Eureka and the Questing Beast:

An Essay on Meno's Paradox and the Problems of Enquiry.[1]

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They sought it with thimbles, they sought it with care;
They pursued it with forks and hope;
They threatened its life with a railway share;
They charmed it with smiles and soap.

- Lewis Carroll, *The Hunting of the Snark*.[2]

[2] L. Carroll, 'The Hunting of the Snark', in *The Complete Illustrated Lewis Carroll*, (Ware, Wordsworth Editions, 1998), pp.667-99. The unavailing nature of the quest, the course of which is plotted through this poem, does not inspire pity for its motley pursuers, but rather a smile at their absurdity (see here: p.39-40).

Here there are expectations. It is expected, for example, that things can, *to a certain extent*, be made sense of, that certain beliefs can and should be justified. Naive, perhaps, but only to a certain extent.[3] If no such expectations persisted, there would be no paradoxes, there would be no irksome quality to a suggestion which ran contrary to apparent reality. If someone were to suggest that in order to properly focus upon the target of a question one would need to already know the answer, there would be grounds for discontent. Such a claim does not seem groundless, yet we evidently do ask questions without previously knowing the answers.

This discussion serves as an attempt to understand how it is that we can ask questions. A particular interest is taken in those questions which are especially abstract and general, of which this current discussion may contain examples.[4] 'How is it that questions can both be asked and answered?' may be one such question, and it is in this way that the paradox, as it appears in Plato's dialogue of the *Meno,* shall be partially understood.

The discussion is, ostensibly, divided into three sections, headed by three questions: 'How to Begin?', 'How to Continue?' and 'How to Conclude?'. These sections are, in turn, preceded by an introduction to the paradox as it occurs in Plato's dialogue, and an overview of the issues as they are encountered in this essay. This division is only ostensible for, as one major theme of the discussion seeks to establish, these questions do, in a very significant way, have one answer. This said, the sections are subdivided as follows:

- The Dialogue: in which the *Meno* is summarised and described as a reference point and anchor for this present treatment of Meno's conundrum.
- The Paradox of the Paper: in which paradoxes *as such*, and the various paradoxes which are encountered as a result of treating the title paradox, are

[3] Cf. B. Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, (London, Thornton Butterworth, 1928), pp.9-25. No great time will be taken over directly tackling the 'should' of this claim, it is hoped, rather, that, as an axiom of this discussion, it shall, in some way, be justified through its application.

[4] In many ways 'abstract and general' can be translated as 'philosophical'. The reason for avoiding the term 'philosophy' and its cognates is largely based on a desire to not speak in terms of academic disciplinary boundaries, and also out of a suspicion that this terminology can, at times, be in danger of bestowing certain airs and graces that are an inappropriate and unwelcome distraction. Having said this, the discussion will, towards its close, raise the subject of curiosity and its important role in enquiry; in doing so, the manner in which particularly abstract and general subjects are only of interest to those who are particularly curious may be seen as reflecting something of the original and most richly insightful sense of 'philosophy'. Something of this trepidation is perhaps expressed in Epictetus' condemnation of the label 'philosopher'. Epictetus, *Discourses*, W. A. Oldfather, (London, Heinemann, 1946), §III:XXI:23.

detailed so as to ground (and bound) the problems of the ensuing discussion.

- The Paradox of the Dialogue: In which Meno's paradox is expanded upon more fully as it occurs in Plato's dialogue, and in which the various philosophical problems which the dialogue raises are outlined.
- **How to Begin?**: In which the problem of the relationship between known and unknown is first raised.
    - Different Kinds of Questions: In which some questions are discussed as being of less interest (for being somewhat exempt from Meno's paradox) and others are discussed as being of particular interest.
- **How to Continue?**: In which the subject of relevance is explored, primarily through a concentration upon the manner in which 'ideas' may relate to one another.
    - Discovery, Similarity and Curiosity: In which the indeterminacy of discovery is raised explicitly, the relationships and distinctions of interrogative thought are expanded upon, and the driving psychology of enquiry is focused on in terms of curiosity.
- **How to Conclude?**: In which an inability to resolve is reconciled with the aims of enquiry, and the intractable limits of judgement are viewed in the context of the psychology of asking questions.
    - Possibilities, Spontaneity, and The End: In which the passive and active elements of questioning and answering are discussed as inseparable and some final excuses are made.

The following discussion is chiefly concerned with the question: '*how is it that we can ask questions?*' The main contention of the essay is that, whilst asking and answering questions does rely upon what we already know, the shape of these activities is not necessarily dictated solely by our prior knowledge. This contention attempts to take into account a possible distinction between questions which appear to be, in a sense,

tautological, and therefore dictated by prior knowledge *in some sense*, and those which do not appear to conform to this model and demand some form of original inspiration. This distinction must, in turn, account for the manner in which a 'reformulation' of prior knowledge (exemplified by equational solutions) may justifiably be viewed as 'less original' than other forms of discovery through enquiry. One manner in which this issue is raised is through the question as to how interrogative thought can be only *partially* shaped by prior knowledge.

This discussion does, to some extent, fit into a broader tradition of discussing the originality and freedom of thought.5 In this vein, one critical suggestion of the essay is that enquiry does, and must, accommodate some seemingly contradictory (and ineffable, or 'senseless') foundations and boundaries, but that this accommodation *should* be mindfully measured. A key feature of this discussion is an elucidation of the psychological phenomena, or principles, which permit and constitute these interrogative processes. Faculties of judgement are primary in this respect, and it is in this way that this discussion agrees with Plato's description of recollection and its role in enquiry. Judgements of *similarity* (and, as such, extent and relevance) are a principle concern. An exposition is also attempted of the role of an awareness of, and ability to achieve, *clarity,* and the manner in which the struggle for clarity is associated with, and inextricable from, a struggle for not yet apprehended, original thought. An emphasis is also placed on the important role, in asking questions, played by curiosity, and how the seeming contradictions and boundaries of meaningful enquiry are effectively traversed through this (somewhat wilful) compulsion. It is continuing in this pattern of skirting contradiction and of pursuing a synthesis of apparently incommensurable principles, that all of these interrogative phenomena are viewed as only *somewhat distinct* and only helpfully considered as distinct given the understanding that any such distinction is itself recognisably limited.

A quick note should be made of sources and exegesis. This essay is not of a primarily exegetical character, rather, Meno's paradox is taken as a classical exemplar of a

[5] For example, see: H. L. Mencken, *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, (Radford, VA, Wilder, 2008), p.100.

far broader philosophical problem worthy of treatment. To this end, classical sources are drawn upon, but are by no means exclusively favoured and, of other sources, the traditions of linguistic philosophy and the work of Wittgenstein are particularly noteworthy. After this manner there is an effort, albeit tempered, to follow in a trend of common sense philosophy and non-technical, natural language.[6]

The Dialogue.

There sits Socrates, a man with a weakness for beautiful young men, and who should desire his advice but the dashing young Thessalian aristocrat Meno.[7] Meno, during his unexplained visit to Athens, appears to be residing with his surly and disappointingly conservative sponsor Anytus. Taking advantage of his good looks, Meno presses Socrates on the issue of instruction in virtue, no doubt a hot topic (in no small part due to significant sums changing hands in the desire to mould the up-and-coming youth of Greece), and one which Socrates is more than happy to discuss with such a comely guest.[8] Typically, Socrates questions the young man's confidence in the definition of virtue, receiving as an answer that there are many virtues, each depending upon circumstances. It

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6 On a textual and methodological note, this adherence to common sense philosophical traditions may be viewed as placing this discussion in the context of Peripatetic critiques of Platonism. Of course, apart from being an historical curiosity, this kind of reflection is somewhat tangential.Cf. J. J. E. Gracia, *Philosophy and its History: Issues in Philosophical Historiography*, (Albany, NY, SUNY Press, 1992), p.129.

7 The Greek text used for this essay is that as edited by R. S. Bluck: ΠΛΑΤΩΝ, *ΜΕΝΩΝ*, R. S. Bluck (ed.), (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1961), and shall be cited henceforth as in this instance: ΜΝΩ:§76b-c. As far as English translations are concerned, Jane Day's is favoured: Plato, 'Meno', in J. M. Day (ed.,tr.), *Plato's Meno In Focus*, (London, Routledge, 1994), and some use has also been made of: Plato, *Meno*, W. K. C. Guthrie (trs.), (Indianapolis, NY, Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), and Plato, 'Meno', G. M. A. Grube (tr.), in J. M. Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works*, (Cambridge, Hackett, 1997).

8 As far as the business of the sophists is concerned, Isocrates is eager to point out that the only man who ever made a fortune through this trade was Gorgias, and then only by miserly and otherwise unscrupulous means (Isocrates, *Antidosis*, G. Norlin (tr.), (London, Harvard Univeristy Press,1929), §15:155, see also: S. P. Consigny, *Gorgias: Sophist and Artist*, (Columbia, SC, University of South Carolina, 2001), pp.95-6). To what degree Isocrates can himself be trusted is hard to say, but we can at least be in no doubt as to the significance of this profession in fifth century Greece, see: B. Cassin, 'Sophists', E. Rawlings and J. Pucci (trs.), in J. Brunshwig and G. E. R. Lloyd, *A Guide to Greek Thought: Major Figures and Trends*, (London, Belknap Harvard, 2003), pp.435-9.

is, of course, the essential and general definition which Socrates seeks, and he searches for this again by asking what virtue is to justice as shape is to roundness.9 Meno objects that this sort of enquiry would demand a continuous regression into further definitions (what is shape? What is colour?), but Socrates insists that no such difficulty exists as long as we use 'terms admittedly known to the questioner'.10 So, conceding, Meno suggests that Virtue is something of which justice is a part, a definition which Socrates swiftly identifies as inadequate, for this merely informs us that there is *something* which these parts of virtue have in common, not *what* this something is.11 So the pair are at a loss, numb in their ignorance, and it is at this point that Meno asks the question upon which this present discussion shall focus:

> **And how will you search for it, Socrates, when you don't know at all what it is? Which of those things which you do not know will you set up for your search? And even if you do indeed happen upon it, how will you know that it is that which you did not know?12**

How is it that, in asking a question, one needs to both not know the answer (in order that there might be a demand for it) and know it (in order that the target, method and fulfilment of the question might be recognised)?

