his own ability to lead Athens accurately, then he would be even less likely to recognize how his actions (and the actions of his political allies) incrementally “corrupt” (or, less dramatically, “harm”) Athens itself. For example, Pseudo-Aristotle accuses Anytus of being the first Athenian to attempt to bribe a jury.⁷³⁶ Whence come such obviously corrupt behavior? Has the corruptive influence of the sophists permeated into the noble Anytus, or perhaps Anytus makes a “noble” sacrifice for the greater good of Athens, taking advantage of the corrupt jurymen’s susceptibility to bribery and saving himself (a “good man”)? Could Anytus himself—a purportedly good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης)—just as much as a sophist like Protagoras, be the cause of “corruption” in Athens, or are they both merely symptoms of a more deeply rooted contradiction in the heart of Athens? Let us consider this possibility through an analysis of Protagoras’ famous maxim in terms of our ongoing inquiry into *arete* and the human good. In doing so, we may more clearly see the foundational suppositions which might inform Anytus’ understanding of the *arete* and the human good that the sophists “corrupt.”

What does Protagoras’ maxim imply about the human good and its relation to the *polis*? Protagoras’ famous maxim, which states that “the human being is the measure of all things (πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄνθρωπον εἶναι),” has been interpreted both epistemologically and morally. Even Socrates, in the (anachronistically described) “epistemological” context of the *Theaetetus*, explains the maxim in the following way: “...as each thing appears to me (ἐμοὶ φαίνεται), so it is for me (ἔστιν ἐμοί), and as [it appears] to you, so [it is] for you.... So it results, apparently, that things are (κινδυνεύει εἶναι) for that [person] such as that [person] perceives (αἰσθάνεται) them.”⁷³⁷ We need not argue against the longstanding lineage of interpreters who read Protagoras’ maxim

⁷³⁶ Aristotle, *Constitution of Athens*, 27.

⁷³⁷ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 152a-c.

epistemologically in order to posit our own interpretation in terms of our inquiry into *arete* and the human good in the *Meno*.⁷³⁸ We aim to augment not dispute. And so, what would it mean to understand Protagoras' maxim as an insight into *arete* and the human good that also reveals something about Anytus' accusation of corruption against the sophists? We have persistently analyzed *arete* as the measure of the human good, i.e., a person who exhibits *arete* is a good person. If we interpret Protagoras' maxim in these terms, then we can understand Protagoras' maxim in the following way: the life of each person establishes a measure against which everything else is meted. We have seen a prior iteration of this claim during our analysis of the leader whose position gives them the power to set the measure of *arete* by simply being a leader. And yet, Protagoras' maxim expands the scope of the leader's claim on the human good to everyone. Each human's life stands as a measure of the human good. However, a person chooses to live attests to that person's sense of what is good for a human being. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this understanding of *arete* and the human good harmonizes well with our prior analysis of the democratic soul.

According to our reading of Protagoras' maxim, the human good involves the establishment of a measure, that is, each person's very existence exercises a claim on the human good. Each individual life represents a possibility of what can be good for *all* human beings. Such a radical relativization of the measure of the human good calls into question our prior insistence on the necessity of a universal measure of the human good. While there is a universal dimension insofar as all human life participates in this claim on the human good, the measure itself is always relative and exclusive to each person whose life attests to it. If we consider the human good abstractly, then there is nothing in principle wrong with such a measure. A person's life as a private

⁷³⁸ Let the following list serve as a brief survey of some relevant anglophone scholarship on Protagoras: Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers*. Bett, "The Sophists and Relativism," 139-169. Lee, *Epistemology after Protagoras: Responses to Relativism in Plato, Aristotle, and Democritus*. Lloyd, *The Revolutions of Wisdom: Studies in the Claims and Practices of Ancient Greek Science*. Woodruff, "Rhetoric and Relativism: Protagoras and Gorgias" in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, 290-310. However, the following list is, perhaps, the more influential one for our interpretation of Protagoras' maxim in the *Meno*. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 416-417. "Thus the essential thing, the science of the Sophists, remains the art of 'dialectic', which must seek and recognize something as a fixed end (*festen Zweck*). They situated this fixed end in human beings; thus humans in their particularity have become the goal and end of all things, and utility the highest value. So the final end (*letzten Zweck*) is a matter of one's personal preference." Heidegger, *Nietzsche IV: Nihilism*, 91-95. While Heidegger's analysis primarily focuses more on metaphysical analysis than our own interpretation, Heidegger's translation/interpretation of the Greek offers useful guidance. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 233-234. "...the Sophists verge upon the first critique of morality, the first insight into morality:—they juxtapose the multiplicity (the geographical relativity) of the moral value judgments;—they let it be known that every morality can be dialectically justified....The sophists are no more than realists: they formulate the values and practices common to everyone on the level of values—they possess the courage of all strong spirits to know their own immorality—"

measure of the human good need not bear upon anyone else, and yet, we know, in practice, that such a measure poses a different sort of problem. The communal horizon in which inquiry into the human good takes place presents the greatest obstacle to the relative measure, and we caught a glimpse of one dimension of this obstacle in our preparatory analysis of the democratic soul. The democratic measure of the good (i.e., freedom and equality) in the democratic soul gave license to any thing pertaining to the soul to occupy the position of leader in the soul (and also in the *polis*). All are worthy and deserving of honor. But, of course, we have analyzed the question concerning the leadership of the soul in relation to *who* leads the *polis*, since whoever leads the *polis* also has a soul that is led in some way. Just as the democratic soul may be overrun by unruly desires which lead that person harmfully, so too does the democratic *polis* risk ruin, if poor leaders take charge of it. In this scenario, we see what is problematic about our understanding of Protagoras' maxim as one which concerns the human good. Indeed it may be the case that what is "good" for a person is always relative to the person for whom something is good, but insofar as humans must cohabitate in a *polis* in order for such an account of the human good to emerge, the necessity of the communal horizon, in which the pursuit of *arete* and the human good takes place, raises the more fundamental challenge to this way of thinking the human good. What is "good for" one person might destroy another person or even the *polis* itself, and in this political expression of the relative measure, we might catch a glimpse of the interrelatedness between Protagoras and Anytus.

We should remember that we began to analyze Socrates' reference to Protagoras because Socrates mentioned him as an example of a successful and well-reputed sophist whose harm to/corruption of the *polis* seems superficially difficult to explain. How could Protagoras be the man he was, if the sophists are the "disgrace (*λώβη*) and corruption (*διαφθορά*)" of their students as Anytus claimed? We have found a surprisingly straight-forward way to account for Anytus' accusation of disgrace and corruption against the sophists through our analysis of Protagoras' maxim; however, Anytus' accusation also turns back on himself. We might understand Anytus' accusation of disgrace and corruption in this way: We imagine that Protagoras teaches his students that "the human being is the measure of all things (*πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄνθρωπον εἶναι*)," and we take this maxim to mean that each individual life represents a possibility of what can be good for human beings. Such a teaching might empower Protagoras' students to pursue their own self-interest in a way that could harm the *polis* (its constituents or "as a whole"), since Protagoras' radically relative measure only values what is good for the individual. He and the other sophists

would “disgrace” and “corrupt” their students by teaching them to live according to a measure of the human good which justifies conflict with others in the *polis*, and which, more broadly construed, represents an anti-social measure of the human good. A person need only concern him or herself with what is good for him or herself. In this sense, Anytus seems to identify a genuine threat to the *polis*. And yet, he is unable to see how he himself poses a similar threat, but he does so through the very institutions of the *polis*. Anytus has the political “right” to rule because he lives in a democratic *polis* (Athens), and because he lives in a democratic *polis*, the constitution of his soul mirrors the constitution of his *polis*.⁷³⁹ Every thing pertaining to the soul may justifiably lead the soul just as every male citizen has the constitutional justification to participate in the governance of Athens, and this justification stems from the democratic measure of the human good (freedom and equality). But then, we must wonder: How does Anytus “know” what (or who) harms (corrupts) the *polis*? If he merely abides by the democratic measure of the human good, then whoever inhibits, detracts, or otherwise undermines the measures of freedom and equality harms the *polis*. Our interpretation of Protagoras’ maxim does not necessarily lead to a confrontation of the democratic measure of the human good, but it could. And what about Socrates? While *we* may retrospectively view Socrates as a benefactor of Athens, his status among his contemporaries was clearly an open question (especially insofar as his peers condemned him to death). Anytus’ subsequent condemnation of Socrates, who, in this very dialogue, we have interpreted as someone accounting for the human good in a very unconventional way, provides an example of Anytus’ dubious benefit to Athens. We need not accuse Anytus of being a “bad man” in order to question his enforcement of the democratic measure of the human good through his participation in the leadership of Athens. Ironically, Anytus’ attempt to do good for the *polis* is the same gesture by which he harms it. Let us explore this claim more through Anytus’ response.

Surprisingly, Anytus does not condemn the sophists, but rather, he blames the constituents for their madness (*μανία*). Anytus laments:

They [i.e., the sophists] are far from being mad (*μαίνεσθαι*), Socrates; but much more so are the youths (*νέων*) who give them gold (*ἀργύριον*), and even more than these are the relatives (*οἱ προσήκοντες*) who turn them over to them, but most of all are the *poleis* that

⁷³⁹ The constitution of Socrates’ soul is a product of the Athenian, democratic *polis* as well, but even Socrates himself describes his circumstance as an exceptional one, as we noted previously.

permit them to come in and don't drive them out, whether it's some foreigner (ξένος) that undertakes to do something of this sort, or a fellow citizen (ἄστος).⁷⁴⁰

Anytus apparently does not think the sophists are mad (μαίνεσθαι) despite accusing them of causing the disgrace and corruption of their students. He does not answer whether he thinks that the sophists knowingly or unknowingly harm their students, but from his response, we might infer that Anytus does not care whether the sophists knowingly or unknowingly harm their students because the responsibility to stave off corruption rests on the *polis*. That is, the *polis* is responsible for protecting its constituents more than the perpetrators are responsible for their harm (knowing or unknowing) to others. Notably, this political objective (to prevent harm) differs considerably from Socrates' assumptions about the objective of politics, namely, to make the constituents as good as possible. Furthermore, it is not clear whose "good" Anytus speaks on behalf of. Anytus does not blame the constituents for not recognizing the harm of the sophists as much as he blames the *poleis* themselves for not expelling the sophists—no matter whether the sophists is a foreigner (ξένος) or fellow citizen (ἄστος). Whereas Anytus initially appears concerned for the constituents of the *polis*, i.e., the youths and their relatives who are mad for paying the sophists for their instruction, Anytus' final qualification intimates his misguided care for "the good of the *polis*"—even if it harms the constituency.⁷⁴¹ It may be difficult for us to grasp the full extent of the repercussions that ostracism (i.e., "driving someone out of the *polis*") implies, but we need not even understand Anytus quite so literally despite the ubiquity of this practice at the time. The intertextual resonance of Anytus' claim illustrates the mortal gravity which it also implies. In our analysis of Protagoras' maxim, we noticed a potentially anti-social consequence of it as it relates to the question of the human good, and we now find Anytus expressing a similarly anti-social sentiment. Anytus unambiguously believes that even an "Athenian sophist" (i.e., a sophist who is also one of his fellow citizens) ought to be driven out, and not doing so would be a sign of madness.⁷⁴² We have noted previously how Anytus' diction mirrors the later accusations against

⁷⁴⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 92b.

⁷⁴¹ Cf. Plato, *Republic*. 435b-444e. There are some similarities between Anytus' hierarchy of blame and the hierarchy of the *polis*/ soul in the *Republic*. We might see a likeness between the youth, the appetitive part of the soul, and the artisanal class; the relatives, the spirited part of the soul, and the guardian class; and the *poleis*, the intelligible part of the soul, and the ruling class. This similarity seems noteworthy, even if the limits of our analysis prevent us from developing the similarity here.

⁷⁴² In a part of their analysis of pleasure (ἡδονή) in *Philebus*, Protarchus and Socrates discuss the relationship between madness, the condition of one's soul, and notably *arete* too. Protarchus claims, "...but intense pleasure (σφοδρὰ ἡδονή) holds sway over (κατέχουσα) the foolish (ἄφρόνων) and audacious (ὑβριστῶν) even to the point of madness (μανίας) and makes them notorious (περιβοήτους)." To which Socrates responds, "Good (καλῶς); and if that is true,

Socrates, which we encounter in Plato's *Apology*, and so it seems reasonable for us to interpret Socrates' prosecution and execution as an example of the type of behavior which Anytus believes to be the fulfillment of the responsibility of a *polis* to its constituents. And yet, we must ask: was Socrates not also a constituent of Athens? Thus, we witness a striking contradiction of measures in this example. How is it possible for Anytus and the other prosecutors to do "good" for Athens and its constituents, when their actions involve harming an Athenian constituent (Socrates)? The execution of Socrates directly contradicts the ostensive "universality" of the concrete actions which act in the name of what is "good" for Athens. Is Socrates not also a part of Athens?

We have tracked the introduction of various responses to Socrates' question about the identity of the teachers of *arete*. Socrates began the inquiry with a conspicuous assumption that differed from the ones he made during his discussion with Meno. Although Socrates never made the claim explicitly, Socrates strongly implied that teaching someone a technical know-how of *arete* would be the best way to make a person good, if *arete* can be taught. However, the paradigm of instruction which uses technical know-how did not seem to work when we applied it to teaching a person how to be good. A technical know-how can make a person good *at* something, but a good person is not good "at" anything in particular. Even though Anytus agreed with Socrates that the best way to make someone good at an activity is to send the person to the teachers of the technical know-how about the activity, he, ironically, objected to Socrates' suggestion that Meno should go to the sophists, who profess to teach *arete*, in order to become a good man. We found his objection ironic because he was right to deny that the sophists could teach Meno the *arete* that would make him a good man, but his reasons for objecting were dubious. Anytus claimed that the sophists disgrace and corrupt their students, and this indictment of their practice led us to examine what such "corruption" might entail. During our analysis, we noticed a distinction which operated tacitly within the discourse but which helped us to begin to interpret Anytus' criticism of the sophists. For the most part, we have focused on *arete* as a measure of the human good, but when Socrates posed the question to Anytus about the teachers of *arete*, he asked it in a new way, which we have

it is clear that the greatest pleasure (μέγιστα ἡδοναί) and the greatest pains (μέγιστα λύπαι) originate (γίνονται) in some depravity (πονηρία) of the soul and body, not in *arete*." Plato, *Philebus*, 45e. Translation modified. According to Protarchus and Socrates' reasoning, madness (μανία) stems from the experience of intense pleasure (σφοδρά ἡδονή), but such pleasure (ἡδονή) relies on a prior depravity (πονηρία) in the soul and body. We have analyzed Anytus in terms of his soul's likeness to Socrates' account of the democratic soul in the *Republic*. Might the madness to which Anytus refers be self-referential? Or further, might Anytus unknowingly diagnose an illness to which both Anytus and the other constituents of democratic Athens are collectively susceptible?

named the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης). We reasoned that Socrates suggested the sophists as teachers of *arete* because he had modified the sense of *arete* to the *arete* of the good citizen, and so, when Anytus objected to the sophists, he did so because he took *arete* as the *arete* of the good person (not of the good citizen). While our recognition of this distinction has helped us to interpret Socrates' and Anytus' dispute more precisely, we also noticed that equivocation about these senses of *arete* is constitutive of the Athenian communal horizon in which their pursuit of *arete* and the human good takes place.

The sophists are one symptom of this equivocation, men who profess to teach *arete* and charge a fee for it. When Anytus objected to Socrates' suggestion that the sophists are the teachers of *arete*, he condemned them harshly as the source of corruption and disgrace. In response, Socrates questioned Anytus about the sophist Protagoras, who became wealthy and well-reputed throughout Greece. How could Protagoras have fooled all of Greece for so long? Even though Anytus did not respond to this question directly, we took Socrates' allusion to Protagoras as an opportunity to examine his relevance to our inquiry into *arete*. Taking Protagoras' well-known maxim as our starting point, we identified a real threat to the *polis* that those who believe Protagoras' maxim could pose. We understood Protagoras' maxim as a radical relativization of the measure of the human good, and such a measure risked causing a twofold harm to the *polis*. First, such a measure could justify harm to the *polis* or to others. Two of its presuppositions (i.e., the isolation of one person from another and the permissibility of such an exclusive measure) allowed for its practitioners to be unaccountable to the broader community, and such an unaccountability speaks to the second harm and an outright contradiction which such a measure obfuscates. We have insisted that one of our most decisive insights from our analysis of the *Meno* is that the pursuit of *arete* and the human good takes place within a communal horizon. Socrates searches for *arete* with others, and he does so because he needs them as much as they need him. The extreme relativization of the measure of *arete* cannot account for its foundation in the communal horizon, a foundation which ironically justifies its presumptions about the isolation of individuals and the permissiveness of an exclusive measure. That is, when a person uses what is good for oneself as a measure of the good, it might appear like a sovereign, relative, and autonomous judgment. However, this seemingly personal and isolated judgment still falls within the purview of/is informed by the communal horizon in which the constituency of a *polis* pursue *arete* and the human good. Our interpretation of the Protagorean maxim and our interpretation of the democratic

measure of *arete* share a common foundation in the democratic *polis*. We found the interrelatedness between the individual and the *polis* illustrated by Anytus, when we noticed a similarity between our interpretation of Protagoras' maxim and our prior analysis of the democratic soul, which we attribute to Anytus. Anytus, who lacks an account of the threat posed by the sophists, believes that it is good to drive out all sophists (domestic or foreign). What measure of *arete* and the human good informs this belief? We cannot say (nor can he). However, we can point to Socrates' execution as an example of the danger that a radically relative measure of *arete* and the human good poses to the constituency, a measure which does not appear in a democratic *polis* by coincidence.

The Noble and Good Athenians (οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι καλοὶ κάγαθοί) Teach *Arete* (92b-93b)

Socrates seems taken aback by how strongly Anytus condemns the sophists and asks whether Anytus has some personal grievance against them. He questions if a sophist has wronged (ἠδίκηκέ) him in some way?⁷⁴³ But Anytus insists that he has never associated (συγγέγονα) with any sophists himself nor would he allow any of his people to do so. Such a bold assertion sounds odd for a couple of reasons. First, we know that the sophist Gorgias instructed Meno, and Socrates called Meno Anytus' guest-friend twice already without eliciting any correction from Anytus.⁷⁴⁴ Does Anytus not know that Gorgias instructed Meno, but at the same time, how could he *not* know? Socrates knew of Gorgias' influence in Thessaly even before meeting Meno face to face, whereas the guest-friendship between Anytus and Meno surely implies a greater familiarity. Or is Anytus perhaps a less diligent guardian of his people than he claims to be? Second, whence comes Anytus' concern about the corruptive influence of the sophists if he has never interacted with one?

Socrates attempts to clarify, asking, "Then you are altogether without experience (ἄπειρος) of these men?"⁷⁴⁵ After hearing Anytus' affirmative response, Socrates poses a familiar follow-up question: "How then, my daemonic one, could you know (εἰδείης) about this matter (πράγματος), whether there is anything good (ἀγαθόν) or worthless (φλαῦρον) in that of which you are altogether without experience (ἄπειρος)?"⁷⁴⁶ We have encountered various iterations of this question sprout up throughout our inquiry. In Socrates' opening speech, he asked Meno, "And how could I know

⁷⁴³ Plato, *Meno*, 92b.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., 90b, 91a.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid., 92b.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., 92c.

what sort of thing something is, if I do not know what it is?”⁷⁴⁷ And later in their discussion, Meno asked Socrates, “And in what way will you seek, Socrates, for that which you know nothing at all about what it is?”⁷⁴⁸ While each of these questions share some common features, the iteration which Socrates asks of Anytus differs because of a new stipulation about Anytus’ lack of experience (ἄπειρος). And retrospectively, we might even find an anticipation of this confrontation during our concluding analysis in Chapter III, in which we considered Socrates’ reference to his shared search with those who are “most experienced in this matter (ἐμπειροτάτους τοῦ πράγματος).”⁷⁴⁹ We interpreted “this matter,” in which Socrates and others like him have become most experienced, as the pursuit of *arete* and the human good, a part of which includes exploring whether anyone teaches others how to be good, i.e., whether there are any teachers of *arete*. Socrates’ participation in this communal search for the human good led us to understand his prior claims “not to know” about *arete* in a new light. Socrates “does not know” about *arete* insofar as knowing “what it is” would imply the conclusion of his search, but it does not mean that he has no experience in inquiring about *arete*. In this way, Socrates “not knowing” about *arete* differed from the *παῖς* not knowing about geometry. With an awareness of this difference between Socrates and his interlocutors in the *Meno*, we can hear a harsh implication underlying Socrates’ question. Anytus, who is a leader in Athens and so (according to Socrates) responsible for benefiting the *polis* and its constituents, lacks experience in searching for *arete* and the human good. So then how does Anytus “know” what is good for Athens and her people? Anytus has not pursued *arete* and the human good mindfully (σὸν νῶ), instead accepting the conventional, Athenian measure, but the assumption of the propriety of the Athenian measure begs the question about which the entire inquiry (what is *arete*?) and this part of the inquiry (who are the teachers of *arete*?) are concerned. Thus, two question confront us: What is the Athenian measure of *arete*? And who is responsible for making the Athenians good? We ought to pause here and note the shift in the discourse.

Momentarily, Socrates narrowed the scope of their inquiry through the framing of his question to Anytus about the teachers of a particular *arete*, namely, the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης). This *arete* does have self-professed teachers: sophists, among whom Protagoras

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid., 71b.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid., 80d.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid., 89e.

stands out as one of the most well-reputed and successful. For Anytus to accept this framing of the search for that *arete*, he would be forced to confront the tension between his confidence in himself as a good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης), on the one hand, and his esteem for the power of technical know-how, which is (to some extent) responsible for his success in Athens, on the other hand. Every artisan completes their work beautifully through technical know-how, and Anytus surely knows the benefit of technical know-how insofar as he is also a hide-tanner. And yet, expectedly, Anytus does not agree with Socrates' framing, and even if he lacks an account to justify his rejection of the sophists, his intuitive (and possibly self-interested) rejection of the sophists as teachers of *arete* is not wrong. His objection touches on a decisive ambiguity at the heart of inquiry into *arete* and the human good. Because humans pursue *arete* and the human good within the communal horizon for which the *polis* provides a site (and a measure), the status of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης)—who can also be a good politician (ἀγαθός πολιτικός) in a democratic *polis*—is entangled with the status of the good person (ἀγαθός). This entanglement does not happen by accident or through some sort of nefarious process. Of course the human good become entangled with the good of the *polis*, since every person needs the communal horizon that the *polis* provides in order to pursue the human good with others. We have understood many of Socrates' exhortations and peripheral remarks as indications of the necessity of searching together with others for *arete* and the human good. We might expect that politicians (i.e., the leaders of the *polis*) would contribute to this pursuit just as much as anyone else. And yet, throughout our analysis, we have noticed the possibility for leaders to abuse their position in the *polis* and set an exclusive measure (in word and deed) of the human good. To put it plainly, such politicians/leaders use their power to their own private advantage rather than to help make the constituents of their *polis* as good as possible, i.e., to facilitate their communal pursuit of the human good. Insofar as Socrates seems to assume the latter as the purpose of political activity, it is important for Anytus to be a part of the search for the teachers of *arete*, since his ability to fulfill the obligations of his position (according to Socratic assumptions) depends upon knowing what or who will make the Athenians good people. Consequently, Anytus' insistence that he “easily” knows about the harm of the sophists (without experience) becomes all the more troubling—especially because we remember Meno's mistaken confidence in the “easiness” of accounting for *arete*.⁷⁵⁰

⁷⁵⁰ Anytus claims “easily” (ῥᾠδίως) to know what the sophists are even without experience (ἄπειρος) of them. Ibid., 92c. This confidence echoes Meno's earlier dubious insistence on the easiness of accounting for *arete*. Ibid., 71e-72a.

Socrates' does not press Anytus to explain how he knows about the sophists without experience (ἄπειρος) of them, although Socrates does condescendingly suppose Anytus might be a diviner (μάντις). Nevertheless, Socrates maintains his resolve to search for the teachers of *arete* (in Athens), and so he continues:

You are perhaps a diviner (μάντις), Anytus, for how else, I might wonder, do you know (οἶσθα) about them, from what you yourself say about them. But we are not searching for (ἐπιζητοῦμεν) those from whose company Meno would become wretched (μοχθηρὸς) after he came to them,—for these, if you want, let them be the sophists—but tell us, and do your hereditary comrade (πατρικὸν ἑταῖρον) here a good turn (εὐεργέτησον) by telling him, to whom to go in so great a *polis* as this so that he might become worthy (ἄξιος) of speech (λόγου) in the *arete* I was just now going through.⁷⁵¹

When Socrates suggests that Anytus may be a diviner (μάντις), he basically tells Anytus that he does not think Anytus understands his own words, even if Anytus speaks truly.⁷⁵² Whether or not Socrates has assessed the situation correctly, we can easily recognize why Anytus might take such a comment as slight against him. Even though Anytus rightly dismisses the sophists as potential teachers of the *arete* sufficient for the human good, Anytus lacks both experience and an account to justify his dismissal. If Anytus were a diviner, it would likely be more flattering than the alternative: Anytus arrived at the right conclusion (this time) by chance. We should also notice how Socrates' playful name-calling anticipates Socrates' later reasoning about divination and the coming to be of *arete* through divine dispensation.⁷⁵³ This casual reference to divine intervention (through the diviner) into the ordinary affairs of human life draws our attention, once again, to Socrates' persistent interest in the relationship between humans and the gods since the beginning of our analysis of the *Meno*.⁷⁵⁴ This latest example of that relationship (in the case of divination) appears at a particularly salient point in the discussion. According to Timaeus' account of divination in the *Timaeus*, the power of divination requires the absence of moderation (σωφροσύνη), a thing pertaining to the soul which, during our analysis in Chapter III, we found

⁷⁵¹ Ibid., 92c-92d. Translation modified.

⁷⁵² Ibid., 99c.

⁷⁵³ Ibid., 99b-100a.

⁷⁵⁴ For example, when Socrates speaks hypothetically as an Athenian citizen, he claims that only someone blessed (μάκαρος) would know about *arete*. Ibid., 71c. Later, he suggests that Meno should stay around for initiation in the Mysteries even though Meno had just shown his predilection for a “tragic” (τραγική) or deep-sounding answer to his question. Ibid., 76e. Socrates prefaces his story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις), which itself partially relies upon a story about the goddess Persephone, by claiming to have heard it from “men and women wise about things divine.” Ibid., 81a-81c.

closely related to the benefit of dialectical reasoning.⁷⁵⁵ Unsurprisingly, the conditions for divination (sleep, sickness, or divine possession) preclude the active use of dialectical reasoning, and if we combine this account of divination with our analysis of Socrates' prior reasoning about dialectical reasoning, then we might read Socrates' suggestion of divination as the justification for Anytus' condemnation of the sophists as a further indication of the constitution of Anytus' soul (which, once again, carries unflattering implications for the propriety of his leadership). Not only might Anytus receive unpredictable guidance from the gods as the basis for his leadership, but also, such a power surely cannot be taught.⁷⁵⁶ Anytus' power of divination, which, in this case, leads him to condemn the sophists, would likely also guide his pursuit of the good both for himself and for his *polis*. And yet, if Anytus "knows" about the teachers of *arete* (and *arete* itself) due to divination, then, once again, *arete* seems *not* to be teachable.

Socrates does not linger on the question of divination here, and we will consider it again later when Socrates reintroduces it into his discussion with Meno. For now, Socrates just wants to know who will make Meno good (ἀγαθός) (and not wretched (μοχθηρός)). Socrates even grants Anytus' objection about the sophists despite Anytus' inability to account for the way in which they corrupt and disgrace (i.e., harm/make wretched) their students for the sake of continuing the search for the teachers of *arete*. And, in fact, because of our analysis, we understand why Socrates might feel no compulsion to press Anytus on this issue. Anytus seems to be right that the sophists are not the teachers of the *arete* which the good person exhibits. In our analysis of the significance of Socrates' reference to Protagoras, we unpacked an interpretation of Protagoras' maxim in terms of the search for *arete* and the human good in the *polis*. According to our interpretation, Anytus may have correctly identified a threat to the *polis*. We understood Protagoras' maxim as a validation of a radically relative measure of the human good which can lead to dangerous, anti-social consequences. The measure of the human good, which justifies each person's individual, self-interested pursuit of his or her own good, creates the impression that its adherents do not participate in the communal horizon in which Socrates (and others) search for *arete* and the human good as

⁷⁵⁵ "The claim that god gave divination (μαντικήν) as a gift (δέδωκεν) to human folly (ἀφροσύνη ἀνθρωπίνη) has good support. While one is in one's right mind (ἔννοος), no one engages in divination (μαντικῆς) no matter how divinely inspired (ἐνθέου) and true (ἀληθοῦς) it may be, but only when one's power (δύναμιν) of dialectical reasoning (φρονήσεως) is bound in sleep (ὕπνον) or by sickness (νόσον), or when some sort of possession (ἐνθουσιασμόν) works a change in him." Plato, *Timaeus*, 71e. Translation modified. Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 236.

⁷⁵⁶ As Klein put it, "If Anytus is a 'diviner,' he cannot be a sensible man, cannot exercise wise judgment, cannot have *phronesis*." *Ibid.* Our own analysis anticipated the improbability of Anytus' possession of dialectical reasoning.

well. Depending upon what Protagoras' students determine their "good" to be, Protagoras' teaching might empower them to pursue private measures of the human good (i.e., what is "good for" oneself) which outright harm the other constituents of the *polis*. In such a scenario, we might even be tempted to agree with Anytus that the sophists seem to "corrupt" their students. And yet, Anytus also fails to recognize that the *polis* too is responsible. It is not, for example, Socrates, who actively participates in the Athenian pursuit of *arete* and the human good, who is susceptible to the sophists' instruction. And yet, there seems to be something constitutive of the Athenian *polis* which leads many of its constituents to seek out the instruction of the sophists! The fact that many Athenians, even and especially the most wealthy and powerful, hire the sophists to educate their sons attests to the uncertainty of many Athenians about *arete* and the human good. Sophists like Protagoras may be dangerous, but the *polis* may also be partially to blame. However, the *polis* is not responsible in the way that Anytus suggests. This predicament implies that, even in Athens, many Athenians lack confidence in the *polis* to make people good. To whom, then, should Meno go to learn how to be a good person while in Athens?

Initially, Anytus refuses to answer, deferring responsibility for the question back to Socrates, but Socrates insists that he thought he had answered until Anytus corrected him:

Well, I did say who I thought were teachers of these things; but it happened that I made no sense (τυγχάνω οὐδὲν λέγων), as you say. And perhaps there is something to what you say. But you now, in your turn, tell him to whom among the Athenians he should go. Tell him the name of anyone you want.⁷⁵⁷

Very subtly, Socrates seems to confirm our sense that the sophists do not teach the *arete* for which we search alongside Socrates and his interlocutors. Perhaps Anytus is right about the sophists, and Socrates simply "made no sense," or "was saying nothing" (οὐδὲν λέγων), when he proposed the sophists as the teachers. Admittedly, Socrates proposed the teachers to whom many Athenians turn, when they want to educate their sons about *arete*—the kind "by which people manage (διοικοῦσι) both households (οικίας) and *poleis* finely (καλῶς), and take care of (θεραπεύουσι) their own parents, and know how to receive and to send off both citizens (πολίτας) and foreigners (ξένους) hospitably, in a way worthy (ἀξίως) of a good man (ἀνδρὸς ἀγαθοῦ)."⁷⁵⁸ The sophist Protagoras teaches the technical know-how of citizenship (πολιτική τέχνη), which makes its

⁷⁵⁷ Plato, *Meno*, 92d-92e.

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 91a.

practitioner into a good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης). And yet, we do not search for the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης). The search for the teachers of *arete* involves searching for those who make people good without further qualification—not good “at” something but simply good (ἀγαθός).

Because Anytus is the elected representative of Athens, it makes sense for Socrates to defer to Anytus’ guidance in their search. Perhaps the Athenians who turn to the sophists for their own education and the education of their sons have misjudged the value of a sophist’s education to the detriment of themselves and Athens as a whole. So then, to whom should they turn? Socrates asks Anytus to *name* anyone he wants who would be a better teacher of *arete*. But does this way of posing the question not catch our attention? When Socrates introduced Anytus into the dialogue, Socrates asked him to join their search for the teachers of *arete*. He used the model of the artisan to search for the teachers who make humans good in the same way that the teachers of flute-playing make flute-players good. Even if our analysis has led us to doubt the appropriateness of using the teachers of technical know-how as a paradigm for teachers of *arete*, we nonetheless do not have any reason to question the general character of their search. Socrates proposed the sophists as teachers of *arete*, and he mentioned Protagoras as one example. But he did not claim that Protagoras alone is the teacher of *arete*. And so, when Socrates asks Anytus to name someone, it stands out because of the deviation from the kind of answer Socrates himself just gave. This question resonates ironically as well. How does this part of the exchange between Anytus and Socrates echo certain parts of the discourse during Socrates’ future trial as it appears in the *Apology*?

When Socrates asks Anytus for the name of the Athenian who would be able to teach Meno *arete*, the question and Anytus’ response both sound reminiscent of the cross-examination between Socrates and Meletus at his trial about who is responsible for making the youth noble and good (καλοὶ καγαθοί) and who is responsible for their corruption. At the conclusion of the back-and-forth, Socrates notices that “all the Athenians, it seems, make (ποιοῦσι) the young noble and good (καλοὺς καγαθοὺς), except me, and I alone (μόνος) corrupt (διαφθείρω) them.”⁷⁵⁹ Anytus’ response to Socrates in the *Meno* intimates a similar sentiment. “Why should one hear the name of just one man? For, of any of the noble and good Athenians (Ἀθηναίων τῶν καλῶν καγαθῶν) he

⁷⁵⁹ Plato, *Apology*, 25a. Translation modified.

should happen to meet, there is none who will not make (ποιήσει) him better (βελτίω) than the sophists would, if he is willing to be persuaded (πείθεσθαι).”⁷⁶⁰ The reasoning about the cultivation of noble and good Athenians (οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι καλοὶ κἀγαθοί) between the *Apology* and the *Meno* is consistent, and yet, the reasoning itself is problematic. First, why is it that one person is capable of such prolific corruption, but the collective of noble and good Athenians make others around them noble and good like themselves? How is it that the influence of the noble and good Athenians is both so fragile and, at the same time, robust? But on a deeper level, we must wonder about the means by which Meno would be made “good” *a la* the Athenian youth. What do the noble and good Athenians “do” to make the youth good? While Anytus (and implicitly Meletus) does touch upon a valuable insight into the human good, i.e., it is a communal pursuit in which everyone participates, his response does not intimate insight into *arete* and the human good commensurate with his confidence in his answer. For example, the sophists teach various sorts of technical know-how, one of which involves the cultivation of an *arete* that plays upon the ambiguity between the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) and the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός). While we recognize what is problematic about what the sophists teach as a response to the search for *arete*, we nonetheless know *how* they would make their students good (if they could). But what do noble and good Athenians “teach” to make others like themselves, and if they do not teach anything, then how do they make others like themselves? This question becomes all the more interesting when we consider the example of Socrates. On the one hand, our comparison of the speeches in the *Apology* and the *Meno* implies a certain likeness between Socrates and the sophists, but despite the tacit accusation of sophism implied in his indictment, Socrates neither taught anyone (in the conventional sense) nor did he charge a fee. On the other hand, according to Anytus’ own reasoning, we might also identify Socrates as a noble and good man like all the other Athenians, who, apparently, are all equally capable of making Meno good. Because Anytus offers no measure of a noble and good Athenian, we might reasonably conclude that *every* Athenian is “good” *because* they are Athenians. But then how did Socrates become so harmful according to his accusers, among whom Anytus is included?⁷⁶¹ The most likely explanation for Anytus’ contradictory and problematic reasoning is that he lacks experiencing inquiring into *arete* and the human good! Not only does this explanation account for Anytus’ confused and inadequate

⁷⁶⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 92e. Translation modified.

⁷⁶¹ Socrates acknowledges that he became unpopular because of his philosophical practice. Plato, *Apology*, 23a.

rationale, but it also accounts for what makes Socrates so different from Anytus, Meletus, and the other so-called noble and good Athenians. Let us reconsider Socratic philosophical practice through Socrates' prior interaction with Meno.

When Socrates responded to Meno's contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος), he did not dispute it on a "logical" basis. He did not explicate unarticulated assumptions, nor did he point out contradictions between premises and conclusions, nor did he make dogmatic assertions. Rather, Socrates told Meno a well-curated story about the soul, one which incorporated familiar styles and themes. He insisted only that his story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) would make Meno "ready to work and to seek" and "more able to be brave and less lazy" if Meno trusts it.⁷⁶² We ought to note a commonality between Socrates' influence on Meno and the way that Anytus claims the noble and good Athenians would make Meno good. In both cases, Meno's prospective "goodness" depends upon being persuaded (πείθεσθαι).⁷⁶³ While not ever explicitly mentioned as such, persuasion has been recurrent in the *Meno* as a way of affecting Meno in addition to what can be taught or what comes from nature. Furthermore, during our comparative analysis of Socrates and Teiresias, we similarly concluded that Socrates seemed to share in a sort of prophetic power by which Teiresias persuaded Oedipus (or Odysseus) to make his prophecy become true. We understood this power not as that of the clairvoyant, who merely receives and conveys "objective truth," but rather, as that of a man whose sensitivity to the human soul informs his speech in a way that will move the soul of his interlocutor to act in harmony with his prophetic pronouncement. And yet, even Socrates differed in his use of this power from Teiresias insofar as Socrates seems primarily to use it to persuade others to join him in his pursuit of *arete*. Our analysis of Socrates' discussion with Meno in the *Meno* provides us with one example of the process through which Socrates persuades someone to care about trying to be a good person. And insofar as Socrates, as an Athenian, is, according to Anytus' reasoning, necessarily a noble and good man, then Anytus is right that a noble and good Athenian would benefit Meno more than any sophist could. However, Anytus does not seem to have Socrates in mind, and so we really have no clue

⁷⁶² Plato, *Meno*, 81d, 86b.

⁷⁶³ See Socrates' remark in the *Apology*: "That I am the kind of person to be a gift of the god to the *polis* (οἷός ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ τῇ πόλει δεδόςθαι) you might realize from the fact that it does not seem like human nature (ἀνθρωπίνῳ ἔουκε) for me to have neglected (ἡμεληκέναι) all my own affairs (τῶν οικείων) and to have tolerated this neglect now for so many years while I was always concerned with you, approaching each one of you like a father or an elder brother to persuade (πειθόντα) you to care (ἐπιμελεῖσθαι) for *arete*." Plato, *Apology*, 31b.

how any of the other “noble and good Athenians” would make Meno good. If anything, Anytus’ engagement with Socrates leads us to doubt the ability of any other Athenian besides Socrates to make Meno into a good person. We have seen quite concretely what Socrates would do, but what would the others do for Meno?

We might find some indications of our uncertainty in Socrates response. Socrates asks, “Did these noble and good ones (οἱ καλοὶ κἀγαθοί) become such by chance (ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου), and yet without learning (μαθόντες) from anyone are they nevertheless able to teach (διδάσκειν) others what they themselves did not learn (οὐκ ἔμαθον)?”⁷⁶⁴ Because they set out to find the teachers of *arete*, it makes sense for Socrates to use educational diction (teaching and learning) in his question. However, the momentum of Socrates’ questioning seems to lead towards the conclusion that *arete* cannot be taught, a conclusion which may have already been implied during his prior account of dialectical reasoning with Meno. How did the noble and good ones become good? Chance offers a plausible explanation, but then they still could not be teachers of *arete*, since what comes from chance cannot be taught. Anytus must be able to answer this question in order for his solution to have any plausibility, but Anytus’ confident response belies any sensitivity to the precarity of the present issue. “I claim that they too learned (μαθεῖν) from those who were noble and good (καλῶν κἀγαθῶν) before them: or don’t you think that there have been many good men (ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες) in this *polis*?”⁷⁶⁵ In this response, we find Anytus deferring the problem. However, instead of temporarily resolving the question about the teachers of *arete*, Anytus’ response creates additional complications with which they must reckon in their inquiry. The suggestion that the noble and good Athenians learned to be good from prior noble and good Athenians merely posits an infinite regress and offers no greater resolution to the question about the teachers of *arete* than had Anytus said nothing at all. Nevertheless, when Anytus subsequently asks Socrates whether he thinks that there have been many good men (ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες) in Athens, we witness the reintroduction of the same ambiguity upon which Anytus’ objection relied previously.⁷⁶⁶ Sometimes the noble and good ones (καλοὶ κἀγαθοί) are the same as the good men (ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες), but sometimes they are good citizens (ἀγαθοὶ πολίτας). We previously saw this ambiguity through the distinction between the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) and the

⁷⁶⁴ Plato, *Meno*, 92e. Translation modified.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., 93a.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid., 91c.

arete of the good person (ἀγαθός). Once again, Anytus' contribution to the conversation reveals the clumsiness and superficiality of someone who has not spent much time examining *arete* and the human good.

When Socrates hears Anytus' response, he quickly makes explicit the distinction which we have been tracking in our analysis. He agrees with Anytus:

I, too, do think, Anytus, that there are good men (ἀγαθοί) in politics (τὰ πολιτικά) here, and before now there have been men no worse than they are, but have they also been good teachers (διδάσκαλοι ἀγαθοί) of this *arete* of theirs? For this is what our discussion happens to be about: not whether or not there are good men (ἀγαθοί ἄνδρες) here, nor whether there have been such before, but we have for some time been examining (σκοποῦμεν) whether *arete* is teachable (διδακτόν).⁷⁶⁷

Even though Anytus said nothing explicitly about “politics” (τὰ πολιτικά), Socrates acknowledges the potential difference between the noble and good ones (καλοὶ κἀγαθοί) and the good men (ἀγαθοί ἄνδρες). The measure of *arete* which the good person exhibits must be easily confused with the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) for Socrates to make this subtle distinction. In some sense, it must be possible to call a good person (ἀγαθός) “noble and good” and also call a good politician (ἀγαθός πολιτικός) “noble and good.” Previously, we considered this ambiguity through several analyses of the emergent measure of *arete* as being a leader of the *polis*. Furthermore, this very distinction informed our prior analysis of the possibility for a technical know-how of *arete*/the human good. There are people who are good at politics; there are people who are good at teaching; and there are good people. If a person can be made into a good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) or a good teacher (ἀγαθός διδάσκαλος) with a technical know-how about the respective tasks, then there must be some technical know-how about how to be a good person (ἀγαθός)—according to this reasoning. And yet, there is something different about being a good person that prevents it from being taught in the same way as the others. Since his introduction, Anytus has failed to acknowledge this point even while making subtle distinctions (e.g., between the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) and the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός)) which tacitly depend upon the impossibility of a technical know-how about the human good. In fact, our sensitivity to the operation of this distinction in the discussion between Socrates and Anytus offers a straightforward explanation for the direction of the conversation. Socrates names four “noble

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid., 93a-93b.

and good men” and their respective sons: Themistocles and his son Cleophantes; Aristedes and his son Lysimachus; Pericles and his sons Paralus and Xanthippus; and Thucydides and his sons Melesias and Stephanus. Conspicuously, all of these “noble and good men” are also leaders/politicians (πολιτικοί). Let us consider Socrates’ introduction and examination of these men as individual sites of tension between distinction between the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) and the good person (ἀγαθός) which we have been juggling throughout our analysis.

Some Exemplary “Noble and Good” Athenians (93c-95a)

Themistocles

Socrates begins with Themistocles, whom Anytus apparently considers the best of all (πάντων γε μάλιστα) good men.⁷⁶⁸ Socrates reasons that if he were as good a man as Anytus claims, then he would likely also be a good teacher of the *arete* which good people exhibit. Anytus agrees skeptically with qualification: if Themistocles wanted to be (ἐβούλετό). Socrates immediately picks up on the absurdity of this suggestion. Does Anytus *really* think that Themistocles would not want to make others, and especially his own son, noble and good (κάλος καὶ ἀγαθός) like himself, if he were able to do so? We can clearly hear the tilt of this question more towards a concern for the *arete* of the good person than the *arete* of the good citizen. Nevertheless, Socrates considers it quite unlikely that Themistocles would not want to make his son good especially because Themistocles hired teachers to educate his son Cleophantus in the wisdom (σοφός) to accomplish many marvelous things (θαυμαστά ἤργαζετο) like being a good horseman—an activity about which teachers teach technical know-how.⁷⁶⁹ Despite his education and exhibiting mastery in other endeavors, Cleophantus, according to Socrates and confirmed by Anytus, did not become a good and wise man (ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς καὶ σοφός) like his father. Socrates presents a very straightforward argument. Themistocles was a good man, and as a good man, he would be qualified to teach his son, whom he undoubtedly would want to help, the *arete* which made Themistocles himself a good and wise man (ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς καὶ σοφός)—if *arete* were teachable. His son became good at many things because of his education, but he did not become a good and wise man. From this example, it seems that *arete* cannot be taught. But, of course, the argument only addresses one level of the discourse. There are other questions which we might consider to help us become more sensitive to

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., 93c.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid., 93d.

other dimensions of the discourse as well. Who was Themistocles? Who was Cleophantus? And what does Anytus' high esteem for Themistocles reveal about the measure of *arete* and the human good in Athens?

Themistocles seems to have earned his positive reputation in Athens and throughout Greece for his cunning in service to the *polis* especially during war. Thucydides presents a flattering account of Artaxerxes' amazement at Themistocles' abilities:

For indeed Themistocles was a man who had most convincingly demonstrated the strength of his nature (φύσεως ἰσχὺν), and was in the very highest degree worthy (ἄξιος) of admiration (θαυμάσαι) in that respect. For by what dwells within (οἰκεία), not reinforced by earlier or later study, he was, at once, both the mightiest judge (βουλῆς κράτιστος) of the immediate present and the best prophet (ἄριστος εἰκαστής) of what would happen in the most distant future.... To sum up all in a word, by the capability of his nature (φύσεως μὲν δυνάμει) and yet with briefest practice (μελέτης δὲ βραχύτητι), he proved himself the most excellent (κράτιστος) at improvising (αὐτοσχεδιάζειν) in matters of need (τὰ δέοντα) [i.e., emergencies].⁷⁷⁰

According to Thucydides, Artaxerxes found Themistocles worthy of his great reputation after the king gave Themistocles a year to acclimate to the language and customs of the Achaemenid Empire. Why was this noble and good Athenian (κάλος κάγαθός) acclimating to Achaemenid customs? Would the Athenians not want such a man in Athens, keeping him safe in the Acropolis as a source of enormous benefit to the *polis* (as Socrates mused previously)? Apparently, the prior Athenians did not know their own good fortune, since they ostracized him, forced him into exile, and were later persuaded by the Lacedaemonians that he colluded with Pausanias, dealing in a treasonous way with the Achaemenid Empire. While we must acknowledge that political malice can motivate some charges, both Thucydides and Herodotus recount stories of a duplicitous man, who curried favor with the Achaemenid King in case of future trouble in Athens.⁷⁷¹ We need not

⁷⁷⁰ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.138.3. Translation modified. Although Thucydides uses his own idiosyncratic diction, the framing of the discourse broadly aligns with the terms in the *Meno*, even if Thucydides' conclusion seems to differ. Thucydides takes for granted that Themistocles was an impressive man because of the strength of his nature (φύσεως), explicitly noting his ability to improvise without prior instruction and only minimal practice. Even though Thucydides takes for granted that Themistocles was who he was by nature, this conclusion raises an interesting question about the implication of Socrates' choice. If Thucydides' perspective on Themistocles were broadly representative of what most people believed about Themistocles, then Themistocles would obviously be a terrible example of someone who would be a good teacher of *arete*. In fact, if Socrates does agree that he is a noble and good Athenian (κάλος κάγαθός), which is currently under consideration, then he would be an even better counterexample *against* the teachability of *arete*.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid., 1.137. 4. Herodotus, *The Histories*, 8.109.

take historical testimony as gospel, but such an ambivalent account of Themistocles' life inevitably raises some questions about the sense of his "goodness." Thucydides and Herodotus serve as sufficient sources of both positive and negative testimony about a man who showed extraordinary influence, cunning, and foresight yet whose life ended in an unfortunate way (condemned and exiled from his homeland).⁷⁷²

But what insight may we glean into Socrates' judgment about the man Themistocles—either Xenophon's or Plato's Socrates? Both Socrates allude to his positive reputation throughout Athens and Greece alike. Between the two, Xenophon's Socrates presents a more neutral judgement towards Themistocles. In his most critical take, Xenophon's Socrates semi-playfully compares Themistocles (and notably Pericles also) to the sirens, explaining to his interlocutor Critobulus how Themistocles won the love of Athens: "Not by spells: no, no; but by hanging some good amulet about her."⁷⁷³ This comparison between the sirens charming of Odysseus to Themistocles' charming of Athens hints at some potential uncertainty about Themistocles' benefit to Athens. Just as the sirens tried to lure Odysseus to his death, enchanting him with sweet words about his glory (κύδος) among the Achaeans, so too, if the image holds, would Themistocles' enchantment of Athens draw the *polis* towards its doom. However, in Xenophon's *Symposium*, we find a more complimentary account of Themistocles' relationship to Greece. Socrates counsels Callias, suggesting a way to win his lover Autolycus' honor (τιμή) through an exhibition of his might (κράτιστος). With this end in view, Socrates advises, "If, then, you would be in his good graces (ἀρέσκειν), you must try to examine (σκεπτέον) what sort of knowledge (ποῖα ἐπιστάμενος) it was that made Themistocles fit (ικανός) to give Greece freedom (ἐλευθεροῦν)..."⁷⁷⁴ While the sense of the phrase "to give Greece freedom" is vague, we might relate it to his efforts during the war against the Achaemenid Empire especially at the battle of Salamis., for which he earned considerable honor.⁷⁷⁵ Themistocles did participate in Athenian politics, but the testimony largely

⁷⁷² For an overview of Themistocles' political life, see Nails, *The People of Plato*, 279-281. Hornblower et. Al, "Themistocles" in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 1454-1455. For Themistocles' exploits within Herodotus' account, see also Herodotus, *The Histories*, 7.143-144,173; 8.4-5, 19, 22-23, 57-63, 75, 79-80, 83, 85, 92, 108-112, 123-125; 9.98. For Thucydides, see Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.73.2, 1.91.1-7, 1.93.1-8; 1.135-138. Plutarch, "Themistocles" in *Lives*, 2-92.

⁷⁷³ Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2.6.13. The Translator glosses this idiom to mean "not by [Themistocles'] words, but by protecting Athens with ships and fortification." Other references to Themistocles in the *Memorabilia* occur at 3.6.2 (as someone whose fame extends throughout Greece and foreign lands) and at 4.2.2 (as an example of a great leader).

⁷⁷⁴ Xenophon, *Symposium*, 8.39. Translation modified.

⁷⁷⁵ Herodotus gives an account of Themistocles' counsel among the other Greek commanders prior to the battle of Salamis (8.79-85). Notably, Aristides is present as well. After the war, Themistocles apparently returned with an

grounds his positive reputation in his cunning and success during the Graeco-Persian Wars. Let us turn now to some comments from Plato's Socrates before tying all the testimony together.

Besides in *Meno*, Themistocles' name appears also in the *Republic* and in *Gorgias*.⁷⁷⁶ In both contexts, we can interpret his introduction as a part of a broader consideration of Athenian *arete* and the human good. In the beginning of the *Republic*, Socrates discusses with Cephalus his experience with growing old. He asks Cephalus if Cephalus thinks growing old has been easier for him because of his wealth, and Cephalus responds with the following story about Themistocles:

When someone from Seriphus insulted [Themistocles] by saying that his high reputation (εὐδοκμοῖ) was due to his *polis* and not to himself, he replied that, had he been a Seriphian, he wouldn't be famous (ὀνομαστός), but neither would the other even if he had been an Athenian.⁷⁷⁷

Cephalus tells this story to bolster his claim that wealth alone does not make old age easy to bear, since, according to his analogical reasoning, the reasonable person (ὁ ἐπιεικῆς) would not bear old age in poverty easily (ῥαδίως), nor would the unreasonable person (ὁ μὴ ἐπιεικῆς) bear old age with wealth contentedly (εὐκόλως). Cephalus' reasoning harmonizes with our prior analyses of wealth as an emergent measure of *arete*. Wealth alone does not make a person good. However, Cephalus' story about Themistocles conveys another insight as well, which might help us in our analysis of Themistocles. In one sense, we can interpret Themistocles' retort to the Seriphian as an expression of the weight of the communal horizon. Indeed, Themistocles would not be famous, or "named" (ὀνομαστός), if he had not been born an Athenian. His reputation as a noble and good Athenian depends upon his circumstantial dwelling in Athens. And yet, Themistocles' pithy retort also touches upon a thread which we have followed through Socrates' many exhortations of his interlocutors. Themistocles claims to have made his own unique contribution to the communal pursuit of the human good in Athens, a unique contribution which his Seriphian antagonist could not make. The communal horizon does not simply subsume the individuality of each constituent,

outstanding reputation for valor during the war throughout Greece, receiving exceptional honor and gifts from the Lacedaemonians (8.123-125).

⁷⁷⁶ See Plato, *Republic*, 329e. A very similar version of this story about Themistocles appears in Herodotus, *The Histories*, 8.125. Themistocles also appears in three of the spurious, pseudo-Platonic dialogues: *Theages*, 126a; *Axiochus*, 368d; and *On Virtue*, 376c-377d. Of the three dialogues, his reference in *Axiochus* is most germane. Therein, Socrates points out to Axiochus the misery of politics, questioning how anyone could live well in that kind of life, and he includes Themistocles as one of several examples of the unfortunate lives of politicians. Socrates asks, "How could anyone be happy living for the masses, when he is whistled for and lashed, like the electorate's pet horse, driven from office, jeered, fined, and killed?"

⁷⁷⁷ Plato, *Republic*, 329e-330a.

nor can any constituent pursue the human good outside of a horizon. Throughout our analysis, we have identified Socratic philosophical practice as an expression of the dialectical tension between the (Athenian) communal horizon and the individual (Socrates). For better or worse, Themistocles has exerted considerable influence over the Athenian pursuit of the human good, and his introduction into the dialogue signals both the gravity of his personal contribution to Athens and the need for its examination. In the *Gorgias*, we encounter such an examination of Themistocles' contribution.

A considerable portion of Socrates' engagement with his interlocutors in the *Gorgias* concerns the relationship between oratory and the *polis*. This relationship undergirds the later discussion of several well-known noble and good (καλοὶ καγαθοί) Athenians including, notably, Themistocles and Pericles. During a segment of his inquiry into the purpose of oratory with Callicles, Socrates asks:

Do you think that orators always speak with regard to what's best (τὸ βέλτιστον)? Do they always set their sights on making the citizens (οἱ πολῖται) as good as possible (ὡς βέλτιστοι) through their speeches (λόγους)? Or are they, too, bent upon the gratification (χαρίζεσθαι) of the citizens (τοῖς πολίταις), and, neglecting (ὀλιγοροῦντες) the common (τοῦ κοινού) [good] for the sake of their own private (τοῦ ἰδίου) [good], do they treat the people like children (παισὶ), their sole attempt being to gratify them?⁷⁷⁸

These questions reflect an idiosyncratically Socratic turn to *arete* and the human good, which resonates with similar concerns in the *Meno*. The implicit expectation for orators to benefit their speakers mirrors the discourse in the *Meno* about the expectation for leaders/politicians to benefit their constituents. In fact, as the conversation progresses, it becomes evident that the "orators" and the leaders/politicians refer to the same people. When Socrates asks Callicles whether he knows any orators who speak out of a concern for making the citizens (πολῖται) as good as possible (ὡς βέλτιστοι), Callicles asks Socrates about the good man (ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός) Themistocles along with Cimon, Miltiades, and Pericles. Callicles' casual reference to Themistocles as a good man (ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός) during a discussion of good orators leads us into similar issues of attribution to the ones that we found in our analysis previously. A good orator may not be a good person, especially when the orator gratifies the citizens (πολῖται) like children (παῖδες). And as we might expect, Socrates objects to Callicles' examples. "Yes, Callicles, if the *arete* you were speaking of earlier, the filling

⁷⁷⁸ Plato, *Gorgias*, 502e-503a. Translation modified.

up of desires (ἐπιθυμία), both one's own and those of others, is the true kind."⁷⁷⁹ When Socrates mentions *arete*, it could seem like a non-sequitur. However, our analysis in the *Meno* has followed two threads which provide a broader context for understanding the reasoning underlying Socrates' response in the *Gorgias*.

There are two questions which we have asked explicitly since Chapter III, but in another sense, since the beginning of our inquiry: What should lead the soul? And who should lead the *polis*? We have treated these questions as interrelated. The person whose soul is led properly should lead the *polis*, since the benefit of their well-constituted soul will cause that person's actions to benefit the constituents of the *polis*. Socrates presented this line of reasoning to Meno during his argument for the identification of dialectical reasoning with *arete*. Socrates does not make the same argument to Callicles as he does to Meno, but we can see how the underlying reasoning about the interrelatedness of what should lead the soul and who should lead the *polis* seems to inform his objection to Callicles' examples of good orators, who are all involved in Athenian politics to various degrees. And Socrates explicitly reckons with the question concerning the purpose of politics during his discussion with Callicles as a part of a broader examination of the aforementioned "politicians," whom we might also call noble and good Athenians. Later in their discussion, Socrates asks, "Haven't we agreed many times already that this [i.e., being devoted to making the citizens as good as possible] is what a man active in politics should be doing?"⁷⁸⁰ We can understand this political question as a reiteration of his prior questioning about the purpose of oratory, which frames them both in terms of *arete* and the human good. With a fundamental concern for being a good person, we read Socrates' examination of the intersection between politics and oratory as a part of a larger engagement with the Athenian communal horizon. And it is within this purview that Themistocles appears in the discourse. Callicles calls him a "good man" (ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός), and even in Caephalus' story, the Seriphian acknowledge his good reputation (εὐδόκιμος). And yet, according to the purpose of oratory/politics as Socrates presents them, his contribution to the Athenian pursuit of *arete* comes under scrutiny. To put the matter plainly: who among the Athenians benefited from Themistocles' political activity? And if most Athenians did not benefit, then in what sense is Themistocles a good man (ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός)?

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid., 503c.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid., 515c.

In spite of Socrates' criticisms of Callicles' examples of good orators/politicians, Callicles remains unconvinced, insisting that, at the very least, those men (Themistocles, Cimon, Miltiades, and Pericles) were better politicians than the ones at present.⁷⁸¹ When we consider Callicles' insistence about the superiority of the prior politicians together with Anytus' high esteem for them and his assessment of who corrupts the *polis*, we find a confusing image of the Athenian communal horizon. According to Callicles, many good men led Athens, but then, somehow, worse men than they became leaders of the *polis*. Anytus, who represents a part of the latter group, clearly does not agree, since he asserted that any (current) noble and good Athenian would make Meno a good person.⁷⁸² However, Anytus also recognizes a threat to the good of Athens: the sophists who corrupt and disgrace their students. When we frame the matter in this way and pair it with our overarching account of Socratic philosophical practice, we can account for the conflict between Socrates and Anytus as a dispute over the Athenian measure of *arete* and the human good. Socrates examines and levies criticisms against conventional understandings of both ordinary and extraordinary affairs in the Athenian *polis*. In his examination of the noble and good Athenians, we can see him directly undermine the so-called "good" of Athens, insofar as these men represent Athenian manifestations of their communal pursuit of *arete* and the human good. To those who believe in the ideal which the noble and good Athenians of the past represent (like Anytus), Socrates does "corrupt" and "disgrace" anyone who believes his reasoning, but to us, Socratic philosophical practice appears to be one of the few activities that could have saved Athens. It is not when something is good, beneficial, healthy, and strong that it falls apart and decays, but rather the appearance of goodness (and everything that goes along with it) can hide an underlying sickness. Before we move on, let us evaluate a more Socratic account of what undermines the good of Athens.

Socrates does not agree with Callicles that the more recent generation of politicians are responsible for the ailing *polis*. To illustrate his point, Socrates develops an intriguing image of the development of illness in the body as an analogue to the circumstance in the *polis*. He notices a tendency of people who indulge their appetites and becomes sick as a result of their over-indulgence to blame those who point out potential causes of their sickness once its symptoms begin to show themselves, and he compares this circumstance to the *polis* whose leaders indulge the

⁷⁸¹ Ibid., 517a-b.

⁷⁸² Plato, *Meno*, 92e.

appetites of its constituents, making the *polis* sick as a result, and then the *polis* blames those who point out the potential causes of that sickness.⁷⁸³ “So, when that fit of sickness (ἀσθενείας) comes on, they’ll blame (αἰτιάσονται) their advisers (συμβούλους) of the moment and sing the praises of Themistocles and Cimon and Pericles, the ones who are to blame for their ills (τοὺς αἰτίους τῶν κακῶν).”⁷⁸⁴ We might question the propriety of Socrates’ image, doubting the sufficiency of the likeness between two extraordinarily complex systems (i.e., the body and a *polis*). And yet, we can nonetheless interpret one consequence of Socrates’ analogical reasoning as a justification for scrutinizing Themistocles’ contribution to the communal pursuit of *arete* and the human good in Athens. The assumptions underlying the Athenian esteem for Themistocles’ status as a noble and good man might also be to blame for the alleged “corruption” of the Athenian constituency. As we pointed out during our analysis of Anytus’ condemnation of the sophists, people who are uncertain about how to be good are the ones who would pursue the instruction of teachers who profess to make people good. If most Athenians were good people already, then the sophists would not have anything to offer them. Moreover, this polarizing sense of either being a good or wretched person does not even adequately explain what is at issue in Socrates’ and Anytus’ conversation about the teachers of *arete*. Themistocles shows us one example of the provisional and ongoing character of the communal pursuit of *arete* and the human good because of his simultaneous reputation as a noble and good Athenian *and* as someone responsible for the ills (αἴτιος τὰ κακά) of Athens according to Socrates. Socrates chooses him wisely too, even if Themistocles’ selection for scrutiny means risking the provisional measure of *arete* that his actions established in Athens.

Not only does the general esteem for noble and good Athenians like Themistocles potentially imply a naïve sense of *arete* and the human good, but these figures even, at times, undermine their own contributions to the *polis*. In a revealing observation, Socrates remarks on a tendency of politicians, which holds true for both the earlier ones and his contemporaries. They “resent it (ἀγανακτούντων) and complain indignantly (σχετλιαζόντων) that they’re suffering terrible things” whenever their *polis* holds them accountable for their injustice.⁷⁸⁵ For the politicians claim that “they’ve done many good things (ἀγαθὰ) for the *polis*, and so they’re being unjustly (ἀδίκως) brought to ruin by [being held accountable]....”⁷⁸⁶ According to Socrates’

⁷⁸³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 517d-518e.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 519a.

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 519b.

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

reasoning, it is impossible for the leaders of the *polis* to be harmed by their constituency, if those leaders benefited their *polis* as much as their claim to do “many good things” (ἀγαθὰ) implies. For if these leaders benefited the *polis*, then the *polis* would have no reason to commit an injustice against its benefactor. On the other hand, if the *polis* did not benefit from these leaders, then their claim to do many good things for the *polis* carries no weight. In a less than surprising transition, Socrates proceeds to reason similarly about the sophists, claiming:

Orators and sophists are the only people not in a position to charge the one whom they themselves educate (παιδεύουσιν) with being wicked (πονηρόν) to them, or else they simultaneously accuse themselves as well, by this same argument, of having entirely failed to benefit (ὠφελήκασιν) those whom they say they benefit (ὠφελεῖν).⁷⁸⁷

Socrates’ assumption that “orators,” whom we understand contextually as “politicians,” sounds odd on the surface. Do politicians/orators really educate people in the same way as the teacher? And yet! That very question is the reason for our intertextual analysis. According to Anytus, the noble and good Athenians (οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι καλοὶ κἀγαθοί)—who are represented in their discussion by politicians (πολιτικοί)—are the genuine teachers of *arete*, even if they do not claim to be teachers nor do they accept any students. We cannot ignore the abundance of signs. Even if it may have seemed absurd for Meno to suggest that being a leader of the *polis* could suffice as a measure of *arete*, we now see that Meno may have expressed a ubiquitous assumption. Moreover, Socrates’ scrutiny of these Athenian leaders, whom many people in and outside of Athens regard so highly, may represent a meagre yet vital counterforce within the Athenian *polis*. Perhaps these men have established a robust measure of *arete* for Athens. If so, then they will stand up to scrutiny. But if not, their measure poses a threat to the communal pursuit of *arete* and the human good, to which, ironically, Socrates (and only a few others) has devoted his life.

We began our intertextual analysis of Themistocles on the basis of many assumptions. The leaders of the *polis*/the politicians, who are the noble and good ones, should serve the interest of the *polis*. That is, they should aim to make the constituency “as good as possible.” Furthermore, we began to analyze Themistocles because of Anytus’ suggestion that the noble and good Athenians are the genuine teachers of *arete*. And, in a sense, this assertion carries weight. From our intertextual analysis, we discovered many indications that people use the noble and good ones as a measure of *arete* and the human good. Their actions inform the communal horizon in which

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid., 520b. Translation modified.

they and their fellow citizens try to become good people. And yet, because of Socratic philosophical practice, we find some reasons to question the measure of *arete* which Themistocles (and others) establish. When Anytus calls Themistocles “best of all” (πάντων μάλιστα), his words betray him more than they praise Themistocles. Beyond his tactical contributions during the Greco-Persian Wars, it is difficult to determine what “good” Themistocles did for Athens. He may have been a hero, but does such a designation also imply that he was good? If his benefit to the *polis* was meagre, then we must question in what way he ought to be called a noble and good Athenian. Furthermore, his son Cleophantus’ failure to become a good and wise man (άνηρ άγαθός και σοφός) like Themistocles also raises several questions about Themistocles.⁷⁸⁸ Was Themistocles a noble and good Athenian, and if so, then why did he not make his son one as well? And if Themistocles was not a noble and good Athenian but Cleophantus nonetheless grew up in Athens, then why did some other noble and good Athenian not teach him how to be good? Is it because *arete* cannot be taught? A consideration of Themistocles’ life together with the education of his son presents a direct challenge to Anytus’ claim that any noble and good Athenian could make Meno (or anyone else) good. Let us turn now to Socrates’ next example.

Aristides

After Themistocles, Socrates considers another noble and good Athenian: Aristides. He asks, “do you not agree that [Aristides] was good (άγαθόν)?”⁷⁸⁹ Anytus agrees emphatically: “I certainly do, in every way (έγωγε, πάντως δήπου).”⁷⁹⁰ And yet, Socrates asks Anytus:

Then did [Aristides] too not give his son, Lysimachus, the finest (κάλλιστα) education of the Athenians, in all those things for which he had teachers (διδασκάλων), and does he seem to you to have made him a better (βελτίω) man than anyone else? For you, I suppose, have been in his company (συγγέγονας), and see (όρᾶς) what sort of man he is.⁷⁹¹

We need not hear in Socrates’ comments about Lysimachus the insinuation of a negative judgment about him despite their suggestive tone in this context. However, Socrates’ subversive repetition of a word that Anytus previously used might raise additional doubt about Anytus’ prior claim to care about his associates. Socrates repeats the word “συγγέγονας,” to associate with or to be in the

⁷⁸⁸ The *Meno* is the primary source of testimony about Cleophantus. See Nails, *The People of Plato*, 99, 335.

⁷⁸⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 94a.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid., 94a-b.

company of someone, which is the same word that Anytus used when he claimed never to associate (συγγέγονα) with any sophists nor to allow any of his people to do so either.⁷⁹² When Anytus first made this claim, we were troubled by the dissonance between it and his guest-friendship with Meno, whom Gorgias the sophist instructed. Now we encounter another one of Anytus' associates, and after our subsequent analysis of Lysimachus, we will be able to determine whether Anytus measures up to his alleged care for the good of his associates (among whom Lysimachus is included). We will analyze Lysimachus' appearance in the *Laches* more thoroughly after our consideration of Aristides; however, as an anticipatory note, we will simply observe the introductory framing of the dialogue according to Lysimachus. Lysimachus claims to search with his friend Melesias (who is the son of the noble and good Athenian Thucydides) for the best way to raise their sons. We previously concluded that Anytus did not recognize some nebulous, yet necessary, deficiency in the *polis* which would lead his fellow Athenians to pursue the instruction of the sophists. People who *are* good and who know how to make others good are *not* the ones who would seek instruction from the self-professed teachers of *arete* (i.e., the sophists). The fact that Lysimachus and Melesias do not know to whom they should turn—especially when they are the sons of two noble and good Athenians—attests again to the superficiality of Anytus' consideration of the problem of *arete* and the human good. No matter whether we consider Lysimachus as the son of Aristides I or as the father of Aristides II, even Anytus' own associate does not seem to agree with Anytus' confidence in the ability of “any noble and good Athenian” to make people good. Our recognition of these subtle slights against Anytus will serve us later in our interpretation of his hostile withdrawal from the dialogue. For now, let us move on to our examination of Aristides himself so that we can see what his designation as a noble and good Athenian might suggest to us.

In contrast to his contemporary Themistocles, the reputation of Aristides aligns more closely with what we might expect of a “noble and good” Athenian.⁷⁹³ Herodotus describes him as “the best man (ἄριστον ἄνδρα) in Athens and most just (δικαιότατον)” and a bitter enemy of Themistocles.⁷⁹⁴ He illustrates Aristides' character during a private speech with Themistocles, in which Aristides insists that “the rivalry between us should only be about which of us will do

⁷⁹² Ibid., 92b.

⁷⁹³ For an overview of Aristides' life, see Nails, *The People of Plato*, 47-49. Hornblower et. Al, “Aristides” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 154. See also Plutarch, “Aristides” in *Lives*, 210-300.

⁷⁹⁴ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 8.79.1; 8.95.

(ἐργάσεται) our country more good (πλέω ἀγαθὰ)—that goes not just for now, but for any other occasion too.”⁷⁹⁵ Despite earning a reputation for righteousness so great that writers in posterity referred to him as “Aristides the just,” Aristides was also ostracized from Athens. He was, however, recalled to help fight on behalf of Greece during the Greco-Persian Wars.⁷⁹⁶ Ostracism functioned as a political measure to protect the *polis* from men who posed a real or perceived threat to the good of the *polis*, but it alone does not reliably indicate whether someone is a good or bad person. Political expedience can also partially explain why someone might have been ostracized. We might be tempted to interpret Aristides’ ostracism, like that of Themistocles, as a reason to doubt his *arete*. And yet, we must keep in mind that it was not the mere fact of Themistocles’ ostracism that led us to question his reputation as a noble and good man. His ostracism was but one sign which reflected poorly on him within our broader examination of the testimony about Themistocles. So far, our cursory consideration of Herodotus’ and Demosthenes’ testimony reflects positively on Aristides albeit in a vague way. If their testimony were somehow sufficient to guarantee for us that Aristides (unlike Themistocles) lived up to his reputation as a noble and good Athenian, we still do not have any greater sense of what being a good person might entail. Moreover, we have learned even less about the possibility for this obscure “goodness” to be taught. As a part of our analysis of Themistocles, we examined Socrates’ reasoning about him in the *Gorgias*, and Aristides appears in that dialogue as well. However, his appearance takes place in a very different part of Socrates’ reasoning than the one in which Themistocles (and Pericles) appeared.

Towards the conclusion of *Gorgias*, Socrates tells Callicles an account (λόγος), which he thinks Callicles will consider a mere story (μῦθος), about what happens to humans when they die.⁷⁹⁷ A full analysis of Socrates’ speech would require a too substantial and extended departure from our analysis, so we will only consider the broad strokes which serve as a prelude to Aristides’ introduction. Socrates claims (based on what he has heard) that, after death, the soul separates from the body, and the soul goes before Rhadamanthus for judgment.⁷⁹⁸ Those who can become better

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid., 8.79.3.

⁷⁹⁶ Concerning his ostracism and return, see Demosthenes, *Against Aristogiton* 2, 6. Herodotus also mentions Aristides’ ostracism and tacitly corroborates his return insofar as his service during combat implies his presence post-exile. Herodotus, *The Histories*, 8.79.1-4.

⁷⁹⁷ Plato, *Gorgias*, 523a.

⁷⁹⁸ A Cretan king who was often included in Greek mythology as a judge of the dead. See Hornblower et. Al, “Rhadamanthys” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 1274.

(βελτίων) by punishment pay their dues, and they are benefited (ὠφελοῦμενοί) because of it.⁷⁹⁹ On the other hand, those who are incurable receive punishment for the benefit of others as warnings. Socrates supposes that most of the irredeemably wicked individuals come from those who ruled: tyrants, kings, potentates, and those active in the affairs of the *polis*.⁸⁰⁰ Despite most of the irredeemably wicked individuals being rulers, Socrates insists that good men (ἀγαθοί ἄνδρες) can still turn up among the powerful, and when they do, they “deserve (ἄξιον) to be enthusiastically admired (ἄγασθαι).”⁸⁰¹ For such men have great power (“ἐν μεγάλῃ ἐξουσίᾳ”) to commit injustice, and yet they live justly (“δικαίως διαβιῶναι”) nonetheless. Although they are few, such men do exist according to Socrates, men who are “...noble and good (καλοὶ καγαθοί) in that *arete* of justly (δικαίως) conducting (διαχειρίζειν) whatever is entrusted (ἐπιτρέπη) to them. One of these, Aristides the son of Lysimachus, has come to be held in high regard (ἐλλόγιμος) indeed, even among the rest of the Greeks.”⁸⁰² The framing of this praise, that is, as a part of Socrates’ account/story about what happens after death, might tempt us to hear it as a judgment about Aristides’ *arete* as a measure of the human good. We might be tempted to conclude that Socrates praises Aristides because he is one of few men who was both good *and* ruled Athens. And yet, we really must resist this temptation! Despite our own acknowledgment of Aristides’ noble reputation (in and outside of the Platonic texts) and Socrates’ ostensive praise of him here, which the prior criticisms of Themistocles (and Pericles) intensify, we nevertheless can identify a familiar ambiguity between the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) and the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός). According to Socrates, the *arete*, for which Aristides has come to be held in high regard (ἐλλόγιμος), is that by which a person conducts, i.e., takes it into their own hands (διαχειρίζειν), affairs justly (δικαίως). Of course, we can imagine circumstances in which such behavior would take place outside of political activity (i.e., the management of the *polis*), but Socrates does praise Aristides during his reflection on rulers’ tendency towards wickedness/injustice. There is a genuine ambiguity here about Aristides’ status as a noble and good man, who conducted himself justly “throughout his life,” or a noble and good citizen/ruler, who conducted himself justly in the affairs of the *polis*.

⁷⁹⁹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 525b.

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁰¹ Ibid., 526a.

⁸⁰² Ibid., 526a-b. Translation modified

There seems to be a parallel between the ambiguous status of Aristides in the *Gorgias* and the ambiguity which we interpret as the crux of the dispute between Socrates and Anytus in the *Meno*. We understood Anytus' objection to Socrates' framing of the question about the teachers of *arete* as an objection to the teachers of the technical know-how of citizenship (πολιτική τέχνη), i.e., the sophists, a technical know-how which purports to make someone a good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης). Insofar as we have primarily focused our analysis on *arete* and the human good, we sympathized with Anytus' objection even if his amateurish proficiency in the navigation of the inquiry reflected poorly on his own pursuit of *arete* and the human good (and so his decision to enter politics). If we grant Socrates' assumptions about the purpose of politics, it does not make much sense for Anytus to display such a rudimentary understanding of the problems about *arete* and the human good, a purview within which the search for teachers of *arete* falls. Even so, our own analysis led us to conclude similarly that the technical know-how of citizenship (or any technical know-how) would not be sufficient to make a person good, since a technical know-how teaches a person how to be good *at* something but not how to be good simply. Our analysis of Aristides' inclusion in the *Meno* and the *Gorgias* seems to lead us to question the significance of Aristides as a noble and good Athenian but not in the naïve sense, which might conclude he was “actually” bad despite having a reputation as a noble and good Athenian. What “made” Aristides a noble and good Athenian? We can understand this question in two ways. First, what is the measure of *arete* which “made” him noble and good (κάλος ἀγαθός)? The answer to this question is open. His just conduct in a position of power accounts for his reputation as a good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης), but does just conduct in a position of power suffice as a measure of a good person too? It may be necessary without being sufficient. Second, what is responsible for making Aristides a noble and good Athenian? Was he born that way, did someone teach him, or was it some other way? This question reiterates the one *Meno* asked in the beginning of the part of the text which we analyzed in Chapter III. It is the question which led Socrates to express his uncertainty about the teachers of *arete*. The openness of this question poses a challenge to Anytus' response as well. He claimed that noble and good Athenians make others good, and they became noble and good by learning from those who were noble and good before them.⁸⁰³ And yet, even in the case of Aristides, whose reputation as a “good man” is remarkably consistent, it is unclear *how* he became noble and good. If it were possible to teach someone how to be a good person, then we

⁸⁰³ Plato, *Meno*, 92e-93a.

could reasonably expect that Aristides would have taught his son Lysimachus to be “noble and good” like himself.⁸⁰⁴ But did he succeed? What sort of man was Lysimachus?

Just as in the case of Themistocles’ son, Cleophantus, the testimony about Aristides’ son, Lysimachus, is rather sparse compared to the testimony about his father. Nevertheless, Lysimachus himself (rather than just his name) does appear in *Laches*. The dialogue begins with Lysimachus speaking to Nicias and Laches, to whom he expresses his and his friend Melesias’ concern about the futures of their respective sons.⁸⁰⁵ He explains:

...[E]ach of us has a great many noble deeds (καλὰ ἔργα) to tell the young men about his own father, things they achieved both in war and in peace in their management (διοικοῦντες) of the affairs both of their allies and of the *polis* here. But neither of us has a word to say about his own accomplishments (ἔργα). This is what shames (ὑπαισχυνόμεθά) us in front of them, and we blame (αἰτιώμεθα) our fathers for allowing us to take things easy (τροφῶν) when we were growing up, while they were busy with other people’s affairs (πράγματα). And we point these same things out to the young people here, saying that if they are careless (ἀμελήσουσιν) of themselves and not persuaded (μὴ πείσονται) by us, they will turn out to be nobodies (ἀκλεεῖς), but if they are diligent in their care (ἐπιμελήσονται), perhaps they may become worthy (ἄξιοι) of the names they bear. Now the boys promise to be persuaded (πείσεσθαι) [i.e., be obedient], so we examine (σκοποῦμεν) this [question]: what form of instruction (μαθόντες) or practice (ἐπιτηδεύσαντες) would make them turn out best (ἄριστοι).⁸⁰⁶

In Lysimachus’ speech, we find the repetition of many themes which we have considered throughout our analysis of the *Meno* and, more recently, in our analysis of Aristides in the *Gorgias*. Lysimachus attests to what we already know of his father, Aristides. Aristides earned his reputation for his many noble deeds (καλὰ ἔργα)—especially during the Graeco-Persian Wars and in the management of the *polis*. But at the same time, we must take note of the many signs of anxiety about *arete* and the human good, which we would not expect to see, if Anytus’ claim about the noble and good (καλοὶ κάγαθοί) Athenians as teachers of *arete* were true. Most notably, Lysimachus tacitly introduces the same distinction which has repeatedly sprouted up throughout our intertextual analyses. On the one hand, Lysimachus mostly appears to praise his father for his

⁸⁰⁴ For the sake of clarity, it may be worth noting that “Aristides” (Aristides I) named one of his sons after his father, Lysimachus I. “Lysimachus” (Lysimachus II) is his son, who appears in the *Laches*.

⁸⁰⁵ Although we identified Nicias and Laches previously during our analysis of a passage from *Laches* in Chapter III, they are, for reference, two well-known Athenian generals. We should also note again that Lysimachus’ friend Melesias is the son of Thucydides, who is the final noble and good Athenian in this section of our analysis.

⁸⁰⁶ Plato, *Laches*, 179c-d. Translation modified.

noble *political* deeds, which, we can reasonably conclude, explains his well-established reputation as a good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης). And yet, at the end of Lysimachus' speech, he claims to search with Melesias for the way to make their sons turn out "best" (ἄριστοι). Does Lysimachus mean the best citizens (i.e., someone involved in political activity), which would entail the sort of noble deeds (καλὰ ἔργα) that Aristides accomplished, or does he mean the best men? We might also hear Lysimachus' concern for (and uncertainty about) raising his son as a subtle criticism of his father Aristides. If Lysimachus does not know how to make his son "good," then it seems unlikely that Aristides made Lysimachus "good." And if Aristides did not make Lysimachus "good," then we might begin to question Aristides' *arete*, if we recall Socrates' reasoning with Meno about dialectical reasoning. According to Socrates' argument, what is good is beneficial, and so the person who exhibits *arete*, i.e., the good person, benefits others. Of course, Aristides provided many human goods for his son Lysimachus, to which Socrates partially alluded with his reference to Lysimachus' fine education, but Socrates reasoned with Meno that human goods are not "good" (beneficial) without *arete*. And so, if Lysimachus does not know how to make his son good because his father did not successfully make him good, then we might ask: Was Aristides a good man (ἀγαθός) or just a good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης)? And was he even a good citizen? If we reflect on Socrates' understanding of the purpose of politics, i.e., to make the citizens as good as possible, then we might conclude Aristides failed to fulfill his political obligation insofar as he could not even make his own son good.

While we might find this reasoning seductive insofar as Socrates' reference to these noble and good Athenians in the *Meno* appears to contradict Anytus' claim that the noble and good Athenians teach *arete*, we should also acknowledge that Lysimachus' anxiety about raising his son simultaneously reflects positively on him and his father Aristides. It may seem underwhelming to give Lysimachus credit for recognizing the importance of raising his son to be the best person possible and his uncertainty about how to do so, but at the same time, our analysis in the *Meno* has primarily focused on two men whose care for *arete* and the human good does not even extend that far. Lysimachus' speech sounds almost paradoxical, when we interpret it through our ongoing analysis of *arete* and the human good. On the one hand, Lysimachus expresses his shame that he has accomplished no noble deeds during his life, which he can point out to his son, and this lack of accomplishment seems to imply that he has somehow failed to be a noble and good Athenian like his father. But, on the other hand, his concern for making his son the best man possible and

his uncertainty about how to do so implies a greater regard for *arete* and the human good than other men, like Meno and Anytus, who have become involved in the affairs of the *polis*. In comparison to his father, Lysimachus' relative anonymity and lack of political action could imply a personal failing. How could the son of such a noble and good man like Aristides—an Athenian hero—become a nobody (ἄκλεής)? But if we compare Lysimachus to Anytus, then Lysimachus suddenly seems to have fared much better. Whereas the Lysimachus of the *Laches* expresses a noble concern for the good of his son, Xenophon's Socrates condemns Anytus for neglecting his son, which, allegedly, resulted in him becoming a drunk.⁸⁰⁷

Lysimachus seems to be a decent man (or at least not a bad one), whose lack of distinction is only noteworthy because of his father's reputation. Notably, Aristides' and Lysimachus' respective accomplishment of noble deeds (καλὰ ἔργα) (or lack thereof) seems to differentiate these two men. This distinction draws attention to another decisive question at the heart of our examination of the noble and good Athenians. Political activity seems to undergird Themistocles' and Aristides' reputations as noble and good (καλοὶ κάγαθοί) Athenians. We suspect the same will hold for that of Pericles and Thucydides too. And yet, the critical assumption underlying each example is that the accomplishment of noble deeds (καλὰ ἔργα) in political activity (which, at the very least, involves war and the management of the *polis*) makes someone noble and good. We can connect much of Lysimachus' expression of shame with his lack of distinction in this domain, even if his speech also shows us signs of a man who is troubled by the question of the human good. And yet, our analysis of Themistocles and Aristides thus far has focused upon the ways in which noble deeds in politics may not suffice as measures of *arete* and the human good. We do not doubt that Themistocles accomplished some remarkable feats, and if we believe Herodotus' account, Themistocles played a central part in saving all of Greece (not just Athens) from destruction during the Graeco-Persian Wars. But was Themistocles a good person? Our analysis of his inclusion in the *Gorgias* left this question unanswered, even casting retrospective doubt on the benefit of his political activity to Athens. Furthermore, our analysis of Aristides' inclusion in the *Gorgias* did not come to a definite conclusion either despite Socrates' praise of Aristides. Aristides did not use his power to commit injustice, and Socrates gave him credit for this rare regard for justice. But

⁸⁰⁷ Assuming, of course, the truth of Socrates' speech. Xenophon, *Apologia*, 30-33. There may have been others reasons for such a negative depiction of Anytus' son other than providing a "factual" account, but it does not ultimately make a difference. The depiction of Anytus in the *Meno* sufficiently impresses upon us the image of a man who arrogantly believes he understands more about *arete* and the human good than he does.

again, does this suffice as a measure of *arete* and the human good? Is being a good person nothing more than not being bad when presented with the opportunity and means to do so? If we reflect on our analysis of Themistocles and Aristides thus far, we notice a twofold inadequacy of Anytus' response to Socrates' question about the teachers of *arete*. First of all, even if we assume that Themistocles and Aristides were good men, neither of them were able to "teach" their *arete* to their sons. Even Lysimachus, who, to us, seems to be unduly hard on himself, implies that he is a "nobody" in comparison to his father. But second, and more fundamentally, the noble and good Athenians of the past may have accomplished noble deeds, which had greater and lesser benefit to Athens, but their heroic political deeds do not "settle" the more basic human question about how to be a good person. Their designation as "noble and good" (καλοὶ καγαθοὶ) Athenians hides an equivocation between the measure of a good citizen (ἀγαθὸς πολίτης) and the measure of a good person (ἀγαθός). Their reputations for being good men seem to obscure a broader, communal uncertainty about *arete* and the human good

Pericles

We have analyzed Socrates' inclusion of Aristides for some time now, but in the *Meno*, Socrates passes hastily over Aristides before introducing Pericles. He asks, "And, if you want, there is Pericles, such a magnificently wise man (μεγαλοπρεπῶς σοφὸν ἄνδρα); do you know that he brought up two sons, Paralus and Xanthippus?"⁸⁰⁸ Anytus is, of course, well aware. And so Socrates continues:

[Pericles] certainly taught (ἐδίδαξεν) them, as you also know, to be no worse (χείρους) horsemen (ἵππεας) than any Athenian, and educated (ἐπαίδευσεν) them in music and gymnastics and everything else that could be had by technical know-how (τέχνης) to be inferior (χείρους) to no one; and did he not want to make them good men (ἀγαθοὺς ἄνδρας)? I would think he wanted to, but it was not something teachable (διδακτόν).⁸⁰⁹

Because of our prior analyses of technical know-how and our attention to the equivocation between the good citizen (ἀγαθὸς πολίτης) and the good person (ἀγαθός), we can draw cleaner divisions within Socrates' reasoning than we might otherwise. Pericles taught his sons to be good at everything about which they could be taught a technical know-how (τέχνη). As a result of their education, they became "no worse" than anyone else at these activities, which is to say, they were

⁸⁰⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 94b. Translation modified

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid.

good at them. And yet, despite the success of their education in the fields with discretely defined boundaries (e.g., horsemanship, music, and gymnastics)—about which a form of technical know-how (τέχνη) *can* be taught—Pericles did not teach them how to be good men (ἀγαθοί ἄνδρες). Why not? According to Anytus, noble and good Athenians make people good, but Pericles, whom many consider a noble and good Athenian, did not teach his own sons how to be good men. Socrates infers that he did not teach them because it cannot be taught. This conclusion does not depart from the conclusion which we reached in our prior analyses, but what else might the inclusion of Pericles and his sons add to the discussion. We must consider them as we did in the prior two cases so that we might become more attuned to other dimensions of the problems which the noble and good Athenians pose as teachers of *arete*.