Socrates' response to the paradox has been read by many as an out-of-hand dismissal, a complete rejection of any need to give time to the problem,[13] and amongst these there have been those who have thought this response both appropriate and expressive of Plato's own view.[14] It cannot be said that such readings place Plato's Socrates entirely incorrectly, for he does indeed reject the paradox, both on the grounds of what

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9 ΜΝΩ:§73e.

10 *Ibid*:§75d

11 *Ibid*:§79d-e

12 καὶ τίνα τρόπον ζητήσεις, ὦ Σώκρατες, τοῦτο ὃ μὴ οἶσθα τὸ παράπαν ὅτι ἐστίν; ποῖον γὰρ ὧν οὐκ οἶσθα προθέμενος ζητήσεις; ἢ εἰ καὶ ὅτι μάλιστα ἐντύχοις αὐτῷ, πῶς εἴσῃ ὅτι τοῦτό ἐστιν ὃ σὺ οὐκ ἤδησθα; *Ibid*:§:80d. Although the translation here is original, much use has been made of both Jane Day's translation as well as Bluck's commentary accompanying his edition of the text.

13 A. E. Taylor is one such person (A. E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and His Work*, [Mineola, NY, Dover, 2001], p.135). See: A. Nechamas, 'Meno's Paradox and Socrates as a Teacher', in J. M. Day (ed.), *Plato's Meno in Focus*, (London, Routledge, 1994), p.221.

14 Paul Shorey is an apt example here (P. Shorey, *What Plato Said*, [Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 1983], p.157).

becomes the theory of recollection and on the grounds that such an argument threatens to paralyse all critical enquiry.[15] This present discussion shall, however, follow Nicholas White and Alexander Nehamas in the suggestion that, not only is the problem which Meno raises an important one, but one which Plato himself thought worthy of consideration.[16] Indeed, it is Meno's paradox which not only brings Socrates to express the theory that the soul, being immortal, merely recalls and never truly learns, but also, when Meno questions this theory, to call forth one of Meno's slaves so that he might demonstrate this recollection.

So it is that Socrates sets about questioning this unsuspecting boy as to the nature of arithmetic and geometric progression. Having demonstrated that the boy can indeed deduce the exponential growth of a square, Socrates moves on to addressing the initial question of whether virtue can be taught. He begins by suggesting that knowledge is the only sort of thing which can be taught, and that it must, therefore, be found whether virtue is a kind of knowledge. Socrates and Meno conclude that virtue only seems to be beneficial when guided by understanding, and that, as such, it must be a kind of knowledge, a knowledge acquired and not possessed congenitally.[17] At this point Anytus is brought briefly into the discussion, for Socrates wonders whether there are any teachers of virtue, whether, indeed, the sophists can claim such a profession, and Anytus is no friend of the sophists. Ultimately Socrates establishes that not even Anytus' noble Athenian gentlemen can claim to be teachers of virtue (at which Anytus storms off, leaving only an ominous warning), that without teachers there can be no pupils and that, with neither of these, virtue cannot be taught. Yet Plato does not conclude the discussion here, for Socrates has misgivings, and with what remains of the dialogue Socrates outlines some important epistemological considerations which he and Meno have failed to take account of. Socrates explains that knowledge, which is what they have hitherto been speaking of, is not the only accurate guide available to us; correct opinion might also do the job. Meno cannot fail

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15 ΜΝΩ:§81.

16 A. Nechamas, 'Meno's Paradox and Socrates as a Teacher', and N. P. White, 'Inquiry', pp.**152**-166.

17 For a discussion of the Greek terms, and their complexities, and of how Plato uses epistemological terminology see: T. D. J. Chappell, *Reading Plato's Theaetetus*, (Cambridge, Hackett, 2004), p.31.

to agree with Socrates but is puzzled as to why knowledge seems better. So it is that Socrates makes a final clarification of his theory of recollection by explaining that knowledge is a correct opinion which is justified, and that this justification acts to secure the correct opinion; this, he says, is what his 'recollection' really is: a justification of correct opinion. Thus the dialogue draws to a close with the conclusion that virtue, being not knowledge yet certainly beneficial, must be correct opinion and, furthermore, possessed only by the grace of the gods.

This essay shall seek to answer the question as to whether Meno's paradox does indeed present us with a problem. The dialogue, as outlined above, shall serve as not only a point of departure, but also a source of guidance. Indeed, as has already been said, Plato's treatment of the paradox and the issues with which he envelops it, may prove apt in illuminating a broader discussion.

It may appear that Socrates gives very little time to Meno's 'contentious argument',[18] and we, along with those scholars mentioned above, may be inclined to agree that the paradox is only a bit of facetious pedantry, needlessly confusing matters which are, in fact, *quite straight forward*. There are, perhaps, some few occasions when one might fairly call some line of argument facetious or pedantic, though this is far more likely a matter of context and the spirit in which the question is asked.[19] Questions can be asked obtusely, disingenuously, inappropriately, irrelevantly (a core topic of this discussion) and with the express purpose of being obstructive or confusing. There are even questions which simply fail to make any sense; and in all these instances we might justly be dismissive. Yet we would be failing as pursuers of philosophical investigation if we were to do so 'out-of-hand', for it is through the illumination of the details and complexities of the seemingly straight forward (and, we may say, the converse) that this breed of investigation finds a greater part of its calling. Indeed, further to this, it will be important not to confuse questions which may be dismissed as being asked with the purpose of being confusing

[18] ΜΝΩ:§80e. For a discussion of 'ἐριστικὸν' (contentious/disputatious) and its use here by Plato see: A. Nechamas, 'Meno's Paradox and Socrates as a Teacher', and N. P. White, 'Inquiry', p.221.

[19] See Bernard Williams' comment below: p.53.

and those which are asked out of confusion. The latter kind of question is one which must be given very serious attention. Of course, many would criticise philosophical enquiry in general for being a bloated profession of runaway pedantry and over-complication, and to some degree (depending on context and spirit) we may agree.[20] Yet the compulsion to ask questions is honest enough, and, as Plato demonstrates, Meno's question has its place. This is all said because this essay *does not* seek to confirm the paradox, that is to say: questions can indeed be validly asked and answered. Not all enquiry is Sisyphean, but perhaps some is (and perhaps some is only partially); the purpose of this paper is to explore the ways in which Meno's paradox, and an exploration of the difficulties it raises, can illuminate the nature of asking and answering questions and illustrate when and where the paradox itself does introduce an interesting problem.

The Paradox of the Paper.

When one asks the question: 'can questions be asked or answered?', it is rather like Epimenides explaining that all Cretans are liars, the self referential loop of reasoning creates a peculiar trap.[21] If one were to answer this present question negatively then one would face a contradiction. Such a contradiction would seem only to leave the possibilities of answering positively or, indeed, not answering at all.[22] Of course, an absence of any answer tells us nothing more, for we already know that this cannot mean that an answer is impossible, so we may be compelled to answer positively. This forced response may, in turn, appear to be no kind of answer whatsoever, for all it illustrates is that this question forces itself into a tight, albeit positive, corner. Needless to say that this sort of logical knot is far from terminal, it serves, rather, to characterise something of the spirit to which

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[20] *Ibid*.

[21] Which appears famously in Paul's Epistle to Titus (Titus, 1:12).

[22] The Law of Non-Contradiction is of persistent relevance throughout this discussion, Patrick Grim gives a good overview of the issue in P. Grim, 'What is a Contradiction?', in G. Priest, J. C. Beall, and B. Armour-Garb (eds.), *The Law of Non-Contradiction: New Philosophical Essays*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), pp.49-71.

Socrates objects in Meno's paradox and also permits an initial illustration of some of the perils and genuine importances of the problems which this paper seeks to confront.

Now, certain objections might be made at this point, perhaps in a Wittgenstinian vein, to this sort of muddle.[23] It may well be claimed that the question: 'can questions be answered?' is not, in fact, a valid question, but is, rather, a confusion of language. In fact, there are two particularly important objections that might be made; first, that the question is so self reflexive that it deals only in tautologies and contradictions and is therefore senseless.[24] Secondly, that it introduces 'questions' as an identifiable class, the essence of which might be scrutinised and elaborated upon and that to do so not only mistakenly assigns an essence to a term, but also assumes that the class is a valid or helpful one in the context of this discussion.[25] We may at least say that these objections raise two issues which are of central importance to this discussion. In the first case, the importance of tautology and analyticity in question asking, and latterly, that as to whether questions do indeed constitute a valid class.[26]

Although both of these issues are more fully expanded upon below, it will be useful to understand their importance here, if only to offer a better understanding of the trajectory and validity of this discussion as a whole. In the case of the former objection, the tautology of the 'paradox of the paper' may indicate the way in which a much broader strand of question may also be described as tautological or, indeed, analytical. This is to say that certain questions may be viewed as inherently answerable, given only a knowledge of the question and the meanings of the terms used therein. Obvious examples of such questions are those of mathematics, and we may reflect that Plato seems chiefly

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[23] The insights of linguistic philosophy, and especially the philosophy of Wittgenstein, into the use of interrogative language will be hugely important later on, here the exploration is cursory so as to better demarcate our understanding of paradoxes.

[24] L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, C. K. Ogden (tr.), (Oxford, Routledge, 2005), §.4.461. Cf. D. Jacquette, *Wittgenstein's Thought in Transition*, (West Lafayette, IN, Purdue University Press, 1998), pp.71-3.

[25] Cf. E. Rosch and C. B. Mervis, 'Family Resemblances: Studies in the Internal Structure of Categories', in H. Geirsson and M. Losonsky (eds.), *Readings in Language and Mind*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1996), pp.442-458.

[26] For an overview of tautology, its treatment in philosophy, and some discussion of the puzzle analogy see: J. Hintikka, *Logic, Language Games and Information: Kantian Themes in the Philosophy of Logic*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.150-73.

concerned with just this sort of question.[27] Without expanding any further, it may be remarked that describing the 'paradox of the paper' as tautological is not necessarily an objection, but rather a classification of the question as being of a particular, and eminently answerable, type. Of course, this shall be contested, as it leaves open to discussion those questions which do not conform to this type, and whether such a distinction is even possible. The latter objection, that 'can questions be answered?' is simply a confusion of language, misusing the term 'questions' as an essential group open to scrutiny, again raises the problem of how (and whether) questions can be distinguished and collectively identified. It may be elaborated that questions are not some abstract or unifiable entity, and are, rather, *something that we do*.[28] It may be said that both questions and answers are multifarious activities which share in certain and various characteristics, but that do not conform to some unifying factor or common essence. In this way, by doing certain questioning and answering, the introduction of other questions into this activity makes a nonsense of the questions introduced.[29] Following this it might also be objected that doubt has no place in the asking of certain everyday questions and answers, it is self-evident that they can and are asked and answered, to doubt this would be to undermine the very language which is used to raise the doubt. Meno's paradox, in such a context, is just vacuous noise, and can teach us nothing about everyday interrogation. It is in this objection that we find something of the spirit of Socrates' initial response, and that of those who have followed him. This paper cannot, at least not wholly, agree. This disagreement is centred around a recognition of the *kinds of questions* which are asked in this paper, and of the breadth of curiosity's reach. There are certainly everyday sorts of questions which, in their being asked in an everyday sort of context, escape the clutches of Meno's paradox,

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[27] Cf. G. Vlastos, 'Anamnesis in the Meno', in J. M. Day (ed.,tr.), *Plato's Meno In Focus*, (London, Routledge, 1994), pp.88-97.

[28] In the vein of 'Illocutionary acts' (J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, [Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1962], pp.148-52). Cf. J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.30-1.

[29] Kenny's selection of Wittgenstein on 'Sense, Nonsense and Philosophy' demonstrates W's position aptly (L. Wittgenstein, *The Wittgenstein Reader*, A. J. P. Kenny [ed.], [Oxford, Blackwell, 2006], pp.245-50). It is, however, *On Certainty* which is drawn upon most explicitly throughout this discussion: L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (eds.), D. Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (trs.), (Oxford, Blackwell, 2003).

but this, it shall be contended below, is due to the everyday context of their asking, a context in which these questions happen not to arouse curiosity of an abstract kind. It shall also be contended that we do not need to doubt in order to wonder (at least, that is, not *altogether*).

Another aporia which is recurrent in the following discussion arises out of a consideration of the way in which things (objects of enquiry, faculties of enquiry, psychological phenomena in general) may be said to be both distinct and unified. Of how, in fact, an enterprise which is guided by a rejection of contradiction must also accommodate it to some degree. How original thought may also be partially determined. How justification may be unjustifiable. How the principles and faculties of enquiry may be distinguishable from one another *only to some extent*. Of course, it would be a contradiction to describe this moderate acceptance of contradiction as an axiom, as something which cannot be justified and must be assumed, this would be to succumb to the absolute impenetrability of the matter, whereas it is, rather, only somewhat impenetrable. Perhaps this is just absurd (though perhaps it is only half absurd), though it may be forgiveable, in attempting to navigate such silliness, to describe one axiom of the discussion as being akin (if not identical) to Kleoboulos' maxim:

ΜΈΤΡΟΝ ἌΡΙΣΤΟΝ[30]

At least, of all words here, these are the most lapidary.

The Paradox of the Dialogue.

In the *Meno*, as outlined above, only two difficulties are raised by Meno and Socrates when discussing the paradox: first, how to begin an enquiry, and secondly, how

[30] *Measure is best*. Of course, it can be contested whether this maxim is best attributed to Kleoboulos, or some other 'sage', but such is the mythical status of the seven that any such contest would be distastefully pedantic.

to conclude an enquiry.[31] To this list shall be added a third concern: how to proceed with an enquiry, for although this is really an amalgam of the former two difficulties, it will be necessary to highlight the manner in which many, if not all enquiries take the form of a process and how this process entails just such an amalgam. It will be suggested that, at least for the kind of enquiry in which this discussion is chiefly interested, and of which this discussion is chiefly composed, one question will inevitably lead to another, making the enquiry an ongoing process which persistently engages those faculties by which we discern our interrogative course.

It will be important to keep in mind that the paradox itself need only be expressed in terms of the problem of knowing and not knowing; as Socrates explains:

> How it is not possible for a man to search either for what he does know or for what he does not know. He cannot search for what he knows, for he knows it and one such as that need not search, nor for what he doesn't know, for he won't know what to search for.32

The problem of *knowing* has been touched upon already in terms of analytical and tautological questioning; it is in the matter of *not knowing* that this discussion shall find the greater part of its focus. Of course, this distinction goes only so far, and it would perhaps be fairer to say that it is the infinitesimal point of meeting between known and not known that lies at the heart of this present discussion and which will be focused upon as being that which characterises and (conversely) distinguishes all questions.

It is important at this juncture to recognise the position of this discussion in relation to the broader problems of epistemology. It may at first seem that Meno's paradox is simply another way for scepticism to worm its scurrilous way into our thoughts and words, yet it is not. In relation to some aspects of this discussion, especially in consideration of how to conclude, more traditional issues of whether we can or can't *know* will be of greater relevance, but elsewhere these problems are peripheral. If we take the example offered in the dialogue, it is clear that Meno would still have something to say even if more traditional scepticisms could be discounted. In a sense, Meno's paradox is

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[31] MNΩ:§80d.

[32] *Ibid*:§80e.

prior to these problems of verification and perception; one could be certain that virtue exists, and perhaps know of some properties that it has whilst still being puzzled as to whether anything further can be learned about it. The problem is not *can I know*, but *can I learn.* As Julius Moravcsik acknowledges, Plato's concentration, and the concentration of Meno's paradox, is upon *enquiry*.33 The paradox does not (at least not directly) raise concerns as to whether the external world can be known; it is not even concerned with learning by experience of the world. The paradox is, rather, interested in asking questions. We may suspect that if Socrates' response is to be branded weak in any sense, this weakness may derive from this apparent lack of attention paid to the richness and variety of learning in all its interrelated forms.

How to Begin?

Plato, or at least Socrates and Meno, must be mistaken. When Meno puts his problem to Socrates he says: 'τοῦτο ὃ μὴ οἶσθα *τὸ παράπαν* ὅτι ἐστίν', 'this, which you do not know *at all* what it is'.34 And Socrates makes no objection, yet they surely do know *something*.35 Socrates has certainly been quite rigorous in his deconstruction of Meno's preconceptions about virtue, he has found that *a great deal* of what Meno supposed he knew about virtue was, in fact, misguided. But not *all*. This is not, however, merely a noise which Meno is making, 'virtue' ('ἀρετή', 'excellence') is not devoid of meaning. By demonstrating that Meno's ideas about virtue are confused Socrates only establishes that it is a confusing idea, not an empty one. Meno has *some grasp* of the idea, even if it is a bare minimum. The very idea that they could be discussing something about which neither of

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33 J. Moravcsik, 'Learning as Recollection', in J. M. Day (ed.,tr.), *Plato's Meno In Focus*, (London, Routledge, 1994), pp.112-16

34 MNΩ:§80d (emphasis added).

35 On Socrates reformulation of the problem and the importance of 'τὸ παράπαν' see: A. Nechamas, 'Meno's Paradox and Socrates as a Teacher', pp.224-5.

them have the first clue is, we might suggest, absurd. We might as well imagine that 'ἀρετή' is replaced by some nonsense word, or non-verbal claxon, and be done with it. Perhaps the linguistic philosophers are correct, and some words, used incorrectly, are tantamount to nonsense, but we may be forgiven for thinking, for now at least, that 'ἀρετή', whatever its philological complexities and philosophical confusions, is not apparently one of these. It's probably got something to do with being good. Yet, in truth, Socrates does not agree that they know *nothing* about virtue, but rather, that they know all there is for them to know about virtue, only that they cannot remember it.

The important point here, though, is not the theory of recollection (at least not directly) but rather the suspicion that asking questions may have something to do with taking what we do know about something and expanding upon it. So, it may be said that Meno's paradox does not present a problem, because nobody would ever ask a question about something about which they knew nothing, but only about things about which they knew something and wished to know more.[36] When it comes to something like virtue, we would use our understanding of it as referring to good qualities and let this guide our enquiry until the holes are all filled in. We might indeed think of the missing information like a black hole which itself cannot be seen, but which is described by the behaviour of bodies which surround it.[37] So Meno may only go about with the most obvious and rudimentary characteristics of virtue in mind, and perhaps he has accrued a great deal of poorly wrought gumpf to accompany these, but *his* 'virtue' still has the same skeleton as *Socrates*' 'virtue'.

Two things must be said about this suggestion. First, it raises the problem of initial learning: discovering those things which are later used to uncover that which is missing. Something must be learnt first. Secondly, and more importantly, it fails to account for the gap, or relationship, between that which is known and that which is not. The paradox raises the problem of how we judge that which we do not know *at all.* This suggestion, of

[36] This 'wishing to know more' will be critical in a discussion of the importance of curiosity in how questions are asked.

[37] This kind of analogy will recur throughout the discussion and is of noteworthy importance.

knowing *partially*, shifts the problem to how we measure known elements against those still unknown elements.

The first problem may seem damning enough. An infinite regress of learning is not an option and so, as Socrates suggests, we are left with either innate knowledge or some other form of non-interrogative learning as the basis of all subsequent learning.38 Indeed, Plato seems to raise this question when Socrates, in first describing his theory of recollection, simply explains that one is recalling things learned previously in another ethereal life. Of course, at this stage he does not give any details as to how ghosts possess some power of enquiry allowing them to initially avoid the paradox. So we are left wondering whether the spirits must not also possess some meta-immortality to fall back onto to assist in their recollection and question asking.39 What follows seeks to explore this difficulty.