Just as Aristides' just conduct earned him the epitaph "the just," Pericles' oratory prowess earned him similar fame, a proficiency which we find frequently emphasized in the Platonic dialogues.⁸¹⁰ Moreover, Pericles participated in Athenian politics for a notably long tenure, leading Athens for thirty years.⁸¹¹ As a result, he played a formative role in the direction of Athens, an example of which includes his persuasion of the Athenians to oppose peace with the Lacedaemonians. We know this conflict between Lacedaemon and Athens as the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides' testimony provides us with one of the more exhaustive accounts of this conflict, and in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides recounts many instances of Pericles' public service, beginning first with his service in the Athenian military before representing his proficiency as a speaker.⁸¹² With respect to Periclean oratory prowess, Thucydides provides us with two examples: once in the famous funeral oration and a second time when Pericles assuages his fellow Athenians' agitation over the hardship of the Peloponnesian War.⁸¹³ However, Thucydides' posthumous assessment of Pericles' approach to politics may offer us the most useful insight into Pericles for our present needs. Thucydides explains Pericles' position within Athens in the following way:

...Pericles, who owed his power (δυνατὸς) to his standing (ἀξιώματι) and recognized ability (γνώμη χρημάτων), having become transparently (διαφανῶς) incorruptible in the

⁸¹⁰ Plato, *Protagoras*, 329a; *Gorgias*, 455e; *Phaedrus*, 269a-270-a; *Menexenus*, 235e; *Symposium*, 215e. Implied in Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2.6.13 but with a negative implication.

⁸¹¹ Nails, *The People of Plato*, 225. Hornblower et. Al, "Pericles" in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 1107.

⁸¹² Regarding Pericles' military service, see Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.111-126.

⁸¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.35-46 (funeral oration); 2.60-64 (speech to restless Athenians after encountering the hardship of war).

highest degree (ἄδωρότατος), restrained the multitude freely (ἐλευθέρως), and led (ἤγε) them rather than was led (ἤγετο) by them; for he did not speak towards their gratification (ἡδονήν) on account of not procuring (κτώμενος) power (δύναμιν) from things which do not belong (ἐξ οὐ προσηκόντων) [i.e., through unjust means], but enjoyed such high esteem (ἀξιώσει) that he was able to anger (ὀργήν) them by contradiction (ἀντειπεῖν). At any rate, whenever he saw (αἴσθοιτό) them unwarrantably (καιρὸν) confident (θαρσοῦντας) and arrogant (ὑβρεῖ), his words would strike them down into fear; and on the other hand, when he saw them unreasonably (ἄλόγως) afraid, he would restore them to confidence (θαρσεῖν) again. And so Athens, though in speech (λόγῳ) a democracy, came to be ruled (ἀρχή) in deed (ἔργῳ) by its foremost man (πρώτου ἀνδρός).⁸¹⁴

Even though our analysis focuses on a Platonic text, Thucydides' account of Pericles emphasizes some dimensions of his tenure in Athenian politics which we have highlighted as a part of our own investigation of the *Meno*. For example, when we analyzed Socrates' account of the democratic soul in the *Republic* as a part of our development of the reasoning that may underlie his suspicion of Anytus, we considered the significance of the parallel between the constitution of the soul and the constitution of the *polis*. Taking our lead from Socrates' account, we reasoned about the risk posed by the democratic measures (i.e., freedom and equality) of the human good. Because these measures permit any thing pertaining to the soul to lead it, the soul risks being occupied by a strong desire (ἰσχυρά ἐπιθυμία), which cannot reliably lead the soul (and so a human being) beneficially. However, we also acknowledged that the permissive, democratic measures of the human good created a circumstance in which dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) could usurp rule over the soul, and because dialectical reasoning makes judgements about the good and beautiful, it could alter the measures of the good which allowed it to become ruler of the soul in the first place. We considered such a serendipitous takeover of the soul as a possible explanation for Socrates' coming to be in Athens. In Thucydides' account of Pericles, we find some surprising parallels. According to Thucydides, Pericles led Athens freely (ἐλευθέρως), and he did not cater to the desires (ἡδοναί) of the constituents, angering them if necessary. Thucydides even goes so far as to claim that Athens was only a nominal democracy (i.e., only in speech (λόγος)) under Pericles, and this sentiment could mirror our analysis of the origin of someone like Socrates in a democratic *polis*. Based upon Thucydides' laudatory account alone, we might wonder whether Pericles also possessed dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) like Socrates. We ought to keep this temptation in mind as we continue our

⁸¹⁴ Ibid., 2.65.8-9. Translation modified.

examination of Pericles. Let us turn now to Socrates' references to Pericles, and see how Pericles stands up to Socratic examination.

Socrates never disputes Pericles' oratory prowess, but his consideration of Pericles draws attention to some assumptions underlying Athenian *arete* and their pursuit of the human good. Just as we found during our analyses of Themistocles and Aristides, Socrates' reflections on Pericles often come in the midst of political discourses. In *Protagoras*, Socrates explains to Protagoras why he had assumed that *arete* could not be taught. As we consider this part of the conversation, we should notice the incremental entanglement of the good person with the good citizen. Socrates observes that the Athenians allow anyone to advise (βουλευσασθαι) on matters of *polis* management (διοικήσεως), and he reasons that they allow it because *arete* cannot be taught.⁸¹⁵ This sense of *arete* resonates with the *arete* that Socrates mentioned to Anytus in the *Meno*, which we interpreted as the *arete* of the good citizen.⁸¹⁶ However, Socrates continues his reasoning, describing what occurs in private life as well:

Public life aside, the same holds also in private (ιδίᾳ), where the wisest and best of our citizens (σοφώτατοι καὶ ἄριστοι τῶν πολιτῶν) are unable to transmit to others the *arete* that they possess. Look at Pericles, the father of these young men here. He gave them a fine education in everything that teachers can teach, but as for what he himself is really wise (σοφός) in, he neither teaches them that himself nor has anyone else teach them either.... I could mention a great many more, men who are good (ἀγαθοί) themselves but have never succeeded in making (ἐποίησαν) anyone else better (βελτίω), either of their own or of other families. And so, Protagoras, in view of these things, I am not led (οὐχ ἠγοῦμαι) [to believe that] *arete* is teachable (διδασκτὸν).⁸¹⁷

Initially, Socrates appears to speak straightforwardly about the *arete* of the good citizen who knows, among other things, how to manage the *polis* beautifully. It makes sense for Socrates to mention this *arete* because he is speaking with Protagoras, who teaches the technical know-how of citizenship (πολιτική τέχνη).⁸¹⁸ Due to the presence of Pericles' sons and the political context

⁸¹⁵ Plato, *Protagoras*, 319e. In *Protagoras*, unlike in *Meno*, Socrates eventually reaches the conclusion that *arete* might be teachable. The scope of our inquiry does not allow us to consider the contextual differences between the *Meno* and *Protagoras* which might lead these respective dialogues to different conclusions, even though it would be an interesting question for another study.

⁸¹⁶ Plato, *Meno*, 91a. "...[Meno] desires (ἐπιθυμεῖ) that wisdom (σοφίας) and *arete* by which people manage (διοικοῦσι) both households (οικίας) and *poleis* finely (καλῶς), and take care of (θεραπεύουσι) their own parents, and know how to receive and to send off both citizens (πολίτας) and foreigners (ξένους) hospitably, in a way worthy (ἀξίως) of a good man (ἀνδρὸς ἀγαθοῦ)."

⁸¹⁷ Plato, *Protagoras*, 319e-320b. Translation modified

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 319a.

of Socrates' comments, we can recognize the salience of Socrates' selection of Pericles as a good citizen who has earned a reputation as one of the wisest and best. And yet, we can pick out quite precisely the moment at which Socrates' speech becomes more ambiguous. Pericles and a great many others "are good (*ἀγαθοί*) themselves but have never succeeded in making (*ἐποίησαν*) anyone else better (*βελτίω*)." What would it mean for a good person to make someone "better"? Does Socrates merely speak in an abbreviated way? That is, the good citizens have never succeeded in making anyone else better at being a good citizen because the *arete* of the good citizen cannot be taught. Socrates' use of the comparative better (*βελτίων*) seems responsible for the difficulty. Better than whom? Has the good and wise Pericles failed to make his sons "better" than other Athenians at governance, for which Thucydides praised Pericles so highly? But their age makes it unlikely that they would have even had the opportunity to exhibit either their proficiency or deficiency. Pericles, for example, participated in Athenian politics for thirty years, which is longer than either Paralus or Xanthippus would have been alive in the *Protagoras*. They are, however, old enough to begin to assess whether they are better or worse *men* than other Athenians. While this assumption may offer a more convincing explanation for Socrates' use of the comparative, it does also create a pair of difficulties. First, if Paralus and Xanthippus are not better men than other Athenians, then it seems unlikely that they would be better citizens/politicians either. How could Paralus or Xanthippus be "worse" men yet better leaders of the *polis*? Although we have conceptually disambiguated the good citizen from the good person, we can nevertheless anticipate practical justifications for their entwinement. Second, in what sense was Pericles good, if he could not benefit his sons in, perhaps, the most important way? While some of his actions may have benefitted some Athenians, he still could not make his sons into good men. This failing is not an indictment of Pericles, but an interrogation of the measure of *arete* and the human good by which he earned his reputation as one of the wisest and best.

If we couple our prior uncertainties about the Periclean claim to *arete* with Socrates' examination of Pericles in the *Gorgias*, then we might understand his inclusion in that dialogue as another moment in Socrates' philosophical confrontation with *arete* and the human good in Athens. As we noted in our analysis of Themistocles, Socrates includes Pericles alongside Themistocles, Cimon, and Miltiades as examples of men whose reputation for being noble and good warrants greater scrutiny than Calicles is willing to exercise. Socrates fervently criticizes Pericles, commenting more extensively about his political activity than on Themistocles, Cimon,

or Miltiades. Socrates reports to have heard that “...Pericles made the Athenians idle (ἀργοὺς) and cowardly (δειλοὺς), chatterers (λάλους) and money-grubbers (φιλαργύρους), since he was the first to institute wages for them.”⁸¹⁹ Callicles dismisses this hearsay as the words of people with “cauliflower ears,” and Socrates does not insist on validating these rumors. However, he does point out that:

...at first Pericles had a good reputation (ἠὺδοκίμει), and when they were worse (χείρους), the Athenians never voted to convict him in any shameful deposition (αἰσχρὰν δίκην). But after he had turned them noble and good (καλοὶ κάγαθοί), near the end of his life, they voted to convict Pericles of embezzlement and came close to condemning him to death, because they thought he was wicked (πονηροῦ), evidently.⁸²⁰

After hearing Socrates mention these events, Callicles asks Socrates if he thinks that Pericles was bad (κακός). Socrates avoids answering straightforwardly, but he does deny that Pericles was good in political matters (ἀγαθὸς τὰ πολιτικά).⁸²¹ As evidence for this claim, Socrates accuses the Athenians of becoming wilder (ἀγριώτερα) than they were before Pericles took them under his care (ἐπεμέλετο), and based upon his analogical reasoning about the caretaker of animals, Socrates concludes that the Athenians became more unjust (ἀδικώτεροι) and worse (χείρονες) because of Pericles.⁸²² Socrates asserts many controversial claims about Pericles (in contrast to the more ubiquitous high esteem for him), but the analogical reasoning about the relationship between the leader/ruler of the *polis* and the good caretaker is as contentious as it is decisive for his reasoning. The assumption upon which this analogical reasoning hinges is that taking care of an animal (e.g., a donkey, horse, or cattle) is so much like governing/ruling/leading the constituents of the *polis* that the constituents’ development of “bad behavior” (i.e., becoming wilder (ἀγριώτερα)) in the *polis* implies an inadequacy in the rulers like wildness in donkeys, horses, or cattle implies the incompetence of their caretaker. Someone who is inadequate or incompetent at the task is not

⁸¹⁹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 515e.

⁸²⁰ *Ibid.*, 515e-516a. Translation modified.

⁸²¹ *Ibid.*, 516d.

⁸²² *Ibid.*, 516b-c. It is important to note that Socrates’ interlocutor, Callicles, who is quite hostile throughout their exchange, very strongly opposes everything that Socrates says about Pericles in this part. We might infer (at least) two consequences from Callicles’ begrudging and antagonistic dialogical engagement. First, his behavior could, ironically, reflect Socrates’ assertion about the effects of Pericles’ leadership on the Athenians. While we may lack a precise sense of what “wild” behavior entails, Callicles behaves in a rather unruly way throughout. Second, Callicles’ resistance to Socrates’ critique of Pericles could reflect the entrenchment of the measure of *arete* and the human good which Pericles exemplified. In that case, Socratic philosophical practice could respond to a potentially urgent crisis in Athens. The broad acceptance of a measure which falters so easily under Socratic scrutiny suggests a weak and rudimentary engagement with *arete* and the human good.

“good” at it. This reasoning seems to justify Socrates’ scrutiny of Pericles’ good reputation as a noble and good Athenian. There are many directions from which we might approach Socrates’ reasoning about Pericles, but let us focus our attention on just one aspect: In relation to what measure of *arete* and the human good does Pericles fail to measure up for Socrates to levy this sort of criticism against him?

This question is challenging to address because it reinforces the ambiguity between the good person and the good citizen which we disambiguated during our prior analysis. The caretaker of animals does not “do good” for the animals by making them like him or herself (i.e. by making the animals into a caretaker), and if Socrates’ analogical reasoning holds, then the leader of the *polis* (e.g., Pericles, who is a “noble and good” Athenian and also a “good citizen”) would not “do good” for the constituents by making them like himself—as a good politician (ἀγαθός πολιτικός). If Pericles were a good politician, then he would make the Athenians good people. And so, if we apply this reasoning to the question we asked about the sense of making someone “better” in the *Protagoras*, then Pericles, despite being “good,” could not make his sons “better” as good men. He could not benefit his sons like the caretaker benefits the animals under his or her care. And yet, if the pursuit of *arete* and the human good is a communal endeavor, which is to say, that it is something in which all members of the community stake an equal claim and pursue together, then the good leader (who is also called the good politician, a noble and good Athenian, and the good citizen) will participate in the pursuit of *arete* and the human good as well. Because the leader is responsible for the good of the *polis* and its constituents, it becomes even more important for the leader to be a good person (ἀγαθός), that is, someone who benefits the other constituents like the good caretaker who benefits his or her animals, on the one hand, but who does not make the animals (in this case, the human kind) like himself (i.e., not good leaders but good people). However, such reasoning leads us straight into ἀπορία. The good leader (who is the good politician, the good citizen, and/or the noble and good Athenian) benefits the constituency by making them good people, and the person who benefits others is good also, which implies that the good leader should be a good person. And yet, the good leader does not make the constituency “good” in the same way that a good leader/politician is good, but when the good leader makes the constituency good, they would nevertheless become good leaders/politicians as well because they are good people, which is to say, they benefit others. Thus, we might be led to reopen a question which we

have assumed for some time now: is the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) different than the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός)?

It seems that we too have become paralyzed in our analysis like so many of Socrates' interlocutors. Whereas we were once confident that the *arete* of the good citizen differed from the *arete* of the good person, we now seem to have reached the conclusion that they are concomitant with one another. In a way, we should have foreseen the inevitability of this conclusion. Why would Socrates, Meno, Anytus, and so many other interlocutors speak equivocally about *arete*, if it were not very easy to mix the *arete* of the good person together with the *arete* of the good citizen? Furthermore, we should also keep in mind our prior analysis of technical know-how and its inability to resolve the question concerning the coming-to-be of *arete* and the human good. The good leader (who is also the good politician, the good citizen, and the noble and good Athenian) is good *at* something, a relation to the good which we have previously examined as an essential component of activities with a technical know-how. And insofar as we understand politics in a conventional way, we must conclude that the measure of the good leader is distinct from the good person, since the conventional understanding of politics does assume a discrete domain of political activities. We find expressions of the conventional understanding of politics in various dialogues, and fortunately for the sake of our analysis, it appeared already in the *Meno* during Socrates' conversation with Anytus. According to Socrates' speech, the conventional understanding of political activity includes the management of the household and the *polis*, taking care of family, and hospitality—"in a way worthy (ἀξίως) of a good man (ἀνδρὸς ἀγαθοῦ)."⁸²³ This final stipulation, i.e., "in a way worthy (ἀξίως) of a good man (ἀνδρὸς ἀγαθοῦ)," speaks to our sense of the distinction between the *arete* of the good citizen and the *arete* of the good person while simultaneously implying their interrelatedness. The good citizen will be good *at* certain political activities, but the good citizen will nonetheless accomplish these tasks *like* a good man would do them. The good citizen's likeness to a good man is not a relation of appearance in the sense that the good citizen is a copy or otherwise inauthentic version of the good man, but rather, this stipulation indicates the confluence of two identities with distinct yet interrelated measures. It seems that we may have found a way to interpret Socrates' critique of Pericles.

⁸²³ Plato, *Meno*, 91a.

Pericles may have been good at political activities in the conventional sense. According to Thucydides, Pericles was the foremost citizen in Athens during his tenure, and he ruled Athens in a way worthy of a free man. He did much good for Athens, but was he himself a good man? We find Socrates express his doubts about his goodness in *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *Meno*. We might interpret Socrates' scrutiny of Pericles on the basis of his unconventional understanding of politics, which assumes that a good politician (ἀγαθός πολιτικός) should help to make the citizens of the *polis* as good as possible like a caretaker tends to his or her animals. A part of making a person good is to make the person "better," i.e., to benefit the person. The beneficence of the good person is a key part of what makes that person good, and so, when Socrates raises questions about Pericles' benefit to the Athenian people and to his own sons, we must hear this scrutiny as an idiosyncratically Socratic objection. Pericles may have been good at politics in the conventional sense but not in the Socratic sense. Even so, the designation "noble and good Athenian" both obscures the distinction between the good citizen and the good person and also emphasizes their interdependence. Pericles (alongside Themistocles, Aristides, and Thucydides) may have accomplished beautiful deeds during his political tenure, for which he (and the others) earned the reputation as a noble and good Athenian among his own people and throughout Greece, but, according to Socrates, he also made the Athenians wilder and more unjust. Pericles could not even make his own sons into good men. Based upon these considerations, we ought to ask, in harmony with Socrates, how it could be that the noble and good Athenians, of which Pericles provides the current example, are the teachers of *arete*.

Before we move on to Thucydides, let us briefly consider the brief and unflattering testimony about Paralus and Xanthippus. Their names appear a handful of times in Platonic and Pseudo-Platonic dialogues, but otherwise, only Plutarch's *Lives* gives us any additional insight. They appear briefly in *Protagoras* as two noteworthy individuals within the crowd of followers surrounding Protagoras, hanging on every word.⁸²⁴ Our development of the distinction between the *arete* of the good person and the *arete* of the good citizen along with our awareness of Protagoras' instruction in the technical know-how of citizenship informs our sense of the threat that Protagoras might pose to Paralus' and Xanthippus' respective pursuit of *arete* and the human good. Socrates mentions them in the Pseudo-Platonic dialogue *Alcibiades* as well, in which

⁸²⁴ Plato, *Protagoras*, 315a.

Socrates asks Alcibiades whether Pericles made Paralus and Xanthippus wise (σοφός), but Alcibiades denounces them as idiots (ἡλίθιοι).⁸²⁵ Besides their representation in the Platonic texts, Plutarch mentions them in passing during his account of Pericles' life. His account of Paralus paints a sympathetic picture, although it tells us more about Pericles than Paralus. According to Plutarch, Paralus' death from the plague broke Pericles' spirit, but Plutarch tells us nothing else about the life of Paralus.⁸²⁶ By contrast, his account of the life of Xanthippus supports Socrates' judgment about him (and his brother). Plutarch depicts Xanthippus as a prodigal son who was responsible for his father's defamation abroad after a dispute over his allowance.⁸²⁷ We ought to heed Plutarch's account as one which falls somewhere between historical fiction and gospel. Plutarch may tell us the story of a man who failed to live up to the impressive reputation of his father, but we should wonder about the extent to which the Platonic texts themselves inform Plutarch's story. Even so, we can compare the accounts of Xanthippus in Plutarch and the Platonic texts alike to the representation of Lysimachus in *Laches* and tentatively infer that Paralus and Xanthippus did not benefit in any special way in their pursuit of *arete* and the human good despite being the sons of Pericles.

Thucydides

For his final example, Socrates calls upon Anytus to examine the noble and good Athenian named Thucydides, who should not be confused with the Thucydides that authored the *History of the Peloponnesian War*. After mentioning Pericles and his sons, Socrates implores Anytus to think about the example that Thucydides provided:

And lest you think that only a few (ὀλίγους) and the paltriest (φουλοτάτους) Athenians are incapable (ἀδυνάτους) in this affair (πρᾶγμα), consider that Thucydides also brought up two sons, Melesias and Stephanus, and he educated (ἐπαίδευσεν) them well both in other things and to be the finest (κάλλιστα) wrestlers in Athens...⁸²⁸

When Socrates refers to “a few (ὀλίγους) and the paltriest (φουλοτάτους) Athenians,” we must recognize his ironic intonation, since the most likely referents of this phrase would be Themistocles, Aristides, and Pericles. In our analysis, we have examined the ways in which their

⁸²⁵ Plato, *Alcibiades*, 118d-e. They also appear in the Pseudo-Platonic dialogue “On *Arete*,” but the discussion in this dialogue is nearly identical to that of *Meno*.

⁸²⁶ Plutarch, “Pericles” in *Lives*, 36.4. Also at *ibid.*, 24.5, but only in passing as one of Pericles' progeny.

⁸²⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.1-3.

⁸²⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 94c. Translation modified.

lives and reputations as noble and good Athenians validate the importance of Socratic philosophical practice by drawing attention to various assumptions that undergird the equivocal referent of the phrase “noble and good Athenian.” Are the noble and good Athenians good citizens, good men, or both? Although our analysis has sympathized with Socratic scrutiny of the measure which validates their reputations, we would by no means conclude that they were paltry (φαύλη). Interestingly, we have already analyzed Socrates’ use of this word during a portion of our analysis in Chapter II, and in that case, we developed a similarly skeptical reading of Socrates’ description of his own wisdom as “paltry.”⁸²⁹ What is “interesting” about the pairing of our prior analysis with our present one is that they both, ironically, play off of the absurd contrast between the ubiquitous, lackadaisical regard for *arete* and the human good and the extraordinary difficulty of the questions surrounding its pursuit. Even if Themistocles, Aristides, and Pericles all made more meagre contributions to the Athenian pursuit of *arete* and the human good than their reputations might imply, they did not live paltry lives. With tongue in cheek, we might even call them Athenian heroes. Socrates never disputes that they accomplished noble deeds, but the sufficiency of these deeds as indications of their respective *arete* never seemed as obvious as most Athenians believed. We suspect that the same will hold for Thucydides too.

Concerning the education of Thucydides’ sons Melesias and Stephanus, Socrates repeats a familiar story for the fourth time. Thucydides, like the others, sought out teachers to make his sons good at all the activities about which Athenians know a technical know-how, but he neither sought teachers to make them good men nor did he teach them himself, which seems to imply that *arete* cannot be taught (not even by a noble and good Athenian). We should take notice of one deviation from the otherwise repetitious account, namely, that Thucydides’ sons became the finest (κάλλιστα) wrestlers in Athens because of their education. This comment does not warrant greater attention because being a good wrestler is categorically different than being a good horseman insofar as neither of them can provide a sufficient paradigm for inquiry into *arete* and the human good. However, we ought to take special note of it because Thucydides’ father, Melesias I of Alopece (not to be confused with Thucydides’ son with the same name), was one of the most famous wrestlers of antiquity, being an Olympic victor and even celebrated by Pindar in several odes.⁸³⁰ We might spell out the implication in the following way: If the grandsons of an Olympic

⁸²⁹ Plato, *Symposium*, 175e.

⁸³⁰ Nails, *The People of Plato*, 291-292.

wrestler became good wrestlers, but these same men, who were also the sons of a noble and good Athenian, did not become good men, then it seems unlikely that *arete* can be taught—or the result of nature. The conclusion that *arete* cannot be taught follows the same logic that we have followed many times already, but the further inference that it cannot come by nature may require some additional explanation. Whereas anyone might become a good wrestler through the instruction of a good teacher, the finest (κάλλιστα) wrestlers (e.g., Melesias and Stephanus) received education *and* had a natural endowment. This example shows us, once again, how problematic inquiry into *arete* is. If we recall, Meno presented the coming to be of *arete* as exclusively disjunctive (i.e., either by instruction, by nature, or some other means). And yet, we can infer from the examples of Melesias and Stephanus that technical know-how can enhance natural endowment and help someone to become superlatively good *at* some activity. At the same time, if Thucydides deservedly received his reputation as a noble and good Athenian, then neither instruction nor natural endowment was sufficient to make his sons good men.

Socrates continues, sketching an image of a capable (δυνατός) man from a great house. It is not clear whether we should read Socrates' references (i.e., to his capability, to his great house, and to the ironic possibility that he was a paltry man) as a mark of distinction between Thucydides and the others or his similarity with them, but the ambiguity itself sounds provocative. Why would Socrates distinguish Thucydides from the other three men? We should keep this in mind when we begin to examine Anytus' response. Nevertheless, Socrates presents an otherwise familiar account of Thucydides as a prospective teacher of *arete*:

Then it is clear that he would never...fail to teach them [whatever is required to make his sons into good men without concern for the cost], if that was something teachable? Or perhaps Thucydides was paltry (φαῦλος) and did not have many friends (φίλοι) among Athenians and the allies? Yet he was from a great house (οἰκίας μεγάλης) and capable (ἐδύνατο) of great things (μέγα) in his *polis* and among the other Greeks, so that if this thing were teachable, he would have found out who was going to make (ποιήσεν) his sons good (ἀγαθοὺς), either one of his countrymen (ἐπιχωρίων), or some foreigner (ξένων), if he himself had no leisure time (ἐσχόλαζεν) because of his care (ἐπιμέλειαν) for the *polis*. But, my comrade Anytus, [I fear that] *arete* may not be something teachable (διδακτὸν).⁸³¹

⁸³¹ Plato, *Meno*, 94d-e. Translation modified. "I fear" is placed in brackets because it lacks a Greek referent, but it is somewhat useful in conveying the tone of the passage.

Even though Socrates repeats a sentiment which he has expressed three times already, this final iteration sounds somehow more suggestive than the others. Did not all of these men not accomplish great things in the *polis* during their respective lives? Our analyses of Themistocles, Aristides, and Pericles examined their respective claims to *arete* and the human good. By what measure did they earn their reputations as noble and good Athenians? We never concluded that any of them unequivocally deserved their reputation—especially because we consider the ongoing, dialectical examination of *arete* within a communal horizon to be decisive for the pursuit of the human good. Nevertheless, we did acknowledge that they did great things in the sense that their deeds (especially during war) were “once in a lifetime” and had wide impact. In the case of Thucydides, however, we have no other testimony about his deeds to corroborate Socrates’ claim. Furthermore, Socrates’ account of Thucydides differs in another conspicuous way as well. He mentions Thucydides’ care (ἐπιμέλεια) for the *polis* as something which might have preoccupied so much of his time that he had no leisure time (ἐσχόλαζεν) to educate his sons. In one sense, this contrast between one’s care for the *polis* (and so an engagement in political activity) and a lack of leisure may seem intuitive, if we assume that those who leisure simply “do nothing.” A person who cares for their *polis* becomes too busy for leisure because of their involvement in what is “good” for the *polis*. And yet, in another sense, this contrast sounds ridiculous in the context of our inquiry. Socratic philosophical practice, which has manifest in our inquiry as an examination of *arete* and the human good, emerges out of leisure, but it is not a leisure that amounts either to “doing nothing” or *not* caring about one’s *polis*. Provocatively, one might claim that Socrates cares more about Athens than any other Athenian, and yet he is constantly at “leisure” (ἐσχόλαζεν) in the sense that he devoted his life to non-productive work. Although our privileged position in posterity allows us to hear the irony in this remark and to sympathize with Socrates’ controversial and unconventional relationship to Athens, we should nonetheless hear this remark as one that Socrates makes to Anytus, who is a very conventional Athenian. While it is valuable for our broader inquiry into *arete* and the human good to examine the significance of each particular noble and good Athenian, we must simultaneously remember that this discourse occurs between Anytus and Socrates. These subtle and peripheral insinuations, e.g., that those who “care” for the *polis* do not have the leisure time to educate their sons about *arete*, incrementally contribute to an increasingly hostile discussion. Anytus, too, has a son, and he also cares about his *polis*, or so he claims. Let us first

examine Thucydides before we turn to Anytus' hostile departure from the discussion and the conclusion of this portion of our analysis.

Thucydides was a contemporary, political rival of Pericles and the aristocratically inclined counterpart to the more populist Pericles like Aristides to Themistocles.⁸³² In contrast to the prior three men, his reputation does not rest so heavily on his military exploits, although it seems likely that he fought at the battle of Marathon.⁸³³ Perhaps for that reason, neither Herodotus nor Thucydides mention him in either of their accounts. In fact, his name does not appear very often in any ancient sources especially in comparison to Themistocles, Aristides, and Pericles. Pseudo-Aristotle mentions him in passing as a member of the party who opposed Pericles, and he also describes him as “[one of] the best politicians at Athens, after those of early times...” and someone who “treated the whole *polis* in a fatherly manner” (τῆ πόλει πάση πατρικῶς χρωμένους).⁸³⁴ Furthermore, a few fleeting references to him appear in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* and *Wasps*.⁸³⁵ The latter work does not memorialize a particularly flattering image of him, comparing one character's inability to plead his case to Thucydides' “tongue-paralysis” when brought to trial. Finally, Thucydides' name appears in Plato's *Laches* as the accomplished and well-esteemed father of Melesias who, alongside Lysimachus, is concerned for the upbringing of his son.⁸³⁶ As a prospective teacher of *arete*, Thucydides fared no better in this regard than any of the others. His sons have fallen into the same relative obscurity as the sons of Themistocles, Aristides, and Pericles.⁸³⁷ Nevertheless, there is something different about Thucydides as well. Thucydides' deeds have not been memorialized to the same extent as any of the prior three men, and yet, Socrates' investigation culminates with Thucydides, even distinguishing him from the others in a certain way. How can we explain the peculiar disparity between the comparatively sparse

⁸³² Nails, *The People of Plato*, 290-292. Hornblower et. Al, “Thucydides” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 1472. Anastaplo and Berns, “Notes,” 72.

⁸³³ Possibly implied in Plato, *Laches*, 178a and also referenced in Aristophanes, *Acharnians*, 696. Nails, *The People of Plato*, 290.

⁸³⁴ Aristotle, *Constitution of Athens*, 28.2-5. Plutarch also implies their rivalry, noting Thucydides' deposition and ostracism as the event which allowed Pericles to secure his imperial policy uncontested. Plutarch, “Pericles” in *Lives*, 16.

⁸³⁵ Aristophanes, *Acharnians*, 676-718. Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 946-949.

⁸³⁶ Plato, *Laches*, 178a.

⁸³⁷ For Melesias in general, see Nails, *The People of Plato*, 198-199. Melesias also appears in Plato, *Laches*, 179c, but he has no speaking role and stands parallel to Lysimachus (the son of Aristides). The historian Thucydides also mentions him as a member of an Athenian envoy. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 8.86.9. For Stephanus, see Nails, *The People of Plato*, 272. His life is even more obscure than that of Melesias, about which we know little.

testimony about Thucydides and his placement at the end of Socrates' consideration of the noble and good Athenians?

While some commentators readily recognize the possibility that Socrates does distinguish Thucydides, no one accounts for *why* Thucydides might warrant distinction.⁸³⁸ One of the most obvious challenges to an analysis of Thucydides is the scarcity of references to him. While we need not assume that Thucydides represents the climax of Socrates' examination of the four noble and good Athenians, we nonetheless need some way of understanding his inclusion. Towards this end, we might consider his relevance to a part of Plutarch's account of Pericles' life. During Pericles' political tenure, he endeavored to rebuild the Athenian acropolis after its destruction. However, not every Athenian supported Pericles' vision. The acropolis served many purposes in the polis. Its placement at the height of the *polis* made it a secure locale, and the selection of the buildings on the acropolis—both their function and their appearance—symbolized the values of the *polis* and its constituents. It greets those who approach the *polis* and begins to tell its story. While Thucydides himself does not speak, Plutarch presents a version of the argument against Pericles' reconstruction plan, which we might understand as broadly representative of Thucydides' sensibilities. According to Plutarch, the opposition argued in the following way:

The deme (δῆμος) has lost its esteem (ἀδοξεῖ) and is in ill repute (κακῶς ἀκούει) because it has removed the public moneys of the Hellenes (τὰ κοινὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων χρήματα) from Delos into its own keeping....And surely Hellas is insulted (ὕβριζεσθαι) with a terrible insult (δεινὴν ὕβριν) and manifestly subjected to tyranny (τυραννεῖσθαι) when she sees that, with her own enforced contributions for the war, we are covering with gold (καταχρυσοῦντας) and beautifying (καλλωπίζοντας) our *polis*...⁸³⁹

Of course this dispute concerns practical political matters, i.e., how Athens ought to use the common money, but we might also interpret the disagreement as one which manifests a broader Athenian uncertainty about *arete* and the human good. As we have noticed during previous parts of our analysis, a common measure of *arete* presumes beauty as sufficient for the human good, i.e., a beautiful person is a good person. And yet, in this representation of the oppositions' argument, we might discern an expression of doubt about this measure, which Pericles presumes

⁸³⁸ Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 231-232. Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, 177. Sharples thinks that Thucydides' position at the climax may suggest Anytus' admiration for him, but he gives no explanation for why he thinks so. Thompson, *The Meno of Plato*, 199, 247. Ionescu, Sallis, Scott, and Weiss say little, if anything, about this part of the dialogue.

⁸³⁹ Plutarch, "Pericles" in *Lives*, 12.1-2. Translation modified.

to benefit Athens. It seems reasonable to assume that Pericles would propose to rebuild the acropolis beautifully because he thought it would be good for Athens. We might further assume that what is good for Athens is also good for its constituency. However, because we have focused our attention on this question of *arete* and the human good in the *polis*, we would approach such an assumption much more cautiously. And in the argument of the opposition, we can see the signs of a dangerous confluence of emergent measures of *arete*. Not only does the beautification of the acropolis imply assumptions about the Athenian measure of *arete*, but the decision to use the common money for the beautification of the acropolis implies a further assumption about the relationship between *arete* and power (i.e., that of which one is capable as a leader (ἡγεμόν)). According to the opposition, the deme (of Athens) has “lost its “esteem” (ἄδοξιῖ) and is in “ill repute” (κακῶς ἀκούειν) because it has removed the common money for this beautification project. In other words, Pericles’ vision for the reconstruction of the acropolis has caused the other *poleis* to question the Athenian claim to the human good. If Athens were a good *polis*, would they take the common money for their personal advantage? Furthermore, if there is some possibility that Athens is not a good *polis*, then perhaps also the Athenians are not good people according to such reasoning. Even in this “international” question which the Athenians dispute amongst themselves, we can see evidence of the communal horizon in which the question of the human good takes place.

At the same time, we must acknowledge the audacity of our interpretation. Not only do we interpret a paraphrastic representation of the opposition’s argument, which we presume to be crudely representative of Thucydides, but we also interpret this dispute in isolation from its place within the ongoing pursuit of the human good in Athens. We know none of the details about Pericles’ reconstruction project, nor do we know the counter-proposal of the opposition. Perhaps the opposition misrepresent Pericles’ plan or perhaps their assumptions about *arete* and the human good are even more detrimental to Athens and the Athenians than those of Pericles.⁸⁴⁰ We must

⁸⁴⁰ Wade-Gery’s study helps to fill in some of the details surrounding the dispute. Although we have sporadically pointed out indications of class conflict in Athens, a sort of conflict which Wade-Gery’s account broadly supports, our analysis concerns class conflict in Athens only insofar as it reflects a communal reckoning with *arete* and the human good. “The opposition chose to see [Pericles’ building program] as a question of political morality and of taste. Perikles defended it on economic grounds. He desired, in peace as in war, an ἔμμισθος πόλις, a population in government service. For a community can accustom itself to a high or low standard of living, to this or that economic basis: only the standard or basis must (for economic health) be constant....The Opposition, with narrower (perhaps intenser [sic]) vision, saw only what was being lost: the modest, proud, spontaneous aristocracy which trusted in God

remain mindful that we have introduced Plutarch's paraphrastic account because of Thucydides' otherwise scarce representation, a scarcity which we might be tempted to interpret as an indication of his modest impact compared to the others. We should also be aware of the reactive character of our reading. We place Thucydides in contrast to Pericles for circumstantial reasons, but perhaps it is improper and misleading for us to do so.⁸⁴¹ Why not interpret Thucydides on his own merits? Such a question, however, may be ill-formed. In what sense could we claim to have interpreted any of the prior noble and good Athenian "on their own merits?" In the prior cases, we at least interpreted passages which spoke directly about Themistocles, Aristides, and Pericles, but we still approached them through an idiosyncratically Socratic framing and from our own encounter with the questions surrounding *arete* and the human good. While we can identify a difference between the intertextual passages about Themistocles, Aristides, and Pericles and the passage about Thucydides, our dependency on an intertextual engagement persists in each case. Although this dependency might create problems for our interpretation, we do not have another option, and furthermore, it may turn out to be a good thing. If we believe one of our own insights from our analysis of the *Meno*, namely, that the pursuit of *arete* and the human good takes place within a communal horizon, then our own engagement with this question on an intertextual and dependent basis validates our approach. Moreover, in the spirit of this communal, interdependent endeavor, we also might posit another way of understanding Thucydides' place within the dialogue, namely, as an example of a noble and good Athenian whose approach to politics has fallen to the periphery.

We began our interpretation of Thucydides' inclusion with the unfortunate observation that his name appears scarcely in Greek texts, but a scarce appearance is still an appearance. While we have been careful to temper our analysis of Thucydides, we may benefit as well from noticing an attribution which has persistently appeared across multiple accounts. Socrates commented on Thucydides' care (*ἐπιμέλεια*) for the *polis* as a reason why Thucydides might not have had the time to educate his sons on how to be good men. Similarly, pseudo-Aristotle described Thucydides as someone who "treated the whole *polis* in a fatherly manner" (τῆ πόλει πάση πατρικῶς

and valour to preserve the sweetness of their life. Let Persians or Semites organize and govern: The Greeks knew how to live." Wade-Gery, "Thucydides the Son of Melesias: A Study of Periklean Policy," 207-208.

⁸⁴¹ The circumstantial reasons are the following: in the *Meno*, it is tempting to read the four noble and good Athenians as pairs because Themistocles and Aristides were rivals like Pericles and Thucydides. We further compound this temptation by using Plutarch's representation of the oppositional party's argument against Pericles' reconstruction plan.

χρωμένους), which we might interpret as a commentary on the character of his care for the *polis*, i.e., he cared for the *polis* like a father cares for his children. And finally, while we recognized some limitations of our interpretation of the argument against Pericles' reconstruction project according to Plutarch, we tentatively attended to Thucydides' party's care for the good of Athens.⁸⁴² The final example may be the weakest piece of evidence, but we can nonetheless track an attribution particular to Thucydides. His contribution to the Athenian pursuit of the human good may be the most obscure to us, but it behooves us to recognize some parallels between Socrates' understanding of politics and Thucydides' political practice as a sort of paternalistic care for Athens. If we take our lead from pseudo-Aristotle's image of fatherly treatment, then we might see some similarities between paternalistic care for the *polis* and the likeness of the good politician to the caretaker of animals. This care may not serve as a sufficient measure of the human good, but it bears upon the confluence between the good citizen and the good person. In this regard, we might interpret Socrates' reference to Thucydides as a recognition of his contribution to the Athenian communal horizon. For Thucydides served the *polis* during a formative, transitional period, and he opposed the new direction albeit unsuccessfully. Pericles sought to leverage Athens' new position after the Peloponnesian War, using Athens' wealth and wise policy to its advantage.⁸⁴³ Anytus has entered Athenian politics within this political milieu, and although we cannot say the extent to which the various noble and good Athenians individually may have influenced Anytus, we can say that his unreflective acceptance of their reputations as noble and good leaves him in a more vulnerable position as a leader of Athens, a vulnerability which manifests through his rudimentary proficiency in the navigation of the discourse about *arete* and the human good with Socrates.

We have pointed out many reasons why Socrates might view Anytus with suspicion throughout our analysis in this chapter. While we have many of our own reasons to sympathize with Socrates, we should remain mindful of the degree to which Socrates' views are idiosyncratic. Socrates does not say many things with which most Athenians would have agreed. While we

⁸⁴² It warrants noting that our present analysis of Thucydides may appear to sympathize more with his political interests than those of Pericles, especially because our prior analysis of Pericles was quite critical. However, our analysis has no stake in a retrospective vindication of Thucydides and a condemnation of Pericles as the harbinger of Athens' demise. Rather, we track a conflict in Athens over *arete* and the human good *according to Socrates*. It makes sense for Socrates—whose account of *arete* we might describe as “undemocratic”—to esteem the aristocratically oriented Aristides and Thucydides more highly than the more populist/democratic Themistocles and Pericles.

⁸⁴³ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2.13.

tentatively propose that Thucydides' paternal care for the *polis* exemplifies an approach to politics which Pericles' political lineage risks excising from the Athenian communal horizon, we must also admit the Socratic character of this suggestion. Clearly Socrates chooses to mention Thucydides, and so it is Socratic in this trivial sense. However, the culmination of the investigation with Thucydides represents a distinctly Socratic move insofar as Thucydides' aristocratic political orientation harmonizes with his "aristocratic" account of *arete*. We have not framed that account in these terms, but we could describe the account of dialectical reasoning, which Socrates gave to Meno, as a justification for "the rule of what is best" in the soul. Similarly, the threat of the democratic soul to the *polis* arises from the permissibility of any "thing pertaining to the soul" to lead the democratic soul. This account, which we took from the *Republic*, partially informed our sense of Socrates' suspicion towards Anytus. While our examination of the noble and good Athenians has primarily focused on the uncertainty and perplexities surrounding questions about *arete* and the human good which we developed through intertextual analyses, we can also draw conclusions about the dialogical dynamic between Socrates and Anytus. Another part of what the examination of the noble and good Athenians shows us is that Anytus—who represents Athens—does not agree with Socrates' assumption that what (or who) is best should rule the soul and the *polis*. We can point to an early moment in their encounter as one piece of evidence, namely, Anytus' agreement with Socrates about the foolishness, unreasonableness, and stupidity of thinking those who neither profess to be teachers nor have any students to be the best at making someone good at something. Even though Anytus agreed with Socrates about the folly of this belief, Anytus nonetheless claimed subsequently that noble and good Athenians are the teachers of *arete*, men who do not profess to be teachers and who do not have any students. Because of this example of dubious reasoning and others, we have primarily treated Anytus critically. Even so, Socrates does not give up on people easily and certainly not a fellow Athenian. And so, in addition to all of the other aspects of our analysis of Thucydides, we might also consider the possibility that Socrates culminates with Thucydides for Anytus—not because Thucydides was a "good man" whereas the others were not, but because of the unique way that Thucydides cared for Athens.

Since we know Anytus' role in the conclusion of Socrates' life, we know that he will not heed Socrates' words. In fact, his final, substantive response conveys the extent to which he cannot follow Socrates. He retorts:

Socrates, it seems to me that you easily (ῥαδίως) speak badly (κακῶς λέγειν) of people. Now I could give you some advice (συμβουλεύσαιμι), if you're willing to be persuaded (πείθεσθαι) by me, to be careful (εὐλαβεῖσθαι): since it is perhaps easier to do badly (κακῶς ποιεῖν) to people than do good (εὖ) to them in other *poleis* too, and in this *polis* that is certainly so. But I suppose (οἶμαι) you know (εἰδέναι) that yourself.⁸⁴⁴

We have carefully examined the four noble and good Athenians, inferring as much as we could glean about their respective contributions to the Athenian pursuit of *arete* and the human good; however, the discourse seems to have struck Anytus much differently. And, to be fair, our own analysis lends some credence to Anytus' annoyance. Although we did not conclude that any of these four noble and good Athenians were not "actually" good, our intertextual interrogation of them stumbled upon various challenges that their respective lives introduced for our analysis of *arete* and the human good. We did not dispute their goodness outright, but we did question what measure of *arete* must be presumed to conclude that they were good men. Such an insight harmonized with our ongoing development of *arete* as a dialectical engagement within a communal horizon. And yet, for Anytus, who may believe that the question of *arete* has been settled in Athens, which we might infer from several of his remarks, an interrogation of the measure of *arete* that justifies, for example, Themistocles', Aristides', Pericles', and Thucydides' respective claims to the human good, threatens "to corrupt" Athens and her constituency. To question the lives of these men *and* the lives of their sons implies either doubt or uncertainty. That is, either Socrates doubts their *arete* or he is uncertain about it. If Socrates doubts their *arete*, then he would disagree with Anytus that they were good, a disagreement which would likely vex a patriotic Athenian like Anytus. On the other hand, if Socrates is uncertain about their *arete*, then their *arete* still comes into question. Anytus might consider uncertainty about *arete* to be a bad thing, but uncertainty need not be bad. Someone who mistakenly believes that the noble and good Athenians teach *arete* when they do not seems to describe someone in a much worse position than someone who is uncertain whether *arete* can be taught at all. Or further, someone who is uncertain "what *arete* is" is more likely to continue to search for it than a person who confidently claims to know it already, and if it so happens that the pursuit of *arete* turns out to be much more difficult

⁸⁴⁴ Plato, *Meno*, 94e-95a. Translation modified.

than it appears, then the former person clearly occupies the superior position.⁸⁴⁵ Anytus, however, does not see it that way, and with this departing threat, he leaves the dialogue.⁸⁴⁶

Conclusion

We began our inquiry in this chapter where we left off at the end of Chapter III. We dissected Socrates' reference to Anytus' father Anthemion, and it led us to sense an undercurrent of suspicion about Anytus. We developed this sense further through a cursory exploration of the testimony about Anytus and an intertextual analysis of Socrates' account of the democratic soul in the *Republic*. We reasoned that Anytus posed a threat to Athens because of the tendency of the democratic soul to measure *arete* and the human good according to equality and freedom. These measures permit any "thing pertaining to the soul" to take the lead over the soul, and a person with an unreliable "leader" in the soul will similarly not be a reliable leader in the *polis*, i.e., equally likely to cause benefit or harm. Because a good person benefits others but an unreliable leader is just as likely to cause benefit as harm, we must question whether such a person, e.g., Anytus, could ever justifiably be called a good person. Moreover, such reasoning led us to wonder how Socrates came to be in Athens, and we noticed that the same permissiveness that puts the democratic soul at risk also provides the opportunity for dialectical reasoning to take lead of the soul, which was significant because of Socrates' prior account of *arete* as dialectical reasoning. We found some supplementary evidence in the *Republic* to support our supposition that Socrates may possess dialectical reasoning, and we drew two inferences from this intertextual connection. First, if Socrates does possess dialectical reasoning, then it would explain why he views Anytus with suspicion. Dialectical reasoning, which is responsible for the beneficence of good things, would lead his soul, and so he would be a better candidate to lead/rule Athens than Anytus. This point

⁸⁴⁵ During our analysis in Chapter II, we examined a similar claim. Remarking on the position of the *παῖς*, Socrates commented that, "...then [the *παῖς*] thought he knew [the answer to the geometrical problem], and boldly (*θαρραλέως*) answered as one who knows (*ὡς εἰδώς*), and he was not being led into *ἀπορεῖν*. But now, at this time, he is being led into *ἀπορεῖν* already, and just as he does not know (*ὡσπερ οὐκ οἶδεν*), he does not think that he knows....For now he, not knowing (*οὐκ εἰδώς*), can even carry on the search (*ζητήσειεν*) gladly (*ἠδέως*), whereas then he could easily (*ῥαδίως*) think that both before many people and many times (*πρὸς πολλοὺς καὶ πολλάκις*) he could speak well (*εὖ λέγειν*) about the double area...." *Ibid.*, 84b-c. It seems that Meno, the *παῖς*, and now Anytus all struggled to navigate the discussion in related ways.

⁸⁴⁶ Meno also threatened Socrates previously. It seems that Socrates finds himself at risk no matter where he goes, whether at home in Athens or abroad. Why? What has Socrates done to warrant two threats against him in such a short amount of time? "And it seems to me that you are well-advised not to sail away or emigrate from here: for, if you a foreigner (*ξένος*) in a different *polis*, were to do this sort of thing, you would probably be arrested as a sorcerer/juggler (*γόης*)." *Ibid.*, 80b.

carries the further retrospective consequence that Socrates' prior account of dialectical reasoning with Meno was an incredibly partial account. The account which Socrates told Meno was not simply "objective," but it was rather an idiosyncratically Socratic contribution. This consequence bears on the second inference as well. From each interlocutors' engagement with Socratic philosophical practice, we inferred the necessity of Socrates' participation in a communal horizon. This necessity does not imply that Athens needs Socrates, but Socrates does not need Athens. On the contrary, Socrates—just as much as anyone else—needs others to examine *arete* and the human good so that he and those who associate with him might become good people. Against this background, we began our analysis of the discussion between Socrates and Anytus in the *Meno* itself.

Once we began our analysis, we noticed a strange assumption underlying Socrates' engagement with Anytus about the teachers of *arete*. Socrates presented the model of education which teaches technical know-how about an activity to make its practitioners "good." Technical know-how makes the good doctor, the good shoemaker, and the good flute-player good, and Anytus agreed with Socrates that it would be foolish, unreasonable, and stupid *not* to send a prospective flute-player to a teacher, if they wanted to make that person good (at flute-playing). And yet, when it came to *arete* and making a person good without further specification, the proper approach become much hazier. A part of the problem with the paradigm of technical know-how for *arete* is that the good person is not "good" at anything in particular, whereas, for example, the good doctor, the good shoemaker, and the good flute-player all have discrete domains in which they exercise their proficiencies. The "goodness" which the good artisan (the person with a technical know-how) practices differs from the "goodness" which the good person exhibits. Another issue which we noticed during our analysis arose from an equivocation about *arete*. When Socrates ceased speaking analogically about flute-playing, he posed the question about the teachers of *arete* to Anytus as a question about the *arete* "by which people manage (διοικοῦσι) both households (οἰκίας) and *poleis* finely (καλῶς), and take care of (θεραπεύουσι) their own parents, and know how to receive and to send off both citizens (πολίτας) and foreigners (ξένους) hospitably, in a way worthy (ἀξίως) of a good man (ἀνδρὸς ἀγαθοῦ)." ⁸⁴⁷ Not only did we notice that Socrates attributed a desire to Meno which he had not expressed, but, more importantly, we noticed a shift

⁸⁴⁷ Plato, *Meno*, 91a.

in the sense of *arete*. Whereas we had primarily interrogated the *arete* whose exhibition would suffice as a measure of the good person (ἀγαθός), this iteration of *arete* seemed to describe an *arete* which we would go on to call the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης). This identification developed retrospectively once we reflected on Socrates' suggestion that the sophists are the teachers of *arete*, a suggestion to which Anytus vehemently objected.

When Anytus disputed Socrates' suggestion that the sophists are the teachers of *arete*, it seemed to us that he objected on the basis of the ambiguous signification of *arete*. In other words, Anytus denied that the sophists teach the *arete* which makes humans into good people. Anytus condemned the sophists, accusing them of causing the disgrace and corruption of their students, and this condemnation prompted us to reflect on the meaning of this accusation. We examined Protagoras partially because Socrates named him as an example of a sophist but also because Protagoras (at least in the *Protagoras*) professed to teach the technical know-how of citizenship (πολιτική τέχνη), by which men are made into good citizens (ἀγαθοί πολίτας).⁸⁴⁸ We noted this claim because Protagoras professed to teach a certain technical know-how which would make good citizens, and it echoed Socrates' explicit claim to search for a certain teacher of *arete* who could help Meno. And yet, our attention to the equivocal sense of *arete*, which, on the one hand, is the measure of the good person, and, on the other hand, is the measure of the good citizen, led us to interpret Anytus' accusation of disgrace and corruption through a rendition of Protagoras' famous maxim that read it in terms of its significance for the pursuit of *arete* and the human good. We understood Protagoras' maxim as a radical relativization of the measure of the human good, and in this sense, we vindicated a part of Anytus' contempt for the sophists, even if he lacked an account for it. According to our interpretation of Protagoras' maxim, we diagnosed a risk for his students to believe themselves a sufficient measure of the human good and so be justified in the assertion of anti-social measures of the human good. Taken to its extreme, Protagoras' maxim may be used to justify harm to the *polis* (and so its constituency) in the name of *arete* and the human good. Such a possibility poses a concrete threat to the livelihood of the constituency, for which Socrates' execution provides an example, but it also contradicts an abiding insight of our analysis. We have maintained that the pursuit of *arete* and the human good takes place within a communal horizon, and it is necessary for it to occur in such a space. Socrates searches for *arete* with others,

⁸⁴⁸ Plato, *Protagoras*, 318e-319a

and he does so because he needs them as much as they need him. The presumed isolation of the measure of *arete*, to which Protagoras' maxim could lead, only obscures its reliance on the communal horizon. Ironically, the justification for such a measure lies upon the assumptions about *arete* and the human good which the communal horizon provides. The pursuit of *arete* is a communal pursuit even when some people's pursuit leads them to measure the good person in "isolation" from, or even in conflict with, others.

Socrates pressed Anytus to account for his condemnation of the sophists, and although we developed an explanation to justify a concern about the sophists, Anytus could not give a reason for his dismissal of them. In fact, Anytus went so far as to claim that he had never even associated with a sophist, which we understood only as an indication of his lack of concern for *arete* and the human good. Nevertheless, Socrates, as always, remained resolved in his desire to search for the teachers of *arete*, and so he implored Anytus to say the name of any Athenian who could make Meno worthy of *arete*. The odd framing of this request led us to draw a connection between it and a line of questioning between Meletus and Socrates in the *Apology*. Socrates' accusers blame him for being the only Athenian who corrupts the youth.⁸⁴⁹ Similarly, when Anytus responds to Socrates' request in the *Meno*, he informs Socrates that any noble and good (καλοί καγαθοί) Athenian would make Meno good. The comparison caught our attention because, on the one hand, Meletus blamed Socrates alone for corrupting the youth, but on the other hand, Anytus claimed that any noble and good Athenian could make someone (like Meno) good. How is it possible for any Athenian to make someone good, but Socrates somehow alone has the power to make (the youth) bad? Not only does it seem improbable to us that Socrates would knowingly make people worse because of our ongoing engagement with Socratic philosophical practice, but it also seems unlikely given the communal character of the pursuit. Anytus again seems to say something true without understanding what he says. Our sense of his ignorance (even about his own speech) intensified when Socrates pressed him to explain how the noble and good Athenians became good themselves. After all, an attempt to figure out the way that people become good is a significant part of the search for the teachers of *arete*. Unfortunately, Anytus responds quite naively, relying on an infinite regress to explain the persistent "goodness" of every noble and good Athenian. However, in Socrates' own reply, we found an indication of a decisive distinction in his speech.

⁸⁴⁹ Plato, *Apology*, 25a.

Socrates agreed that there are good men (ἀγαθοί) in politics (τὰ πολιτικά) in Athens even though Anytus had not said anything explicit about politics. This comment, which we understood as an explication of the tacit distinction between the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) and the good person (ἀγαθός), prepared us to hear Socrates' subsequent examination of Themistocles, Aristides, Pericles, and Thucydides in a very particular way. It seems that, somehow, good leaders (i.e., good politicians, good citizens, noble and good Athenians) are understood as good people, but we wondered why.

We tracked this ambiguity between good leaders and good people through four intertextual analyses of Socrates' references to Themistocles, Aristides, Pericles, Thucydides, and all of their respective sons. In each case, Socrates pointed out a similar circumstance. These men earned reputations as noble and good Athenians respectively, and they educated their sons in the activities about which a technical know-how was taught. And yet, according to Socrates, none of these men taught their sons how to be good men, which contradicted Anytus' claim that the noble and good Athenians are the teachers of *arete* (in Athens). However, our analysis took us deeper into the testimony about these four men, and each successive examination led us into greater perplexity about their respective contributions to the Athenian pursuit of *arete* and the human good. While our analysis of Themistocles in the *Republic* drew out a sensitivity to the communal horizon in which the pursuit of *arete* and the human good take place, we also reflected on the blame that Socrates placed on certain noble and good Athenians (like Themistocles and Pericles) in the *Gorgias* for making Athens "sick." Ultimately, our analysis left us ambivalent about the justification for Themistocles' reputation as a noble and good Athenian. This ambivalence became persistent across every examination. Aristides "the just" seemed likely to be a good man, but we picked up on a decisive qualification in Socrates' praise of him also in the *Gorgias*. We could not determine whether Aristides deserved praise because he conducted himself justly in the affairs of the *polis*, i.e., he exhibited the *arete* of the good citizen, or because he conducted himself justly throughout his life, i.e., he exhibited the *arete* of the good person. The good person may not be a good citizen, and the good citizen may not be a good person. Our analysis has made explicit their difference, but speakers often speak about them equivocally—especially ones who lack experience in discourse about *arete* and the human good like Anytus. We concluded our analysis of Aristides through an evaluation of his son Lysimachus, who appears in the *Laches*, and our interpretation of Lysimachus' speech raised questions about one of the justifications for his father Aristides'

reputation as a noble and good Athenian. Lysimachus felt ashamed that he had not accomplished any noble deeds (καλὰ ἔργα), whereas his father accomplished many. Lysimachus' own lack of distinction caused him to warn his son that he might become a nobody if he does not heed Lysimachus' advice. But does the accomplishment of noble deeds (καλὰ ἔργα) make someone a good person? We understood "noble deeds" not as ordinary good deeds (like a *mitzvah*), but rather, as extraordinary political actions, e.g., acts of heroism in war. We seemed to have stumbled upon a bit of a crisis in Athens over the measure of *arete* and the good person.

Our sense of this crisis intensified when we turned to Pericles whose extended tenure in Athenian politics influenced Athens considerably. And yet, when we examined his contribution to the Athenian pursuit of *arete* and the human good, we could not determine whether his leadership of Athens ultimately benefited it. The inconclusive benefit of Pericles' leadership forced us to confront the distance between Thucydides' laudatory testimony in the *History of the Peloponnesian War* and Socrates' scrutiny of him in the *Gorgias* and *Protagoras*. This dissonance troubled us, but we eventually reconciled it through a pair of decisive insights. First, the good citizen will be good *at* certain political activities, but the good citizen will nonetheless accomplish these tasks *like* a good person would do them. The likeness of the good citizen to the good person does not imply deceit, inauthenticity, or some sort of phoniness, but rather, it implies the confluence of these identities despite their distinct measures. The justification for both Thucydides' assessment of Pericles *and* Socrates' scrutiny lies on the equivocal interrelatedness of the good citizen and the good person. Second, our sense of Pericles' inadequacy relies upon an idiosyncratically Socratic understanding of politics. That is, Socrates' contribution to the Athenian pursuit of *arete* and the human good leads to a retrospective reassessment of Pericles. It would be naïve and reductive to claim that people believed "mistakenly" that Pericles was a good man, when he "really" was not. On the contrary, because of Socratic philosophical practice and his engagement in the communal horizon, the measure of *arete* and the human good underwent a transformation which causes us to reassess the legitimacy of, for example, Pericles' claim on the human good. This observation about the idiosyncrasies of Socrates' contributions to the discourse also played a decisive role in our assessment of Thucydides' place in the inquiry.

Socrates' presentation of the final noble and good Athenian, Thucydides, stood out to us because it seemed more saturated with irony than the previous accounts. This stylistic difference

led us to wonder what might be distinct about Thucydides, and our curiosity was also fueled by the surprisingly sparse testimony about Thucydides (especially in contrast to Themistocles, Aristides, and Pericles). In fact, the testimony about Thucydides was so sparse that our intertextual analysis focused upon Plutarch's synoptic presentation of Thucydides' party's argument against Pericles' rebuilding plan. We developed a reading of this account which interpreted it as a dispute over different assumptions about *arete* and the human good—or more broadly about what a good *polis* would (or would not) do. While we eventually tempered this reading with an admission that it may be improper for us to interpret the passage so liberally with such a scant sense of the details, we nevertheless insisted that our reliance on Plutarch's testimony like our reliance on the other pieces of testimony reinforced our sense of the interdependence of inquiry into *arete* and the human good. Interdependency always implies uncertainty, but the solution is not to withdrawal into oneself *a la* our interpretation of the Protagorean maxim. And so, despite the modest testimony about Thucydides, we noticed a recurrent attribution to him (his paternalistic care for the *polis*), and we read this quality into the contextual dynamic between Socrates and Anytus as another example of Socrates curating his speech to his interlocutor. Thucydides may not be any more “good” than the other noble and good Athenians, but the way that he cared for Athens seems to have set him apart in some way. Anytus, who also claims to care for Athens in his own way, might benefit from a different example of care for the *polis* than the ones which have informed him hitherto. Furthermore, we noticed how Thucydides' aristocratic political orientation seemed to harmonize with Socrates' account of an “aristocratic” constitution of the soul (i.e., the assertion of dialectical reasoning as the leader of the soul). Socrates' engagement throughout the *Meno* conveys his own partiality and idiosyncratic understanding of the questions about *arete* and the human good. His partiality does not undermine his contributions. On the contrary, they are valuable *because* they raise new questions about *arete* and the human good with which the Athenian communal horizon must reckon. Unfortunately, Anytus does not see the benefit of Socrates' contributions, accusing him of speaking badly (κακῶς λέγειν) about the noble and good Athenians, and even worse, his threatening words mark his departure (in speech) from the dialogue. Once again, the pursuit of *arete* and the human good will fall on the joint efforts of Socrates and Meno.

CHAPTER VI: SOCRATES AND MENO RECONSIDER THE IDENTITY OF THE
TEACHERS OF *ARETE*: THE INTERTWINEMENT OF *ARETE* IN THE SOUL AND *ARETE*
IN THE *POLIS*

Introduction

Throughout Chapter IV, we analyzed the discussion between Socrates and Anytus with a sensitivity to Anytus' position within the *polis*. Anytus is not just any Athenian, but he is a well-esteemed, Athenian leader. Some might even call him a noble and good (κάλος καγαθός) Athenian, or, at least, we might interpret his anger at Socrates after he scrutinized four other noble and good Athenians as an indication of his identification with this title. Ultimately, it does not matter how Anytus views himself, since we examined Socrates' scrutiny of the four noble and good Athenians with a particular focus. Based upon our intertextual analysis, we did not make determinations about the *arete* of these men, i.e., whether they were "really" noble and good. Instead, we tracked a more basic dilemma in Athens. These men may be good politicians/citizens, but we focused upon the inadequacy of the *arete* which made them good in politics for the Athenian pursuit of the human good. Their *arete* in politics did not suffice as a measure of the *arete* which they would exhibit, if they were good men too. This disparity between two distinct senses of *arete* poses an axiological problem in Athens, but it also poses a very "practical" one too. Not only does uncertainty about the measure of a good person make it difficult to be a good person, but the inability of the noble and good Athenians to make their sons good (or anyone else) contradicts Anytus' claim that they are the teachers of *arete*. Without a measure of *arete* and without any obvious teachers of *arete*, we might begin to question if there are any good people in Athens at all. While Socrates did claim that he believed there to be good men in politics presently and in the past as well, the precarity of their search for a measure of *arete* and for the teachers of *arete* might appear to us as a symptom of an existential danger to Athens.⁸⁵⁰ Consequently, Socrates' rigorous, persistent, and (most importantly) cooperative search for *arete* also appears to us as a response to the threat which may be otherwise unacknowledged.

In Chapter V, we will continue to explore the tension between the *arete* of the good politician and the *arete* of the good person. Socrates takes up the inquiry anew with Meno, examining whether the situation in Thessaly differs. Not only will Meno reveal that the noble and

⁸⁵⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 93a.

good in Thessaly are no more confident about the teachability of *arete* than Socrates and Meno are in their inquiry, but Socrates will even recite some verses from Theognis, which, allegedly, show Theognis' uncertainty about the teachability of *arete* as well. Why might Socrates, once again, recite poetry for Meno? In any case, their inquiry will lead them to conclude that *arete* seems *not* to be teachable (contrary to the supposition which Socrates presupposed long ago). When it seems that their inquiry has reached a dead end and that there may not be any good men at all, Socrates will suggest that they revise a prior line of reasoning. In Chapter III, Socrates reasoned that, when dialectical reasoning leads the soul, a person is led rightly, and so, Socrates reasoned, if *arete* is teachable, then *arete* is dialectical reasoning (or at least some part of it). However, in this subsequent stage of their reasoning, which we will analyze in Chapter V, their supposition of the teachability of *arete* will seem no longer tenable, which implies that something else (besides dialectical reasoning/knowledge) must be able to lead a person rightly. Socrates will suggest that right/true opinion can also lead rightly. And, as we will see, Socrates will leverage the usefulness of right/true opinion to explain how it is that the “politicians” lead the *polis* without knowledge. Even though they do not know the truth of what they say, like soothsayers and diviners, they nevertheless somehow manage to lead rightly. We work only in very broad strokes for now, but even so, we might wonder how this explanation will help us to make sense of the tension between the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) and the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός).⁸⁵¹ If the leaders of the *polis* lead without knowledge, then they certainly cannot teach others their “*arete*.” The ambiguous referent of *arete* is representative of the broader problematic. We should also keep in mind Socrates' role in this inquiry. In what way does his account respond to a lack in the Athenian communal horizon? Let us turn now to the final stage of our inquiry.

Noble and Good Men as Teachers of *Arete* Reconsidered (95a-96c)

Anytus will not speak again in the *Meno* after his final warning, but he must not go too far, since Socrates mentions his presence towards the end of the dialogue.⁸⁵² Before renewing the search for the teachers of *arete* with Meno, Socrates addresses Anytus' hostile departure:

⁸⁵¹ Because of Athens' political organization, a politician (πολιτικός), a citizen (πολίτης), and a political man (πολιτικός ἀνὴρ) can designate the same person. We will often use these terms interchangeably, noting deviations as they arise. A leader of the *polis* can be a politician, but there are undoubtedly other leaders as well.

⁸⁵² Ibid., 99b.

Meno, Anytus seems angry (χαλεπαίνειν) to me, and I don't wonder at it: for, first of all, he supposes (οἶεται) me to be speaking-ill of (κακηγορεῖν) those men, and then he is leading (ἡγεῖται) himself also [to suppose himself] to be one of them. But if he should ever know (γνῶ) what sort of thing talking badly (τὸ κακῶς λέγειν) is, he will cease being angry (χαλεπαίνων), yet now he does not know (ἀγνοεῖ). But you, tell me, are there not men (ἄνδρες) among your people who are noble and good (καλοὶ καγαθοὶ) too?⁸⁵³

Throughout our analysis in Chapter IV, we pointed out several of Socrates' remarks which, we noticed, could imply a distance between the man Anytus claimed to be and the man that he is. Now, Socrates mentions Anytus' anger explicitly, and his observation helps to validate our sense of an underlying tension between Socrates and Anytus. We might also interpret Anytus' anger as an example of a "strong desire" (ἰσχυρὰ ἐπιθυμία) which, according to Socrates' account of the democratic soul in the *Republic*, can storm the acropolis of the democratic soul and lead it unreliably. This account plays a crucial part in our analysis because we also assume that the soul leads a person, and a person leads a *polis*. Because of our prior analysis, Socrates' observance of Anytus' anger does not surprise us. In an anticipatory way, we already noticed his similarity to the foolish person in the *Laws*, someone "...whose soul (ψυχὴν) is afire with the arrogance (ὑβρεως) that so far from needing someone to rule (ἄρχοντος) and lead (ἡγεμόνος) him, he is fit (ικανός) to lead (ἡγεῖσθαι) others—he is left (καταλείπεται) desolate (ἔρημος) by the god (θεοῦ)."⁸⁵⁴ Anytus, who is a leader in Athens and, perhaps, a noble and good Athenian exercises considerable influence over the Athenian pursuit of *arete* and the human good, and yet when Socrates pointed out that four renowned noble and good Athenians were unable to teach their *arete* to their sons, Anytus became angry. Socrates' account of the democratic soul explains Anytus' anger in one way, but how can we understand Anytus' anger according to what Socrates says about it in the *Meno*? Socrates claims that Anytus is angry because he believes that Socrates is speaking-ill of (κακηγορεῖν) the noble and good Athenians (including Anytus), but according to Socrates, if Anytus "should ever know (γνῶ) what sort of thing talking badly (τὸ κακῶς λέγειν) is," then he would not be angry. What might Socrates mean with this claim?

As we begin to unpack Socrates' claim, we should pay attention to a very inconspicuous yet important word-choice. Socrates speaks hypothetically about what Anytus would need to "know" (γνῶ), i.e., talking badly (τὸ κακῶς λέγειν), but his *subjunctive* use of the verb "γινώσκω"

⁸⁵³ Ibid., 95a. Translation modified.

⁸⁵⁴ Plato, *Laws*, 716a. Translation modified.

is, on the surface, somewhat surprising. We have come a long way since we first noticed a conspicuous use of this word, but we have nevertheless analyzed it before. During our analysis in Chapter I, we examined a distinction in Socrates’ opening speech between two sorts of knowing. Socrates asked, “Or does it seem possible to you that someone who has no ‘cognizance’ (γινώσκειν) of Meno at all, who he is, could know (εἰδέναι) whether he is handsome or rich or well-born, or the opposite of these?”⁸⁵⁵ We inferred from Socrates’ distinction that a part of being “cognizant” (γινώσκειν) of Meno seemed to require a direct encounter with him. It required some experience of the man. We have recently thematized the relationship between “knowing” and experience in another way as well. When Socrates commented on Anytus’ lack of experience (ἄπειρος) with the sophists and how such a lack would make it difficult to know what they are, we retrospectively interpreted Socrates’ own claim not to know *arete* in a new way. Even if he cannot (for various reasons) say what *arete* is, he does have experience in inquiring into *arete*—perhaps more experience than anyone else. He may not know what *arete* is, but the way that he does not know is different than the way that the *παῖς* did not know about geometry. Bringing all these moments together, we could infer from Socrates’ word choice that Anytus has not experienced someone talking badly (τὸ κακῶς λέγειν) directly. Because Anytus has not experienced it, Socrates’ scrutiny of the noble and good Athenians angered Anytus. Anytus seems to believe that Socrates speaks-ill of (κακηγορεῖν) them (and so of Anytus too) by pointing out that none of them taught their *arete* to their sons. However, we infer, if Anytus ever had experienced someone talking badly (τὸ κακῶς λέγειν) before, then he would not mistake Socrates’ scrutiny of the noble and good Athenians as the teachers of *arete* for speaking-ill (κακηγορεῖν) of them. We have partially disambiguated Socrates’ response, but we can still develop it more. What does it mean to speak “badly” (κακῶς), and why does Socrates speak about Anytus “knowing” in the subjunctive mood?

Throughout our analysis, we have identified what (or who) is “good” (ἀγαθός) with what (or who) is “beneficial” (ὠφέλιμος). We developed this identification within our own analysis of the many textual cues which seemed to imply it.⁸⁵⁶ Although Socrates has spoken more about the good than the bad, what is bad does occasionally appear especially in contrast to what/who is good/beneficial. Consequently, when Socrates mentions “talking badly” (τὸ κακῶς λέγειν), we might reasonably assume that what is “bad” (κακός) in “speaking badly” (τὸ κακῶς λέγειν) is what

⁸⁵⁵ Plato, *Meno*, 71b.

⁸⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 77d, 87e, 88b-d.

is “harmful” (βλαβερός). Now, if Anytus is right, and Socrates has indeed spoken-ill of (κακηγορεῖν) Themistocles, Aristides, Pericles, and Thucydides by pointing out that they were unable to teach their *arete* to their sons, then he would, at worst, harm their reputations as noble and good Athenians. But the decisive question is: Do these men deserve a reputation as noble and good if they were unable to benefit others (especially their sons)? Or, in a less Socratic register, we might ask: What measure of *arete* justifies their claim on the human good? In either case, it is difficult to justify Anytus’ angry response, and it could be appropriate for us to understand it as the foolish anger of someone who lacks understanding and experience about the matter under his consideration. So then what *would* Anytus need to “know” in order for him to cease being angry?

The ancient Greek subjunctive mood can be used to speak hypothetically about the present or the future. We could interpret Socrates’ claim in isolation as a simple, hypothetical conditional: if Anytus were to know what talking badly is, then he would no longer be angry with Socrates. Such an interpretation translates the syntactical structure of the sentence acceptably, but does it heed the resonance of the claim as a part within a whole? Our analysis provides us with a framework for understanding Socrates’ claim in a slightly different way. We have attuned ourselves to the intertextual resonance of the interaction between Socrates and Anytus, an interaction which, we know, will end with Anytus’ participation in Socrates’ prosecution and execution.⁸⁵⁷ We know the details of a future to which this subjunctive claim could refer. At the time of the *Meno*, Anytus does not know from experience (“γνῶ”) what sort of thing talking badly (τὸ κακῶς λέγειν) is, i.e., talking harmfully—but *we* know that he will know. Anytus will know firsthand about a very harmful sort of speech when he shares in Socrates’ execution. Not only does he harm himself because of his share in the violence against Socrates, but he harms Athens as well when he deprives Athens of its most experienced inquirer into *arete* and the human good.⁸⁵⁸ In Socrates’ speech, we might observe some parallels with our prior analysis of Oedipus’ encounter with Teiresias. Just as we understood Teiresias’ prophetic power to lie in his ability to provoke Oedipus in a way which compelled Oedipus to bring to fruition the truth of Teiresias’ prophetic speech, so too might we understand Socrates’ dialogical power in a similar way. When we

⁸⁵⁷ Weiss reads Socrates’ reference to “slander” (or “to speak-ill of” (κακηγορεῖν)) as anticipatory of the later “slander” which Anytus, Meletus, and Lycon will speak against Socrates. Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato’s Meno*, 150.

⁸⁵⁸ It might seem that we have omitted an obvious victim of Anytus’ harmful speech, namely, Socrates himself, but in the *Apology*, Socrates claims that his accusers cannot harm him. Plato, *Apology*, 40c-41e, esp. 41d.

analyzed the noble and good Athenians in Chapter IV, we viewed their respective claims on the human good within the Athenian communal horizon ambivalently. Even so, we never concluded that any of them were bad men. We simply tracked a persistent, underlying uncertainty that troubled each of their respective claims to be good, and the confluence of the good person and the good citizen complicated our search as well. In contrast to the purported simplicity of the search for teachers of *arete*, which Anytus' responses implied, we found in Socrates' speech a reckoning with a multi-faceted problem. The inability of Themistocles, Aristides, Pericles, and Thucydides to teach their *arete* to their sons poses a considerable challenge to the Athenian pursuit of *arete* and the human good, especially if most Athenians share Anytus' assumption that they are the ones who teach *arete*. If this observation angers Anytus, then Anytus' anger reveals more about the precarious state of the Athenian pursuit of *arete* than it does about Socrates' blameworthiness. And insofar as we hear Socrates' claim in a prophetic register, Socrates does seem to speak this truth (i.e., that the Athenian pursuit of *arete* and the human good lies in a precarious state) into existence through his engagement with Anytus. Ironically, Anytus' attempt to "do good" for Athens will become the same act through which he will come to know what speaking harmfully is. Such arrogant behavior is exactly what we would expect from a foolish person who believes himself capable of leading his *polis* without concern for *arete* and the human good.

While we have not hidden our sympathies with Socrates and his approach to inquiry into *arete* and the human good, we should nonetheless acknowledge that Anytus can both be mistaken about what (or who) is good and simultaneously *want* to be good/do good for Athens.⁸⁵⁹ We need not commit ourselves to the pessimistic and jaded interpretation of Anytus' anger as a self-interested reaction to a perceived threat to his personal reputation as a noble and good Athenian. Socrates' scrutiny of the prior noble and good Athenians may have personal consequences for Anytus, which Socrates notes (e.g., "...[Anytus] is leading (ἡγεῖται) himself also [to suppose himself] to be one of [the noble and good Athenians]"), but, as we maintain, the pursuit of *arete* and the human good must take place within a communal horizon. And so, even if Anytus detests the sophists (among whom Anytus seems to include Socrates) and believes that their corruptive influence justifies harming them (i.e. with ostracism or death) for "the greater good" (of Athens), Anytus' assumptions rest upon the Athenian communal horizon for their justification, and his

⁸⁵⁹ The assumption that all humans want beneficial things for themselves (so that they can become good) is a Socratic assumption, which we analyzed previously. Plato, *Meno*, 77c-78a.

actions represent his unique contribution to the collective pursuit, a contribution which simultaneously opens him to the scrutiny of others. This give-and-take between the individual and the community (the *polis*) is what makes it possible for a person to be good at all but also what is responsible for the pursuit of *arete* to be ongoing. The pursuit of *arete* and the human good is a work which is only brought to completion in death. As we pointed out previously, Anytus shows many signs of inexperience in inquiry into *arete*, and from these signs, we might infer that Anytus simply took for granted many conventional assumptions about *arete* and the human good. Both Anytus and Meno—like Socrates—do not know about *arete*, but they differ from Socrates too insofar as they take too much about *arete* for granted whereas Socrates’ experience informs his circumspect approach to inquiry.

Underlying Socrates’ address to Anytus, we might hear the faint, prophetic whispers of his untimely death, but in the meantime, he will continue his philosophical practice. Taking up the inquiry once more with Meno, Socrates asks him about the circumstances in Thessaly. Do the Thessalians also have their own noble and good men (καλοὶ καγαθοὶ ἄνδρες), and do these men teach the *arete* which makes them noble and good (καλοὶ καγαθοὶ)? Meno claims that the situation in Thessaly is no different than in Athens. The noble and good Thessalians are ambivalent about *arete*, and there is no agreement about its teachability.⁸⁶⁰ There is no reason to think that the noble and good Thessalians would be able to teach *arete* any more than the noble and good Athenians, so Meno’s response is not surprising. Socrates and Meno agree that such men are unlikely to be teachers of *arete*, men who do not even agree that it can be taught. And so, Socrates asks, “Well, what then? Do these sophists, who alone proclaim it, seem to you to be teachers of *arete*?”⁸⁶¹ Anytus’ prior rejection of the sophists, our analysis of the Protagorean maxim, and our analysis of technical know-how (τέχνη) might make Socrates’ and Meno’s reconsideration of the sophists seem redundant. In a fairly trivial way, does Socrates not already “know” that the sophists cannot be the teachers of *arete*? However, we should remember that Anytus rejected the sophists’ authority on *arete* baselessly (or at least he gave no explicit reasons for his rejection of them). Socrates playfully mocked his confident dismissal with the suggestion that Anytus must know about the sophists because of divine inspiration. By contrast, Meno (and the Aleudai) were

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid., 95b. Scott notes Meno’s rhetorical repetition as characteristic of Gorgias’ style. Scott, *Plato’s Meno*, 174 FN 19.

⁸⁶¹ Plato, *Meno*, 95b.

educated by Gorgias. Because we recognize the communal horizon as constitutive of inquiry into *arete*, we should also acknowledge Meno's unique position to comment on at least one sophists' ability to teach *arete*. Meno does not disappoint, proclaiming:

Now that is something I admire (ἄγαμαι) most in Gorgias, Socrates, that you would never hear (ἀκούσαις) him promising (ὑπισχνουμένου) this [i.e., to teach *arete*], but he even jeers (καταγελά) at the others whenever he hears (ἀκούσῃ) them promising (ὑπισχνουμένων) that. But he does think that it is necessary (δεῖν) to make (ποιεῖν) clever people (δεινούς) [with respect to] speaking (λέγειν).⁸⁶²

According to Meno, Gorgias, unlike Protagoras, does not claim to teach *arete*. On the contrary, he jeers (καταγελά) at those who do. If Meno represents his teacher Gorgias accurately, then Gorgias seems not to consider the pursuit of *arete* very important at all. Even so, Meno does mention Gorgias' insistence upon people being clever (δεινούς) in speech, a claim which stands out because of its morphological similarity with the phrase frequently used to describe the pursuit of the human good (i.e., "to make (a person) good" (ποιεῖν ἀγαθός)). Let us examine Meno's contribution to the inquiry more closely through our own interpretive framework.

Meno claims to "admire" (ἄγαμαι) (also exalt, honor, or adore) Gorgias because he does not promise/ undertake (ὑπισχνουμένου) to teach *arete* to his students. We can examine this expression from at least two directions. What does it imply about Meno's orientation towards the pursuit of *arete*, if he admires someone who jeers at those who promise/undertake to teach it? And what does it say about Gorgias, if he views the pursuit of *arete* in this way? If we were to consider Gorgias' position in isolation from the broader contextual resonance of our examination of the *Meno*, we could entertain the reading of Gorgias' abstention as a tacit agreement with Socrates' own position. Perhaps Gorgias jeers at those who promise/undertake to teach *arete* because Gorgias recognizes, like Socrates, that the primary pedagogical tool of the sophists, namely, technical know-how (τέχνη), cannot adequately address problems posed by the pursuit of *arete* and the human good. If we attribute such a position to Gorgias, then he appears quite philosophically minded—even Socratic. And yet, because of our prior analyses, it seems difficult for us to assume that Gorgias jeers at self-professed teachers of *arete* for this reason. If we assume that Meno reflects his teacher (even if imperfectly), then we might be able to discern a more

⁸⁶² Ibid., 95c. Translation modified. It is worth noting that the word for "promise," ὑπισχνουμένου, can also mean "to take upon oneself" or "undertake to do." Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 840. In that sense, Meno remarks upon Gorgias' scorn for those who endeavor or take it upon themselves to teach *arete*.

convincing and (con)textually rooted interpretation of Gorgias' mockery. Let us review some prior textual moments between Socrates and Meno as symptoms of Gorgias' instruction.

Meno claims to admire Gorgias for jeering at those who promise/undertake to teach *arete*, and we might retrospectively identify his imitation of this behavior as a testament to his admiration and the power of Gorgias' instruction. For example, in the part of the text which we analyzed in Chapter II, Socrates suggested for them to renew their search for *arete* a fourth time, and Meno mocked (σκώπτειν) Socrates for his likeness "in looks and in other respects" to the torpedo fish.⁸⁶³ When we reconsider Meno's comments now, we see their similarity with the behavior that Meno attributes to Gorgias. Socrates never claimed to be able to teach *arete* (or anything else), but Meno did indicate that he would learn from Socrates, if Socrates would teach him.⁸⁶⁴ And so, even if Socrates does not claim to teach *arete*, the dynamic between Socrates and Meno, at the very least, shares some similarities with that of a teacher/student. And if we presume that this dynamic occasionally imposes itself on their interactions, then we might consider Meno's mockery of Socrates as a manifestation of behavior that he learned from Gorgias—behavior for which Meno partially expressed his admiration. We might also recall Meno's presentation of the contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) as another consequence of Gorgias' instruction. Even when we interpreted this argument initially, we understood it as a clever (δεινός) response, which Meno asserted "fearlessly and magnificently as is fitting for one who knows." Our entire interpretation of this textual moment revolved around its salience to a broader question about the relationship between dialogical comportment and *arete*. Meno's argument was clever yet sophomoric, and so it did not affect Socrates' ability to navigate the inquiry. While these two examples certainly do not "prove" that Meno does not care about *arete* and the human good because of Gorgias' instruction, they do contribute to our prevailing sense of a disconnect between Socrates' and Meno's respective commitment to the inquiry. Anytus may not have been able to account for the "corruption" for which he holds the sophists responsible, but our reconsideration of Meno's prior behavior does give us another reason to think that Anytus may not have been totally mistaken about the danger of the sophists.

⁸⁶³ Plato, *Meno*, 80a.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid., 81e. "Yes, Socrates. But how do you mean this: that we do not learn, but that what we call learning is recollection? Can you teach me how this can be?"

When we analyzed Anytus' emphatic rejection of the sophists as teachers of *arete*, our development of a justification for his claim partially rested on our interpretation of Protagoras' maxim. However, in light of Meno's remarks about Gorgias' behavior, which we take as a partial indication of Gorgias' assumptions about *arete* and the human good, we might identify another danger of a separate sophist's instruction. If Meno represents Gorgias' views faithfully, then it seems unlikely that Gorgias values being a good person very highly. According to Meno, Gorgias thinks "it is necessary (δεῖν) to make (ποιεῖν) clever people (δεινούς) [with respect to] speaking (λέγειν)." From this claim, we might infer that Gorgias teaches his students that being a clever (δεινός) person is more important than being a good person (ἀγαθός). We readily recognize the problematic foundation of Anytus' assumptions about *arete* and the human good, but he does, at least, assume that being good—in its ambiguity between the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) and the good person (ἀγαθός)—is important. Gorgias' teaching directly contradicts a conventional response to the question of *arete* and the human good. Furthermore, Gorgias' teaching is dangerous in another way too. Two of the noble and good Athenians, namely, Themistocles and Pericles, were themselves known to be clever speakers. Repeatedly, we have drawn attention to the power of a *polis*' leaders to influence the measure of *arete* and the human good. And so, if most Athenians believe that Themistocles and Pericles were noble and good men, a claim which made Anytus angry when Socrates raised questions about it, and if they were clever in speaking, then we might infer that one's cleverness in speaking could be a measure of *arete*. To be clear, we need not assert that the Athenians considered Themistocles and Pericles noble and good men *because of* their cleverness in speaking, but rather, their cleverness in speaking in conjunction with the teachings of sophists and their status as leaders *could* lead the Athenians to judge cleverness in speech as a sufficient measure of *arete*, and so, of a good person. Again, we find Anytus' weariness about the sophists justified, but also again, the reason for their danger differs from what he claimed. We can understand Socratic philosophical practice as a response to the urgency of a ubiquitous, unreflective orientation towards inquiry into *arete* and the human good. The Athenian claim to *arete* and the human good is not in danger because, for example, Socrates asked questions about those who purportedly exhibit it, but rather, the *arete* of Athens (the *polis* and its constituency) is in danger because not enough Athenians care to interrogate the Athenian measure of *arete* like Socrates.

Socrates does not react to Meno’s dangerous and naïve praise of Gorgias. He simply clarifies Meno’s conclusion. Not only do those who are noble and good (in Thessaly and Athens alike) not seem to be the teachers of *arete* but neither do the sophists either. Finding himself in agreement with “the many” (οἱ πολλοί), Meno voices his uncertainty about the sophists. “I cannot say, Socrates. For I too undergo (πέπονθα) the very thing that the many (οἱ πολλοί) [undergo]: sometimes it seems to me they [i.e., the sophists] are [the teachers of *arete*] and sometimes not.”⁸⁶⁵ We might conjecture that Meno speaks here like someone who has not thought very much about this question (whether *arete* is teachable, and if so, who teaches it). Ironically, we might even sense a consolatory tone in Socrates’ response. It is not just Meno who experiences uncertainty about the teachability of *arete*. Socrates asks Meno, “Do you know that it seems so not only to you and to the other politicians (τοῖς ἄλλοις τοῖς πολιτικοῖς), that some times they think this is teachable (διδασκτόν) and other times not; but do you know that Theognis the poet, too, says these same things?”⁸⁶⁶ Because of our prior analysis, Socrates’ introduction of the “politicians” (πολιτικοί) appears to us as a continuation of a familiar line of questioning. Even though Meno said nothing about politicians (πολιτικοί), Socrates’ response indicates that their inquiry into *arete* (which, in this case, involves an examination of its teachability, and if it is, who teaches it) pertains to the politicians (πολιτικοί) (i.e., the leaders of the *polis*)—politicians like Anytus who appeared to us as unreflective about *arete* as Meno. We might assume that this question interests the politicians (πολιτικοί) because they are responsible for the good of the *polis* and its constituency according to Socrates, but, of course, such a claim never appears explicitly. Our analysis leads us to make this assumption.

Socrates reassures Meno that it is not only he and the politicians (πολιτικοί) who are uncertain about the teachability of *arete*, but Theognis’ verses seem to indicate his agreement with them as well. As evidence for this claim, Socrates recites two sets of verses. The first set, he insists, represent Theognis’ claim that *arete* is teachable:

In [Theognis’] elegiacs, where he says: Drink and eat with them, and with them sit,
 And gratify (ἄνδανε) them whose power is great (μεγάλη δύναμις).
 For from good people (ἐσθλῶν) you will be taught good things (ἐσθλά).

⁸⁶⁵ Ibid., 95c. Translation modified.

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid., 95c-d.