If one's theory of enquiry rests solely upon the use of innate knowledge and the filling in of gaps, then certain problems must be confronted. Any *tabula rasa* would be out of the question and those things with which we were endowed congenitally would need to serve as the compass to *all subsequent learning*. Such pre-learning may seem entirely plausible, if not evident, yet it is the breadth of its application which is chiefly at issue here. It may also be noted that this solution ultimately resolves itself into something very closely resembling Socrates' theory of recollection: we are born knowing all that we can know, learning is just recalling what we have forgotten. In this instance it is not that we would be born knowing all things, but rather with enough that we could 'deduce' (or infer) all things.

At first glance this kind of objection may be responded to as an over-abstraction of the matter; it is hard to imagine a situation in which we do not use prior knowledge to ask questions. We can hardly imagine a criminal detective who does not make thorough use of this method of enquiry: following clues, scrutinizing scraps of information so as to be lead to the indubitable answer. Whilst this is not, as yet, a discussion of the epistemological

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38 ΜΝΩ:§81.

39 *Ibid*.

merits and pitfalls of deduction and induction, it might be conceded that this retort, that we do use prior knowledge in the pursuit of further revelation (often successfully) is quite sound. Indeed, this discussion shan't seek to argue against prior knowledge being instrumental in enquiry, but rather seek to explore the difficulties that remain.

Perhaps, though, there are no such 'remaining' difficulties and any attempt to discredit pre-learning fails before it can gain any purchase whatsoever. Some time must be given still, however, to the aforementioned issue of 'types of learning': that we may come to our initial understanding by means other than enquiry (at least enquiry of the expressible and considered kind).40 In this way we might comfortably avoid any polarised commentary on *innate* knowledge. The learning (which is still genuine learning) that we use to judge our question asking and answering may be arrived at by means other than enquiry. Myriad experiences may lead to impressions and understandings which subsequently inform our enquiries. Even if, however, we were to concede to this non- or pre-enquiry learning (and there seems no reason not to),41 what remains at issue is *the extent of the use we make of such learning* and the evident reflection that not all learning follows this pattern. This proposed solution to Meno's paradox, in order for it to remain a solution, must deny any learning through enquiry, which is really no solution at all, rather it is a surrender *to* the paradox. Of course, it may be responded that this solution does not require the denial of all enquiry, only initial enquiry, and that enquiry does indeed proceed successfully, using as its building blocks things learned in other ways. And yet, if enquiry is to occur at all, even if it has some pre-existing foundations, the paradox may still apply to that element of the unknown which remains, and how we may use that little which we do know to apprehend and judge this unknown.42 So whether or not there are instances

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40 This non-investigative learning will be referred to in many ways before it is explored more fully. Whether in terms of non-investigative, non-interrogative or pre-learning, what is being referred to is any kind of learning which does not involve a considered or articulable investigation.

41 As has been said, this debate does not, in the main, seek to confront these traditional epistemological problems.

42 It may also be worth noting here that whilst it has been said briefly that this surrender resembles Socrates' response, it will be contended below that the theory of recollection has much more to say than this. It should also be said that any attempt to *dismiss* Meno's paradox by embracing this interpretation of Socrates' theory of recollection will be entirely contradictory. As said, such a view would uphold the

in which understandings arrived at by means other than enquiry then go on to inform or shape processes of enquiry (which there surely are), the paradox remains unresolved.43

As to the latter problem: a failure to describe the manner in which previous learning could lead to all subsequent learning, the repost may again follow that too much is being made of nothing. It is clear that connections are made between what is known and what is unknown, such connections are the stuff of daily existence. Of course, as has been said above, previous learning *can* and frequently *does* play a role in enquiry, but this is precisely why Meno's paradox is a *para-dox*: it seems to reasonably suggest something which is utterly contrary to what is evidently the case.44 It is crucial to recognise here that this remaining problem follows directly from the last. It may seem somewhat unsatisfactory to say, on the one hand, that we do indeed use prior learning to inform our processes of enquiry, to tell us what we are looking for and help us to judge, and on the other say that this does nothing to address Meno's paradox. Is this not just the problem, that we can neither begin nor conclude our enquiry through lack of means? And to say that these non-interrogative means are insufficient, that we use *answers* to ask questions too, and that this is the sole topic of discussion, is this not to avoid the helpfulness of the proposed solution? It is not. This 'solution', by suggesting that the origins and conclusions of all questions lie in non-interrogative learning (or, if desired, innate knowledge), must either deny genuine enquiry, or merely shift the problem. Since a denial of genuine enquiry is not to be countenanced here, this 'shift' must be elaborated upon.

What is meant by 'shift' is only that, rather than the problem being as to how we might first discern, and then judge the appropriateness and accuracy of question and

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paradox by claiming that things are indeed altogether contrary to appearances.

43 It must be emphasised that enquiry can (and surely must) include empirically learnt content, the point is, rather, that it cannot be solely constituted thus. This is one form of the central issue of this discussion, that there are elements of enquiry with which we are presented: the given, and others which we actively seek: the taken.

44 Or at least popularly believed to be the case: in this respect 'δόξα' will be seen more in a sense of 'common sense' rather than the widely held beliefs of an uneducated rabble. For a discussion of 'δόξα', its use by Plato and its relationship to Aristotle's understanding of common sense see: P. Gregoric, 'Aristotle's "Common Sense" in the Doxographic Tradition', in J. Allen, E. K. Emilsson, B. Morrison and W. R. Mann (eds.), *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Michael Frede*, Vol.XL, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.117-20.

answer, the problem now lies in how we might judge likewise in relation to some other piece of information and a question or answer. Not for the first time, nor for the last in this discussion, it must be said that *something remains missing*. One can accept that one knows something about virtue, and use this something to guide one's questioning, but since there is still something that one does not know, and wishes to, how might one judge the usefulness of that which one does know, in reaching that which one doesn't, given that one doesn't know that which one doesn't? How, indeed, does one know that something is missing? Saying that one *does* make such use only reiterates, once again, the *paradoxical* nature of the problem.45

Perhaps it may be taken from this problem of clues and the 'association of ideas' that the solution to the paradox may, at least partly, lie in describing how the unknown, however real, is not as isolated and obscure as Meno seems to suggest.46 It must also be noted that it will be important not to confuse the difference between different kinds of learning and different kinds of questions. By raising the matter of previous learning being the key to answering questions, two forms of 'learning' have been identified: innate knowledge (not, in fact, learning at all), and non-interrogative learning. As has been said, neither of these possible responses to the paradox can currently be entertained. As for different kinds of questions, a number have already been noted, and these shall be the topic of what remains of this section of the discussion.

It would perhaps be prudent, at this point, to take note of one particular aspect of the structure of the current discussion. This matter shall be returned to, yet it is worth noting that the problem of the paradox, as seen in relation to beginning, continuing and

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45 As is noted below in relation to Lewis Carroll's Tortoise and Achilles, this problem of 'shifting' the focus of judgement is just one expression of a far more widely encountered problem of justifying justification (note 81). One comparison that might be made is to the philosophical difficulties of exchange particle theory. According to this theory, the force exerted between subatomic particles is exercised through the exchange of short lived force carrying particles. Of course, any such explanation begs questions as to what particle carries the force between the force carrying particle and its origin and destination. The problem is just nudged along a little. Cf. P. Watkins, *The Story of W and Z*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.17-20.

46 The reference to Hume here is not accidental and shall be expanded upon later; D. Hume, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, (Cambridge, Hackett, 1993), §III:I:I.

concluding, is, ultimately, only one problem. Both Socrates and Meno recognise this, if only implicitly, and Socrates' solution, though it seems to focus upon how we can judge answers, really seeks to respond to the underlying problem, common to both beginning and concluding, of how one can discern and judge the unknown.

Different kinds of questions.

So we may fairly say that whilst there aren't really any questions where we have absolutely no conception whatsoever about that which we ask about, the paradox remains puzzling. We may now quite safely reflect that with some kinds of questions we have a much firmer and more complete set of opinions about that which we are asking about than we do with others. 'Can virtue be taught?' and 'Where are my keys?' may be apt examples in illustration of this difference (and other differences). Not only will, in all likelihood, the opinions one has about whether or not virtue can be taught be far more complex and varied than those about where one's keys might be lurking, they will also be more vague. It may also be said that the processes of asking these two questions will similarly differ in extent and complexity. But what of such fatuous distinctions? Well, it is partly such fatuousness which is at issue. As with the previous suspicion that the paradox suggests too much unknowing (τὸ παράπαν), it may once again be suspected that certain kinds of questions simply do not demand the scrutiny which the paradox represents. This is, by and large, the position of this paper. The question is: is it how much one already knows at the outset of a question which determines whether or not the paradox is applicable, is it the degree of confidence one has in this knowledge, or is it some other factor such as the context in which a question is asked? It shall be suggested here that questions such as 'where are my keys?' may, in fact, have the paradox applied to them, but only sometimes, and only with great care.

It would certainly be wrong to suggest that, when enquiring as to the whereabouts of one's keys one is not asking a genuine question. It may be that I do know where my

keys are and that by asking myself the question I come to recall where they are. It may be that I really don't know where my keys are and I have to ask somebody that does in order to find them, or I may just need to have a good look. Whatever the imagined scenario, there is a search for something missing. Now, we cannot simply renege upon the previous conclusion that the availability and use of prior knowledge fails to dissolve the paradox, yet the very mediocrity of asking after the location of one's keys may cast it as a particular *kind* of question, one deserving of a certain treatment. It shall be argued that there are indeed questions of this sort which, *in the usual context of their being asked*, do not fall victim to Meno's paradox. This escape must, however, be contrasted with a linguistic dismissal of the paradox.

A proper return must now be made to Wittgenstein. There are some questions, we are to understand, which just don't make any sense.