But if you mingle (συμμίσης) with the bad (κακοῖσιν), you will simply lose

Even the mind you have (ἀπολεῖς καὶ τὸν ἔοντα νόον).⁸⁶⁷

We might be surprised that Socrates interprets these verses as an assertion of *arete*'s teachability, if we had not been tracking the relationship between *arete* and the human good since the beginning. His interpretation might surprise us because the word “*arete*” does not appear in these verses. And yet, we are well positioned to understand Socrates' assertion because our analysis of *arete* has focused on *arete* in relation to the human good. We (alongside Socrates, Meno, and Anytus) search for the *arete* that good people exhibit, and so our investigation of the measure of *arete* has led us to question what and who is good in the *polis*. In this sense, we can incorporate Theognis' contribution to the inquiry. According to these verses, “good people” (ἔσθλοί) will teach Cynrus “good things” (ἔσθλα), which, it seems, will make him (and presumably anyone else) good in turn.⁸⁶⁸ Thus, if good people can teach someone how to be good, and if *arete* is the measure of a good person, then it would seem that good people teach *arete*, which implies that *arete* is teachable. However, these verses do not seem to contribute anything different than Anytus did previously, when he declared that the noble and good Athenians learned to be noble and good from those who were noble and good before them.⁸⁶⁹ At least on the surface, Theognis' verses poetize a conventional position on the origin and cultivation of *arete*, namely, good people “teach” their *arete*. Theognis also offers a warning to Cynrus about how he would become “bad” (κακός) too, namely, by mingling with bad people, which would cause him “to lose his mind.” We will analyze the assumptions and implications underlying these verses shortly, but before doing so, let us explore some questions about Theognis. First, who is this poet Theognis, and why might Socrates have chosen him this time (in contrast to Pindar, for example, of whom Socrates knows Meno to be fond). Second, what do these verses mean when Socrates recites them in the *Meno*? Because Socrates recites the verses in this dialogue, we should interpret them through the framework within which we have inquired into the *Meno* as a whole. Let us begin our examination.

Theognis was an elegiac poet from Megara, whose corpus includes a collection of 1400 verses. The corpus is commonly divided into five sections, but Socrates' verses come from only

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid., 95d. Translation modified.

⁸⁶⁸ In its fuller context, Theognis addresses someone named “Cynrus” before giving the advice which Socrates recites, and this style of verse is representative of the so-called Cynrus-blocks within Theognis' corpus.

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid., 93a.

two: section two, verses 19-254, which are addressed to Cynus, and section three, verses 255-1022, which are “...heterogeneous and disorderly...with a few Cynus-blocks here and there.”⁸⁷⁰ Concerning the collection as a whole, Hornblower et al claim that “[i]t may be taken as a representative cross-section of the elegiac poetry circulating in social settings between the late 7th and early 5th cent., and is our best source for the ordinary man’s ideas about life, friendship, fate, death, and other matters.”⁸⁷¹ Insofar we take for granted that Theognis’ poetry does represent the views of an “ordinary” Greek (man), we should take note of the coincidence between Theognis’ poetry and some recent dialogical trends in the *Meno*. Meno just said that he found himself in agreement with the many (οἱ πολλοί), who are unsure whether the sophists teach *arete*. We also noticed in our preliminary consideration of the verses how they repeated similar assumptions about the origin and cultivation of *arete* as those which undergirded Anytus’ assertions about the noble and good Athenians. The agreement between Theognis’ verses and the views of Meno (and Anytus) might reassure someone like Meno that his uncertainty about the teachability of *arete* is “normal” (and so unproblematic). The noble and good ones (καλοὶ κάγαθοί), the many (οἱ πολλοί), and even great poets like Theognis all share a common uncertainty about the teachability of *arete*. And yet, to us, the prevalence of this uncertainty is disconcerting—not because we need an answer to the question more urgently than they did nor because the answer to the question is more obvious to us. The disconcerting part of the prevailing uncertainty is that many different sorts of people admit that they do not know whether *arete* is teachable, and yet, only Socrates has committed himself to inquiring into/searching for what *arete* is. If it is important to *be* a good person, then it is also important to know *how* people become good. And if it is unclear who, if anyone, is good, that is, if a measure is lacking, then it behooves the person who wants to be good (i.e., who wants to “know what *arete* is”) to search for such a measure. This dialogue began with Meno asking Socrates how *arete* comes to be in humans, which we might translate into the question: How do people become good? If Theognis does not know how people become good either, then it would be short-sighted for Meno to feel reassured by his agreement. On the contrary, if even Theognis and those who are “noble and good” do not know whether *arete* can be taught, then the interrogation of *arete* seems even more urgent. So then should we understand Socrates’ recitation

⁸⁷⁰ Hornblower et al, “Theognis” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 1459-1460.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid. For additional commentary on Theognis and Elegiac poetry, see: Burn, *The Lyric Age of Greece*, 247-264. Figueira and Nagy (eds.), *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis*. Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, 401-425. West, *Studies in Greek Elegy and Iambus*, 40-71.

of Theognis' verses as a sort of "call to action"? Perhaps a reconsideration of Socrates' prior recitation of poetry could offer some guidance.

Socrates last recited poetry for Meno when he recited some Pindaric verses to augment his story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις).⁸⁷² When we examined this textual moment in Chapter II, we interpreted it as a part of a true *and* beautiful account, which Socrates presented *for* Meno. As we developed our interpretation further, we realized that much of the account conformed with beliefs that Meno already held or with which he was likely familiar. Socrates did not invoke Pindar's poetic authority in order to use his authority as justification for the account. Meno himself likely already held many of the assumptions which were required for him to believe its "truth." However, we noticed that the invocation of divine and poetic authority contributed to Socrates' broader effort to persuade Meno to trust his account, a trustworthy account which might reorient Meno towards the pursuit of *arete*. Among other prejudices, we recalled Meno's prior predilection for Pindaric poetry and other sorts of "tragical" (τραγική), i.e., "deep-sounding," answers.⁸⁷³ We might go so far as to assert that Socrates recites poetry to speak to Meno's soul. If Socratic invocation of poetic authority tends to follow this pattern, then how should we interpret his recitation of Theognis?

If we assume that Socrates uses poetry to speak to Meno's soul and, thereby, persuade him, then we should question what Socrates is invoking Theognis to persuade Meno of. Surely Socrates does not recite Theognis just to reassure him that many people do not know whether *arete* is teachable. We could interpret the verses "on their own terms," which would require us to consider their place within Theognis' poetical corpus. However, such an approach seems strange. We encounter these verses engulfed in the *Meno*. They are as much a part of the *Meno* as they are a part of Theognis' corpus. Furthermore, our entire investigation has revolved around an analysis of Socrates' idiosyncratic and unconventional approach to inquiry into *arete*, and in our preliminary consideration of the verses, we already began to interpret these verses as a part of our analysis of *arete* and the human good in the *Meno*. And so, perhaps a better approach to interpreting these verses for our investigation of the *Meno* would involve an interpretation of them through the *Meno*'s dialogical conflict. Let us venture such a reading.

⁸⁷² Plato, *Meno*, 81b-c.

⁸⁷³ *Ibid.*, 76d-e.

In the verses that Socrates has recited, Theognis advises Cynrus to gratify those whose “power is great (μεγάλη δύναμις),” and the verses imply that those people are “good” (ἔσθλοί). Throughout our analysis, we have raised questions about the relationship between power in the *polis* and the human good. Wealth can give a person power, and being a leader of the *polis* can give a person power as well. When we examined Meno’s early accounts of *arete*, we noticed many of his assumptions about *arete* were intertwined with his assumptions about the “good” of wealth and power.⁸⁷⁴ In Chapter III, our analysis of Ismenias drew out the confluence of these measures of the good, and further, to identify Anytus more with Ismenias than with his father.⁸⁷⁵ In Chapter IV, we examined four noble and good Athenians who had great power in Athens and with whom Anytus identified himself.⁸⁷⁶ We have often remarked upon Anytus’ conventionality both in terms of his life and his views. And so, if we bear the force of our prior analyses in mind, then it seems that Anytus is more like the “good person” whom Theognis advises Cynrus to gratify because Anytus, not Socrates, has great power in Athens. Furthermore, Theognis warns Cynrus about mingling with bad people, and if we analyze these verses in terms of the dialogical conflict in the *Meno*, Socrates seems more like one of the bad (κακοί) than the good (ἔσθλοί). That is, Socrates does not have great power according to the conventional measure of the “good” (ἔσθλοί) in Theognis’ verses, but it does seem likely that he could cause Meno (or anyone else who associates with him) to lose his mind. But, of course, such a claim presses us to ask what it means to lose one’s mind.

The translation of “ἀπολεῖς καὶ τὸν ἐόντα νόον” as “you will simply lose / Even the mind you have” works well in many ways. The English idiom effectively conveys the negative connotation that Theognis’ warning about “bad people” (κακοί) implies, and it does not require the addition of much extraneous verbiage. The English and the Greek correspond fairly neatly. And yet, a question confronts us as we venture an interpretation of these verses through the conflict of the *Meno*. We have never entertained the possibility that Socrates could be a bad man (κακός). On the contrary, he seems to be one of a few Athenians who care greatly about the challenges of being a good person (ἀγαθός). Our positive disposition towards Socrates may be an artefact of the transmission of the Platonic texts, and we should recognize that our esteem for him was likely not

⁸⁷⁴ Especially in his third account. *Ibid.*, 78c-79a.

⁸⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 90a-b.

⁸⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 93c-95a.

the norm among his contemporaries. Socrates even attests to his unpopularity among the Athenians in the *Apology*.⁸⁷⁷ Even in the *Meno*, we have witnessed both Meno and Anytus insinuate that Socrates could be at risk of negative judgment, that is, being considered a bad man (κακός) in Athens or abroad.⁸⁷⁸ How can we reconcile our esteem for Socrates and his philosophical practice with the persistent negative insinuations about him (e.g., from Meno, Anytus, and now, his likeness to the bad person in Theognis' poetry)? We cannot resolve this issue simply by asserting that Socrates was right, and his contemporaries were mistaken about him. We have often concluded that there is no simple resolution to the challenges raised by the pursuit of *arete* and the human good, and one reason for its resistance to simple resolution is because the pursuit takes place within the Athenian communal horizon. Our negative impressions of Meno and Anytus stem from their rudimentary and unreflective approaches to inquiry into *arete*. We do not blame them for being “wrong” about *arete* but for being arrogant and overconfident about their ability to resolve ἀπορία about *arete*, ἀπορία which we draw out of their respective engagements with Socrates. That they all share in this horizon is constitutive of the conflict in the *Meno*, and another benefit of the English idiom “to lose one’s mind” is that it conveys the gravity of the conflict. For example, to raise questions about Themistocles’, Aristides’, Pericles’, and Thucydides’ respective claims on the human good opens the possibility for them (and those who followed their model (like Anytus, perhaps)) to lose their claim on the human good. The interrogation of *arete* has immediate, concrete consequences for individuals. And yet, not questioning the measure of *arete* offers no reprieve from the challenges which questioning it makes explicit. If, for example, “great power” is the measure of the human good, as Theognis’ verses assert, then, on the one hand, many Athenians are already excluded from their share of the human good, and, on the other hand, such a measure can justify the harmful behavior of allegedly “good people.” In other words, even if the contradictions of such a measure remain tacit and unexamined, they nonetheless have negative consequences for many constituents in the *polis*. What justifies the good of some over the good of others? Does the possession of wealth, power, or even wisdom suffice?

We have noticed many times that Socrates’ interrogation of *arete* has put him at odds with his interlocutors. Socrates takes for granted many unconventional assumptions. “To lose one’s mind” involves losing foundational assumptions which support one’s navigation through the

⁸⁷⁷ Plato, *Apology*, 23a.

⁸⁷⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 80b, 94e-95a.

world. If we assume that conventional assumptions are “right” and “good,” then losing one’s mind would threaten one’s claim on the human good. However, Socrates’ unconventional assumptions (e.g., a good person is beneficial to others, or the objective of politics is to make the constituency as good as possible) are not obviously “wrong” and “bad.” If Meno were to “lose his mind,” would it be so bad? If Meno were to lose the basis of his assumption that, for example, a good man is measured by his ability to provide gold and silver for himself, would he be harmed by such a loss?⁸⁷⁹ We might retrospectively interpret a prior textual moment as evidence of the benefit of Meno’s loss. When Meno mentioned his experience of ἀπορία, which we analyzed in Chapter II, we could now interpret his experience as an inability to support the assumptions about *arete* which allowed him to speak about it so well on previous occasions.⁸⁸⁰ Socrates may have caused Meno “to lose his mind,” but Meno was not harmed by it. Our interpretation of Theognis’ verses through the conflict of the *Meno* may give us insight into one dimension of the challenge which Socratic philosophical practice confronts, but we should also account for the impact of these verses on Meno. We are not yet positioned to analyze their effect on Meno, and so we have no choice but to move on to the next set of verses, which, according to Socrates, contradict the first set.⁸⁸¹

Meno does not engage substantively with the verses, responding only with “it appears so” (“φαίνεται”) as he responded to Socrates’ suspicious reasoning previously.⁸⁸² Nevertheless, Socrates continues, reciting another set of verses which allegedly contradict the first set:

But in other verses, he changes course a bit: “And if it was able to be done (εἰ δ’ ἦν ποιητόν),” he says, “and mindfulness (νόημα) could be put into (ἐνθετον) a man (ἄνδρῃ),”—he says something like that—“many and great fees would they bear off, those who are able (οἱ δυνάμενοι) to do (ποιεῖν) this,” and,

Never would a bad man (κακός) be born from a good father (ἀγαθοῦ πατρὸς),

Being persuaded (πειθόμενος) by sensible speeches (μύθοισι σαόφροσιν). But by teaching (διδάσκων)

You will never make (ποιήσεις) the bad man (κακὸν ἄνδρ’) good (ἀγαθόν).⁸⁸³

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid., 78d; also implied at 84b.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid., 80a-b.

⁸⁸¹ For other readings which agree that the verses do not contradict themselves in the way Socrates claims, see Bluck, *Plato’s Meno*, 395-396; Woodbury, “The Riddle of Theognis: The Latest Answer,” 1-10.

⁸⁸² Plato, *Meno*, 86a-86b.

⁸⁸³ Ibid., 95e-96a.

There is something very odd about Socrates' recitation of these verses. Not only does Socrates splice the verses with redundant interjections (e.g., "he says"), but he also modifies the verses in a way which, at least to us, seems noteworthy. Socrates' interjections, which function like minor caesurae, break up the verses into three distinct parts, and in a way, they adorn Socrates' supplementation of the "original" verses.⁸⁸⁴ Let us explore the peculiarity of Socrates' recitation more carefully.

The first segment of the verses, "and if it was able to be done (εἰ δ' ἦν ποιητόν)," assumes a different framework than that in which we analyzed the first set of verses. That is, we begin within a counterfactual register, one in which something (which has not yet been disclosed) *could* take place. This assertion will ostensibly not concern factual life. The second segment of the verses lays out the task: "and mindfulness (νόημα) could be put into (ἔνθετον) a man (ἀνδρὶ)."⁸⁸⁵ The verb "to put in" (ἐντιθέναι) can signify two sorts of activities.⁸⁸⁶ It can signify a visible activity, e.g., the child "put" the trash into the bin; but it can also signify an invisible one, e.g., the warrior

⁸⁸⁴ It seems somewhat misleading to identify our fragmentary records of Theognis' poetry as the "original," but the point is that Socrates uses some "creative license" in his recitation. Of course, this deviation could be a consequence of its transmission through an oral tradition or Socrates' abidance by different citational norms than our own. Nevertheless, we ought to be aware of a "standard" so that Socrates' deviation will even appear to us as a deviation. Theognis, *Poemes elegiaques*, 48-49. "εἰ δ' Ἀσκληπιάδαις τοῦτο γ' ἔδωκε θεός, / ἰᾶσθαι κακότητα καὶ ἀτηρὰς φρένας ἀνδρῶν, / πολλοὺς ἂν μισθοὺς καὶ μεγάλους ἔφερον: / εἰ δ' ἦν ποιητόν τε καὶ ἔνθετον ἀνδρὶ νόημα, / οὔποτε ἂν ἐξ ἀγαθοῦ πατὴρ ἐγενετο κακός, / πειθόμενος μῦθοισι σαόφροσιν. ἀλλὰ διδάσκων / οὔποτε ποιήσεις τὸν κακὸν ἀνδρ' ἀγαθόν." "If the sons of Asclepius had received from the god / this [thing] to cure wickedness and the bewildered hearts of men, / many and great fees would they bear off! / And if it was able to be done, and mindfulness could be put into a man, / then never would a bad man be born from a good father, / being persuaded by sensible speeches. But by teaching / You will never make the bad man good." Translation modified. Plato, *Meno*, 95e-96a. "ἐν ἄλλοις δέ γε ὀλίγον μεταβάς,— / 'εἰ δ' ἦν ποιητόν,' φησί, 'καὶ ἔνθετον ἀνδρὶ νόημα,' / λέγει πως ὅτι—'πολλοὺς ἂν μισθοὺς καὶ μεγάλους ἔφερον / οἱ δυνάμενοι τοῦτο ποιεῖν, καὶ— / οὔ ποτ' ἂν ἐξ ἀγαθοῦ πατὴρ ἐγενετο κακός, / πειθόμενος μῦθοισι σαόφροσιν. ἀλλὰ διδάσκων / οὔ ποτε ποιήσεις τὸν κακὸν ἀνδρ' ἀγαθόν.'" "But in other verses, he changes course a bit: "And if it was able to be done," he says, "and mindfulness could be put into a man,"—he says something like that—"many and great fees would they bear off, those who are able to do this," and, "Never would a bad [son] be born from a good father, / Being persuaded by sensible speeches. But by teaching / You will never make the bad man good."

⁸⁸⁵ Anastaplo and Berns translate "νόημα" as "intelligence," which is a good option, but it does not preserve the morphological continuity between "νόημα" and "νοῦς," which is important for our analysis. Liddell and Scott gloss "νόημα" in the following way: "That which is perceived, a perception, thought, Hom., Hes., Att.:...2. A thought, purpose, design, Hom., Ar. II. Like νόησις, understanding, mind, Hom.: disposition, Pind." Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 534. Conspicuously, the translation "mindfulness" is absent, but its similarity to understanding, mind, and even intelligence should be recognizable. "Mindfulness" has no kinship with the contemporary psychological concept, which Buddhist meditative practices partially informs. Rather, the translation "mindfulness" attempts to preserve a continuity between this part of the text, which we analyze in Chapter V, and the part of the text which we analyzed in Chapter III. During our analysis of Socrates' reasoning about dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) in Chapter III, we emphasized the necessity of mind (νοῦς, σὺν νῶ, μετὰ νοῦ) for the soul which dialectical reasoning leads. That is, mind (νοῦς) is constitutive of the good person's soul. Plato, *Meno*, 88b-89a.

⁸⁸⁶ The verbal adjective of possibility "ἔνθετον," which appears literally in the text, is based upon this verb.

“put” fear in their hearts.⁸⁸⁷ As an invisible activity, it shares similarities with inspiration—the unpredictable divine inhabitation of a human soul.⁸⁸⁸ The connection between the invisible sense of “to put in” (ἐντιθέναι) and inspiration warrants acknowledgment because it draws attention to a continuity between a prior textual moment and the conclusion towards which our analysis heads. When Anytus could not justify his assertion that the sophists were the disgrace and corruption of their students, Socrates playfully suggested that Anytus must be a diviner (μάντις).⁸⁸⁹ We noticed an ironic implication of this suggestion. Even if divination offered a satisfactory justification for Anytus’ knowledge of the sophists without experience, it cannot be taught. Divination could explain the basis of Anytus’ assertion, but it would simultaneously undermine his claim that *arete* is teachable. Socrates will mention divination again later as well, when he compares all political men to diviners.⁸⁹⁰ We might also anticipate a connection between the invisible sense of “to put in” (ἐντιθέναι) and Socrates’ final answer to the question concerning the coming-to-be of *arete*, namely, divine allotment (θεία μοίρα).⁸⁹¹ If *arete* comes from divine allotment, then would it not come from the invisible act of “putting” *arete* into a person? We must let these anticipatory connections linger for now, but we point them out as a part of our justification for reading Socrates’ recitation of Theognis’ verses through the conflict of the *Meno*. In other words, we suspect that these verses do more than reassure Meno that many people share his uncertainty about the teachability of *arete*. Let us continue with our analysis of the verses.

For review, Socrates has recited a set of Theognis’ verses which begin with a counterfactual antecedent: if it were possible to put mindfulness into a man. What then would follow? On the surface, Socrates appears merely to recite the verses, although he does signal that he may be reciting them imprecisely (“—he says something like that—”). However, his “imprecision” transforms the signification of the verses. He recounts, “many and great fees would they bear off, those who are able (οἱ δυνάμενοι) to do (ποιεῖν) this.”⁸⁹² Because we noted the “original” transcript, we see what Socrates has added, namely, “those who are able to do this (οἱ δυνάμενοι τοῦτο ποιεῖν).”⁸⁹³ In its “original” context, the sons of Asclepius’ counterfactual reception of some

⁸⁸⁷ Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 266.

⁸⁸⁸ Cf. Plato, *Meno*, 99c-d.

⁸⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 92c.

⁸⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 99d.

⁸⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 99e-100b.

⁸⁹² *Ibid.*, 95e.

⁸⁹³ See footnote 880 for a side-by-side comparison.

sort of divine gift, which would allow them to cure “wickedness and the bewildered hearts of men (κακότητα καὶ ἀτηρὰς φρένας ἀνδρῶν),” is that for which they would bear many and great fees. Socrates’ amendment of the verses changes the referent, and this shift is significant especially because Socrates presents these verses as a contrast to a prior set, a set in which we observed a reflection of a conventional measure of the human good, namely, the good (ἔσθλοί) are those who have “great power” (μεγάλη δύναμις). In these verses, we find capable people (οἱ δυνάμενοι) represented differently, i.e., as those who can put mindfulness into a man. When we interpret these verses through the conflict of the *Meno*, the contrast between the two sets highlights a powerfully subversive tension. In the first set of verses, we thought that Anytus seemed more like a good person (ἀγαθός), and Socrates seemed like a bad person (κακός). However, in this second set of verses, Anytus seems much less powerful, and he even seems a bit foolish insofar as Theognis asserts that it is not possible to *teach* someone how to be good (no matter if the teacher is a noble and good Athenian or not). We pointed out from the beginning that these verses take place within a counterfactual register, and so we cannot say confidently that Socrates is capable of putting mindfulness into a man. And yet, we have more reasons to think that Socrates could do so than Anytus. Let us table this possibility momentarily and consider the conclusion of the verses since they tell us the consequence of this power/capability (δύναμις).

Whereas Socrates broke up the first few verses with his own interjections, he recites the final three verses without interruption. Accordingly, the verses convey the following consequence: “Never would a bad (κακός) [son] be born from a good father (ἀγαθοῦ πατρὸς), / Being persuaded (πειθόμενος) by sensible speeches (μύθοισι σαόφροσιν). But by teaching (διδάσκων) / You will never make (ποιήσεις) the bad man (κακὸν ἄνδρ’) good (ἀγαθόν).” These verses appear to echo a similar assumption which informed Socrates’ examination of the noble and good Athenians. As Socrates progressed through the four examples, he repeatedly pointed out that each of the noble and good Athenians educated their sons in every subject in which a teacher could instruct them. However, none of them taught their sons *arete*/how to be good nor did they hire a teacher to instruct on their behalf. From this behavior, Socrates inferred that the noble and good Athenians could not be the teachers of *arete* (contrary to Anytus’ claim), nor did it seem likely that *arete* could be taught at all. Insofar as Socrates alleges that these verses illustrate Theognis’ claim that *arete* cannot be taught, we should expect to see similarities between these verses and Socrates’ prior reasoning against the teachability of *arete*. However, the verses add another dimension to our

analysis as well. Let us weave together parts of Theognis' verses in a suggestive (and not entirely misleading) way: If it were possible to put mindfulness (νόημα) into a man, then those who could do it (οἱ δυνάμενοι τοῦτο ποιεῖν) would be given many and great fees, *and* never would a bad (κακός) [son] be born from a good father (ἀγαθός πατρός), being persuaded (πειθόμενος) by sensible speeches (μῦθοι σώφρονες). Because we have ventured to interpret Theognis' verses through the conflict of the *Meno*, our fabrication of the verses into a conditional claim causes the latter consequent especially to sound very provocative. We have good reason to wonder whether Socrates has used sensible speeches (μῦθοι σώφρονες) to persuade Meno in this very dialogue.⁸⁹⁴

We can draw an overt connection between Socrates' story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) and our present curiosity about his use of sensible speeches (μῦθοι σώφρονες). In Chapter II, our examination of the story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις), the exhibition with the παῖς, and Socrates' commentary about it led us to interpret these textual moments as Socrates' attempt to persuade Meno to comport himself differently. We understood them collectively as a response to Meno's contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος), an argument which appeared to us as a symptom of Meno's dialogical comportment. This observation laid the groundwork for our recognition of the necessity of the communal horizon as a locus for the cooperative pursuit of *arete*. Retrospectively, we might view Socrates' response to Meno like the good father of Theognis' verses who uses sensible speeches (μῦθοι σώφρονες) to persuade his son. And yet, we cannot overlook a central term in our comparison. According to Socrates' recitation of the verses, the good father would be able to use sensible speeches to persuade his son *if* mindfulness (νόημα) could be put into a man. Should we similarly believe that Socrates' persuasion of Meno depends upon his ability to put mindfulness (νόημα) into Meno, even though we acknowledge it as a counterfactual possibility? We encountered a similar and relevant predicament during the conclusion of our analysis in Chapter III. We maintained that Socrates presented his account of dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) *for* Meno, and yet, we wondered how useful this account could be to Meno, if dialectical reasoning cannot be taught nor does it come from nature. That is, even if Socrates did persuade Meno that *arete* is dialectical reasoning (and all the consequences which follow), what purpose does persuading Meno of this account serve, if Meno does not have

⁸⁹⁴ "Sensible" translates σαόφροσιν, which is an adjectival form of "moderation" (σωφροσύνη). Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 789. We should recall that Socrates has often mentioned moderation as a part of his reasoning about *arete* (e.g., Plato, *Meno*, 73a-b, 74a, 78e) and dialectical reasoning (e.g., *ibid.*, 88a-d).

dialectical reasoning already and cannot learn it either. Just as it seems impossible for Socrates to “put” dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) into Meno, so too does it seem impossible for Socrates (or the good father) to “put” mindfulness (νόημα) into him. So then how does anyone become a good person (ἀγαθός)?

Our interpretation of Socrates’ recitation of Theognis’ verses through the conflict of the *Meno* has raised more questions than it answered, if it has answered any questions at all. In the first set of verses, we noticed a similar measure of *arete* to the one which undergird Socrates’ interrogation of the noble and good Athenians: the good (ἔσθλοί) are those whose power is great (μεγάλη δύναμις). Such a measure, even when poetized by Theognis, rested upon little justification; however, the verses concluded with a warning about mingling with bad people (κακοί), which provoked us to question the basis of our sympathies with Socrates. Contrary to the prejudices which have guided our inquiry since the beginning, is it possible that Socrates is a bad man (κακός)? We, of course, did not reach such an outrageous conclusion, but this possibility drew our attention to an unexpected consequence of “losing one’s mind.” If we assume that the measure of the good (ἔσθλοί), i.e., great power (μεγάλη δύναμις), in Theognis’ verses suffices, then Socrates’ interrogation of this measure could place him in danger since he would undermine the claim on the good of powerful people. However, if this measure is lacking, as we have maintained on many occasions over the course of our analysis, then the loss of this “good” poses a meagre threat in comparison to the danger posed by *not* questioning it. After examining the first set of Theognis’ verses through the conflict of the *Meno*, we found that “the good” were not so beneficial, and “the bad” were not so harmful. And yet, according to Socrates, these verses show that Theognis claims *arete* to be teachable! Our intertextual analysis became even more complicated once we set out to interpret the second set of verses. Because of Socrates’ interjections, we noticed that he had slightly modified the verses in a suggestive way. The verses, as Socrates recited them, began in a counterfactual register, but they described a surprising power, namely, the ability to put mindfulness (νόημα) into a man. When we interpreted this set of verses through the conflict of the *Meno*, we noticed a similarity between Socrates’ dialogical behavior in the *Meno* and this other group of capable (or powerful) people (οἱ δυνάμενοι). Such people do not teach, which we note because of Socrates’ claim that these verses illustrate Theognis’ denial of the teachability of *arete*, but rather, they are those who are able to persuade with sensible speeches (μῦθοι σώφρονες) in a way that reminded us of our prior interpretation of Socrates’ response to Meno’s contentious

argument (ἐριστικός λόγος). No matter how compelling our interpretation of these verses through the conflict of the *Meno* may or may not be, we still have not answered two critical questions: Do these sets of verses show Theognis contradicting himself about the teachability of *arete*? And of what might Socrates be persuading Meno with the recitation of these verses?

We have hardly considered the possibility that these sets of verses contradict one another, focusing more on the development of interpretations. Nevertheless, our interpretations do not even seem to lead us to this conclusion which Socrates purports to be the reason for his recitation. It is not obvious that the first set of verses assert the teachability of *arete*. While Theognis advises Cyrnus to keep company with the good (ἐσθλοί) so that they will teach him good things (ἐσθλά), *arete* is not the only “good thing.” Moreover, throughout our analysis of the *Meno*, we have concluded that the provision of goods for oneself cannot suffice as a measure of *arete*. Socrates even asserted previously that “goods” only benefit a person when they are used rightly.⁸⁹⁵ Even if Cyrnus (or Meno) were to learn every good thing from good people, we have found many reasons to doubt that *arete* amounts to the cumulative possession of goods. Furthermore, when Socrates examined the noble and good Athenians’ rearing of their sons, he pointed out how they taught them many things but not how to be good men.⁸⁹⁶ This circumstance sounds very similar to the one which Theognis’ verses describe, and so it would be difficult for us to infer that the verses indicate that *arete* is teachable, especially after Socrates recently argued against it with similar terms. We might raise some questions about the second set of verses as well. While Theognis does assert that a bad man cannot be taught how to be good, which comes close to the assertion that *arete* cannot be taught, we also found a provocative, counterfactual claim in Socrates’ recitation. The verses appear to imply that it is not possible to put mindfulness (νóημα) into a man, but we wondered whether Socrates might not attempt to do something very similar in the *Meno*. Of course, we recognized many obstacles which prevent us from believing that Socrates could put mindfulness (νóημα) (or dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις)) into Meno with sensible speeches (μῦθοι σώφρονες), and we certainly do not suppose an equivalence between “putting mindfulness into a man” and teaching. And yet, if it were possible “to put mindfulness into a man,” it would be *better* than teaching because it would always make the recipient into a good person. Only in the

⁸⁹⁵ Plato, *Meno*, 87e.

⁸⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 93d-94e.

most superficial way do these verses seem to us to contradict one another. So then what other purpose might they serve?

Perhaps Socrates cannot put mindfulness (νόημα) or dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) into Meno, two “things pertaining to the soul” which would, ostensibly, make Meno into a good man. However, we can confidently make the more modest claim that Socrates does attempt to persuade Meno to care about *arete*. During our analysis of these verses, we have pointed out some ways in which they anticipate the conclusion of the dialogue, namely, that *arete* comes to some from divine allotment (θεία μοίρα). As preparatory assertions, the verses do open Meno to possibilities which he has never included in his framing of questions about *arete*.⁸⁹⁷ Not only might *arete* come to be in humans differently than Meno supposed, but our interpretation of the verses has also introduced another sort of power (δύναμις) than the kind which the wealthy and politicians possess. According to our interpretation of Theognis’ verses, persuasion harbors a potential power even greater than political power, a power which is widely recognized as “good” while nevertheless being impotent with regard to the transmission of *arete*. The power to put mindfulness (νόημα) into a man, using sensible speeches (μῦθοι σώφρονες) to persuade the recipient, may not be possible, even if it would be best. Nevertheless, Socrates’ sensible speeches might still carry considerable persuasive force. Our own consideration of these verses has drawn out a myriad of assumptions about *arete* which undergird Theognis’ verses. If Meno were to heed even the most superficial of these problems, e.g., whether *arete* is or is not teachable, then he might find himself drawn into the difficulty of inquiry into *arete*. Consequently, if we were to suppose that Socrates recited these verses to persuade Meno to recognize the difficulty of human *arete*, a difficulty which clearly warrants his care, then it would not be a scant assertion nor an ignoble aim. For, if we recall our encounter with Meno and Socrates during the early stages of our analysis, Meno appeared to engage with *arete* in a quite superficial and antagonistic way. Let us press forward with our analysis and see how Socrates addresses Meno after reciting these verses.

Once again, Meno does not engage with the second set of verses any more than he engaged with the first set. Even so, Socrates continues their cooperative search for the teachers of *arete*, drawing Meno’s attention to some questions that arise from their investigation. He asks:

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid., 70a, 86c-d.

Can you tell me then of any other matter (πράγματος) whatever where those who affirm (φάσκοντες) that they are teachers are not only not agreed upon (ὁμολογοῦνται) by others to be teachers but are not even [recognized as] knowing (ἐπίστασθαι) it themselves, being regarded instead as worthless (πονηροὶ) in the very matters (πρᾶγμα) in which they declare (φασί) themselves to be teachers—while, on the other hand, those who are agreed (ὁμολογούμενοι) [to be] noble and good (καλοὶ καγαθοὶ) sometimes declare (φασιν) it to be teachable and, at other times, not? Could you declare (φαίης) that people who are so confused (τεταραγμένους) about that [matter] are, in any authoritative sense (κυρίως), teachers of it?⁸⁹⁸

We might read Socrates' questions as an overview of the inquiry which began even before Anytus joined them. After setting out to find the teachers of *arete* with Meno, Socrates spent more time exploring the identity of the teachers of *arete* with Anytus. They identified two separate groups of people as potential teachers of *arete*. On the one hand, there are the sophists, whom Anytus fervently rejected. In our analysis, we discovered many reasons why the sophists are unlikely to be the teachers of *arete*; however, the reasoning that Socrates provides for their dismissal of the sophists as teachers of *arete* is quite revealing. He claims that others do not agree that they are the teachers, and a part of the disagreement stems from the possibility that they may not “know” (ἐπίστασθαι) what they teach. Such a claim does not sound quintessentially Socratic (at least not the former part), but it harmonizes quite well with a central insight in our own analysis. We have regularly maintained that inquiry into (and so a potential knowledge of) *arete* and the human good takes place within a communal horizon, and so the communal disputation of the sophists' status as teachers of *arete* affects the measure of *arete* and their claim to teach it. For example, according to Meno, Gorgias teaches his students how to be clever in speaking and not how to be good (ἀγαθός). We inferred that he must teach the former and jeer at those who attempt to teach the latter because he values the former higher. This valuation of being clever over being good too exerts an influence over the pursuit of *arete*, even if being clever appears to operate outside of the purview of *arete* and the human good. Meno illustrates this point well. Throughout our analysis, we have understood Meno's dialogical comportment as a symptom of Gorgias' instruction, and so in a straightforward way, we can see the influence of Gorgias on the pursuit of *arete* despite his alleged rejection of it. If not the sophists, then who else could be the teachers?

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid., 96a-b. Translation modified. Anastaplo and Berns add the phrase “recognized as” to their translation, a phrase which has no referent in the Greek. This supplement contributes considerably to the readability of the passage in English, but the haphazard inclusion of the verb “to recognize” seems, at the very least, worth noting as a translational artifact in a dialogue which includes distinctions between various forms of knowing throughout.

On the other hand, there are the noble and good (καλοὶ καγαθοί) Athenians (or the noble and good of another *polis*), about whom people do agree that they are “good.” And yet, in their very title, we noticed a crucial ambiguity during our analysis in Chapter IV. The “noble and good” (καλοὶ καγαθοί) appear simply to denote those who exhibit *arete* and are good people (ἀγαθοί). However, when Anytus suggested them as the teachers of *arete*, we noticed that the designation of someone as “noble and good” (κάλος καγαθός) often vacillated between the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) and the good person (ἀγαθός). The vacillation between these two separate yet related types of “good people” became even more confusing when we recognized that all the examples of noble and good Athenians were politicians (πολιτικοί)! Their beautiful deeds in the management of the *polis* and war made them heroes in the Athenian imagination, and yet, none of them could teach anyone the *arete* which they exhibited. According to Socrates (and Meno), the noble and good (καλοὶ καγαθοί) do not even agree among themselves that *arete* can be taught. They are “confused” (τεταραγμένοι) about it. Does this ambivalence about the teachability of *arete* reflect the behavior of people who are supposed to be the teachers of it? It seems unlikely.

Meno agrees with Socrates that neither the sophists nor the noble and good ones (καλοὶ καγαθοί) are likely to be the teachers of *arete* (perhaps also because it is consistent with what he learned from Gorgias).⁸⁹⁹ Since they find themselves in agreement, Socrates leads Meno to the conclusion of this line of reasoning. They cannot find any teachers of *arete*.⁹⁰⁰ Without teachers (διδάσκαλοι), there can be no learners (μαθηταί), and without either teachers or learners, it seems unlikely for a subject to be teachable. Meno sees nothing wrong with Socrates’ reasoning. Accordingly, Socrates concludes, “Therefore *arete* could not be something teachable?”⁹⁰¹ We ought to recall how this line of reasoning began, since Socrates first supposed it long ago (in the part of the text which we analyzed in Chapter III). Meno implored Socrates to examine how *arete* came to be in humans, whether it is teachable, comes by nature, or in some other way. Socrates agreed to gratify Meno, but he proposed that they imitate geometers, who reason provisionally about something after laying a foundation (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως).⁹⁰² The foundational supposition which Socrates laid was that *arete* is teachable. Upon this foundational supposition, Socrates presented an account of dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) as that which leads the soul of the good/beneficial

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid., 96b.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁹⁰¹ Ibid.

⁹⁰² Ibid., 87b.

person. As we followed Socrates through his account of dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις), we simultaneously tracked its political consequences, that is, the way in which his account affected the measure of a good leader. According to convention, a “good” leader need not benefit the constituency, an assumption which partially undergird the noble and good Athenians claim on *arete*, and yet, in Socrates’ reasoning, we found challenges to this conventional assumption. If a leader of the *polis* (i.e., a politician (πολιτικός)) does not benefit the constituency (that is, does not “do good” for them), then in what sense are they good? We have followed this reasoning about *arete* and the human good for some time now; and yet, we now reach a part of the text in which Socrates has abandoned the foundational supposition which justified this reasoning. If *arete* cannot be taught, as Socrates and Meno had taken for granted for some time now, then how do people become good?

Right/True Opinion (ὀρθή δόξα/ δόξα ἀληθής) and Knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) (96d-99b)

We have often remarked upon Meno’s unreflective engagement with Socrates. However, when he hears Socrates’ conclusion, Meno responds with a question that we could interpret as an indication of an uncharacteristically thoughtful concern for *arete* and the human good. Could this concern be a consequence of his time with Socrates? In any case, Meno asks, “It’s not likely [that *arete* is teachable], if we were looking at it rightly (ὀρθῶς). So that I really wonder, Socrates, whether perhaps there are no good men (ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες), or from what origin (τρόπος τῆς γενέσεως) do the good [ones] (τῶν ἀγαθῶν) come to be?”⁹⁰³ Meno voices a possibility which we have avoided asserting in our examination, namely, that no one is good (ἀγαθός). We thematized this possibility most overtly while examining the noble and good Athenians. We did not conclude that they were only “seemingly” good men, but more modestly, that their claim on *arete* and the human good lacked sufficient justification. Their claim on the good required greater scrutiny than their reputations as noble and good men might seem to warrant. We arrived at this conclusion partially because of our sympathies with some of Socrates’ idiosyncratic and unconventional assumptions. For example, the identification of the “good person” with the “beneficial person” was an essential assumption that undergird Socrates’ critique of Pericles (and the other noble and good Athenians as well). According to Socrates, Pericles did not “make his sons better,” from which we inferred that he was unable to make them good men (ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες). Pericles’ inability

⁹⁰³ Ibid., 96d. Translation modified.

to do so does not imply that he was a bad man (κακός). Instead, this example and other related ones informed our assertion that Socratic philosophical practice contributes to the Athenian pursuit of *arete* and the human good in a valuable way. It is necessary to question *arete* partially because the conventional assumptions about it rest upon dubious bases. Even so, it would be difficult to justify the “benefit” of Socrates’ contribution to the Athenian communal horizon, if he led people to believe that no one can be good. Thus, Meno’s question raises a different sort of urgent issue than the ones which we have analyzed previously. While it may be crucial to the pursuit of *arete* for Meno (and others) to question its measure, it is equally important for Meno (and others) to believe that there are good people lest, for example, Gorgias’ teaching be justified.

Socrates acknowledges the danger implied by Meno’s question. With an almost pensive tone, Socrates reconsiders whether they have reasoned properly about *arete* up to this point:

There is a danger (κινδυνεύομεν), Meno, that I and you are both sort of worthless (φαῦλοί) men, and that Gorgias has not sufficiently (ικανῶς) educated you, nor Prodicus me. So that, above all, we should apply our minds (νοῦν) to our very selves (ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς), and seek whoever will make (ποιήσει) us better (βελτίους) in some one particular way (ἐνί γέ τῳ τρόπῳ): and I say this, first focusing my gaze on the search just made, how ridiculously (καταγελάστως) it has escaped us that it is not only when knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is leading (ἡγουμένη) that human beings act (πράττεται) rightly (ὀρθῶς) and well (εὖ) in their affairs (πράγματα), and perhaps that is why knowing (γινῶναι) in what way (τρόπον) men (ἄνδρες) become (γίνονται) good (οἱ ἀγαθοί) has escaped us.⁹⁰⁴

Let us focus our attention on two aspects of Socrates’ response. First, Socrates comments on his and Meno’s predicament, blaming their respective teachers for putting them at risk of being worthless (φαῦλοί). It is rather ironic for Socrates to blame their teachers for inadequately educating them after concluding that *arete* cannot be taught. Moreover, Socrates’ reference to “danger” sounds somewhat hyperbolic. The ordinary use of the verb for “to be in danger” (κινδυνεύειν) could inform our sense of a hyperbolic undertone. The danger facing Socrates and Meno certainly differs in kind from, for example, the danger facing Darius’ generals, should they fail to take Miletus.⁹⁰⁵ According to Herodotus’ account, the generals faced the danger of a

⁹⁰⁴ Ibid., 96d-e. Translation modified.

⁹⁰⁵ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 6.9.1. “...the Persian generals, learning the number of the Ionian ships, feared they would be too weak to overcome the Greeks. If they did not have mastery of the sea, they would not be able to take Miletus, and would be in danger (κινδυνεύωσι) of some evil treatment by Darius.” Herodotus uses “κινδυνεύω” in its common, corporeal sense. Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 433. In Platonic dialogues, Socrates often uses this word to express his conviction that a danger to the soul poses a greater threat than whatever can be done to the

violence which would inflict mortal harm on them. For Socrates and Meno, the stakes *seem* much lower. If they do turn out worthless (φᾶλοί), they will presumably not be punished (or killed) for it. And yet, if we pause and reflect on our presumption, we might realize that the stakes are higher than they appear superficially. The worthless person does not live a fortunate life, but rather, such a person lives an unfortunate life. As Socrates reasoned previously, no one wants to live an unfortunate life.⁹⁰⁶ Furthermore, we have marked several instances in which Socrates appeared like a bad man (κακός). If we pair these observations with our awareness of Socrates' death, then we might recognize that the danger which at first appeared hyperbolic could be quite imminent and existential. The fear of being worthless (or bad) does not amount to a fear of a "bad reputation." On the contrary, it seems to designate someone whose claim on the good is in jeopardy. If their teachers did "promise" to make them good, then Socrates blames Prodicus and Gorgias justifiably. But do either of them claim to teach *arete*?

If Meno became a worthless (φᾶλος) man because of Gorgias' instruction, we could readily explain this outcome. Based on Meno's testimony about Gorgias, we inferred that Gorgias does not seem to think it possible to teach people how to become good, mocking those who profess to teach *arete*. Instead, Gorgias' instruction aims to make his students clever (δεινοί) at speaking.⁹⁰⁷ And yet, even while Gorgias appears to reject the pursuit of *arete*, he nonetheless exercises an influence over it as Meno's engagement with Socrates in the search for *arete* has illustrated. Ironically, even if Meno exemplifies Gorgias' instruction (i.e., even if Meno were superlatively clever in speaking), Socrates, who allegedly never "tries" to be clever, has persistently appeared much cleverer than Meno in their search for *arete*.⁹⁰⁸ From this comparison,

body including death. For example, see Plato, *Apology*, 28b; *Republic*, 451a.; *Protagoras*, 314a-b; possibly implied in *Laches*, 187a-b.

⁹⁰⁶ Plato, *Meno*, 78a-b. We have readily embraced the moral valence of the phrase "a good person" (ἀγαθός), and we have done so on a textual basis. However, the claim that a good person lives a fortunate life does not imply a moral condemnation of the person who lives an unfortunate life insofar as a person can clearly have "bad luck." The *arete* of the good person is as much a qualitative designation as a moral one.

⁹⁰⁷ Plato, *Meno*, 95c.

⁹⁰⁸ In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates remarks on his "cunning" (δεινός). "Apparently then, my friend, I am at risk (κινδυνεύω) to become so much more cunning (δεινότερος) in technical know-how (τέχνην) than that man [namely, Daedalus], as he made only his own works not remain (οὐ μένοντα) [i.e., move], whereas I, as it seems, [make] the works of others [not remain] as well as my own. And the most exquisite thing (κομψότατον) about my technical know-how (τέχνης) is that I am wise (σοφός) against my will (ἄκων); for I would rather have your accounts (λόγους) remain (μένειν) unmoved (ἀκινήτως) than possess the wisdom (σοφία) of Daedalus and the wealth (χρήματα) of Tantalus as well as." Plato, *Euthyphro*, 11d. Translation modified. Socrates appears to value being clever quite lowly, expressing his willingness to renounce great wisdom (σοφία) and wealth (χρήματα), if only Euthyphro could give an account that would "remain unmoved" (μένειν ἀκινήτως).

we might infer that being clever in speech (e.g., about *arete*) may not be a valuable pursuit. And yet, this observation could lead us to wonder why Socrates blames Prodicus for failing to educate him properly as well.

We previously explored the testimony about Prodicus when Socrates mentioned him earlier in the dialogue.⁹⁰⁹ From the testimony, we learned that Prodicus earned a reputation as someone who concerned himself with the precise use of language, and he also wrote an essay “On Hercules,” according to Xenophon, which included a story (μῦθος) about *arete*. So then has Prodicus failed to educate Socrates in *arete* or in the precise use of language? The former possibility would be strange, as we already pointed out, because Socrates just concluded that *arete* cannot be taught. It would be odd for Socrates to blame Prodicus for other reasons as well. How can Socrates claim not to know at all what *arete* is, if Prodicus educated him about it? If Prodicus educated him so poorly that Socrates claims not to know *arete* at all, then Prodicus’ instruction hardly warrants mentioning. Furthermore, whence come Socrates’ dexterity in navigating their inquiry into *arete*, if Prodicus instructed him about it so inadequately? The possibility that Prodicus instructed Socrates in *arete* does not seem like a fruitful avenue through which to consider Socrates’ remark. So then perhaps Socrates implies that Prodicus has not educated him adequately in the precise use of language. This possibility sounds much more enticing as an explanation. A considerable portion of our analysis in Chapter IV focused on the equivocal sense of the noble and good Athenians (οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι καλοὶ καὶ ἀγαθοί). Are they good men (ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες), good citizens (ἀγαθοὶ πολίτας), both, or neither? We noticed throughout the discussion between Socrates and Anytus that the referent often seemed to vacillate, but this vacillation has not been as prevalent in Socrates’ discussion with Meno since his return. The other noteworthy addition in Socrates’ speech might offer some guidance. Socrates concludes his response with the suggestion that his prior reasoning (about dialectical reasoning) may have been mistaken. Curiously, Socrates mentions knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) (and not dialectical reasoning) as that which may not be necessary for humans to “act rightly and well in their affairs.” Let us follow Socrates down this new line of reasoning and see what it might reveal.

⁹⁰⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 75e.

Socrates retraces several steps from his account that we examined in Chapter III until he arrives at what he claims they may have overlooked initially.⁹¹⁰ He asserts, “...that good men are required to be beneficent (ἀγαθοὺς ἄνδρας δεῖ ὠφελίμους); we have agreed rightly (ὀρθῶς ὠμολογήκαμεν)...”⁹¹¹ Meno agrees, and so Socrates continues. “And that [good men] will be beneficent (ὠφέλιμοι) whenever they lead our affairs rightly (ὀρθῶς ἡμῖν ἡγῶνται τῶν πραγμάτων), I suppose we were right in agreeing to this too.”⁹¹² Again, Meno agrees, and Socrates continues. “But that it is not possible to lead rightly (ὀρθῶς ἡγεῖσθαι), if a person lacks dialectical reasoning (μὴ φρόνιμος), in this we are like (ὅμοιοί) those who have not rightly agreed.”⁹¹³ Upon hearing this claim, Meno asks for clarification about the term “rightly” (ὀρθῶς); however, we ought to pause here and note that Socrates has revised his prior account in an extraordinarily significant way. A major claim which we developed from our analysis in Chapter III was that Socrates’ account of “what leads the soul” also impacted the measure for who (should) lead the *polis*. We noticed a confluence between what leads the soul beneficially and who leads the *polis* beneficially. Now, however, when Socrates reviews his account, he has framed his reasoning overtly as a question concerning leadership of the *polis*.⁹¹⁴ Whereas previously Socrates spoke more vaguely about the identity between *arete* and beneficence, he now explicitly describes good men (ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες) as beneficent.⁹¹⁵ Moreover, he does not speak about what leads the soul rightly such that “goods” will be beneficial (as he did previously), but instead, he describes the benefit of good men in leading affairs (of the *polis*). The point is not that Socrates has contradicted his prior reasoning, but rather, he has made a dimension of his reasoning much more explicit now than it was when we first encountered it. Even so, Socrates does explicitly modify the account as well. The person who has dialectical reasoning (φρόνιμος) may not be the only one who can lead the affairs of the *polis* rightly (i.e., do good for or benefit the *polis*). This modification relieves one tension which has troubled us in our own analysis. We could not account for the origin of dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) in some people, and if it were necessary for a person to be good, then this condition made it difficult to explain how anyone (besides a minority whose origin is

⁹¹⁰ Ibid., 87e-89a.

⁹¹¹ Ibid., 96e-97a.

⁹¹² Ibid., 97a.

⁹¹³ Ibid. Translation modified.

⁹¹⁴ Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, 245. “But that *logos* spoke in the main of *phronêsis* as providing the right ‘lead’ in a man’s soul. There was actually no explicit agreement as to the role ‘good men’ play in the *polis*, no explicit agreement about the role of good statesmanship.”

⁹¹⁵ Cf. Ibid., 87e.

unaccountable) could be good. Conspicuously, relief from the prior tension surrounding this measure of *arete* comes from an amendment to the measure of *who* can lead the *polis* (rightly). What then does it mean to lead “rightly”?

Socrates mentions the road to Larissa (ὁ ὁδός τὴν εἰς Λάρισσαν) as an example to illustrate the sense of “rightly” (ὀρθῶς) in the phrase “leading rightly” (ὀρθῶς ἡγεῖσθαι). He explains, “I’ll tell you. If someone who knows (εἰδῶς) the road to Larissa, or any other place you want, went there and led others, would [the person] not lead (ἡγοῖτο) them rightly (ὀρθῶς) and well (εὖ)?”⁹¹⁶ We must remain vigilant despite the mundane character of this example. As we saw previously with Anytus, Socrates sometimes uses an example of something ordinary to reason analogically about something more complicated (like *arete*).⁹¹⁷ We cannot yet determine the broader implicature of this example, and so let us first attempt to understand it as an illustration of “leading rightly.” It seems that the person with experience, that is, the person who has previously travelled the road to Larissa, “knows” (εἰδῶς) the road to Larissa and so can lead others rightly (ὀρθῶς) and well (εὖ) along this road.⁹¹⁸ This example illustrates a dimension of so-called “practical knowledge,” a part of which we might now call “instrumental reasoning.”⁹¹⁹ What is “good” or “beneficial” about knowing the road to Larissa is that it allows the knower to accomplish his or her goal successfully. It is “useful” for reaching a goal (which in this case means arriving in Larissa). The “success” of this knowing seems crucial to it, which we can glean through a counterfactual consideration of Socrates’ example. That is, if a person who had travelled the road to Larissa (and so “knew” it) led others along this road but took them to Lacedaemon instead of Larissa, then they would not have led “rightly” or “well.” In this example, the sense of something done “rightly” (ὀρθῶς) seems straightforward. Moreover, insofar as we have inferred that the pursuit of *arete* must take place within a communal horizon and that its pursuit is intertwined with

⁹¹⁶ Ibid. Translation modified.

⁹¹⁷ For example, when Socrates asked Anytus about the best way to train someone to be a good flute player. Ibid., 90d-e.

⁹¹⁸ Some scholars speculate about the source of this “right opinion.” For example, Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, 182. Thomas, *Musings on the Meno*, 201. Weiss does not comment on the source, but she does note that Socrates does not account for it. Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato’s Meno*, 155.

⁹¹⁹ Socrates, of course, never speaks about the “practical” as a conceptual distinction. Even if the designation of something as “practical” may be anachronistic, Socrates will explicitly mention “action” (πρᾶξις) and “acting” (πράττειν). Plato, *Meno*, 97b-c. Even though our analysis does not hinge upon the conceptual distinction between “the practical” and “the theoretical” or “the impractical,” we will nevertheless place “practical” in quotation marks to signal the tension between its problematic application to a text which precedes the conceptual distinction and its utility for our analysis.

questions about leadership of the *polis*, the practical dimension of this example seems quite relevant. That is, a good person is partially measured by “successfully” benefiting others and the *polis*. “Good intention” alone would not suffice. In this sense, we can glean a similarity between a “practical” consequence of “knowing” about the road to Larissa from having been there, i.e., successfully arriving in Larissa, and the benefit of the good person/leader, i.e., making others better.

Socrates continues his reasoning, asking Meno, “And what if someone opines (δοξάζων) rightly (ὀρθῶς) about where the road is (ἤτις ἐστὶν ἡ ὁδός), but has not gone and does not know (ἐπιστάμενος) [the road], would he not also lead (ἡγοῖτο) them rightly (ὀρθῶς)?”⁹²⁰ Socrates’ reasoning sounds more suggestive in this iteration. We already suspect that he may not *just* be talking about the difference between two people who have “knowledge” and “right opinion” about the road to Larissa, and the similarity between Socrates’ pursuit of *arete* and the person who does not “know” the road to Larissa but who opines rightly about it seems like an enticing interpretative possibility. Socrates has asserted multiple times that he does not know *arete*, and yet, his proficiency in the navigation of the inquiry has compelled us to distinguish his self-professed ignorance about *arete* from his lack of experience in inquiry into *arete*. If we draw out the implications of this example for the *Meno*, it seems that Socrates could have right opinions about *arete* which inform his engagement in the inquiry. At the same time, we can identify a couple issues with this comparison. First, we have also suggested that Socrates may possess dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις), and if he does, then he would be more like the person who knows than the person who opines rightly despite not “having been there” like the person who knows the road to Larissa.⁹²¹ After all, dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) are not the same, even if their relatedness to one another grounded Socrates’ introduction of dialectical reasoning in the first place. This distinction leads us to a second issue. Does the person who “knows” the road to Larissa “know” it in the same way that a person might “know” *arete*? We might find our concern about this equivocal sense of “knowing” intimated in Socrates’ subsequent assertion. He adds:

⁹²⁰ Ibid., 97b. Translation modified. Anastaplo and Berns translate “ἤτις” as “what” and so the phrase “what the road is” for “ἤτις ἐστὶν ἡ ὁδός.” However, this translation sounds, ironically, too “philosophical” and distracts from the example.

⁹²¹ Even though Socrates first introduced the connection between knowledge and dialectical reasoning previously, Socrates will restate the connection in his subsequent assertion. For the reasoning that first justified their connection, see Ibid., 87d-88c.

And just as long as he would have right opinion (ὀρθὴν δόξαν) about those things of which another has knowledge (ἐπιστήμην), himself supposing (οἰόμενος) what is the truth (ἀληθῆ), but not being one who reasons dialectically (φρονῶν), he will be no worse a leader (ἡγεμῶν) than the one who reasons dialectically (φρονοῦντος).⁹²²

Socrates' further assertion both validates and complicates our suspicion. On the one hand, this assertion sounds much broader in scope than the prior two assertions which explicitly concerned knowledge and right opinion about the road to Larissa. If we were to consider this claim apart from its immediate context, it sounds germane to Socrates' prior reasoning about what leads the soul/who leads the *polis* rightly and so beneficially. Both dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) and right opinion (ὀρθή δόξα) can lead the soul "rightly." On the other hand, however, this assertion complicates the relationship between knowledge and dialectical reasoning. According to Socrates, the person who reasons dialectically (φρονῶν) has knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), and such a person is distinct from someone who has right opinion (ὀρθή δόξα), supposing what is the truth (ἀληθῆς). If Socrates possesses dialectical reasoning, then he would also have knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) contrary to his claims otherwise. Let us table this issue for now and return to it when Socrates explains the difference between knowledge and right opinion.⁹²³ In the meantime, we will consider the transformation of "right opinion" (ὀρθή δόξα) into "true opinion" (δόξα ἀληθῆς).

In Socrates' prior assertion, he maintained that the person who has right opinion (ὀρθή δόξα) supposes what is the truth (ἀληθῆς). Within the context of Socrates' example, we can pin down a likely referent for this phrase, namely, the person who has the right opinion about the road to Larissa supposes the truth about "where the road is" despite never having been there. The supposition of truth which undergirds the "practical" equivalence between right opinion and

⁹²² Ibid. Translation modified. This passage poses a translational challenge because the translation will depend so heavily on one's interpretation of the *Meno* as a whole. For example, Anastaplo and Berns translate the passage in this way: "And just as long as he would have right opinion about those things of which another has knowledge, himself supposing what is the truth, but not prudently knowing it, he will be no worse a guide than he who prudently knows it." Anastaplo and Berns' translation better draws out the connection between knowledge and the verbal form of "φρόνησις," which we have translated as dialectical reasoning. However, "knowing prudently" might imply a distinction between right opinion and a species of knowing, which is called "knowing prudently." Such an implication is problematic because we have interpreted Meno's question about the origin of good men (ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες) as a question that stems from the uncertain and ambiguous origin of dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις). It does not seem to be a "thing pertaining to the soul" that every single person has, which is one reason why we described this account as an idiosyncratically Socratic one. We have also described it as an account which partially undermines the propriety of Anytus' participation in the leadership of Athens. Even so, such an exclusive measure of *arete* could imply problematic consequences for the communal pursuit of *arete*, and so Socrates' softening of his position here makes sense insofar as we assume that he genuinely cares about "doing good" for the Athenian constituency.

⁹²³ Ibid., 97e-98b.

knowledge about the road to Larissa likely justifies Socrates' subsequent introduction of the phrase "true opinion" (δόξα ἀληθής). Thus, Socrates concludes:

True opinion (δόξα ἀληθής), therefore, is no worse a leader (ἡγεμὸν) towards the correctness of an action (ὀρθότητα πράξεως) than dialectical reasoning (φρονήσεως). And this is what just now we were leaving aside in our examination about what sort of thing *arete* might be, when we said that only dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) leads (ἡγείται) [someone] to act (πράττειν) rightly (ὀρθῶς), whereas true opinion (δόξα ἀληθής) does so too.⁹²⁴

We have previously encountered the phrase "true opinion" (δόξα ἀληθής) during the part of the text which we analyzed in Chapter II. When Socrates reviewed his exhibition of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) with the παῖς, Socrates asked Meno, "Then in someone who does not know (τῷ οὐκ εἰδῶτι) about that which he does not know (περὶ ὧν ἂν μὴ εἰδῆ), there are true opinions (ἀληθεῖς δόξαι) about those things which he does not know (περὶ τούτων ὧν οὐκ οἶδε)?"⁹²⁵ In our analysis, we were struck by Socrates' emphatic insistence that the παῖς does not know and yet has true opinions nonetheless. Socrates went on to suppose that if the παῖς were questioned many times and in different ways, then he would (eventually) understand ("ἐπιστήσεται") those things about which he held true opinions. That is, he would eventually have knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) of the things about which he previously "only" held true opinions. When we first encountered Socrates' reasoning, we found it difficult to follow, and in conjunction with Socrates' new example about the road to Larissa, Socrates' reasoning is no less confusing. Whereas previously Socrates maintained that the true opinions (δόξαι ἀληθεῖς) of the παῖς could become knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), Socrates now asserts that a true opinion (δόξα ἀληθής) is just as effective (in "practical" matters) as dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) at leading rightly. We can acknowledge that the respective contexts in which these claims take place differ and also that Socrates has even changed the terms in his reasoning. And yet, we cannot ignore how tempting it is to raise a question based on the continuity between these two textual moments. Why does it matter if the παῖς (or Meno or anyone else) has knowledge about something, if a true opinion is just as effective at leading a person to act rightly?

Meno will ask a very similar version of this question shortly, but before we examine Meno's question, we should acknowledge a decisive ambiguity that may undergird these textual moments. If a person "knows" the side-lengths of a square whose area is eight, where the road to

⁹²⁴ Ibid., 97b-c. Translation modified.

⁹²⁵ Ibid., 85c.

Larissa is, and what *arete* is, does the person “know” each of these things in the same way? The former two examples seem different than the third. If a person possesses true opinions about the geometrical problem or about the road to Larissa, then their true opinions are just as useful as knowledge. Although Socrates does change “true opinion” (δόξα ἀληθής) back to “right opinion” (ὀρθή δόξα), he nevertheless asserts their equal benefit himself. “Right opinion, therefore, is no less beneficial than knowledge (οὐδὲν ἄρα ἥττον ὠφέλιμόν ἐστιν ὀρθή δόξα ἐπιστήμης).”⁹²⁶ When we consider this conclusion through the “practical” lens, through which we have interpreted Socrates’ example of the road to Larissa, Socrates’ conclusion does not seem very controversial. However, there is something troubling about Socrates’ reasoning for our analysis of *arete* and the human good. We have by no means assumed that the pursuit of *arete* is “impractical” or “theoretical.” A “good person” (ἀγαθός) who does not benefit anyone else stakes a dubious claim on *arete*—at least according to our analysis. Moreover, we have maintained that Socrates (or anyone else) needs others just as much as others need him to pursue *arete*. It is not a solitary endeavor. Nevertheless, we cannot overlook that we have at no point assumed *arete* to be the kind of thing about which a discrete knowledge *can* be known.⁹²⁷ One reason is that there is no limit to *arete*. Being a good person concerns the way that a person lives his or her life “as a whole.” How could someone “opine truly” about the way that he or she ought to live his or her life as a whole? This question does not make sense. Another reason that we have questioned whether there can be a discrete knowledge of *arete* is that we have interpreted it as a phenomenon which takes place within a communal horizon. Individuals in a community stake a personal claim on *arete* which both informs and is informed by the broader communal pursuit. Insofar as our analysis tracks the overlap between what leads the soul and who leads the *polis*, the dubious likeness between these objects of knowledge/true opinion (namely, the side-lengths of a square whose area is eight, where the road to Larissa is, and what *arete* is) creates challenges for our inquiry into *arete* and the human good. However, we should also remember our observation about Socrates’ modification of his account. Socrates introduced the example of the road to Larissa to illustrate to Meno the sense of “rightly” in the phrase “to lead rightly.” Socrates used this phrase during his review of their reasoning about the way that good men benefit the *polis* by leading affairs rightly. And so, even while we acknowledge the way in which Socrates’ reasoning problematizes our inquiry into *arete*,

⁹²⁶ Ibid., 97c.

⁹²⁷ While we frame the problem in this way, Socrates has raised related issues, e.g., that *arete* does not seem teachable.

we should simultaneously remain mindful that his speech ostensibly justifies how so-called good men (ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες) can lead the *polis* rightly without either knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) or dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις).

Before Anytus entered the dialogue, Socrates presented to Meno an account of *arete* as dialectical reasoning in order to explain how *arete* comes to be in human beings. He did so by reasoning from the foundational supposition that *arete* is teachable. We inferred from Socrates' account that his reasoning about what leads the soul of the good person likely bears upon the way that a leader leads the *polis* as well, when a leader benefits (i.e., does good for) the *polis*. Our analysis of this inference drew out several idiosyncratically Socratic assumptions which undergird it. While we have been attuned to the political tenor of Socrates' reasoning since the beginning of the dialogue, the political dimension became overt in a different way once Anytus, who is a leader of Athens, entered the dialogue. When Anytus joined the dialogue, we noticed a tacit tension between the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) and the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός). This tension culminated with Anytus' assertion of the noble and good Athenians (οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι καλοὶ καὶ ἀγαθοί) as the teachers of *arete*. As we analyzed Socrates' four examples of noble and good Athenians, we noticed that they were all politicians (πολιτικοί) or "leaders" of the *polis*. We came out of our analysis quite ambivalent about the justification for their respective claims on *arete*. We struggled to point out a measure of their *arete*. After Anytus left the dialogue, Socrates asked Meno similar questions to the ones which Socrates considered with Anytus. Now, however, we find Socrates much more explicitly concerned about those who are noble and good (καλοὶ καὶ ἀγαθοί) insofar as they lead in political action. We have consistently pointed out the equivocal signification of this phrase, and Socrates has used it no less equivocally during his renewed discourse with Meno. Our present analysis concerns Socrates' reference to good men (ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες) insofar as they "lead rightly" (ὀρθῶς ἡγεῖσθαι). This review of the path that brought us to this point in our analysis should draw our attention to an explanation for the difficulty that we noticed in our reflection on the various objects of "knowing"/opining rightly and truly. Even though Socrates referred to "good men" (ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες), this phrase could denote the good leader/citizen/politician more than the good person. This equivocation emphasizes how the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) and the good person (ἀγαθός) overlap with one another.

When Meno hears Socrates' claim that "right opinion (ὀρθή δόξα) is no less beneficial (ὠφέλιμὸν) than knowledge (ἐπιστήμη)," he adds a qualification. Someone who has knowledge will always hit the mark (ἐπιτυχάνοι), but someone with right opinion will sometimes hit it and sometimes not.⁹²⁸ Socrates, however, asks him how it could be that a person with right opinion could sometimes hit the mark and sometimes not, if that person's opinions are "right." This question might reassure us that our analysis of Socrates' example has heeded it well. Right opinion, like knowledge, always "hits the mark," that is, reaches the goal or brings an action to competition successfully. They are "practically" equivalent, as we have assumed. Meno agrees, but Socrates' question leads him to wonder about the greater esteem for knowledge over right opinion. He reveals:

Necessarily, it appears so (φαίνεται) to me. So that I wonder, Socrates, this being so, that knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is so much more honored (πολὺ τιμιώτερα) than right opinion (τῆς ὀρθῆς δόξης), and why one of them is so different (ἕτερον) from the other.⁹²⁹

This question arose in our analysis as well. When we reconsidered Socrates' commentary about his exhibition with the παῖς and Socrates' subsequent claim that the person with right opinion about the road to Larissa will lead rightly just as well as the person with knowledge of the road, we questioned the distinction between a true opinion/right opinion and knowledge. Only in relation to *arete* could we find any reason to distinguish the two. Perhaps if we analyze Socrates' answer to this question, we will have a better sense of the difference. Socrates explains to Meno why Meno wonders about the difference through an image. "Because you have never applied your mind (οὐ προσέσχηκας τὸν νοῦν) to the statues of Daedalus. But perhaps there are none among you."⁹³⁰ Understandably, Meno does not understand the implication of this seeming non-sequitur. How do the statues of Daedalus explain why "knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is so much more honored (πολὺ τιμιώτερα) than right opinion (τῆς ὀρθῆς δόξης)"?⁹³¹ In a somewhat coy and not especially helpful

⁹²⁸ Ibid., 97c.

⁹²⁹ Ibid., 97c-d.

⁹³⁰ Ibid., 97d. Weiss reads this comment as tongue-in-cheek, implying that no one would have had easy access to the statues of Daedalus. Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's Meno*, 155.

⁹³¹ Daedalus is the second sculptor whom Socrates has mentioned in this dialogue, but Daedalus was the subject of broader and more detailed literary intrigue than Phidias throughout Greece. The stories about Daedalus recount a man of magnificent cunning worthy of his name. The words "δαιδάλεος," "δαιδάλλω," and "δαιδαλος" denote the cunning work (led by technical know-how (τέχνη)) with metal or wood, and substantively (especially in reference to Daedalus himself) to the cunning craftsman/artisan or artist. Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 171. Might Socrates' invocation of Daedalus tempt us to renew a search for a technical know-how of *arete* since his very name invokes an impressive spectrum of achievements which the cunning use of technical know-how make possible? And yet, if we have gleaned anything from our analysis of the *Meno*, then we must remember that being a good person falls within

way, Socrates explains his image further. “Because if they have not been tied down (μὴ δεδεμένα), they make their escape (ἀποδιδράσκει) and run away (δραπετεύει); but if they are tied down (δεδεμένα), they stay put (παραμένει).”⁹³² Again, Socrates gives Meno (and us) little to work with! What do these strange statues have to do with the difference between knowledge and true opinion?

After a bit of playful banter, Socrates finally ventures to explain how the statues of Daedalus (or his “creations”) will help Meno to see the difference between knowledge and true opinions (δόξαι ἀληθεῖς):

To have acquired (ἐκτῆσθαι) one of his creations (ποιημάτων) that has been let loose is not worthy (ἄξιόν) of very much honor (τιμῆς), like a fugitive (ὥσπερ δραπέτην ἄνθρωπον), for [it] does not stay put (παραμένει); but one that is tied down (δεδεμένον) is worth a great deal (πολλοῦ ἄξιον). For his works (ἔργα) are very beautiful (καλά). With a view to what, then, do I say this? With a view to true opinions (τὰς δόξας τὰς ἀληθεῖς). For true opinions (αἱ δόξαι αἱ ἀληθεῖς) too, for as long a time as they should stay put (παραμένωσιν), are a fine thing (καλὸν τὸ χρῆμα) and accomplish (ἐργάζονται) all kinds of good things (πάντ’ ἀγαθὰ). Yet much of the time they are not willing to stay put (παραμένειν) but run away (δραπετεύουσιν) out of the human soul (ἐκ τῆς ψυχῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου); so that they are not worth much (οὐ πολλοῦ ἄξιαί) until someone should bind (δήση) them by accounting for (λογισμῶ) the causes (αἰτίας). And this, my comrade Meno, is recollection (ἀνάμνησις), as we agreed before. And whenever they have been bound (δεθῶσιν), first they become knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and then steadfast (μόνιμοι). And this is why knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is more honorable (τιμιώτερον) than right opinion (ὀρθῆς δόξης), and, by its bind (δεσμῶ), knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) differs from (διαφέρει) right opinion (ὀρθῆς δόξης).⁹³³

Socrates’ explanation is quite subtle, and its explanatory force hinges upon analogical reasoning. In the first place, Socrates compares the acquisition (ἐκτῆσθαι) of a statue of Daedalus to the acquisition of a “fugitive” (δραπέτης ἄνθρωπος), or more literally, a “runaway human.”⁹³⁴ It is

the purview of life as a whole. For that reason, technical know-how, ironically, cannot guide the pursuit of *arete*—no matter how remarkably it guides in so many other human endeavors.

⁹³² Plato, *Meno*, 97d.

⁹³³ Plato, *Meno*, 97e-98a. Translation Modified.

⁹³⁴ This translation could be considered controversial on a conventional, not lexical, basis. Most translators render “δραπέτης ἄνθρωπος” as “runaway slave.” See, for example, Allen, *The Dialogues of Plato*, 183; Anastaplo and Berns, *Plato’s Meno*, 42; Lamb, *Plato: Laches, Protagoras, Meno, Euthydemus*, 361; Waterfield, *Meno and Other Dialogues*, 139; somewhat ambivalently in Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, 184. Thompson, *The Meno of Plato*, 221. Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato’s Meno*, 155. There are a few who differ. Long translates the phrase as simply “runaway.” Long, *Plato: Meno and Phaedo*, 37. McKirahan does not suggest a translation, but he does note that the verbs “ἀποδιδράσκει” and “δραπετεύει” “are often used of slaves.” McKirahan, *Plato’s Meno*, 48. In terms other Greek prose, we can find plenty of precedent for inferring that this phrase refers to a runaway slave, although we ought to note that some word for a “slave” (often “δοῦλος”) tends to accompany such usage. The subsequent example from *Crito* is illustrative in this regard, but in the sense that the exception proves the rule. That is, the comparison of Socrates

as a “runaway” to a “runaway slave” in the *Crito* depends on the more ubiquitous usage which implies that a runaway is often a runaway slave.

There are at least two reasons why the translation of “δραπέτης ἄνθρωπος” as “fugitive” rather than “runaway slave” better serves our analysis. The verb “δραπετεύω” (“run away”) need not always refer to a runaway slave, but it can also denote a more metaphoric sense as in a dereliction of duty, e.g., Demosthenes, *Against Phaenippus*, 42.25, or skulking in battle, e.g., Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 2.4.16. See Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 211. In several Platonic dialogues, this verb and its derivatives appear not to invoke the image of a slave either, even if such connotations can never be totally severed. See, Plato, *Symposium*, 216b. In part of Alcibiades’ speech about Socrates, he claims, “Only before [Socrates] do I feel shame (αἰσχύνομαι). For I know within myself that I am incapable of contradicting (ἀντιλέγειν) him or of saying that what he commands must not be done and whenever I go away, I know within myself that I am doing so because I have succumbed to the honor I get from the many (τῆς τιμῆς τῆς ὑπὸ τῶν πολλῶν). So I have become a runaway (δραπετεύω) and avoid (φεύγω) him; and whenever I see him, I am ashamed of what has been agreed upon (αἰσχύνομαι τὰ ὁμολογημένα).” Note how Alcibiades does not seem to liken himself to a “runaway slave” but more so to a fugitive or exile. See also, Plato, *Crito*, 50a, 52d. In response to Crito’s proposal to flee Athens after his sentence, Socrates implores Crito, “Look at it this way. If, as we were planning to run away (ἀποδιδράσκειν) from here, or whatever one should call it, the laws and the commons of the polis (οἱ νόμοι καὶ τὸ κοινὸν τῆς πόλεως) came and confronted us . . .” Later in the speech, Socrates’ personified laws do compare him as a fugitive to a runaway slave explicitly, “. . .and you are doing what the most paltry slave (δοῦλος ὁ φαυλότατος) would do, since you are trying to run away (ἀποδιδράσκειν) contrary to the compacts and agreements you made with us. . . .” Of course, we must acknowledge that the literal verb (δραπετεύω) has changed in this passage, but “δραπετεύω” and “ἀποδιδράσκω” do share a common root (δρα-). In the former passage from the *Crito*, Socrates appears to speak of “running away” as a fugitive or exile, but in the latter passage, the personified laws liken his behavior to that of the runaway slave. Even though the laws explicitly refer to a slave (δοῦλος), Socrates’ runaway would be *like* that of a runaway slave. In other words, the image implies that other people can become “runaways” besides slaves, since Socrates could not be compared to a runaway slave if all “runaway humans” (δραπέτης ἄνθρωπος) were necessarily “runaway slaves.” We do not propose to translate “δραπέτης ἄνθρωπος” in the *Meno* as “fugitive” rather than “runaway slave” to erase the institution of slavery from the Greek text. If anything, our prior decision to render the παῖς as “παῖς” has only emphasized the significance of the slave in the polis. Nevertheless, we have no hope to understand Socrates’ analogical reasoning about Daedalus’ statues, a fugitive, and true opinions if we are not even confident about the terms of the analogy.

In this passage from the *Meno*, Socrates compares Daedalus’ statues to the “fugitive” insofar as neither will “stay put” (παρὰμένει), which makes both of them respectively not worth much (οὐ πολλῆς τιμῆς ἄξιόν). However, Socrates goes on to claim that they both become much more valuable when they are tied down (δεδεμένον). We will develop an interpretation of Socrates’ analogical reasoning in the main text; however, as a part of our justification for the translation “fugitive,” it warrants pointing out a difference which arises from the decision to translate “δραπέτης ἄνθρωπος” as either “fugitive” or “runaway slave.” What aspect of Daedalus’ bound statues is like a bound fugitive/slave? Even though lexical precedent can justify the translation of δραπέτης ἄνθρωπος as “runaway slave,” it is difficult to justify this translation contextually. According to Socrates, the problem with Daedalus’ statues and the “runaway” is that they will not “stay put.” And yet, our analysis of the *Meno* has focused on the relationship between *arete*, the human good, and the polis. We understand the pursuit of *arete* as one which takes place within a communal horizon, and even the παῖς exercised his own meagre claim. It is clear what would be good about “tying down” one of Daedalus’ statues. They are very beautiful according to Socrates, and if they cannot run away, then their beauty can be admired. But how does this possibility relate to the “bound” runaway slave? It is difficult to see what is beautiful about a “runaway slave” who is bound by either rope and metal or ideological binds. In fact, the shamefulness of such deeds is a part of the slave’s contribution to the communal horizon. The slave can never be noble and good (κάλος κἀγαθός), and so the slave’s existence contradicts the universality of the pursuit (i.e., all people want to be good). We might levy the same concern about the image of a bound fugitive too; however, it may be instructive to remember that there are three steps in Socrates’ analogical reasoning. He compares the statues of Daedalus to the fugitive which are further like true opinions. The problem with the image of the bound slave is that it does not matter whether the slave is bound with physical fetters or ideological ones. It is shameful either way. However, the same does not hold for the fugitive. A fugitive who will “stay put” because of “ideological fetters” can become simply a citizen, which means further that the “bound fugitive” can become a good person (ἀγαθός). The invisible binding of the fugitive ties the fugitive to a polis, which, in turn, creates the opportunity for the fugitive to be a good person. Our anticipatory observation that the analogical reasoning concludes with true opinions can help us to recognize that we are not strictly dealing with the “visible.” Even if we presume that visible fetters bind the statues and the “runaway,” we could never

strange that scholars have not focused more on this term “fugitive” (δραπέτης ἄνθρωπος), which is often translated as “runaway slave,” even though it plays such a determinate role in Socrates’ analogical reasoning. Would the implications of Socrates’ reasoning not differ considerably if he compared Daedalus’ creations to a fugitive instead of a runaway slave? Let us first attempt to draw out the similarity on which the analogical reasoning hinges.

Why does Socrates claim that the acquisition of one of Daedalus’ creations (ποίηματα) is not worth much? The answer is simple: because they run away. And why does their fleeting character pose a problem? Socrates is less explicit about the answer to this question, but his observation that they are very beautiful (καλὰ) might imply that their propensity to run away hinders a viewer’s ability to admire their beauty. Consequently, if no one can witness their beauty because the creations are always running away, then they may not be worth much in this sense. This approach to Socrates’ reasoning could explain the similarity between Daedalus’ beautiful creations and the beauty of true opinions, but Socrates first likens Daedalus’ “creations” to the fugitive (δραπέτης ἄνθρωπος) before he introduces true opinions.⁹³⁵ While we may be able to anticipate a commonality between Daedalus’ beautiful creations and beautiful true opinions, the relationship between the fleeting creations and the fugitive (a fleeing human) seems opaquer. According to Socrates, it is not worth much to acquire one of Daedalus’ creations, like a fugitive, because neither will stay put. However, once each one is respectively tied down, Socrates claims that they are worth a great deal. No commentators offer justification for their translation/interpretation of “δραπέτης ἄνθρωπος” as “runaway slave,” and so it is difficult to say why this decision has been assumed so frequently. There is, of course, lexical justification for this decision, but what is the contextual justification? How exactly would we justify the claim that a “runaway slave” who “is tied down (δεδεμένον) is worth a great deal (πολλοῦ ἄξιον)”? Is the implication that, because Greek custom permitted the ownership of slaves, Socrates and any other Greek would “obviously” see considerable value in a bound runaway slave *in the same way as a tied down statue of Daedalus*? Let us venture a very different interpretation of Socrates’ analogical reasoning.

reasonably justify such an interpretation of the “fetters” which bind true opinions to the soul, and so, we might understand the “fugitive” as a middle term which connects the visible binding of the statues to the invisible binding of true opinions. The image of the runaway slave cannot fulfill such a role in the analogical reasoning.

⁹³⁵ Cf. Plato, *Republic*, 506c. All opinions, even true ones, are ugly.

According to Socrates, one of Daedalus' creations is not worth much unless it is tied down, and then it is worth a great deal. Further, the value of one of Daedalus' tied-down creations is like that of a "tied-down" fugitive (δραπέτης ἄνθρωπος). If we assume that the fugitive is like an outlaw, i.e., a bad person (κακός), then we could run into a similar problem to the one which we pointed out in the "runaway slave" interpretation. However, we ought to recall our interpretation of Theognis' verses, and specifically, how Socrates seemed more like a bad person than a good one in the first set of verses. This similarity warrants pointing out also because Socrates, as we learn in the *Crito*, could have become a fugitive (δραπέτης ἄνθρωπος), if he wanted. And yet, he refused to do so. Did Socrates refuse to become a fugitive because he could not escape the visible fetters which bound his hands and feet? No. Socrates had wealthy and powerful friends who could have helped him to escape.⁹³⁶ The fetters which kept Socrates in Athens were not visible ones like those which would tie down one of Daedalus' creations, but they are, perhaps, even more valuable. These fetters tied down Socrates, the would-be fugitive, so steadfastly that he allowed himself to die an Athenian—and not a fugitive (δραπέτης ἄνθρωπος). That which bound Socrates, the would-be fugitive, to remain in Athens despite his death sentence is very valuable, i.e., worthy of much honor. The "value" of this binding comes from its relationship to the pursuit of *arete*. Socrates only had the opportunity to be a good person (ἀγαθός) *because* he was so bound to Athens. Our interpretation has nothing to do with an assumption about the righteousness of Socratic practice in contrast to the injustice of Athenian prosecution. This possibility has nothing to do with Socrates dying like a "martyr," and such an interpretation has no place in our analysis. On the contrary, the invisible fetters that bound Socrates to Athens gave him the opportunity to be a good person because they intensified his contribution to the Athenian communal horizon. Socrates lived and died as an Athenian, and this ostensibly trivial observation becomes much more significant if we recall our analysis of the noble and good Athenians. We questioned how "good" a so-called noble and good Athenian could be, if they were exiled from Athens. Or, if we wish to absolve ourselves from adjudicating on the murky details of ancient Athenian politics, we might ask more simply: Could an Athenian fugitive/exile, while being a run-away, also be a noble and good Athenian? In what sense would we call a man "good" who "benefits" his *polis* most by running away from it?

⁹³⁶ Plato, *Crito*, 45a-c.

There may be more nuance to this question than our presentation of it might imply, especially if we were to expand our scope to include examples from modern history. However, let us continue to examine this part of the text through the terms with which we have grown familiar in our analysis thus far. That it is “good” for a person to be bound to their *polis a la* Socrates does not imply that the *polis* is infallible. A person does not become good merely by submitting to the measure of a good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) in the *polis*. Both the *polis* and the bound fugitive benefit from the binding. Let us begin to unpack the character of this symbiotic relationship through an analysis of a passage from the *Crito*. When Socrates personifies the Athenian laws, they claim:

...and to do so [i.e., to obey one’s country or else persuade it] is right (δίκαιον), and one must not give way or retreat or leave one’s post, but both in war and in courts and everywhere else, one must do (ποιητέον) the things which the *polis* and country commands (κελεύη) or persuade (πείθειν) it to engender (πέφυκε) what is right (δίκαιον).⁹³⁷

If we consider the laws’ disjunction through our analysis of the dialectical relationship between the *polis* and the individual, then we can see one way in which the binding of the fugitive to the *polis* is mutually beneficial. On the one hand, the fugitive who is bound to a *polis* will obey the *polis* because it commands what is right (δίκαιον), and doing what is right (δίκαιον), or “just,” is a part of being a good person (ἀγαθός). But, on the other hand, the latter disjunct implies that what is “right” is not right simply *because* it is what the *polis* commands. That is, the bound fugitive, who, in this case, is really only a would-be fugitive like Socrates, also contributes to the measure of what is right (δίκαιον) and so *who* is good (ἀγαθός). The *polis* benefits from the would-be fugitive being bound to it by being persuaded about matters related to the human good, if it should err, and the would-be fugitive benefits from the binding through his or her participation in this communal horizon. Similarly, a real fugitive, someone who does run away from his or her *polis*, is still more “valuable” (to the *polis* and to him or herself) when bound to a *polis* for the same reasons. The fugitive needs the *polis* in order to be good, and the *polis* needs the fugitive insofar as the fugitive can offer a unique contribution to the communal pursuit of *arete*.

Socrates uses analogical reasoning to explain to Meno the difference between knowledge and true opinion. The first step of the analogical reasoning compares one of Daedalus’ creations to a fugitive, which many interpreters have assumed is a runaway slave. We, however, have

⁹³⁷ Ibid., 51b-c. Translation modified.

developed an interpretation based upon a different assumption. In our account, the fugitive functions as a middle term which connects Daedalus' creations to true opinions. Daedalus' creations require visible fetters to be tied down, but the fugitive can be bound with either visible or invisible fetters. Our interpretation has primarily focused on the potential of the invisible fetters which bind a (would-be or real) fugitive to a *polis*, and through this interpretation, we developed another way to understand Socrates' esteem for the value of the binding. Moreover, our analysis of the fugitive drew out the power of invisible fetters, which is noteworthy insofar as what binds true opinions to the soul will likely also be some sort of invisible fetters. Let us move on now to the next step in Socrates' analogical reasoning, which will reveal something about true opinions based upon their similarity to one of Daedalus' creations that has been tied down and to a bound fugitive.

Socrates remarks that the creations of Daedalus are like true opinions because they are both beautiful, and yet they tend not to “stay put” (παραμένειν). While one could tie down one of Daedalus' runaway creations so that it could no longer run off, no visible fetters can “bind” true opinions to the soul. A fugitive could be bound with visible fetters like one of Daedalus' creations as well, but this sort of binding was meager in comparison to the invisible fetters which could bind a fugitive to a *polis*. We did not understand the binding of the fugitive as a question of political obedience or control, but rather, it created a mutually beneficial situation for both the fugitive and the *polis*. Bearing our prior analysis in mind, we are now confronted by interpretative questions concerning the binding of true opinions to the soul. According to Socrates, true opinions (αἱ δόξαι αἱ ἀληθεῖς) are a “fine thing” (καλὸν τὸ χρεῖμα) because, we might infer, they lead a person to accomplish good things (“πάντ' ἀγαθὰ”), like, for example, arriving in Larissa without having travelled there previously. In our prior analysis of the road to Larissa, we pointed out how the “practical” dimension of a true opinion seemed like the focus of Socrates' image, and we might recognize that same emphasis here. However, Socrates now insists that the trouble with true opinions is that they, like Daedalus' creations or a fugitive, will not stay put (παραμένειν). They “run away” out of the soul. Socrates claims that true opinions are troublesome in this way, and so “not worth much,” “...until someone should bind (δήσει) them by accounting for (λογισμῶ) the causes (αἰτίας). And this, my comrade Meno, is recollection (ἀνάμνησις), as we agreed

(ὡμολόγηται) before.”⁹³⁸ In our analysis of the fugitive, we did not have a name for what bound the fugitive to the *polis*, but we did see what was mutually beneficial about this binding. Now, however, we find another example of invisible fetters, and Socrates has even named that which binds true opinions to the soul: accounting for (λογισμός) the causes (αἰτίαι). And yet, this assertion creates problems for us too, since Socrates calls it recollection (ἀνάμνησις) and further insists that he and Meno agreed to this claim previously. But to what prior agreement does Socrates allude?