> Only in some cases is it possible to make an investigation "is that really a hand?" (or "my hand"). For "I doubt whether that is really my (or a) hand" makes no sense without some more precise determination. One cannot tell from these words alone whether any doubt at all is meant – nor what kind of doubt.47

These empty questions are of no direct interest as subjects of the paradox, but it may be suggested that Meno's question, asked in certain circumstances, becomes just such a question. If Socrates were to ask after lost keys and Meno were to say: 'wait just a moment Socrates, if you don't know where they are how can you possibly start asking where they are and how will you judge whether any answer is correct?' we might be tempted to side with those who denounce him as a fool. Yet does Meno's question really equate purely to a declaration of doubt? Is it not fair to understand it, rather, as a request for clarification? Perhaps Meno is saying: 'There seems to be a gap between unknown and known, yet there appears also to be a vital relationship between them which is more than antithesis, how can this be?'. If Meno possessed no doubt as to whether Socrates could indeed ask sensibly after the whereabouts of his keys, if this question was indeed so utterly ingrained in the fabric of Socrates' daily existence, such that it (and others like it) constituted a fundamental

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47 L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §372.

prerequisite for asking the kinds of questions of which Meno's was one, would this preclude the possibility of Meno still finding it confusing? Perhaps not (though this may necessitate an overly liberal interpretation of Meno's question). It has already been said that this discussion does not, at any point, propose that questions cannot be asked, the δόχα of the paradox are quite μόνιμος (secure), but it is precisely this security which is the impetus behind a desire for reconciliation and understanding. To resolve this, the dialogue and Plato must once again be turned to.

As the dialogue draws towards its conclusion, Socrates explains to Meno the reason that Knowledge seems better than correct opinion and, by giving some further explanation of his theory of recollection, brings the paradox to the fore once again.

> It's of no great value to own one of Daedalus' productions that's loose, any more than a runaway slave – for it wont stay – but to own one that's tied down is worth a lot; they are very fine works. So what am I thinking about in saying this? True opinions. True opinions too are a fine thing and altogether good in their effects so long as they stay with one, but they won't willingly stay long and instead run away from a person's soul, so they're not worth much until one ties them down by reasoning out the explanation. And that is recollection, Meno my friend, as we agreed earlier. And when they've been tied down, then for one thing they become items of knowledge, and for another, permanent. And that's what makes knowledge more valuable than right opinion, and the way knowledge differs from right opinion is by being tied down.48

Recollection is, then, at least in some sense, a reasoning out of explanation. It is a tying down of true opinion. This may, however, depend upon a fairly strict understanding of δεῖν (to tie down/fasten) and μόνιμος (permanent/secure); and would we be inclined to agree anyway? If Plato were suggesting that unjustified, poorly considered opinions could never be steadfastly held we might simply say that he is wrong; plenty of severely under-scrutinised opinions are formed and maintained every day. Plato is suggesting that the paradox is not a problem as we have an innate ability to tie down, through recollection, any given possible belief, any possible question or answer, and that this process of reinforcement allows us to retain our beliefs; yet there are other ways to retain beliefs. Ignoring the contradictions inherent in a belief might be one such way, hearkening to the

[48] ΜΝΩ:§97e-98a

ramblings of false prophets may be another. Yet might we not interpret his words otherwise, or at least carry them further? Might he not be saying that a well thought out explanation grants an opinion *reliability, a solid foundation*? When a statue is carved without a solid foundation, not only may it be lost, but it also serves as a poor specimen of sculpture. Might he, in fact, be suggesting that we are endowed with faculties which allow us to distinguish and judge possibilities, such that we are able to recognise correctness? Ultimately, of course, a reading can only be taken so far, and it cannot be denied that this paper must depart from Plato to some extent. It is clear that for Plato (at least in this dialogue) knowledge requires some virtue beyond the intrinsic worth of understanding, a position which cannot be subscribed to here. As Aristotle says, in discussing past philosophers:

> they were pursuing science in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end...Evidently then we do not seek it for the sake of any other advantage; but as the man is free, we say, who exists for himself and not for another, so we pursue this as the only free science, for it alone exists for itself.49

It is probably fair to say that Plato expresses something of this notion of worth, perhaps in the sense of μόνιμος which tends towards 'reliability' (maybe even 'consistency'), and, if so, this is the sense which will be pursued here.

Another possible insight to be drawn here is the manner in which not only might we distinguish between doubt and confusion, certainty and understanding, but also how Wittgenstein's suggestion, and Socrates' explanation, can accommodate this. There are times, not only where there is no doubt, but also when there is *less wonder*, less of a desire to understand. What is meant here is that whilst one may be entirely confident in, say, our ability to ask certain everyday questions and have them answered, one may also possess no desire to understand them any further. So the question 'Where are my keys?', for being a genuine question, may, *in the context of discussing Meno's paradox*, be both sensible and engender *some degree* of curiosity. This breed of mundane question may, as far as it

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[49] Aristotle, 'Metaphysics', W. D. Ross (tr.), in J. Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol.2, (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1995), §982b:12-28. It will also be prudent to note Aristotle's insistence upon the freedom of enquiry.

presently assists in the understanding of questions in general, be allowed some room; yet it may not inspire the same degree of wonder as more abstract topics. Thus the 'fatuousness' is both contextual and inspirational. In the context of this discussion some questions, though relevant, are so only to a lesser extent for, ultimately, they are less curious.

It would, of course, be a false syllogism to now suggest that we *must* be certain that questions like 'what is virtue?' can be asked or answered satisfactorily. Just because one may doubt whether or not some questions can be asked or answered satisfactorily, and not others, does not mean that one cannot wonder about how questions are asked and answered generally. It may also have hitherto sounded as if this discussion sought to present curiosity and doubt as entirely unrelated; this need not be so, only that some curiosity does not necessitate certain doubts.[50] A lack of confidence in *how* does not equate to a lack of confidence in *that*, or *why*.

The purpose of this treatment of the distinction to be made between questions like 'where are my keys?' and 'can virtue be taught?' is, first, to answer the problem of the dialogue with something akin to a Wittgensteinnian response: in most circumstances in which the former question would be asked it would make little sense to ponder over the nature of how to ask the question. At the same time it has also been important to indicate that all genuine questions[51] do, by dint of being questions and *in the context of this discussion*, incite some curiosity as to the nature of their asking and answering. Secondly, it has been important to distinguish the kind of question which is of greatest interest in terms of Meno's question, namely those which, in the context of their being asked, we may indeed doubt whether or not they can in fact be satisfactorily concluded.

There are not, though, only two kinds of questions, the mundane and the abstract. A

[50] Indeed, as Aristotle recognises, something which one doubts will, generally, instil greater wonder than that which one does not (*Ibid*).

[51] This is to say, questions which are interrogative and not merely rhetorical.

distinction has been repeatedly mentioned, between those questions, the answer to which may be arrived at only through access to that which constitutes the question, and those which demand something new. In the former case it might be said that an understanding of the question itself grants an answer, or, indeed, that finding a proper formulation of a question *is the answer to that question*.[52] In the latter case there may be a demand for something which is, even if only in some small way, entirely original, and not synthetic in character.[53]

The square peg fits into the square hole; this might be viewed as an appropriate representation of some questions which use prior knowledge (evidence, clues) in order to lead to an answer. Previously this sort of analogue, as a response to the paradox, has been found wanting, as it has been viewed as leaving the relationship between known and unknown largely unexplored, beyond, that is, a strict and exhaustive relationship of description. This sort of response to the paradox must, however, be treated more thoroughly. There is a sense in which an image of a geometrical puzzle is entirely apt for describing certain kinds of questions, questions for which a clear understanding of the question itself constitutes an answer. There are questions for which an answer serves only as a re-articulation of what was already contained in the question. In this sense we might say (whilst not wishing to take the analogy too far) that the square shaped hole is just a negative expression of the peg, and that no inspiration beyond the question is required in order to describe the required peg.

Perhaps those questions which most obviously fit this model of geometrical puzzle are mathematical and logical ones: those which are expressed through formal language

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[52] As with other points of this essay, this distinction closely follows Nicholas' White's discussion of 'Inquiry' in the Meno. White uses the expressions 'proof' and 'bringing into one's "ken"' to designate what is referred to here in terms of 'equation' and 'apprehending/originality'. Whereas White is, as far as the former kind of enquiry is concerned, 'willing to leave such recalcitrant inquiries aside', this discussion (although, ostensibly, concentrating on the latter) chooses to call this distinction into some doubt and give some time to the struggle for clarity demanded by the former. N. P. White, 'Inquiry', p.157.

[53] The term 'synthetic' will be used in this way to describe conclusions arrived at and constituted by a rearrangement of prior knowledge. In this sense, 'synthetic' is being used in a sense somewhat at variance with its usual Kantian opposition to 'analytic'. A 'synthetic' question or answer is to be exemplified by an equation, and in this way might be called 'analytic'. I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, M. Weigelt (tr.), (London, Penguin, 2007), §B10-14.

and through *the equation*. When a problem is pared down to its fundamental constituents and expressed in the form of an equation there is an obvious sense in which it can be called tautological.[54] Now, it has already been mentioned that any attempt to address Meno's paradox through a description of questions and answers being an expression only of knowledge already possessed, encounters a fairly substantial difficulty in that it may suggest that no genuine discovery is ever possible. It is this difficulty which Plato's initial description of recollection encounters; the struggle to learn is reduced to a struggle to remember. Many have tackled the problems of deduction and induction, this essay shan't attempt to do so in any great detail, rather it shall, as Russell acknowledges in his criticism of the Greek overestimation of deduction, point to the manner in which deductive reasoning appears to offer no new knowledge.[55] This is not, however, the be-all and end-all of deduction; *there is still a struggle*. Of all the insights which Plato's theory of recollection offers as a response to Meno's paradox, apart from raising the paradox in the first place, the greatest is its highlighting of the struggle which occurs in enquiry, and how this struggle is akin to that of trying to remember.