Socrates claims that he and Meno had agreed previously about this account of recollection despite making this claim for the first time just now. It seems unlikely that Socrates would have completely forgotten what he said previously (especially such a provocative claim), but where should we look for a claim which has not been said? It seems reasonable for us to return to Socrates’ story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις), since it first introduced recollection into the dialogue. However, it was not until Socrates reviewed his exhibition with Meno that Socrates explicitly discussed true opinions, knowledge, and recollection all together—including the transformation of true opinion into knowledge.⁹³⁹ In a perplexing remark, Socrates asserted that:

And now those very opinions [i.e., the true opinions (ἀληθεῖς δόξαι)] have just been stirred up in him, like a dream (ὥσπερ ὄναρ). But if someone were to ask him these same questions many times and in different ways (πολλάκις τὰ αὐτὰ ταῦτα καὶ πολλαχῆ), you know that he will finally understand (ἐπιστήσεται) them no less precisely (ἀκριβῶς) than anyone else.⁹⁴⁰

After this claim, Socrates spoke exclusively about the “knowledge” (ἐπιστήμη) that the *παῖς* would have. The connection between this passage and our current one seems reasonable insofar as they both discuss the transformation of true opinion into knowledge. The question which we must ask ourselves is whether “binding by accounting for (λογισμός) the causes (αἰτίαι)” reiterates the process of “asking questions many times and in different ways.” Even if we did think them sufficiently similar, we would still need to figure out how either of these assertions amount to “recollection” (ἀνάμνησις). For some time now, we have deviated from the conventional, Anglophone approach to the *Meno*, which takes for granted certain assumptions about recollection

⁹³⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 98a. Translation modified.

⁹³⁹ Many scholars turn to this part of the dialogue as the likely referent. Bluck, *Plato’s Meno*, 31-32.

Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, 155. Thompson, *The Meno of Plato*, 221. Vlastos, “Anamnesis in the *Meno*,” 156-157. Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato’s Meno*, 152-156.

⁹⁴⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 85c.

and its importance in the *Meno*. Moreover, Socrates has caused us to doubt its technical significance as well.⁹⁴¹ And so, while the potential identification of “accounting for (λογισμός) the causes (αἰτίαι)” with “asking questions many times and in different ways” is by no means a useless one, we might be better off, if we do not attempt to force a correspondence. Instead, how might we understand the binding of true opinions to the soul by “accounting for (λογισμός) the causes (αἰτίαι)” through our analysis of *arete* and the human good?

According to Socrates, this process (namely, accounting for (λογισμός) the causes (αἰτίαι)) describes the binding through which true opinions become knowledge. Knowledge remains steadfastly in the soul, whereas true opinions are useful but tend to “run away” out of the soul like one of Daedalus’ creations or a fugitive. But can knowledge not also be forgotten, as Weiss so keenly asks?⁹⁴² Is it not, for example, because knowledge *can* be forgotten that Socrates’ story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) has any persuasive force whatsoever? If knowledge could not be forgotten, then Socrates’ story of recollection would lack even a superficial plausibility. Furthermore, in our ongoing analysis of the *Meno*, we have never considered *arete* as something about which a steadfast knowledge would even, in principle, be possible. On the contrary, we understand inquiry into *arete* as a dialectical process in which the individual stakes a unique claim on the good that simultaneously informs and is informed by the communal horizon. Since we assume the pursuit of *arete* to have such a character, the establishment of a robust distinction between knowledge and true opinion does not pose an urgent problem for us to confront. In fact, we might even sympathize with Meno insofar as his question supposes that true opinion and knowledge are difficult to distinguish from one another. And yet, we ought to make our own distinction here. According to Socrates’ reasoning, the person who reasons dialectically (φρονῶν) has knowledge, but does such a person have knowledge of *arete*?⁹⁴³ Our analysis does not lead us to such a conclusion, and yet, dialectical reasoning reckons with questions concerning the good (ἀγαθός) and the beautiful (κάλος). Socrates even supposed dialectical reasoning either to be *arete* altogether or some part of it.⁹⁴⁴ We repeat this assertion about *arete* because, as Klein remarks,

⁹⁴¹ See, for example, *ibid.*, 87b-c. Socrates asked, “First, then, if [*arete*] is the kind of thing that is different (ἀλλοῖον) from, or like (οἶον), knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), is it teachable or not, or, as we were just now saying, is it recollectable (ἀναμνηστόν)—let it make no difference to us about whatever name we use—but is it teachable?” The murkiness of the current reference to recollection might also lead us to doubt its “technical” importance.

⁹⁴² Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato’s Meno*, 157.

⁹⁴³ Plato, *Meno*, 97b.

⁹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 89a.

dialectical reasoning is *not* something which can be forgotten.⁹⁴⁵ In other words, it is not at risk of running out of the soul, a characteristic which sets it apart from both knowledge and true opinion. We still have many questions about dialectical reasoning. We do not know where it comes from nor do we have a reliable way to identify who has it. And yet, all these considerations about knowledge, true opinion, and dialectical reasoning warrant our attention because they may serve as a reminder for us to ask what sort of “knowledge” Socrates’ analogical reasoning explains. After all, when we noticed the “practical” equivalence between knowledge and right/true opinion in the example of the road to Larissa, we also considered the implications of the example through a more refined scope. The “practical” equivalence of knowledge and right/true opinion implied something about those who are “good” *because* they “lead rightly,” namely, that they need not possess dialectical reasoning at all. Even though Socrates and Meno discuss the difference between knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and right/true opinion (ὀρθή δόξα/ δόξα ἀληθείας), we have interpreted the discourse in a political register rather than an epistemological one.

Our analysis leads us to question whether the scope of Socrates’ differentiation of knowledge from true opinion is as broad as it first appears. Socrates’ analogical reasoning differentiates knowledge from true opinion by comparing them to Daedalus’ creations when bound and unbound, creations which he first compares to the bound and unbound fugitive. We arrived at this point after Meno expressed his uncertainty about the difference between knowledge and true opinion, an uncertainty which arose in response to Socrates’ reasoning about the “practical” equivalence between knowledge and true opinion about the road to Larissa. They both succeed at leading rightly. Furthermore, Socrates presented this example to emphasize a prior error in his reasoning, namely, that a person is led rightly *only* when led by dialectical reasoning. The example of the road to Larissa illustrated that true opinion leads with equal success. The philosophical significance of questions about knowledge can cause us to forget the context in which Socrates makes his claims. However, if we remain attuned to the themes underlying Socrates’ reasoning, which we have followed since the beginning of our inquiry, then we might interpret Socrates’ claim about knowledge (i.e., true opinions which have been bound by accounting for reasons) as a differentiation between two kinds of *leaders*. There are leaders who accomplish their tasks successfully (i.e., “lead rightly” in a “practical” sense) *and* who can account for the cause of their

⁹⁴⁵ Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, 248.

success. And there are also leaders who accomplish their tasks successfully (i.e., “lead rightly” in a “practical” sense) but who cannot account for the cause of their success. This distinction could seem trivial, if we had not repeatedly analyzed both explicit and tacit claims that a leader and good person (ἀγαθός) are one and the same. The designation of Athenian politicians (πολιτικοί) as noble and good (καλοὶ κἀγαθοί) emphasizes a recurrent example of the confluence between the leader (ἡγεμών) and the good person (ἀγαθός). Socrates’ distinction between knowledge and true opinion may have epistemological significance, but it is just as much a political claim too. Leaders who can account for why they lead in a certain way are more valuable than those who cannot just like knowledge is more valuable than true opinion because of its binding.

We have proposed that Socrates makes a political claim through his account of the greater esteem for knowledge over true opinion despite their “practical” equivalence; and yet, if we have learned anything from our analysis, then we must also recognize that this political claim is simultaneously a claim on the human good. Insofar as the leaders of a *polis* exercise a claim on the human good, we can identify an axiological differentiation between the claims of two sorts of leaders. The leaders who can account for why they lead in a certain way are *better*. They are “more good” so to speak. And if we reflect on Socrates’ distinction, then we might notice that this consequence originated from a “practical” necessity. Both sorts of leaders successfully benefit others. They “hit the mark.” Insofar as they both succeed at doing good for others, we cannot distinguish what leads them. However, those who can account for *why* they lead in the way that they lead will more reliably (which does not imply perfectly or infallibly) benefit those who follow. Such leaders are not more reliable because they have knowledge whereas the others “only” have true opinion. As Socrates’ example of the road to Larissa illustrated, both knowledge and true opinion succeed at leading rightly. Rather, the leaders with an account for the cause of their success will not “lose” their opinions as easily as those who lead with true opinion alone. After all, it was in regard to their respective tendency to run out of the soul that Socrates differentiated knowledge from true opinion. Accounting for the cause is an invisible fetter which binds true opinions to the soul like the invisible fetters that bind the fugitive to the *polis*. Socrates’ assertion of a greater esteem for knowledge over true opinion, which we explore through an analysis of different kinds of leaders who both “lead rightly,” harmonizes with our insistence upon the communal character of inquiry into *arete* as well.

If leaders can account for the causes of their success, they do not only benefit others by “leading rightly.” Such an account is transmissible to others. It is possible, though never guaranteed, that their account could tether a true opinion to the soul of a “follower” who hears it.⁹⁴⁶ By contrast, those who have true opinions alone can only assert their true opinions. If we recall Socrates’ interaction with Anytus, we might notice how unpersuasive this approach is despite Anytus saying something “true.” After all, we arrived at a similar conclusion to one which Anytus asserted, i.e., that the sophists can be harmful to the *polis*, but Anytus’ inability to account for his claim, lacking even recourse to experience, made it difficult to accept his assertion.⁹⁴⁷ Consequently, Anytus’ inability to account for his claim led us to question the propriety of his leadership, which also raised questions about his claim to *arete*. Perhaps Anytus is a good man (ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός). Perhaps he is someone who benefits his followers—the Athenian constituency and his kin. But what leads Anytus when he does so? Can he explain the basis of his opinions? If we understand his engagement in the dialogue as a reflection of what he “knows,” then he seems more like someone who has, at best, true opinions. He could not account for the harm (i.e., the “corruption and disgrace”) of the sophists, nor could he account for the way in which the noble and good Athenians could teach people how to be good. Insofar as the “practical” dimension of “leading rightly” is a necessary measure of *arete*, i.e., a person must succeed at benefiting others to be good, someone like Anytus, who may only have true opinions, does make a valuable contribution to the communal pursuit of *arete*. It is not just a “theoretical” pursuit. And yet, simultaneously, someone like Anytus poses a threat as well. So long as true opinions guide a leader, then the leader will benefit the *polis*, but lacking an account of the causes, such a leader risks leading harmfully, if the aforementioned true opinions should “run out” of the leader’s soul. By contrast, a leader whose soul is led by knowledge is more valuable to the *polis* insofar as such a person is less likely to “lose” that which leads that person’s soul rightly. According to our analysis, this distinction between knowledge and true opinion intimates a concern for the good of the *polis* and *who* is more likely to benefit it reliably.

⁹⁴⁶ We should note an important ambiguity here. A “follower” could refer to a constituent, and so the relationship between a politician and the constituency, but a “follower” could just as well refer to a participant in a dialogue. For example, Socrates is a “leader” in this part of the discussion, and Meno is the “follower.” We need not enumerate every conceivable interpersonal dynamic between leader/follower to infer the salience of the transmissibility of a “binding” account for our inquiry into *arete*.

⁹⁴⁷ Plato, *Meno*, 92b-c.

Meno agrees emphatically with Socrates' explanation, but Socrates quickly qualifies himself. He claims:

And yet, I too speak, not like one who knows (ὡς οὐκ εἰδῶς), but like one who makes images (εἰκάζων). But I certainly do not think I am making images (εἰκάζειν) [when I affirm] that right opinion (ὀρθή δόξα) and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) are different things (ἄλλοιον). But if there is anything I would affirm (φαίην) that I know (εἰδέναι), and there are few (ὀλίγα) I would affirm (φαίην)—one of those, at any rate, which I would set down (θεῖην) that I know (οἶδα) is this.⁹⁴⁸

Immediately, the phrase “like one who knows” (ὡς εἰδῶς) should stick out to us because it has appeared many times throughout the dialogue.⁹⁴⁹ Previously, Socrates used it to refer to Gorgias' students, to Meno, and even to the παῖς. In each case, we heard the phrase with a subversive intonation. When we analyzed each instance, it seemed to us that each person answered questions with an undue confidence in their assertion. They seemed *like* one who knows, which implied to us that they may not know. And yet now, Socrates speaks of himself in this way but negatively, i.e., *not* like one who knows. According to Aristotle, such a claim is consistent with Socrates' tendency towards modesty, but contextually, it might sound strange for Socrates to deny his likeness with one who knows immediately after asserting a strong distinction between knowledge and true opinion.⁹⁵⁰ We might hear the strangeness of this gesture more intensely also because Socrates insists that he *does* know that right opinion (ὀρθή δόξα), to which he has notably reverted

⁹⁴⁸ Ibid., 98b. Translation Modified. Weiss contra Klein insists that “εἰκάζων” or “making images” is better rendered as “guessing,” and she cites 89e as precedent. Anastaplo and Berns take a half-measure and translate “εἰκάζων” as “one who makes images and conjectures” and “εἰκάζειν” as “making images or guessing.” Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 249. Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's Meno*, 159. At 89e, Socrates asks, “... would we not liken/guess (εἰκάζοντες) [*arete*] rightly if we should liken/guess (εἰκάζομεν) it to what is not teachable...?” Anastaplo and Berns prefer “liken” where Weiss proposes “guess.” If we use this passage as precedent, then it seems at least contentious whether “guess” could be a useful translation. However, we might be better served by looking at 80c for additional precedent. At that part of the text, Socrates insists that Meno compared him to a torpedo fish for the following reason: “...[S]o that I would make a likeness of you in return (ἀντεικάσω). And I know (οἶδα) this about all beautiful people (πάντων τῶν καλῶν), that they delight (χαίρουσιν) in having images made (εἰκαζόμενοι) of them; it pays for them. Because, I suppose, even the images (εἰκόνες) of beautiful people (τῶν καλῶν) are beautiful (καλαί).” In this case, the superiority of “making images” over “guessing” seems more suggestive. “Making images” resonates contextually, and the translation reflects the rhetorical act in Socrates' speech. If we compare this example to our present one, then we might recognize a repetition of the latter precedent. Socrates has made an image of knowledge and true opinions in his speech, and we can understand how Socrates' analogical reasoning could seem like “guessing.” However, the translation of “εἰκάζων” as “guessing” could imply that Socrates makes his claims here with little evidence. While we acknowledge that Socrates has reasoned previously from a foundational supposition, which is a bit like guessing, “guessing” emphasizes a very different dimension of Socrates' speech from what we have focused our analysis upon. Our acknowledgment of such a minute translational decision contributes to our broader effort to recognize the subtle ways in which translation and interpretation intertwine with one another.

⁹⁴⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 70b, 80d, 84a.

⁹⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1127b 25.

back from true opinion (δόξα ἀληθής), and knowledge differ from one another.⁹⁵¹ Thus, we might ask two questions in response to Socrates' qualification. First, about what does Socrates speak not like one who knows (ὡς οὐκ εἰδῶς), but instead, like one who makes images (εἰκάζων)? For he clearly cannot mean that he does not know *that* there is a difference between knowledge and true/right opinion immediately before asserting that he would affirm that he knows they are different things. And second, upon what basis does Socrates assert that he *does* know that right opinion (ὀρθή δόξα) and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) are different things (ἄλλοιοι)?

When Socrates claims to speak not like one who knows (ὡς οὐκ εἰδῶς) but like one who makes images (εἰκάζων), we can hear his claim in multiple registers. Socrates' claim could imply that he makes images of *what* (in contrast to "that") knowledge and right/true opinion are, and so it could refer to his "images" of knowledge and true opinion as statues of Daedalus and the fugitive.⁹⁵² Socrates' assertion might also imply something broader about his manner of speaking like one who makes images about the matters which they have examined throughout the dialogue, and it might remind us of Socrates' early claim not to know what *arete* is, which has persistently troubled our analysis. We might ponder the consequences of this claim for our prior interpretation of the greater esteem for a leader who is led by knowledge over a leader who is led by true/right opinion as well. What leads the soul of someone who makes images of things, and how would such a person compare to someone who is led by knowledge or right/true opinion? This question adds a layer of complexity to our inquiry because Socrates seems, at the very least, to have "made images" of knowledge and right/true opinion as a way "to lead" Meno to agree that they are different. And indeed Meno will agree. Socrates may make an image of knowledge and right/true opinion partially *because* he must speak about a matter which he has openly professed not to know but also one about which he cannot remain silent. In this way, Socrates seems like a very different sort of "leader" in Athens compared to the sophists or the politicians. Socrates differs from these people in other ways too. For example, when Meno made it difficult for Socrates to gratify his

⁹⁵¹ If we make an inference about the difference between right opinion (ὀρθή δόξα) and true opinion (δόξα ἀληθής) based upon Socrates' use of the phrases in the *Meno*, then they seem interchangeable. The justification for this interchangeability seems to rest upon the "practical" focus of Socrates' reasoning, which we first noted in the example of the road to Larissa. A right opinion is "right" because it accomplishes a goal successfully, and in this sense, it is also "true." Consequently, a right opinion, a true opinion, and knowledge all lead a person rightly. Even if we can identify a (con)textual justification for assuming the interchangeability of right and true opinion, such a justification would not alone give us an adequate justification to infer epistemological consequences beyond the *Meno*.

⁹⁵² As Klein assumes. Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, 249-250.

demand to hear Socrates account for shape, Socrates assured Meno that he would answer his interlocutor with the truth (if his interlocutor claimed not to know color). But, Socrates maintained, if he and his interlocutor were friends, then he would answer not only with the truth but also with those things which his interlocutor agreed to know.⁹⁵³ This regard for the other differs from someone who is led by right/true opinion and from someone who is led by knowledge, since neither of the latter people *must* consider the other with whom they speak. Furthermore, during his commentary on his exhibition with the παῖς, Socrates revealed himself to be not altogether convinced by his own account; however, he did assert his willingness to do battle “in word and deed” on behalf of the claim that they would be better, braver, and less lazy if they supposed that they ought to seek what they do not know than if they believed Meno’s contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος).⁹⁵⁴ In other words, Socrates seemed to care more for what would make him and Meno better than for his account, an account to which Meno had not even objected. If we weave these instances together, we might conclude that Socrates asserts the difference between right opinion and knowledge *for* Meno. If Meno believes Socrates, then Meno might strive to become a better leader than the kind which his guest-friend Anytus has become.

Now that Socrates has convinced Meno *that* there is a difference between knowledge and right/true opinion while also acknowledging that they both lead rightly, Socrates hastily reviews their prior reasoning with the addition of this new insight.⁹⁵⁵ Since true opinion (δόξα ἀληθής) leads rightly just as well as knowledge, Socrates concludes that right opinion (ὀρθή δόξα) is no worse nor any less beneficial (ὠφελίμη) than knowledge.⁹⁵⁶ He further claims that the same goes for a man (ἄνθρωπος) who has right opinion and for one who has knowledge.⁹⁵⁷ In our analysis of Socrates’ analogical reasoning about the creations of Daedalus, the fugitive, and the distinction between knowledge and true/right opinion, we discerned an insight about the measure of *arete* through Socrates’ explanation for why knowledge is so much more honored (τιμιωτέρα) than right opinion. We understood the greater esteem for the leader who has knowledge over the one who has true/right opinion *not* on a “practical basis”—they both lead rightly in this regard—but rather

⁹⁵³ Plato, *Meno*, 75d.

⁹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 86b-c.

⁹⁵⁵ Socrates first presented another version of this argument at 87c-89c. The review is “hasty” in the sense that Socrates does not exercise consistent terminological precision nor does Socrates follow the same path through his reasoning.

⁹⁵⁶ Throughout Socrates’ recapitulation, he waivers between right opinion and true opinion frequently, which seems worth noting even if we assume their effective synonymy in the *Meno*.

⁹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 98b-c.

on an axiological one. With an account of the causes, such leaders are less likely for their true opinions to “run out of” their souls, since they can explain the justification for their opinions. Furthermore, we supposed that such leaders can confer another benefit on their *polis* because they have an account which they can share with others. Consequently, their contribution to the communal horizon can have a greater weight, if it affects the souls of others who hear it. Now, when Socrates asserts that a man (ἄνθρωπος) who has right opinion is no worse nor any less beneficial than one who has knowledge, he makes a claim that, at the very least, does not contradict our own interpretation. Insofar as we consider the respective likelihood of a person with knowledge and true/right opinion to hit the mark, both the leader who has right opinion and the one who has knowledge are equal, and we have never assumed otherwise. As we will see, the equal, practical benefit of knowledge and true/right opinion will lead us to reexamine the political claim of the politicians on the human good. If we look forward in an anticipatory way, we will find Socrates’ asserting that knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) does not seem to lead political action (πολιτική πράξις).⁹⁵⁸ Let us continue to track the development of Socrates’ reasoning.

In a manner consonant with our prior observation, Socrates has conspicuously reframed his account in terms of the *people* who are led by knowledge or true/right opinion. And so, Socrates reasons:

Now then, since not only through knowledge (ἐπιστήμην) can men (ἄνδρες) be good (ἀγαθοί) and beneficial (ὠφέλιμοι) to their *polis*, if they would, but also through right opinion (ὀρθὴν δόξαν); and neither of these two is natural (φύσει) to human beings (τοῖς ἀνθρώποις), neither knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) nor true opinion (δόξα ἀληθής), nor are they acquired (ἐπίκτητα)—or does it seem to you that either of them is by nature?⁹⁵⁹

Meno agrees that knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and true opinion (δόξα ἀληθής) are not natural. Does the “unnaturalness” of knowledge and true opinion in human beings support or contradict Socrates’ story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις)? At this point, it seems more difficult to justify its relevance than to read it circumstantially, as we analyzed it in Chapter II. Since neither knowledge nor true opinion are natural, Socrates concludes that good (ἀγαθοί) (people) are not naturally good either. And since it is not natural to become good, then, according to Socrates, they examined whether *arete* is teachable. Socrates implies that he is repeating the same reasoning from earlier in

⁹⁵⁸ Ibid., 99a-b.

⁹⁵⁹ Ibid., 98c-d.

their discussion, but we remember that it did not unfold in this way. Nevertheless, Meno does not object. Accordingly, Socrates asks, “Then did it not seem to be teachable (διδασκτὸν), if dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) is *arete*?”⁹⁶⁰ With Meno’s assent, Socrates questions again, “And if it should be something teachable, it would be dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις)?” If *arete* were teachable (which was the foundational supposition that undergird all of Socrates’ reasoning in the part of the text which we analyzed in Chapter III), why must it be dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) rather than, for example, knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), technical know-how (τέχνη), or wisdom (σοφία), all of which have also appeared in this dialogue? Socrates offers no justification for this assertion, which is, at least, consistent with the way that dialectical reasoning suddenly appeared in his account the first time; however, our analysis of dialectical reasoning as a thing pertaining to the soul, whose purview questions concerning the good and beautiful fall within, might justify its emphasis here. None of the other sorts of knowing could replace dialectical reasoning, when we understand it in this way and in this context.

Even so, Socrates does not linger on this point, quickly turning to the line of questioning about the absence of teachers. With similar effect, Socrates doubts that *arete* is either teachable or dialectical reasoning. If *arete* could be taught, then there would likely be teachers of it. And yet, as Socrates concluded with Anytus and Meno, there do not seem to be any teachers of *arete* nor does *arete* seem to be dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις), if it cannot be taught.⁹⁶¹ Nevertheless, Socrates insists on their prior agreement that *arete* is good (ἀγαθός), and whatever “leads rightly” is beneficial (ὠφέλιμος) and good (ἀγαθός). And so, having reviewed their prior reasoning (albeit with a suspicious lack of precision), Socrates reiterates their new insight about the *two* things which “lead rightly.” He claims:

And these two things only lead rightly (ὀρθῶς ἡγεῖσθαι): true opinion (δόξαν ἀληθῆ) and knowledge (ἐπιστήμην), which the human being who leads rightly has. For the things which come to be rightly (ὀρθῶς) from some sort of chance (ἀπὸ τύχης τινὸς) do not come to be from human leadership (ἀνθρωπίνη ἡγεμονία). But the things, of which a human

⁹⁶⁰ Ibid., 98d.

⁹⁶¹ Ibid., 98e. Socrates has rearranged the order of his prior argument. Previously, their assertion of dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) as *arete* (either altogether or some part of it) provided the basis for rejecting the possibility of *arete* coming to be by nature. This time, Socrates considers these two possibilities (by nature or by teaching) independently. Moreover, the absence of teachers of *arete* only called into question its status as knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). Here, Socrates leaves out the step about knowledge, of which dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) is a part, and simply denies the identity between *arete* and dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις).

being is one who leads (ἄνθρωπος ἡγεμών) to the right [outcome] (τὸ ὀρθόν), are these two, true opinion (δόξα ἀληθῆς) and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη).⁹⁶²

Whence come chance (τύχη), and why does Socrates now contrast it with human leadership (ἀνθρωπίνη ἡγεμονία)? Since the beginning of our analysis, we have examined the *Meno* as a text about human *arete*, and so it might almost seem redundant to us that Socrates emphasizes the concern for *human* leadership. And yet, we must simultaneously acknowledge how our own inquiry has undergone a transformation. We began our investigation searching for a measure of *arete* sufficient for the human good, and as our investigation has progressed, we have complicated our search in many ways. Despite the growing complexity of our inquiry, Socrates' explicit reference to human leadership brings to the fore a problem which has persisted since the beginning. Might we now hear echoes of this concern in Socrates' early allusion to Gorgias and the Aleudai in Larissa, who are precisely the sorts of leaders whom Socrates and Anytus consider during their conversation (i.e., a sophist and the noble and good (καλοὶ καγαθοί))?⁹⁶³ Or might we be better served if we recall Meno's second attempt to account for *arete* as those who rule?⁹⁶⁴ Socrates may use the phrase "human leadership" (ἀνθρωπίνη ἡγεμονία) for the first time as we approach the conclusion of the dialogue, but this issue has always been a part of the inquiry. Furthermore, we might heed the opposition of chance against human leadership as an expression of an anxiety about the human good which has haunted our analysis. Could it be that humans do not have any power to influence who becomes good and who does not? Could the human good be nothing more than a matter of chance? Socrates does not appear to consider this possibility. According to Socrates, we must consider the two things which lead a human to the right (outcome) (τὸ ὀρθόν). In other words, we consider the matter "practically," which also, at least partially, implies politically, since the politicians (πολιτικοί) are the ones who lead the *polis* rightly (or not). But what leads their souls when they lead the *polis* rightly—and so become the "noble and good" (καλοὶ καγαθοί)?

In principle, the leaders of the *polis* (the politicians, the noble and good) could be led by either knowledge or right/true opinion when they lead the *polis* rightly. And yet, it does not seem

⁹⁶² Ibid., 99a. Translation modified. "Outcome" supplied in brackets where no substantive exists for "the right" (τὸ ὀρθόν) to modify. The addition of "outcome" emphasizes what we understood to be the basis of the equivalence between true opinion and knowledge, namely, that they both "lead rightly" or "hit the mark" successfully. While "outcome" has no Greek referent, it does usefully paraphrase what we have assumed to be important about Socrates' comparison.

⁹⁶³ Ibid., 70b.

⁹⁶⁴ Ibid., 73c.

that knowledge leads them, if *arete* is not teachable.⁹⁶⁵ Thus, Socrates concludes, “Therefore of two things which are good (ἀγαθοῖν) and beneficial (ὠφελίμων), one of them has been let off, and in political action (πολιτικῇ πράξει) it could not be knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) that leads (ἡγεμών).”⁹⁶⁶ It might seem strange to us that Socrates arrives at this conclusion. After all, we are aware that Protagoras professed to teach the technical know-how of citizenship (πολιτικὴ τέχνη) in the *Protagoras*.⁹⁶⁷ And yet, in the *Meno*, Anytus emphatically insisted that the sophists do not teach *arete*, and Socrates did not protest.⁹⁶⁸ While we would not be so foolish as to assume that the technical know-how of citizenship (πολιτικὴ τέχνη) is unequivocally a knowledge of *arete*, it is nonetheless problematic for anyone to claim, as Anytus did, that the noble and good (καλοὶ καγαθοί) are the teachers of *arete*, if knowledge does not lead in political action. Socrates may be speaking to Meno, but Anytus is nearby.⁹⁶⁹ Nevertheless, we might hear in Socrates’ claim a profoundly subversive indictment of Athens. If the measure of *arete* is leading rightly, and if leading rightly means successfully accomplishing one’s task, then “the good” do not need knowledge in order to be good. Not only might this conclusion imply that some of the aforementioned noble and good Athenians did not deserve their reputations for wisdom, but it might further imply that they do not deserve as much honor as they have received insofar as the person led by knowledge is more honorable than the one led by right/true opinion. This conclusion carries consequences for the measure of *arete* in Athens. It emphasizes the precarity of the Athenian pursuit of *arete* insofar as Athens has not been led by men with knowledge for some time (if ever), and even though right/true opinions do lead rightly, they are at greater risk of “running away” out of the soul. This conclusion also represents a uniquely Socratic challenge to the Athenian communal horizon. Were it not for Socrates’ examination, who would have questioned the contributions of men like Themistocles, Aristides, Pericles, and Thucydides—men who are known as “the noble and good” (καλοὶ καγαθοί)? If Socrates has reasoned well, then Athens seems to be in jeopardy.

⁹⁶⁵ Ibid. 98e. Translation modified.

⁹⁶⁶ Ibid., 99a-b.

⁹⁶⁷ Plato, *Protagoras*, 319a.

⁹⁶⁸ Plato, *Meno*, 91c-92e.

⁹⁶⁹ Ibid., 99b.

Divine Allotment (θεία μοίρα) (99b-100c)

When Socrates raises doubts about the role of knowledge as a guide of political action, he does not just draw attention to a political problem. The denial of knowledge in political action poses a challenge to the pursuit of the human good too. Once again, it seems to us that those who lead the *polis*, that is, the noble and good, the politicians, the leaders, do not provide a sufficient measure of *arete*. Let us listen for the resonance of this problem in Socrates' conclusion. He reasons:

It is not, therefore, by any wisdom (σοφίᾳ τινὶ) or by being wise (σοφοὶ ὄντες) that such men lead (ἡγοῦντο) their *poleis*, Themistocles and those like him and those about whom Anytus here was just speaking. And, indeed, this is why they are unable to make (ποιεῖν) others such as they are themselves, in as much as it is not through knowledge (ἐπιστήμην) that they are the kind [of men] they are.⁹⁷⁰

In this assertion, we must notice the subtle confrontation between two decisive threads in our analysis. At first, Socrates sounds like he is continuing his reasoning which he began when he suggested that right/true opinion leads rightly just as well as knowledge. Socrates has led Meno to the conclusion that knowledge does not lead political action, and if they have concluded rightly, then, of course, the men who lead the *polis* cannot be wise or have wisdom, since wisdom is a sort of knowledge. Furthermore, Socrates specifies Themistocles and those like him, about whom he and Anytus had spoken previously, as the sorts of men who lead the *polis*. Much of our analysis since Socrates introduced the example of the road to Larissa has hinged upon the supposition that his reasoning implied consequences for the leaders of the *polis*, and the noble and good Athenians seemed likely to exemplify such leaders. Those who lead the *polis*, the politicians, are the noble and good, and the confluence of these identities is partially responsible for the strength of their claim to *arete*. However, in the second part of Socrates' assertion, he speaks ambiguously about these men, and this ambiguity highlights a major difficulty in our inquiry into *arete*. He claims that their lack of knowledge is the reason why the noble and good Athenians could not make others like themselves. Are these men unable to make others like themselves as good men, or are they unable to do so as politicians who lead rightly? It is not sufficient for the good person to benefit

⁹⁷⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 99b. Translation modified. The "Socratic revisionism," as Weiss calls it, is noteworthy. Anytus spoke about Themistocles and the others insofar as he responded briefly to Socrates, but it was really Socrates who brought up Themistocles, Aristides, Pericles, and Thucydides. Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's Meno*, FN 74 165.

others successfully to be good even though it is necessary. On the other hand, it is both necessary and sufficient for a politician to lead rightly in order to become “noble and good.” While the measure of the “good politician” may be more easily identified, the ostensive impossibility of “producing” good politicians (i.e., to make (ποιεῖν) others like themselves) is a political problem insofar as a politician is responsible for leading the *polis* well, but it is also a problem for the pursuit of *arete*. If no leaders benefit their *polis* by leading it rightly (e.g., if the right/true opinions which guided them previously flee), then perhaps there will be no good people in the *polis* at all. In the most extreme case, a foolish and ignorant leader could lead the *polis* to its demise, and the destruction of the *polis* would destroy the communal pursuit of *arete* as well.

And so, if the politicians (πολιτικοί) lack knowledge (ἐπιστήμη but also dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις), wisdom (σοφία), and technical know-how (τέχνη)), then right/true opinion must lead them. Or at least, we would expect this conclusion to follow from Socrates’ prior reasoning. However, Socrates does *not* arrive at this conclusion about what leads the politicians. Instead, he asserts:

Then if not by knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), what remains, indeed, comes to be by sound opinion (εὐδοξία), which is what political men (πολιτικοὶ ἄνδρες) use (χρῶμενοι) when they rightly lead (ὀρθοῦσιν) their *poleis*. They are not in a different situation with respect to dialectical reasoning (φρονεῖν) than soothsayers (χρησμοφοδοί) or inspired diviners (θεομάντιες). For these, too, when they are inspired (ἐνθουσιῶντες), do say (λέγουσιν) true things (ἀληθῆ), very many of them, but they know (ἴσασι) nothing of what they say (λέγουσιν).⁹⁷¹

Sound opinion (εὐδοξία), not true opinion (δόξα ἀληθής) or right opinion (ὀρθή δόξα), leads political men (πολιτικοὶ ἄνδρες). Why has Socrates suddenly changed the terminology at this point? Is “sound opinion” (εὐδοξία) simply another interchangeable term for right/true opinion (ὀρθή δόξα/ δόξα ἀληθής)? The word “εὐδοξία” frequently denotes “good repute” or “honor,” but our decision to render it as “sound opinion” highlights Socrates’ play on his prior reasoning.⁹⁷² In one sense, we can infer from Socrates’ assertion that sound opinion (εὐδοξία) does denote something like right/true opinion (ὀρθή δόξα/ δόξα ἀληθής). Socrates compares the political men (πολιτικοὶ ἄνδρες), which is another conspicuous terminological shift from the “noble and good”

⁹⁷¹ Plato, *Meno*, 99b-c. Translation modified. ὀρθοῦσιν = ὀρθῶς ἡγοῦνται, see McKirahan, *Plato’s Meno*, 51.

⁹⁷² See Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 324. Commentators readily acknowledge the *possibility* of this wordplay, but not every commentator thinks it likely. See Bluck, *Plato’s Meno*, 421. Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno*, 253. Sharples, *Plato: Meno*, 187. Thompson, *The Meno of Plato*, 225. Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato’s Meno*, 164.

(καλοί κάγαθοί), to soothsayers (χρησμοφοδοί) or inspired diviners (θεομάντεις). But on what basis does he compare them? Both say true things, but they do not know what they say. This comparison might sound vague, but if we use Socrates' previous example of the road to Larissa as a guide for our interpretation of this comparison, then we might be able to pick out the similarity which links the two sorts of people. In the example of the road to Larissa, a true opinion was "true" insofar as it led a person to hit the mark successfully. Similarly, we might infer that the true things which soothsayers and inspired diviners say are of this sort. That is, they say things which turn out to be true but which they do not "know" when they say them. They do not "know" the true things insofar as they cannot account for the cause, i.e., explain the basis of their assertion. In this way, that is, saying things which one does not "know" but which turn out as the speaker said them, soothsayers, inspired diviners, and political men are all similar.⁹⁷³ However, "εὐδοξία" also means "good repute" or "honor," which substantially changes the implicature of Socrates' claim. This other meaning raises an interpretive question too. When we interpreted "εὐδοξία" as "sound opinion," we assumed that "εὐδοξία" as "sound opinion" abided by the same relationship between soul, leader, and *polis* as that which structured our prior analysis of knowledge and right/true opinion (ὀρθή δόξα/ δόξα ἀληθής). Some "thing pertaining to the soul" leads the soul, which leads a person, who leads a *polis*. We assumed this relationship based on Socrates' prior reasoning in the part of the text that we analyzed in Chapter III.⁹⁷⁴ Insofar as the common root (δόξα) and similar usage in the *Meno* link "sound opinion" (εὐδοξία), "right opinion" (ὀρθή δόξα), and "true opinion" (δόξα ἀληθής), our assumption seems reasonably justified. But should we assume the same relationship when we reinterpret "εὐδοξία" as "good repute" or "honor"? If we base our new analysis on Socrates' prior remark about Anytus and a part of Aspasia' speech, which Socrates recites in *Menexenus*, then perhaps we might hear Socrates' assertion in a very different way.

When Socrates first introduced Anytus into the dialogue, Socrates inferred the Athenians' high esteem for his upbringing and education based on his election to the highest offices in Athens.⁹⁷⁵ Could we be justified, then, in inferring that Anytus has good repute or honor (εὐδοξία)

⁹⁷³ Weiss thinks that the similarity between political men and soothsayers/ inspired diviners is that they lack knowledge and *not* that they both say truth things. However, she does not say why it cannot be both. Weiss, *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's Meno*, FN 76 165.

⁹⁷⁴974 Plato, *Meno*, 88a-89b.

⁹⁷⁵ Ibid., 90b. "Then [Anthemion] brought up (ἔθρεψεν) and educated (ἐπαίδευσεν) our man here well (εὖ), as the majority of the Athenians judge; they elect him, at any rate, to the highest offices (μεγίστας ἀρχάς)."

among the Athenians? While it could require some speculation for us to imagine what exactly it might mean for political men (πολιτικοὶ ἄνδρες) to use their good repute to lead a *polis* rightly (if we assume it abides by the same relationship to the leader as right/true opinion), we might more easily understand the meaning, if we assume that good repute (εὐδοξία) leads the Athenians rather than Anytus. If we made such an assumption, it would be consistent with Apasia's use of good repute in her speech. Reciting her speech for Menexenus, Socrates proclaims:

For a polity (πολιτεία) is a thing which nurtures humans, good ones when it is noble (καλὴ μὲν ἀγαθῶν), bad ones when it is base (ἢ δὲ ἐναντία κακῶν). It is necessary, then, to demonstrate that the polity wherein our forefathers were nurtured was a noble one, such as caused goodness (ἀγαθοί) not only in them but also in their descendants of the present age, amongst whom we number these men who are fallen. For it is the same polity which existed then and exists now, under which polity we are living now and have been living ever since that age with hardly a break. One man calls it “democracy” (δημοκρατίαν), another man, according to his fancy, gives it some other name; but it is, in truth, an “aristocracy” (ἀριστοκρατία) with the good repute of the multitude (μετ' εὐδοξίας πλήθους).⁹⁷⁶

This excerpt from Socrates' recitation of Apasia's speech is useful because we find many familiar themes from the *Meno* brought together into a similar yet distinct discourse. We still can draw out the sense in which the pursuit of *arete* and the human good take place within a communal horizon. However, Apasia's speech focuses more on the polity (πολιτεία) as a whole, whereas we have focused our analysis more on the parts of the *polis* (its constituency, its leaders, and the relationship between the constitution of the soul and the constitution of a *polis*). Even so, the critical assertion for our analysis of the *Meno* occurs at the end of the excerpt. Athens, which is the polity being praised in the speech, according to Apasia (or, at least, according to Socrates' recitation of her speech), is a nominal “democracy” (δημοκρατία), as Thucydides also suggested during his praise of Pericles.⁹⁷⁷ But “in truth,” according to the speech, Athens is an “aristocracy” (ἀριστοκρατία) with the good repute of the multitude (μετ' εὐδοξίας πλήθους).” What can this assessment tell us about the way in which good repute (εὐδοξία) leads? The contrast between the nominal “democracy” and the *de facto* “aristocracy” could imply that Athens constitutionally permits those from “the commons” (δῆμος) to rule, but they use their political right to elect the best (ἄριστοι) among them (the noble and good (καλοὶ καὶ ἀγαθοί)) as leaders.⁹⁷⁸ Even though any man could

⁹⁷⁶ Plato, *Menexenus*, 238d-e. Translation modified.

⁹⁷⁷ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2.65.8-9.

⁹⁷⁸ One reason why we place “democracy” (δημοκρατία) in quotes is because we might find Athenian “democracy” troublingly “undemocratic.”

become an Athenian leader in principle, only the “best” men are elected to serve the *polis* in practice. In this sense, it seems that Apasia might call Athens an “‘aristocracy’ (ἀριστοκρατία) with the good repute of the multitude (μετ’ εὐδοξίας πλήθους).” The enfranchised portion of the commons are led by the good repute or honor (εὐδοξία) of certain Athenians (e.g., Anytus) to elect them to office, Athenians who are, in the judgment of the majority of Athenians and Apasia, the best (ἄριστοι). With this sense of how good repute or honor (εὐδοξία) might lead in mind, let us return to the passage in question from the *Meno*.

Socrates claimed, “Then if not by knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), what remains, indeed, comes to be by good repute (εὐδοξία), which is what political men (πολιτικοὶ ἄνδρες) use (χρῶμενοι) when they rightly lead (ὀρθοῦσιν) their *poleis*.”⁹⁷⁹ Based upon our intertextual analysis, we might conclude that good repute or honor (εὐδοξία) leads the Athenians to elect certain political men (πολιτικοὶ ἄνδρες) to rule/govern/lead. The political men (πολιτικοὶ ἄνδρες) use their good repute (εὐδοξία) to become leaders, but once they are leaders, they then lead the *polis* rightly or wrongly. Even though Socrates has ruled out knowledge as what leads them in political action, these men need not err in their leadership. On the contrary, they might succeed and so do good for the *polis* while themselves being led by right/true opinion. When they do succeed, we might say that they have used their “good repute” (εὐδοξία) among the Athenians (or another “democratic” constituency) to lead rightly, since their good repute precipitated their election to political office and then their successfully leadership validated it. We should point out a couple troubling consequences of this interpretation of good repute (εὐδοξία). First, whence come the good repute or honor that justifies certain men becoming noble and good (καλοὶ καγαθοί) in the *polis*, when they do happen to lead rightly? If we attempted to answer this question based on Socrates’ account of Anytus and Anthemion, it seems that Anytus’ good repute relied upon the comportment and deeds of his father. The implicit assumption in this example seems to be that Anytus is likely to have “inherited” whatever “goodness” his father possessed; and yet, later in the discussion between Socrates and Anytus, Socrates repeatedly voiced his concern about the inability of the noble and good (καλοὶ καγαθοί) to transmit their *arete* even to their sons—noble and good ones who were politicians unlike Anthemion. Additionally, we might notice an expression of an unsettling “results-oriented” logic in Socrates’ claim. When the political men who were chosen to lead

⁹⁷⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 99b.

because of their good reputation lead rightly, then their good reputation seems to have led the constituency well. However, as Socrates' comparison of political men to diviners and soothsayers emphasizes, the political men do not "know" the truth about the things they say, even when things do turn out as they said. When these political men succeed, their good reputation seems justified, but what about when they harm, corrupt, or disgrace their *polis*? In that case, their good reputation may have been justified at the time of their election, but after the fact, it seemed like an unreliable guide for the communal pursuit of *arete* and the human good. According to our interpretation of Socrates' claim, Athenian political practice does not seem to take the challenges of the pursuit of human *arete* very seriously.

Because the political men say true things without knowing what they say, Socrates insists that they must be divine. He asks, "Then, Meno, do these men deserve (ἄξιον) to be called divine (θεῖους) who, having no mind (νοῦν μὴ ἔχοντες), set straight (κατορθοῦσιν) many great matters in the things that they do (πράττουσι) and say (λέγουσι)?"⁹⁸⁰ For the most part, Socrates reiterates a similar sentiment to the one which he expressed previously, but he does add in a brief albeit significant phrase: "having no mind" ("νοῦν μὴ ἔχοντες"). Mind (νοός) has carried a special significance for our analysis ever since we examined it more closely during Chapter III. We concluded that it seemed constitutive of the soul led by dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις), which, of course, was what Socrates supposed to be *arete*. Our analysis of Socrates' reasoning led us into a comparative analysis between Socrates and Teiresias (as he appeared in the *Odyssey* and *Oedipus Tyrannis*). When we began an anticipatory analysis of the verses about Teiresias in the *Odyssey*, we noticed mind (νοός) as something which distinguished Teiresias from the rest of the dead in Hades, and because of the connection between mind (νοός) and dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) in the *Meno*, we examined whether Teiresias might have dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) (and Socrates too insofar as we considered their similarities with one another). As a part of our exploration of this possibility, we turned to the interaction between Oedipus and Teiresias in *Oedipus Tyrannis*. We developed an interpretation of the exchange which read Teiresias as someone who caused the truth to come to be by persuading his interlocutor (Oedipus). We saw Teiresias not as a clairvoyant but as a powerful dialectician. These qualities led us back to Socrates who also seemed to us to engage with his interlocutors (e.g., Meno, the παῖς, and Anytus) similarly.