There are certainly very formal equations for which an '=' serves as a sort of carnival mirror, reflecting, yet manipulating, only what is given, yet the distortion itself is not granted, it must be achieved; the slave boy, using what powers of reason he possesses, must deduce the answer to Socrates' questions.[56] It shan't be suggested that all questions, the conclusions of which follow necessarily from their premises, are reducible to formal equations, though there are some which certainly are. Rather, there are a range of questions for which an answer is arrived at, and constituted by, a proper understanding of the question itself.[57] Now, whilst it shall be conceded that many questions of this sort do arise out of confusion, which is to say: out of a lack of understanding of the terms involved, others arise from a genuine desire for alternative expression. By simplifying or

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54 Obviously there are other valid forms of deductive expression, such as the syllogism. Cf. B. Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, (London, Unwin, 1948), p.221.

55 *Ibid*, p.222.

56 ΜΝΩ:§82a-85b.

57 On the application of formal translation see: M. Losonsky, *Linguistic Turns in Modern Philosophy*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.203-5.

consolidating one's articulation, a fresh and fuller understanding may be achieved. This need not only be in mathematics, or logic, but also in cases of more natural expression, and what is key to this current discussion is that this process of clarifying the terms of a problem constitutes a critical and inseparable (though certainly not primary) element of all enquiry. Perhaps equally important is the recognition that even when an enquiry is identifiable as being born out of this need for re-articulation it may not (as Wittgenstein rightly recognises), and often will not, involve an understanding of this tautological nature prior to (or whilst) being pursued. It is not immediately obvious that the answer to one's question is to be arrived at through a proper understanding of the question itself. Of course, as has been said, some questions may begin with a full awareness of the tautological nature of the enquiry, many mathematical questions are of this type, but what is important for this discussion is the kind of struggle which is involved in achieving this clarity, and how far it may be distinguished from (and how it is related to) struggles of a kind which reach into the realms of the previously unknown.[58]

In one sense, the identification of an enquiry as being tautological in this way does address Meno's paradox, or, at least, it addresses the question as to how known and unknown are related: unknown is a reformulated expression of known. For the purposes of this discussion it will be prudent to discuss those enquiries in which clarity is wanting as distinct from those in which the equality of the conclusion is expected. This is not to say that there is never a struggle in the latter case, only that the struggle is always identifiable as being of its particular species: when I set out to solve an arithmetical equation I fully expect (indeed I demand) that the unknown quantity will equate to the known. There are cases, though, when one may not be aware of the lack of clarity in one's question, when, due to the overlooking or misconstrual of certain details, one strives hopelessly in the dark for some hitherto unknown factor only to find that effort should have been made in

[58] In Freidrich Waismann's notes from his conversations with Wittgenstein and Schlick, he notes that 'a mathematical equation is in a certain sense more like an empirical proposition than like a tautology'. This discussion can only agree in the '*certain sense*' that what is being demonstrated, or observed, are those principles and faculties by which equality is recognised at all. F. Waismann, *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, B. McGuinness and J. Schulte (trs.), (Oxford, Blackwell, 2003), pp106-7.

another direction, to clarify what one already possessed.[59]

It may be contended that there is no distinction to be made between these struggles for clarity, and that the same muscles are exercised in all such efforts of enquiry. This discussion shall contend that there *is* a psychological distinction to be made, and that a recognition of this distinction may lead to a more complete understanding of enquiry itself, as long, that is, as the inextricable, practical commingling of these phenomena is always kept in mind.

Meno wants to know how a target can be set for a question if the answer to that question is not already known. Socrates suggests that the answer is already known and that the struggle to reach this is simply a struggle of trying to remember. This is certainly a struggle with which we are familiar: when some thought, or piece of information is sitting just out of reach, when an idea is lost in such a jumbled and obscure fashion that only a rumour of its true identity can be detected.[60] It is as if a sentence stood before us, incomplete but for a single phrase. Indeed, it might be suggested that the struggle to remember is to be identified with an effort to reorder, to set one's thoughts in their proper place and to generally see things more clearly. As with an anagram, attention is demanded if that which we have previously learnt is to be reformed into something which yields the understanding which we have previously only detected vaguely.

Question by former help = The problems of enquiry

So, it might be said that there are questions which are both asked and answered using only prior knowledge. It would, of course, be clumsy to suggest that recalling forgotten information is identical to the kind of activity in which one is attempting to solve some mathematical equation, and perhaps even more foolish to suggest that it is exactly the same as when we have, for example, failed to understand our own question. If one were to ask something like: 'What is the meaning of life, the universe and everything?', one would

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[59] See: p.*** on 'The Ultimate Question'.

[60] On identity and equational validity see: J. LaLumia, *The Ways of Reason: A Critical Study of the Ideas of Emile Meyerson*, (London, Routledge, 2002), pp.51-2.

find that, in fact, by clarifying what one means by each term involved in asking the question, all sorts of incompatibilities and confusions are exposed. One would find that what one means by 'meaning' is not necessarily the sort of thing which one can attribute to 'life', and that what one means by 'everything' is perhaps not even remotely clear.[61] In this way, understanding the question is, after a fashion, understanding the answer. It would, then, be wrong to say that this process of clarification is exactly the same as the kind of clarification which goes on when one tries to remember someone's name, yet these questions all present a similar response to Meno's paradox which some other questions may not. This is to say that in clarifying one's question, in solving equations and in recalling forgotten information the relationship between what one knows and what one wishes (or should wish) to know is that of figuration and perspective, not of original content.

Of course, a question may set as its target original and hitherto unknown inspiration, and it may do so *mistakenly*. It is true that one may strive for the discovery of new knowledge when one should only be striving for greater clarity. It is also certainly the case that an order, an arrangement, could be and should be viewed as a kind of new thing, a synthesis still has certain originality. Yet the faculty which is exercised in achieving this synthesis and the materials necessary for its constitution, make enquiry of this sort psychologically, and philosophically distinct from enquiry which strives for what is referred to here as 'the unknown'. The paradox relates to this latter kind of question in a different way. It is also true, and must be reiterated, that enquiries which do strike into the unknown must also engage in processes of clarification, not only so that an enquiry may be identified as 'genuinely exploratory' but also because a clear view of the problem is necessary for any kind of learning. Perhaps it would be better to cast this distinction in terms of *poles of an interrogative continuum*, with questions demanding more obvious

[61] It may be interesting to note that it is through a lack of understanding the nature of their question that certain hyper-intelligent pan-dimensional beings come to be so vexed by an answer of '42'. It may also be interesting to note that the inability for this question to occupy the same universe as its answer, and that the two would mutually cancel one another out, may be likened to certain other lines of enquiry which also similarly seem to evade conclusion. D. Adams, *The Ultimate Hitchicker's Guide to the Galaxy*, (New York, NY, Del Rey, 2002).

syntheses being viewed as less original on one end of the scale, and those demanding inspiration of striking originality lying on the other end. This is certainly the sort of image which this discussion would seek to present as most useful. As shall be discussed below, there is perhaps no way of negotiating the problem of distinction and connection to complete satisfaction, but complete satisfaction may be a more hollow option than it at first seems. It would be wrong to suggest that an original thought could be completely unrelated to any prior thinking, this would just render it utterly meaningless, and its discovery an impossible achievement. Similarly it would be wrong to suggest that there is nothing new about a synthesis, or a revised perspective. It would, though, perhaps be fair to suggest that there is a scale of originality and that the paradox relates to one end in a way that differs from its relation to the other (though, in a similarly scaled fashion). The paradox is addressed by the way in which the unknown is related to the known and this is most evident when one considers occasions when this relationship seems to be almost that of simple reformulation or equation. At the same time, the paradox seems still to bite quite fiercely when questions on the other end of the scale are considered, and it is no longer so clear how the paradox might be addressed with these kinds of questions.

It would perhaps be prudent to reiterate, at this point, the manner in which Plato's identification of recollection as being the means by which questions are both asked and answered is hugely informative. As Julius Moravcsik notes, it is one's innate ability to deduce, which is, amongst other things, expressed in Plato's theory of recollection.[62] When one tries to remember something one must first have the sense that one has forgotten something. There is no denying that this is a peculiar and revealing phenomenon. To almost think something, to catch only the edge of an idea may be a familiar occurrence, but it is not an easy one to make sense of. It is this liminal psychological state, which hovers between dissonance and unified coherence, which is critical to an understanding of

[62] As Moravcsik also notes, depending on one's interpretation, this theory of innate abilities may sit more or less well with Hume or Kant. For as far as this discussion pursues this question, it is with Hume and his associations of ideas that inspiration and corroboration shall be sought. J. Moravcsik, 'Learning as Recollection', pp.117-20.

all enquiry.[63] Now, this essay shan't attempt to wield any designation of these psychological occurrences as constituting 'experiences' or not, though it is in this way that Wittgenstein treats them in manuscript 169.[64]

> Now what does it mean to say that in searching for a name or a word one feels, experiences, a gap, which can only be filled by a particular thing, etc. Well, these words could be the primitive expression in the place of the expression "the word is on the tip of my tongue"... "It's on the tip of my tongue" no more expresses an experience than "Now I've got it!" it's an expression which we use in certain situations and is surrounded by a certain behaviour, and also by several characteristic experiences.[65]

What is important here is that this psychological activity, of striving after the forgotten, is conducted through a pursuit of something which is vague and only barely grasped. Of course, the strength of the scent which one is following may differ widely, and, as shall be discussed below, it may be that, with certain questions, one scent will inevitably lead to another, but what is always important is *a sense of smell*. Plato's theory of recollection is not a loose metaphor, it is a direct and palpable analogy for all forms of enquiry. It is those faculties and sensitivities which allow for enquiry, and particularly abstract enquiry which shall be explored in the second section of this discussion.

Whilst it is not always helpful to distinguish between branches of learning it may be useful, at this juncture, to recognise explicitly the manner in which this current discussion boarders on what may be called psychology, and how far this distinction, and others, may be useful.[66] Some of the difficulty in placing questions asked out of forgetfulness, out of confusion, out of curiosity, or out of barely considered everyday asking, comes from the

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[63] It would be nice to expand upon this psychological liminality in the context of Diotima's 'betweeness', and of all the possibly fruitful tangents that this discussion may invite, this discussion of μεταξύ is perhaps the most inviting. Plato, *Symposium*, K. Dover (ed.), (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), §202e. Cf. E. Voegelin, *Anamnesis: On the Theory and History of Politics*, M. J. Hanak (tr.), (Columbia, MO, University of Missouri Press, 2002), p.329.

[64] L. Wittgenstein, *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology: The Inner and the Outer*, Vol.2, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994), pp.19-20.

[65] *Ibid*.

[66] On the limits psychology and its Aristotelian and modern incarnations see: L. S. Hearnshaw, *The Shaping of Modern Psychology: An Historical Introduction*, (London, Routledge, 1987), pp.26-9.

role that that which is 'non-conscious' may play in philosophy.[67] It might be suggested that, since one is neither conscious of that which one has forgotten nor that which one has never known, the processes of reaching these things, starting from that which one *is* conscious of, is *philosophically* the same. As far as this discussion is concerned, such a suggestion would take philosophy to be a far more distinct and far less subtle and sophisticated thing than it is taken to be here.

Some emphasis has been placed, so far, upon the importance of not taking questions and answers to be wholly discrete psychological (or linguistic) activities, capable of being isolated and expressed in perfectly comprehensive terms of analysis. A central contention of this paper is that any process of enquiry involves a complex interweave of expectations, prior understanding, knowledge, confidence, curiosity, and judgements of deficiency and discrepancy. Of course, it is only by isolating and treating as discrete these mental phenomena that we may discuss them and hope to better understand the subject more generally. At the same time it is necessary to acknowledge that this treatment can only hope to achieve the degree of accuracy that such a reduction can admit to. It is not necessary to cast the elements of enquiry in stark definition, this would only be counter productive to the task of furthering understanding.

To make one final exploration of the distinctions we may make between types of questions (and one final use of the keys), it may be recalled that the possibilities were raised of either actively seeking them, or of asking someone else.[68] Now, whilst this may seem a wholly recognisable division in terms of how *answers* are reached, it may seem inconsequential when dealing with the problem of how to begin asking a question. In this

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[67] For a 'psychological' exposition of the role of the unconscious mind in knowing and not knowing see: A. H. Modell, 'The Unconscious as a Knowledge Processing Centre', in J. Petrucelli (ed.), *Knowing, Not-Knowing & Sort-of-Knowing: Psychoanalysis and the Experience of Uncertainty*, (London, Karnac, 2010), pp.45-49. It should be noted that the place of the 'non-' or 'unconscious mind' in philosophy is something treated most eminently by Iris Murdoch, and it is through Murdoch's influence that this essay attempts to similarly place the importance of this psychological conundrum; see: I. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, (London, Routledge, 1971), p.46.

[68] This dichotomy does not exclude questions asked out of forgetfulness, so too might both introspection and advice be pursued, and this is related to the sense of recollection which speaks of a sensitivity to the faculties of interrogative thought.

way it may be said that it is entirely natural to suggest that a conclusion to a question could either be arrived at through careful and private thought or, as it were, through intercession; whilst, on the other hand, it may appear rather less usual for a question to *originate* from some external source. Aptly enough, in the *Meno* Socrates suggests that the reverse is the case. Socrates takes some care over insisting that he never truly gives any answers but instead just assists in reminding an individual of what they already know (and don't know).[69] In the light of Socrates' insistence, and constant prompting, the idea of a question coming from elsewhere may seem less objectionable. There are certainly times when someone will exclaim in a moment of realisation: 'Gosh! Yes, what a good question, I'd never thought about it like that before'. There may indeed be deficiencies and discrepancies in our knowledge and understanding which have hitherto gone unnoticed and which can be revealed by the recognition of the same in another. Indeed, as has been said before, this reflection may suggest a similarity between the events of forming questions and of judging answers. In fact, though the analogy of the keys suggests different kinds of questions (those asked of others and those pursued alone), no such suggestion is being entertained here. Rather the suggestion is being made that where there may seem to be different kinds of questions there are only different ways of pursuing questions, ways which are entirely compatible with one another.

Of course, one can ask oneself a question just as one would ask another. Dialectic philosophy is very much founded on this principle and one can, and frequently does, arrive at questions through this kind of reflection. The *activity* of an enquiry is to be identified with the manner in which one takes what one knows and scrutinises it so as to arrive at a question or answer; the *passivity* of an enquiry is to be identified with the manner in which one comports oneself so as to be more receptive to possible questions or answers.

Ultimately, the distinction which is being outlined here, in terms of passivity and activity, is aimed at the (for lack of better terms) psychological methods by which we use prior knowledge to guide our enquiries, and by which we conduct ourselves in a focused

[69] ΜΝΩ:§82a-85b.

and receptive manner so as to better apprehend that which we are not yet aware of. It is this discussion which will bring this current section to a close, and which will be fully expanded upon in the next.

Plutarch was in no doubt as to the power and importance of sudden inspiration:

> ...at the bath, as the story goes, when he discovered from the overflow how to measure the crown, as if possessed or inspired, he leapt out shouting 'I have it' and went off saying this over and over. But no glutton have we ever heard that he shouted with similar rapture 'I ate it,' and of no gallant that he shouted 'I kissed her,'...[70]

Though we may take issue with Plutarch's central contention that intellectual realisation is the most noteworthy species of realisation, we can appreciate the force of Archimedes' rapture, and the kind of event of which it is a type. We may begin by reflecting that Archimedes is, it seems, dealing largely in questions which could be expressed through equations, those which have been identified as lying on the less original end of the interrogative scale.[71] Yet, given his sudden and enthralling realisation, would we be inclined to revise this apparent designation of his enquiries as being of an equational and unoriginal nature? It would certainly seem to suggest that the passive reception of inspiration is not a method restricted to, or even predominantly prevalent in cases of enquiry lying on the original end of the scale. To clarify this distinction between passive and active means of apprehending the unknown, and discern its viability and possible significance, more must certainly be said. Perhaps, for the time being, it would suffice to say that, in some senses, what is being said here is that *a clear mind is not the same as an inspired mind*. This is to say that an individual who is, whether temporarily or otherwise, good at thinking clearly is not necessarily someone who is good at thinking originally.

'Οἷον ἔκ τινος κατοχῆς ἢ ἐπιπνοίας' Plutarch says: 'as one who was possessed or inspired'. We can certainly recognise this revelatory character of enquiry and we may

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[70] Plutarch, *Moralia,* B. Einarson and P. H. De Lacy (trs.), (London, Heinemann, 1967), §1094.

[71] Mary Jaeger gives an excellent account of the various classical stories of Archimedes' realisation in: M. Jaeger, *Archimedes and the Roman Imagination*, (Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Press, 2008), pp.17-31

reflect that it is this of which Meno speaks when he talks of 'happening upon' an answer.[72] 'ἐντυγχάνω' speaks of the same passivity of the enquirer, the same kind of *subjection* which has been discussed here in terms of a receptivity. What must be queried is the relationship that this passivity bares to the kinds of activities in which we may engage in judging that which we do know and discerning how far towards the conclusion of an enquiry such judgements may take us. It is, perhaps, safe to say that this distinction between passivity and activity of enquiry cannot map neatly upon any distinction that has been made so far between different kinds of questions. It may be fair, indeed, to assign this topic to a discussion of the methods of enquiry, and how it is that, having begun we might continue, and so it shall.

It may be wise, prior to moving on to the next section of this discussion, to offer some discussion of epistemological terminology. Hitherto, the terms 'knowledge' and 'understanding' have been used somewhat interchangeably, as have the terms 'discrepancy' and 'deficiency' and very little has been said about 'beliefs' as such. It may seem that out of a desire to avoid the complications of verificationism (et al.), ways of asking have been focused on to the unfortunate and mistaken exclusion of ways of believing.[73] This exclusion needn't be detrimental, for whilst ways of believing do play an important role in the way in which we ask and answer questions, they also relate closely to the distinctions already noted. It will, however, be important to address this relation prior to a full discussion of the methods and psychology of enquiry.

Whilst one may be said not to *know* another person's name it would be odd, we may say wrong, to express this lack of knowledge in terms of *understanding*. In this sense it could be said that, when speaking of knowledge, there is something more definite lacking, something is missing and a question may be asked in order gain (or retrieve) this information. The use of this term here does not (once again) map cleanly onto any distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description, nor does

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[72] MNΩ:§80d.

[73] Cf. W. P. Alston, *A Realist Conception of Truth*, (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1991), pp.103-4.

it follow exactly a distinction between propositional and objectual beliefs.[74] The distinction is, rather, between something discreet and something more general. It is, of course, entirely possible to speak of *understanding that*, as well as *understanding of* and *understanding how*, and it is equally possible to imagine knowledge being spoken of interchangeably in all of these cases. Yet there are senses in which knowledge is discreet where understanding is broad, where knowledge speaks of information within a defined system and understanding speaks of a more general coherence. Whilst knowledge is retention, understanding is comprehension. It is in the context of these senses of knowledge and understanding that 'deficiency' and 'discrepancy' may, to some extent, also be understood.

It may, of course, be suggested that, whilst it would certainly be peculiar to describe a lack of knowledge as being judged to be a discrepancy, it may be entirely natural to describe a failure to understand as being based upon both discrepancy and deficiency. In this sense we might take Frege's discontent with the lack of rigour and justification he found behind arithmetic, and describe this as a deficiency. In response to this suggestion it must be said that any such judgement must be based upon a certain expectation: that all bodies of knowledge must conform to the same standards of rational justification and logical processes. This kind of expectation is, in turn, part of a wider vision of how things work. So we could view this sensitivity to deficiency as, in reality, a sensitivity to discrepancy.