⁹⁸⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 99c.

The truth of the dialectician differs from the truth of the clairvoyant because the dialectician participates in the give-and-take out of which truth emerges, whereas the clairvoyant serves as the vessel for the passive reception of truth. The dialectical engagement of the dialectician resonates with our own understanding of the dialectical tension between the individual and the *polis*. Now, as we approach the conclusion, we find Socrates speaking about the *lack* of mind in the political men (πολιτικοὶ ἄνδρες), which might remind us of his prior comment about courage. He asked, “...is it not the case that when a human being is mindlessly bold (ἄνευ νοῦ θαρρῆ), [that person] is harmed (βλάπτεται) and whenever mindfully (σὺν νῶ), benefited (ὠφελεῖται)?”⁹⁸¹ Were we to tie all of these threads together, we might hear Socrates convey a profoundly solemn warning about the *polis*. Does it seem likely for the political men who lead the *polis* without mind to benefit the *polis*, a benefit which would be necessary if they are really good men? The communal pursuit of *arete* is at risk in Athens, and a part of the danger arises from the confluence between good men (ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες) and political men (πολιτικοὶ ἄνδρες), whose intersection shows itself to us in the phrase “the noble and good” (καλοὶ κἀγαθοί).

The political men (πολιτικοὶ ἄνδρες) do not know how to make others good nor even themselves, when they happen to succeed, because, according to Socrates, they lack both mind (νοός) and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). While they do sometimes lead a *polis* rightly, they “know” not what they do (or say). And so, Socrates continues:

We could, therefore, rightly call divine (θείους) those about whom we were just now speaking, soothsayers (χρησμοφδοῦς) and diviners (μάντις) and all poetic people (ποιητικοῦς); and the politicians (πολιτικοῦς) are not least of those whom we might affirm to be divine (θείους) and divinely inspired (ἐνθουσιάζειν), being inspired (ἐπίπνους) and possessed by the god (κατεχομένους ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ), whenever by their speaking (λέγοντες) they set straight (κατορθῶσι) many great affairs (πολλὰ καὶ μεγάλα πράγματα), knowing (εἰδότες) nothing of the things that they say (λέγουσιν).⁹⁸²

The politicians (πολιτικοί), like soothsayers (χρησμοφδοί), diviners (θεομάντις), and even poetic people (ποιητικοί), use their speech but “know” not what they say.⁹⁸³ Socrates has added another subtle stipulation to his account of the politicians. They *speak* while “having no mind (νοῦν μὴ ἔχοντες).” Moreover, Socrates suggests that they use their speech to “set straight many great

⁹⁸¹ Ibid., 88b. Translation modified

⁹⁸² Plato, *Meno*, 99c-d. Translation modified.

⁹⁸³ Concerning especially that by which the poet poetizes (without knowledge), see Plato, *Ion*, 534b-d; *Laches*, 195e-196a; *Laws*, 4.719c.

affairs” in the *polis*. We ought to hear Socrates’ assertion with an emphasis on speaking especially because such an emphasis on speech harmonizes with several threads which we have been following for some time now. We first noticed how significant speech and dialogical comportment are for the pursuit of *arete* and the human good during our analysis of Meno’s contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος) in Chapter II. This insight has since then developed into our claim that the pursuit of *arete* is a dialectical process which takes place within a communal horizon. Of course, the politicians contribute to the communal horizon as well, and their contribution has greater weight insofar as their political appointment gives them the power to set a measure of *arete* in a way that other constituents cannot. And yet, having followed Socrates’ reasoning up to this point, the subversive implicature appears quite conspicuously. The politicians (the leaders), who have the power in the *polis* to set the measure of *arete* in word and deed, speak, according to Socrates, mindlessly. In Socrates’ prior reasoning, he implied that mind (νοός) is constitutive of the soul with dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις). Consequently, we have run into a familiar predicament. The *arete* of the good politician (ἀγαθός πολιτικός) (or the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης)) and the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός) are not the same even though the phrase “noble and good” (καλοί καγαθοί) names them in their ambiguity. These incommensurate measures appeared also when Socrates spoke with Anytus, who shares many similarities with these politicians.

When Socrates calls the politicians “divinely inspired” (ἐνθουσιάζειν), we inevitably hear its echo with his earlier remark to Anytus, when he supposed Anytus might be a diviner (μάντις) for condemning the sophists without experience. And its echo resounds more loudly when Meno mentions Anytus’ annoyance during his response: “And it appears (φαίνονται), Socrates, that [women and the Laconians] speak rightly (ὀρθῶς λέγειν) [when they call good men (ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες) divine (θεῖοι)]. And yet, perhaps Anytus here is annoyed (ἄχθεται) with you for speaking this way.”⁹⁸⁴ Anytus is precisely the sort of politician who leads the *polis* without knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) or mind (νοός), using his good repute (εὐδοξία) among the Athenians. If he should happen to use his speech to lead Athens rightly while himself being led by sound opinion (εὐδοξία), then his good repute (εὐδοξία) would be warranted. He would be noble and good (κάλος καγαθός)

⁹⁸⁴ Plato, *Meno*, 99d-e.

insofar as he successfully led the *polis*. And yet, from our privileged position in posterity, we know that he will *not* lead Athens rightly.

And with Anytus ominously looming in the background, Socrates leads Meno to the conclusion of his reasoning about how *arete* comes to be:

[Anytus' annoyance] doesn't matter to me (οὐδὲν μέλει ἔμοιγε). We will, Meno, indeed converse (διαλεξόμεθα) with him again. But now, if in this whole account (ἐν παντὶ τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ) we both searched (ἐζητήσαμεν) and were speaking (ἐλέγομεν) beautifully (καλῶς), *arete* would be neither by nature (φύσει), nor something teachable (διδασκτόν), but has come (παραγιγνομένη) by divine allotment (θεία μοίρα) mindlessly (ἄνευ νοῦ) in those to whom it might come (παραγίγνηται)...⁹⁸⁵

Finally, Socrates has answered the question which Meno posed at the very beginning, and when he does so, Socrates concludes that *arete* must come to be “in some other way” (a fourth way), namely, “by divine allotment (θεία μοίρα) mindlessly (ἄνευ νοῦ).”⁹⁸⁶ If we were to rend this conclusion from its context, then we might find it utterly unsatisfactory. Devoid of its context, Socrates appears to claim that the gods allot *arete* to some and not to others, which is to say, that humans are helpless in their pursuit of *arete* on their own. However, if we reflect on Socrates' conclusion as the culmination of his reasoning which we have analyzed in this chapter, then we might notice that Socrates appears to have, once again, shifted the sense of *arete* in this conclusion. He draws a very refined conclusion about the *arete* of the political men who lead their *polis* rightly without mind—men like Anytus who lack justification for the words and deeds which miraculously lead to successful political action. Socrates does not seem to describe the measure of *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός) alone despite purporting to say how “*arete*” comes to be in an *ostensibly* unequivocal way. Nevertheless, we might find an intimation of this distinction between the *arete* of the good politician (ἀγαθός πολιτικός) and the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός) in the second half of Socrates' response. Quoting Homer, Socrates qualifies his conclusion:

...unless there should be that sort [of man] among the political men (πολιτικῶν ἀνδρῶν) who could also make (ποιῆσαι) someone else political (πολιτικόν). And if there should be one, [that one] could almost be said to be among the living (ἐν τοῖς ζῶσιν) what Homer said Tiresias was among the dead (ἐν τοῖς τεθνεῶσιν), saying about him that “he alone of

⁹⁸⁵ Plato, *Meno*, 99e. Translation modified. We render “θεία μοίρα” as “divine allotment” instead of “divine dispensation”

⁹⁸⁶ Thompson compiles a useful list of other iterations of this phrase “θεία μοίρα” and closely related ones throughout the Platonic dialogues. Thompson, *The Meno of Plato*, 227-228.

those in Hades is thoughtful (πέπνυται), but the others flit about as shadows (σκιαὶ αἰσσοῦσι).” Likewise here as well one such as that [would be] as if, among the shadows (παρὰ σκιάς), a true thing (ἀληθὲς πρᾶγμα) were to exist in relation to *arete*.⁹⁸⁷

Socrates’ musing about someone who could make another person political (πολιτικός) could sound strange if we had not been tracking the confrontation between what is good for the *polis* and the human good since the beginning of our inquiry. On the contrary, we might question our analysis if Socrates did not conclude the dialogue with this sort of qualification. But what implications might follow from Socrates’ comparison of a person who could “make someone else political” to Teiresias among the dead in Hades?

In the first place, Socrates uses a phrase which is very similar to the one that he has often repeated throughout the dialogue. Suddenly, Socrates speaks about making someone political (πολιτικός) despite otherwise discussing with his interlocutors how to make a person good (ἀγαθός). In light of the conclusion which he asserted only a moment prior, Socrates’ hypothetical musing about such a person seems inane and impossible. If the *arete* of the politician (πολιτικός) comes from divine allotment (θεία μοίρα) without mind, then no human could make a person “political” (πολιτικός) in this way. But it would be too simple for us to think that Socrates has so thoughtlessly contradicted himself especially because the Homeric verse includes a description of Teiresias as a unique member among the dead in Hades *because* he is thoughtful (πεπνῦσθαι).⁹⁸⁸

⁹⁸⁷ Plato, *Meno*, 100a. Translation modified.

⁹⁸⁸ The verb “πεπνῦσθαι” is the term on which our intertextual analysis hinges. It is also a difficult term to translate. Liddell and Scott gloss the term to mean “to have breath or soul, and metaph. to be wise, discreet, prudent.” Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 621. It seems unlikely that the former, “literal” sense of “πεπνῦσθαι” would appropriately describe the sense in which Teiresias is distinct from the other souls in Hades, and so perhaps we should defer to the latter, “metaphoric” sense. For guidance, we might turn to some other examples of its usage in Homer. For example, in the following passages, different people are described with inflected forms of “πεπνῦσθαι.” “In his turn Antenor of the good counsel (πεπνυμένος) answered her:...” Homer, *Iliad*, 3.203. “So he spoke, and put in her hand the cup of sweet wine, / and Athene was happy at the thoughtfulness (πεπνυμένῳ) of a just man...” Homer, *Odyssey*, 3.52. “Do not be angry with me, Odysseus, since, beyond other men, you have the most understanding (πέπνυσο).” Ibid., 23.210. While these examples do illustrate various ways in which a person can be “wise, discreet, or prudent,” we still might struggle to pin down a precise sense of what wisdom, discretion, or prudence entail. Because of this difficulty, we should also be aware of another use of this word. “πεπνῦσθαι” can describe the way a person speaks as well, and there are a couple examples of this use again in Homer. “Yet you have not made complete your argument, / since you are a young man still and could even be my own son / and my youngest born of all; yet still you argue in wisdom (πεπνυμένα) / with the Argive kings, since all you have spoken was spoken fairly.” Homer, *Iliad*, 9.58. “Dear friend, never before has there been any man so thoughtful (πεπνυμένος), among those friends from far places who have come to my palace as guests, so thoughtful (πεπνυμένα) and so well-considered is everything you say.” Homer, *Odyssey*, 19.352. From these two examples, we might notice a salient function of “πεπνῦσθαι” for our analysis of the *Meno*, when it describes the way a person speaks. It describes people who speaks palatably with their interlocutor. Their speech is palatable not because it flatters the other person but because it is said with fairness and/or regard for the other person. Because we assert the necessity of a person’s participation in the communal horizon as a

This reference to Teiresias might also pique our interest because we have frequently compared him to Socrates. If our comparison holds any weight, then we might infer that Socrates, ironically, describes his own position in Athens. Before we pursue this interpretative possibility, let us review the passage from the *Odyssey* so that we might remind ourselves of its (inter)contextual resonance.

Guided by “some god” into the harbor of Circe’s island, Odysseus and his crew explore Circe’s island. During their initial exploration, Hermes confronts Odysseus, giving him medicine (Moly) and instructions so that he can resist Circe’s enchantment. After dining with Circe, resisting her spell, and forcing her to swear an oath not to harm him, Odysseus and his crew (whom Circe transforms back into humans from swine) live together with Circe on her island. However, Odysseus’ crew become restless and eager to return to Ithaca, and so they convince Odysseus of their need to return home. Having been persuaded by his comrades, Odysseus reminds Circe of her promise to help him return home. Circe acquiesces, but she tells him that he must first go on another journey to Hades and

“...consult with the soul of Teiresias the Theban,
the blind prophet, whose senses stay unshaken within him,
to whom alone Persephone has granted intelligence
even after death, but the rest of them are fluttering shadows.”⁹⁸⁹

From Tiresias, “leader of men” (ὄρχαμε λαῶν), Odysseus will learn “...the way (ὁδὸν) to go, the stages (μέτρα) of [his] journey (νόστον), and how to make [his] way home on the sea....”⁹⁹⁰

Socrates recites a much briefer version of this passage, saying only that “[Teiresias] alone of those in Hades is thoughtful (πέπνυται), but the others flit about as shadows (σκιαὶ ἀίσσουσι).”⁹⁹¹ In

part of the pursuit of *arete*, speaking with a regard for others is an important part of inquiry into *arete*. Consequently, our interpretation of the passage about Teiresias within the *Meno* will assume “πεπνῦσθαι” as “being thoughtful” because the thoughtful person (in speech and deed) shows consideration and anticipation of the needs of others.

⁹⁸⁹ Homer, *Odyssey*, 10.490-495. “...ψυχῆ χρησομένους Θηβαίου Τειρεσίαο, / μάντηος ἀλαοῦ, τοῦ τε φρένες ἔμπεδοί εἰσι: / τῷ καὶ τεθνηῶτι νόον πόρε Περσεφόνηια, / οἷῳ πεπνῦσθαι, τοὶ δὲ σκιαὶ ἀίσσουσιν.” We should notice that Lattimore translates “τῷ καὶ τεθνηῶτι νόον πόρε Περσεφόνηια, / οἷῳ πεπνῦσθαι” as “to whom alone Persephone has granted intelligence / even after death.” Lattimore’s translation does not retain the reference to mind (νοός), absorbing it (in the English) into the phrase “has granted intelligence,” which also ostensibly translates “πεπνῦσθαι.” We will not modify Lattimore’s translation/interpretation to highlight what is at stake for our own interpretation of the *Meno*. Nevertheless, we should be aware of his translational decisions because mind (νοός) disappears in his translation *and* in Socrates’ recitation. In relation to our inquiry into the *Meno*, the lack of mind (νοός) was recently a distinctive feature of the political men.

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid., 10.538-540. Translation modified.

⁹⁹¹ Plato, *Meno*, 100a.

Socrates' recitation, the omission of Teiresias' retention of his senses (φρένες) and his receipt of "intelligence" (which represents both "νοός" and "πεπνῦσθαι" in Lattimore's translation) from Persephone emphasizes that Teiresias "is thoughtful" (πεπνῦσθαι) compared to the others. *This* quality sets Teiresias apart from the dead like the ability to make someone else political sets Socrates' hypothetical man apart from the other political men. But what might it mean for the soul of Teiresias in Hades to be thoughtful (πεπνῦσθαι)? If we were to assume that it means the soul of Teiresias speaks carefully especially with consideration for his interlocutor, then we would assume a very salient point of comparison between Teiresias and Socrates' other sort of political man. And why should we not make such an assumption? After all, our inquiry into *arete* has emphasized the inextricability of participation in a communal horizon for its pursuit, and a part of this participation involves searching and speaking together with others. Thus, Teiresias, whom we have examined as a dialectician like Socrates, is thoughtful compared to the rest of the dead because he speaks carefully and with a concern for Odysseus. Socrates' comparison invites us to wonder whether the same might be said of his other sort of political man. Such a man would be distinct from the other political men, who have no mind, because he *does* speak carefully (unlike the other political men who know nothing of what they say). Moreover, we could further conclude that this other political man's consideration for his interlocutors is the way that he is able to make others "political" like himself. Through a thoughtful engagement with his interlocutor, he might "make another political" by imploring others to participate in the communal horizon. A person who is "political" in this sense leads their *polis* with a greater existential gravity than someone who only participates in the management of the *polis*. The former person invites others to stake their claim within the communal horizon, shaping and being shaped by the pursuit of *arete* with others. The engagement of such a person emphasizes a sort of "political" engagement which attends to the intertwinement of the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) with the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός). It is not a matter of meeting an "objective" measure of *arete* which would make a person good forever nor is it a matter of embracing unquestioningly the emergent measures of *arete* in the *polis*. On the contrary, the endeavor which this other political man would pursue is dangerous, tiresome, and unsettling, and it involves risking one's own share of the human good. And yet, as we concluded after Socrates' exhibition with the παῖς and Socrates' discussion with Anytus, there is no greater security in *not* placing one's share of the good at risk. Those who would engage in such a pursuit would strive to become good people in a good *polis*.

We have decided how we will understand Socrates' comparison of another sort of political man to Teiresias in Hades, and our interpretation heeds the tension between the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) and the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός). Even so, there is a persistent question which we must address once again. Does Socrates speak ironically about himself when he describes someone like Tiresias among the dead who can make someone else political? Is Socrates the man who is like “a true thing (ἀληθές πᾶγμα) among the shadows in relation to *arete*”? Our analysis of Socrates' comparison strongly lends itself to the inference that Socrates describes himself, and we have found ourselves tempted on many occasions to conclude that Socrates might exhibit the *arete* for which he searches with his interlocutors. However, even if we were to assert that Socrates is a good person, it would not suddenly resolve the many problems that we have confronted. Socrates has searched tirelessly for *arete* with his interlocutors, patiently examining questions about it which implied his interlocutors' rudimentary engagement with the pursuit of *arete*, and this behavior only reinforces our suspicion about the *arete* of Socrates. And yet, what about his interlocutors? Was Socrates able to help them? Do either Meno or Anytus seem any more proficient in their own respective pursuits of *arete*? If we bear in mind the testimony about their respective future deeds, the situation looks even more dire. According to Xenophon, Meno will become a quite vicious man. And because of the leadership of Anytus and other allegedly noble and good Athenians, Athens will condemn Socrates death. Both accounts illustrate the severity of our inference about the risk of this inquiry. The dangers of inquiry into *arete* are part and parcel of the lives of the inquirers.

We approach the conclusion of the *Meno* with a heavy heart, anticipating the grim future that awaits each participant of the dialogue. However, Socrates seems to conclude with hope.

Then from this reasoning (ἐκ μὲν τοίνυν τούτου τοῦ λογισμοῦ), Meno, *arete* appears to have come to us by divine allotment (θεία μοίρα), for those to whom it may come. But we shall know what is clear (σαφές) about it when, before we seek whatever way (τρόπῳ) *arete* comes to human beings, we will first undertake to seek (ζητεῖν), in and of itself (αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ), what *arete* is (τί ποτ' ἔστιν ἀρετή). Now it's time for me to go, but you persuade (πειθε) your guest-friend (ξένον) Anytus here too about those very same things that you yourself have been persuaded (πέπεισται), so that he may be more gentle (πραότερος): for if you do persuade (πείσης) him, you will also confer an advantage (ὀνήσεις) upon the Athenians.⁹⁹²

⁹⁹² Plato, *Meno*, 100b-c. Translation modified.

For the political men who lead the *polis* without mind, using their good repute to lead rightly, their *arete* comes by divine allotment (θεία μοίρα). This *arete* is a specific kind like the *arete* which Socrates told Anytus that Meno wanted to learn.⁹⁹³ In our own inquiry, we have searched for another *arete*—still a human *arete*—but an *arete* over which every human exercises a claim. Socrates’ conclusion does not imply that they have reached a definitive end, since he explicitly tells Meno that they *still* must seek what *arete* is. When we hear this exhortation, we invariably hear it as a call to search for the measure of *arete*—a search for how to be good. Even so, Socrates does depart from the dialogue with another exhortation to renew the inquiry as he had done with Meno previously. Even if it is vitally important to continue the search, Socrates’ final words speak to a different dimension of the inquiry. Meno must persuade Anytus of what Meno himself has been persuaded. We, of course, must be curious about what exactly Socrates could think that Meno has been persuaded of. Unfortunately, we will never know. However, Socrates does say *why* it would be good if Meno could persuade his guest-friend Anytus. Not only might Meno make Anytus gentler (πρρότερος), but Meno would also “confer an advantage upon the Athenians.”

What insights might we be able to glean from Socrates’ final words? Even though Socrates must leave before he and Meno have resolved their search (as if it could be resolved), Socrates never deviates from his cooperative discourse. Not only does he claim that he and Meno together still must seek what *arete* is, but he also implores Meno to help his guest-friend Anytus too. This suggestion aligns with our own insight into the necessity of participation in the communal horizon, and even if we cannot say of what Meno is *now* capable of persuading Anytus, we nevertheless can recognize the profundity of this gesture. If Meno were persuaded that he should be a brave and tireless seeker of *arete* (and anything else he does not “know”), then we could perhaps say that Socrates *is* “the sort of man among the political men who could also make someone else political.” Socrates would have made Meno political by persuading him to become more engaged in his own pursuit of *arete*, a pursuit which always carries political consequences because it must take place within a communal horizon. Meno would not be political in the conventional sense, which involves the management of the *polis* and other political activities, but he would be political in another, more existentially grave way. If Meno were to persuade Anytus, then he might just make him a

⁹⁹³ Ibid., 91a.

gentler man—and so a more just man too.⁹⁹⁴ In other words, he would “do good” for Anytus. Additionally, as Socrates maintains, Meno would “confer an advantage upon the Athenians” by persuading Anytus. And so, again, we can see another way that this simple, persuasive act has broadly “political” consequences. If Meno could indeed persuade Anytus, then he would benefit Athens considerably, saving it from a man who leads mindlessly and without knowing the things he says. For example, that a *polis* ought to drive out the “sophists” no matter whether the sophist is a foreigner or a fellow citizen.⁹⁹⁵ If Meno could persuade Anytus to temper this opinion, then perhaps Anytus would not go on to accuse Socrates, conspiring in his death. And yet, this story ends in tragedy. Anytus succeeds in his prosecution of Socrates, and he and the other political men lead their fellow Athenians in pursuit of a very different claim on the human good than the one which Socrates argued for them to pursue.

Conclusion

We began our analysis with an examination of Socrates’ response to Anytus’ anger. We focused on two aspects of his response. First, we sharpened our sensitivity to the sense of “talking badly” (τὸ κακῶς λέγειν), and we reasoned that it could imply speaking harmfully. Together with this assumption, Socrates’ use of the subjunctive, which was the second noteworthy aspect of his response, sounded almost prophetic. Anytus may not know firsthand what it means to talk harmfully at the time of their interaction, but when he will later share in the indictment of Socrates, he will then know what it means “to talk badly.” Our observation that Socrates seems to speak in a prophetic register did not imply that Socrates might have supernatural powers, but rather, it supported our comparison of him to Teiresias whom we understood as someone who makes truth come to be by persuading his interlocutor to act in predictable ways. Socrates too seems to have a unique dialogical ability to persuade his interlocutors. This supposition also informed our subsequent analysis of Socrates’ recitation of Theognis’ verses in his discussion with Meno. Socrates’ conversation with Anytus seemed to imply that the noble and good were not likely to be the teachers of *arete* in Athens, and Socrates continued to pursue this line of questioning once Meno returned. According to Socrates, two sets of Theognis’ verses indicated his ambivalence about the teachability of *arete* like the noble and good ones’ ambivalence about its teachability in

⁹⁹⁴ On the relationship between gentleness and justness, see Plato, *Gorgias*, 516c. According to Socrates, the saying comes from Homer.

⁹⁹⁵ Plato, *Meno*, 92b.

Thessaly. We acknowledged previously that Meno seemed susceptible to the accounts of authority (poetic or otherwise), and so we approached Socrates' recitation of the verses suspiciously.

When we interpreted the first set of verses through the dialogical conflict in the *Meno*, we arrived at surprising conclusions. Theognis advises Cynrus to consort with the good whose power is great (μεγάλη δύναμις) so that he might learn good things (ἐσθλά) from them. When we interpreted this claim through the *Meno*, we concluded that Anytus and the other noble and good Athenians seemed like the good whose power is great, whereas Socrates seemed more like a bad man, about whom Theognis warns Cynrus. According to Theognis, a bad person (κακός) will cause those who consort with such a person to lose their mind. Reflecting on these interpretative possibilities, we recognized how dangerous Socrates' philosophical practice was. If "the good" are simply those who have great power, and the people who have great power are either very wealthy or have political influence, then Socrates would place himself in opposition to men who have great means and motive to harm him. After all, if their claim on the good were found wanting, then they would lose many goods which come with being good. From their perspective, Socratic philosophical practice might seem like something that causes those who find it persuasive to lose their minds, and yet, we reasoned that any measure of *arete* is no more secure when unquestioned. It is necessary to pursue *arete* together with others, if anyone is ever to be a good person. In the second set of verses, which, according to Socrates, contradicted the first set, another difficulty in the pursuit of *arete* appeared to us. We caught Socrates amending his recitation of the verses in a quite significant way, describing another sort of powerful people (οἱ δυνάμενοι) who could put mindfulness (νόημα) into a man. Even though we acknowledged that these verses began in a counterfactual register, we pointed out some similarities between Socrates and the hypothetical people in his modified verses. Socrates too seemed to use sensible speeches (μῦθοι σώφρονες) to persuade Meno, e.g., the story (μῦθος) of recollection (ἀνάμνησις). Of course we did not suggest that Socrates could do what Theognis described counterfactually (put mindfulness (νόημα) into Meno or dialectical reasoning (φρόνησις) either), but it seemed plausible to us that Socrates could persuade Meno of something more modest. Namely, to take a greater interest in the many difficulties which inquiry into *arete* pose and consider them with greater care than that which Gorgias inculcated in him.

We did not ridiculously believe that Meno was immediately cured, but he did ask more perceptive questions during this final iteration of their search. Once Socrates led them to the conclusion that *arete* seemed unlikely to be teachable, Meno asked Socrates whether there might not be any good men (*ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες*), or if there are, how they come to be. In order to address Meno's concern, Socrates suggested that they revise their prior reasoning. Socrates insisted that their prior reasoning rightly concluded that good men must be beneficent and that they are beneficent when they lead rightly, but he questioned their assumption (an assumption which was more "Socratic" than collective) that only a person with dialectical reasoning (*φρόνιμος*) can lead rightly. Socrates introduced the example of a person traveling the road to Larissa, based upon which he asserted that right/true opinion "leads rightly" just as well as knowledge. We understood the point of the example about two things pertaining to the soul leading someone along the road to Larissa as an illustration of the "practical" equivalence of knowledge and right/true opinion. They both will lead a person to arrive in Larissa successfully. However, we did not focus our analysis on the mundane example itself, but we instead interpreted the example through an inquiry into the leaders of the *polis*. According to Socrates' prior reasoning, it seemed that only those who have dialectical reasoning can lead the *polis* in a beneficial way, but now, because of the "practical" equivalence between knowledge and right/true opinion, it seems also that those who lead the *polis* with right/true opinion can benefit the *polis*. This other way of leading the soul of those who lead the *polis* drew our attention again to the equivocal sense of the phrase "noble and good." Sometimes "noble and good" denotes those who are good men (*ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες*), and sometimes it denotes those who just lead the *polis* rightly. These identities may overlap, but they need not always do so. After Socrates presented his account of the right/true opinion and how it succeeds at leading rightly just as well as knowledge, Meno wondered why knowledge was "so much more honored than right opinion." To account for the difference, Socrates made another image for Meno.

According to Socrates, Meno would better understand why knowledge is more honored than right/true opinion if he reflected on the statues of Daedalus. The interpretation of this comparison posed several challenges, the first of which involved interpreting Socrates' analogical reasoning. Socrates did not just compare right/true opinions to the statues of Daedalus, but he also compared them to a fugitive (*δραπέτης ἄνθρωπος*), a translation of the Greek which we took as a point of contention. Our translation of "*δραπέτης ἄνθρωπος*" as "fugitive" rather than the more conventional "runaway slave" shaped our approach to Socrates' reasoning. When we considered

the terms of the analogy in order, we came to understand the fugitive as a middle term between the creations of Daedalus and true opinions. Visible fetters could tie down a statue, but invisible fetters bound true opinions to the soul. The fugitive, however, could be bound by either visible or invisible fetters. We developed our sensitivity to the invisible fetters that bind a fugitive through an examination of Socrates' own opportunity to become a fugitive, which he addressed in the *Crito*. Our intertextual analysis of that dialogue together with our examination of the *Meno* drew out the symbiotic relationship between the individual and the *polis*. The fugitive who is bound to the *polis* with invisible fetters benefits the *polis* by contributing to the communal horizon in which *arete* and the human good are pursued, and the *polis* benefits as well by being persuaded, if it should err, and by the inhabitation of good people within it. We noticed how the *polis* and the fugitive need one another for the pursuit of *arete*, and this supported our inference that Socrates, too, needed his interlocutors in his search for *arete* as much as they need him.

After developing our interpretation of the fugitive within Socrates' analogical reasoning, the implication of Socrates' analogy still confronted us. Even if we understood the similarities between the images upon which Socrates' analogy hinged, we could not yet explain the consequence of Socrates' distinction between knowledge and right/true opinion for the inquiry into *arete*. We doubted that anyone could possess a discrete knowledge of the *arete* which the good person exhibits, and so we needed another way to understand Socrates' analogical reasoning. In order to address this difficulty, we reminded ourselves of the context in which Socrates' reasoning took place, and in doing so, we reconsidered an explanation of the analogy through an examination of the leaders of the *polis*. The "practical" equivalence of knowledge and right/true opinion implied that men who led the *polis* with either one could lead rightly, i.e., successfully do good for the *polis*, and yet, we inferred from the analogy that there was an axiological difference between them. Those who are led by knowledge are "more honorable" than those who are led by right/true opinion. On the one hand, these leaders are more honorable because they are less liable for their right/true opinions to run out of their soul. Their opinions are bound by an account of the causes, i.e., the opinions have a justification which can be explained (or "accounted for"). This quality of their opinions led us to infer another reason why these leaders are more honorable. Besides the practical benefit of their leadership, these leaders can contribute to the communal horizon because they can share the justification for their right/true opinions with others. This ability strengthens their own claim on *arete* and also the broader, communal pursuit of it. We

compared such a leader to Anytus, who seemed to us like one of the leaders who is led by right/true opinions. We noticed that Anytus seemed to speak truly when he condemned the sophists, for example, but he did not speak very persuasively. This lack weakened his contribution to the Athenian pursuit of *arete*, but it also conveyed his danger to the *polis*. In the case of the sophists, he may speak truly (or lead people to the right conclusion), but his “mindless truth” offered little to the communal pursuit of *arete* in Athens.

Meno accepted Socrates’ explanation of the greater esteem for knowledge over right/true opinion, and so Socrates led them through a line of reasoning about the consequences of these two things pertaining to the soul in political action. Since it did not seem that *arete* could be taught nor could they identify any teachers of *arete*, Socrates concluded that knowledge does not lead in political action. Nevertheless, we remained attentive to the equivocal sense of *arete* in this line of reasoning. As Socrates began to use more overtly political diction, we questioned whether he reasoned about the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) or the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός). Even if they cannot easily be separated, we remained convinced that they are not the same either. Once Socrates dismissed knowledge as a possibility, we expected him to conclude that right/true opinion leads those who lead the *polis*, but surprisingly, he asserted instead that “sound opinion” (εὐδοξία) leads the political men (πολιτικοὶ ἄνδρες). We questioned whether sound opinion was just another synonym for right/true opinion, a phrase which we adopted because Socrates used right opinion and true opinion interchangeably throughout his reasoning. However, when we analyzed the term more closely, we drew out a word play which seemed germane to our analysis. If we understood “εὐδοξία” as “sound opinion,” then it seemed to function no differently than right opinion or true opinion did previously. However, if we understood “εὐδοξία” as “good repute” or “honor,” a translation which conformed to another common use of the word, we gathered different consequences from Socrates’ claim. In order to interpret this other sense of εὐδοξία, we compared Socrates’ prior remark on Anytus’ esteem in Athens with a passage from the *Menexenus*.

Our examination of an excerpt from Socrates’ recitation of Apasia’s speech in the *Menexenus* guided us to another way that something can lead. We supposed that Apasia described Athens as an aristocracy with the good repute of the multitude because the multitude (the many, the constituency) are led by the good repute of certain Athenians, which causes them to elect these

men to public office. We transposed this interpretation into the *Meno* by assuming Anytus' election to be representative of this process. Our scrutiny of the good repute which informed the Athenians' election of Anytus revealed that, according to Socrates, the deeds and comportment of Anthemion (Anytus' father) were primarily responsible for Anytus' good repute. And yet, this justification seemed problematic because Socrates had just presented four examples of noble and good Athenians who were unable to transmit their *arete* to their sons, and Anthemion was not even a politician. Another issue with the use of this basis for the election of politicians was that it is "results-oriented." When men like Anytus happened to lead rightly, then their good repute appeared retrospectively justified, but they, of course, do not always succeed. The inevitability of failure led us to question whether "good repute" was a reliable guide for the election of leaders who exercise greater influence on the communal pursuit of *arete*. Socrates, however, did not consider the possibility of their failure to lead rightly, but instead, he reasoned about what leads them when they do lead the *polis* rightly. He compared them to soothsayers and diviners, who say true things without knowing what they say. These political men, whom Socrates insisted must be divine, accomplish many great things even while having no mind. Socrates' assertion that political men have no mind when they lead the *polis* rightly caught our attention because of the interrelatedness between mind and dialectical reasoning in Socrates' prior account of *arete*. Teiresias' possession of mind was a distinctive characteristic of his soul in the *Odyssey* as well.

The political men's lack of mind and Teiresias' unique possession of mind played an important part in our final analysis of Socrates' conclusion. Socrates concluded that *arete* came to be "by divine allotment (θεία μοίρα) mindlessly (ἄνευ νοῦ)." However, we noticed that this conclusion seemed to have a more refined scope than how it might sound superficially. It did not seem to us that Socrates claimed the *arete* of the good person to come by divine allotment, but rather, it was the *arete* of the good politician (ἀγαθός πολιτικός), who lacked mind yet hit the mark nonetheless—someone like Anytus perhaps. However, Socrates also spoke about someone who could make another political, and he compared such a person to the soul of Teiresias in Hades. Through an intertextual analysis of the passage from Homer which Socrates recited, we concluded that this other sort of political man (who could make another political) spoke carefully and with a consideration for his interlocutor. In this sense, he enhanced the pursuit of *arete* through his participation in the communal horizon. This political man attends to the intertwining of the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) with the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός). We

wondered whether Socrates might be this sort of man, and it even seemed likely to us. Nevertheless, the dialogue ends with Socrates' exhortation for Meno to persuade Anytus so that he might do good for Athens. Even though we recognized that later events imply Meno's failure, we took solace in our insight that the pursuit of *arete* is a communal endeavor. No one fails or succeeds in the search for *arete* alone.

CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION

An epistemological discourse (including one about recollection (ἀνάμνησις)) does take place within the *Meno*; however, our analysis of this text has drawn out an equally rich and provocative discourse on the incommensurability between two measures of *arete*. There are emergent measures of *arete* which various members of the *polis* exhibit and for which individuals who exhibit this *arete* become well-esteemed. As we progressed through the dialogue, we called this *arete* the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) or the good politician (ἀγαθός πολιτικός). That good citizens can also be good politicians bespeaks the narrow scope of our analysis. The Athenian *polis* allowed its citizens to be its politicians, i.e., the men who lead Athens, and these men are responsible for the good of the *polis*—both making it good and its goodness. Meno, too, can be both a citizen and “politician” (despite not living in Athens) because of his status as a Thessalian aristocrat. And yet, throughout Socrates’ speeches, we tracked his unique contribution to the Athenian pursuit of *arete*. Another *arete*, which we called the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός), frequently conflicted with the *arete* of the good citizen/politician, and Socrates presented lines of reasoning that undermined or complicated the emergent measures of *arete* for which Meno and Anytus respectively accounted. Socrates questioned, for example, whether it was sufficient to be beautiful (κάλος), wise in a technical know-how (τέχνη), or even one of the so-called “noble and good” (καλοί κάγαθοί) to be a good person. It never seemed to us that any of these measures sufficed, but their inability to resolve this search did not appear to us as a failure of the inquiry. On the contrary, Socrates’ engagement with Meno, the παῖς, and Anytus represented to us their idiosyncratic contributions to the communal pursuit of *arete* and the human good. Socrates’ persistent exhortation for his interlocutors to search together with him (and in the end with each other) led us to see the quintessentially interpersonal character of the pursuit of the human good. We described their conversation as one which took place within a communal horizon, a collective vantage point from which members in community with one another share in the pursuit of *arete* in word and deed. *Arete* is not the special gift of the individual good person but an impermanent culmination of a collective effort.

Having analyzed the *Meno* in this way, let us pick out some decisive moments from our analysis. After Meno presented his contentious argument (ἐριστικός λόγος), Socrates spoke at length about recollection (ἀνάμνησις), using language in different ways to persuade Meno to trust

his account. Our analysis of Meno's challenge and Socrates' response to it focused on its implications for the relationship between dialogue and *arete*. Socrates reasoned that they would be better, braver, and less lazy if they believed his account than if they believed Meno's contentious argument.⁹⁹⁶ In other words, trusting Socrates' account would be more beneficial to their pursuit of *arete*, even if some of the details of Socrates' argument were not altogether convincing. We see now that Socrates' supposition about what they would be better off to believe implied something foundational about the pursuit. Not only would Meno benefit from heeding Socrates' reasoning, but Socrates includes himself with Meno, implying that he too would benefit from it. Socrates' speech frequently indicated to us the necessity of the other for the pursuit of *arete*. Socrates does not allow Meno's contentious argument to disrupt their conversation by persuading them not to continue their search, but instead, Socrates speaks to Meno as his friend, using the things that Meno "knows" (e.g., rhetorical and philosophical styles) in addition to the "truth."⁹⁹⁷ Socrates may not have "saved" or otherwise "rehabilitated" Meno during the dialogue, but Meno's willingness to engage in the inquiry is a precondition for him to make his own contribution to the endeavor. Such encouragement about the value of his contribution differs considerably from what he might have learned from Gorgias. Although Socrates reinvigorated Meno's interest in the inquiry, Meno did not want to examine "what *arete* is" but rather how it comes to be.

Socrates gratified Meno's desire to hear *arete* spoken about in this way, even if Socrates did not think it was the best approach, and what followed was still a discourse which required cooperative participation (immanently in the dialogue and implicitly in the *polis*). However, our examination of "how *arete* comes to be" focused on an analogical relationship between the soul and the *polis* that undergird this latter portion of the *Meno*. To be clear, we noticed the political dimension of the inquiry from the very beginning. Socrates mentioned the political arrangement in Thessaly; Meno accounted for *arete* as the ability to rule; and Socrates even referred to Meno's guest friendship with a powerful ruler.⁹⁹⁸ However, during our analysis of Socrates' reasoning in Chapter III, the political dimension of the discourse appeared to us in tandem with a conversation on the soul especially what "leads" the soul of the good person. According to Socrates' reasoning, the things pertaining to the soul (like the goods of the *polis*) are beneficial when dialectical

⁹⁹⁶ Plato, *Meno*, 86b-c.

⁹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 75d.

⁹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 70b, 73c, 78d.

reasoning (φρόνησις) leads the soul, and we inferred that a person whose soul is led by dialectical reasoning would lead the *polis* beneficially. Or, in other words, such a leader of the *polis* would be a good person (ἀγαθός) in a good *polis*. While many of the details about the origin of dialectical reasoning and what it even is remained hazy during this part of the conversation, the uniquely Socratic character of this line of reasoning showed itself to us most conspicuously when Anytus interjected himself into the dialogue. Anytus was a leader of Athens whom we considered an exemplary representative of the Athenian *polis*, and yet he seemed to us to lack dialectical reasoning. We wondered whether Athens could be a good *polis*, one in which good people cooperatively pursued the human good, if Anytus represented Athenian leadership. This concern intensified when Socrates and Anytus concluded their conversation in disagreement about the ability of the so-called “noble and good Athenians” to teach *arete*. Socrates pointed out many ways in which they seemed not to be the teachers, and based upon Socrates’ scrutiny, we questioned whether the Athenian pursuit of *arete* was as secure as Anytus seemed to believe.

Because we had tracked the analogical relationship between the soul and the *polis* throughout Chapters III and IV, we were well positioned to interpret the culmination of Socrates’ reasoning. Socrates convinced Meno that their prior reasoning about dialectical reasoning had been incomplete, i.e., that it was the only thing pertaining to the soul which could lead the soul rightly. He claimed also that right/true opinion could lead rightly as well, and we recognized the relevance of this assertion for both parts of the analogical relationship. In fact, this reasoning seemed at times more germane to the question concerning the leadership of the *polis* than the leadership of the soul, even if we acknowledged the inextricability of the one from the other. A decisive consequence of the “practical” equivalence of right/true opinion and knowledge both leading rightly appeared to us when we ventured an interpretation of Socrates’ conclusion that “*arete* comes to be by divine allotment without mind.” This conclusion sounds like it could describe the origin of the *arete* which the good person exhibits; however, our prior analysis informed our decision to understand it as an assertion about the *arete* of the good politicians—men who, like Anytus, lead the *polis* without “knowing” the truth of what they say or do. In contrast to this sort of political man who engages in the management of the *polis* and other such activities, we compared Socrates who seemed to us like Teiresias among the dead. They both spoke mindfully and with consideration for their interlocutors. This behavior manifested in the *Meno* through Socrates’ curated speeches for Meno and Anytus but also through his persistent exhortation for his interlocutor to share in the

search with him. While the subsequent events in Socrates', Meno's, and Anytus' lives might cause us to question the effectiveness of Socrates' approach (or at least to recognize its enormous difficulty), we have insisted that Socrates' ultimate "failure" does not imply the worthlessness of the pursuit. Socrates made a unique, influential, and invaluable contribution to the Athenian communal horizon, and even if the Athenians chose to pursue a different measure of *arete* than that which Socrates' reasoning partially justified, Socrates did more good for Athens than if he had lived either a quiet, private life or a more conventional, political one. Socrates was clearly "political" (πολιτικός), but he was political because he made a unique contribution to the Athenian pursuit of *arete*, and he encouraged others to do so as well. This sort of engagement heeds the tension between the *arete* of the good citizen (ἀγαθός πολίτης) and the *arete* of the good person (ἀγαθός)—two senses of *arete* which are not identical but are intertwined.

According to our analysis, the *Meno* is a dialogue about being a good person and how difficult it is despite being something that everyone wants. This pursuit is a political pursuit albeit in an unconventional way. To "be a good person," one cannot mindlessly follow the laws, customs, or leaders of the *polis*. The tension between the *polis* and the individual manifests in the communal horizon, a collective locus from and in which a constituency strive towards *arete*. No one can pursue *arete* without others, and each member of the *polis* stakes a unique claim. Consequently, we concluded that the pursuit of *arete* must be an ongoing endeavor because every word and deed affect the measure of *arete* towards which a constituency strive. In our encounter with the text, we found considerable disagreement about both what *arete* is and how it comes to be; and yet, we recognized the importance of resolve in this cooperative endeavor despite the difficulty. It is a task that is too important to abandon because of the consequences for oneself and others. Such a reading differs considerably from the approach of many Anglophone scholars who interpret the *Meno* as a canonical text on the possibility of pre-natal knowledge (among other epistemological conclusions). Even the Anglophone scholars whose approach to Platonic texts generally or to the *Meno* harmonizes more closely with our own have not approached the *Meno* in this way. Our analysis of the *Meno* will hopefully contribute to its reconsideration as a political text, a political text in which what is "political" intertwines with the pursuit of *arete*. Socrates needs his interlocutors to help him in his own pursuit of *arete* just as much as they need him (even if they may not realize it), and this simple insight might help us to remember that we, too, still need others in our own pursuit of the human good.

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