It may, of course, be suggested that understanding is best spoken of in cases where clarity is the aim of enquiry. Perhaps this broader coherence is, in fact, merely a question of bringing one's view of things into sharper focus. Likewise, it might be imagined that when speaking of 'new knowledge' and 'original thought', '*knowledge*' in the discrete sense which has been suggested, is exactly what is being spoken of.[75] These assignations would

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[74] Cf. R. Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, (Oxford, Routledge, 2011), p.21.

[75] The issue of new knowledge, and the apparent difficulty for deductive reasoning in resulting in such a thing, has certainly been discussed at length elsewhere. Perhaps the most notable (or obvious) commentator is John Stuart Mill in his discussion of 'immediate inferences': J. S. Mill, *A System of Logic:*

succumb, though, to a false sense of dichotomy and exclusion. Of course, clarity may indeed speak of a broader cohesion, a 'making sense', or 'understanding', rather than of discrete possibilities or 'knowledge', and we can well imagine original ideas springing up with little or no understanding of how to clearly articulate them, or how they relate to other ideas. This said, it cannot be denied that all of what has been suggested so far constitutes, in itself, a possibility, and *it has been articulated*, and cannot be devoid of some claim of, and desire for, comprehension (not to mention a greater or lesser degree of clarity).

One could, of course, be quite a clear thinker and still find oneself without any breadth of thought. One might, for example, be quite capable of discerning faults in logical reasoning and still lack any significant conception of how these logical fallacies relate to, say, metaphysical speculation; or indeed any notable ability to think in oblique and unexpected ways. Understanding, as it is meant here, is not comfortably applied to this kind of clear thinking. It may be tempting to suggest that 'understanding' is constituted by, on the one hand a clear view of things, and on the other a breadth of inspiration (or, we might say, an awareness of a range of possibilities). Yet this possibility, and others aforementioned, retain an uneasy air of being arbitrary, one which does not square with any sense of 'understanding'. It may, in light of this, be fair to look to some sort of third way of thinking, some basis upon which clarity and inspiration are founded, some kind of judgement, or insight which is indeed concerned with a breed of verification.

How to Continue?

> It is evident that there is a principle of connexion between the different thoughts or ideas of the mind, and that, in their appearance to the memory or imagination, they introduce each other with a certain degree of method and regularity. In our more serious thinking or discourse, this is so observable, that any particular thought,

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Ratiocinative and Inductive, (Teddington, Echo, 2009), p.131. Cf. G. Scarre, *Logic and Reality in the Philosophy of John Stuart Mill*, (Dortrecht, Kluwer, 1989), pp.15-32.

> which breaks in upon the regular tract or chain of ideas, is immediately remarked and rejected. And even in our wildest and most wandering reveries, nay in our very dreams, we shall find, if we reflect, that the imagination ran not altogether at adventures, but that there was still a connexion upheld among the different ideas, which succeeded each other. Were the loosest and freest conversation to be transcribed, there would immediately be observed something, which connected it in all its transitions.
>
> – David Hume, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, §III:I:I[76]

So this section follows the last, and each paragraph does likewise. And if any sentence should err in speaking of things foreign to the subject at hand, then we would brand it *irrelevant*. Indeed, 'In our more serious thinking', question and answer are rarely bipartite, one question will lead to another, and another, and enquiry becomes an extended thing. Each subsequent question must be judged in relation, not only to that which preceded it, but also in relation to that towards which it is aimed. So this faculty of judgement, of discerning the 'connexion' between ideas, must serve as a compass to quite lengthy journeys, journeys on which a shifting horizon obscures any final destination.

And what ether draws this needle? What magnetic whisper breaths so thin through the landmarks of our journey's past, and binds so vaguely the hidden purpose of our questions?

Doubtless Hume is right, there is indeed a coherence through which our thought and language adhere, a rule, we may say, which, at any given time, shapes and bounds these curious games. Of course the introduction of boundaries, and rules as to what does and does not count as valid in a process of enquiry, could bring this current discussion back to the paradox which it itself faces. It may even be suggested that the paradox of the paper is truly impenetrable, that to reflect upon reflection is a doomed task, fated to stare into an empty mirror.[77] Yet, as has been said, such a conclusion would be contradictory and counter intuitive (not to mention contrary to this paper's axiom of measure), and such

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[76] D. Hume, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

[77] The paradox of Wittgenstein's reflections, to reflect upon the nature of the rule governed system of meaning is itself a senseless reflection; L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, §.6.54.

things sit poorly. Perhaps it would be fair to suspect that understanding, as is currently sought, comes in gentle degrees, and to understand the fairness of this suspicion is, although a circular task, one which carries with it its own increments of success.

The bulk of this section shall be concerned with an exposition of relevance and to begin it may be prudent to offer some explanation as to how relevance is itself relevant to a discussion of Meno's paradox. In the most basic sense, Meno's question targets the difficulty of judging something of which one has no knowledge. This difficulty is imagined as arising as one attempts to formulate questions and answers. If it were to be conceded that, more often than not, an enquiry will consist of various questions and answers (the answers themselves being, or leading to further questions) then each step of this process of enquiry will be subject to Meno's paradox. When one introduces a line of thought to an enquiry, perhaps the subject of relevance for instance, a judgement must be made as to whether this thinking fits with the thoughts which precede it and those towards which it proceeds. Hence the current explanation. The question is asked: 'what has that got to do with anything?', but the question must here be asked: 'what is it for anything to have anything to do with anything?'

Sidestepping this sort of expansive silliness a little, it may be forgiveable to reflect upon, not what is meant by 'relevance' as such, but rather, supposing something of Hume's insight to be correct, the manner in which relevance can seemingly be both entire and indirect.

In the previous section the manner in which questions and answers may present themselves 'spontaneously' was put forward. It was suggested that, either through inspiration, or through a shift in perspective or focus, an answer, or (all importantly) a question as an answer, presents itself. We might imagine that, in this vein, a step in an enquiry may at first appear to be quite oblique, whereas, upon later reflection, the step (the thought/possibility/question/answer) was utterly essential in reaching whatever stage has granted this hindsight possible.[78] So, relevance need not be immediately apparent, as

[78] It is important to recognise here the manner in which the process of enquiry is an extended succession of question and answer. In this process, questions (more often than not) will serve as answers, though here

Hume may seem to suggest, but might be less obvious. Yet Hume also seems to imbue these 'thoughts or ideas of the mind' with some degree of, we may not say autonomy, but 'activity'; for 'they *introduce each other* with a certain degree of method and regularity' 'to the memory or the imagination'.[79]

Of course there are certainly authors who, in encountering the aporia of reflection upon reflection, have presented their considerations with rather less perspicuity than Hume. When the target of an enquiry is so exceedingly obscure, and straightforward language seems only to dash itself upon the rocks of its own boundaries, many would seemingly 'resort' to poetry and Heraclitean aphorisms in a hope of shedding some light. Indeed, it would certainly seem that an image, metaphor, or analogy which only appears to be indirectly related to that which it seeks to illuminate by imitation, can occasionally offer greater insight than more direct description and analysis. Yet to succumb wholly to the suggestion that subjects such as this, which do not admit *immediately* any promise of success, should be talked *around* and never directly approached, would seem a fuddled resignation. Whilst it may be conceded that light can indeed be shed upon a subject by means other than those which immediately betray direction, it would not do to enter into any 'wandering reveries'. It may even be said that subjects which are more complex benefit from expositions which are especially perspicuous. This is all to say that, in speaking of relevance, of how much things have to do with one another, it will be important not to loose sight of those characteristics of enquiry which have already been outlined.

Rules of expression may, of course, be one means by which that which is already possessed may guide towards that which is not. It may, for example, be suggested that Wittgenstein's language games account for this direction in terms of rules. So, by this

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we may wish to begin referring to *responses* rather than answers, for objections, retorts, reposts, confirmations and supporting statements may all also be offered in the place of answers.

[79] D. Hume, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, §III:I:I. It may be recognised, at this point, that written discussion strikes a different figure in the world of enquiry from lived discourse. A written discussion has the great advantage of walking hand in hand with both hindsight and foresight and when these two sons of Ἰαπετός preside together, the paradox is in danger (see below the discussion of asking a question already knowing the answer: p.46).

'theory',[80] one's association of ideas is entirely context dependant and any given idea will lead to another only by dint of the rules under which the current line of thought is conducted. Of course, as has already been said, Wittgenstein was not unaware of the paradox that this suggestion would create, for it is only by dint of the rules themselves that the role of rules may be arrived at. This is all to say that the rules of, for example, logic and valid inference, are those by which the significance of these rules are justified, and something which is self-justified may be said to fail to play by the rules.[81] This is not to introduce an objection to the suggestion that ideas and languages are bound by certain strictures, only that it is the principle of these strictures which is of interest. To suggest that, rather than one's current beliefs guiding one's enquiry, it is some sense of the rules to which these beliefs must conform which guides, would seem to make no advance. It might simply be said that the rules are just another thing which one already knows, for them to guide towards that which is unknown, and to dictate that which is fitting and that which is not, would just be another case of prior knowledge describing the unknown. Perhaps the important question is as to whether (or how far) the basis of the strictures of valid expression can be meaningfully enquired after.[82]

Discovery, Similarity and Curiosity.

As has already been suggested one might be tempted to reduce some of this debate

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[80] This is only half heartedly tongue-in-cheek.

[81] This is certainly a recurrent issue throughout this discussion and one which possesses a wealth of commentary. As Quine himself notes, Lewis Carroll is among the most notable commentators on the justification of logical inference, and the tortoise's refusal to submit to Achilles' logic taking him 'by the throat' is as fine an exposition as might be noted. W. V. Quine, 'Truth by Convention', in *The ways of Paradox*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1976), p.105 and L. Carroll, 'What the Tortoise Said to Achilles', in *The Complete Illustrated Lewis Carroll*, (Ware, Wordsworth Editions, 1998), p.1107. It should also be noted that the validity of inference did not emerge from antiquity solely in the unscathed form of Aristotle's syllogism, and, as Michael Frede notes, the Stoic contribution is particularly noteworthy: M. Frede, *Essays in Ancient Philosophy*, (Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p.115.

[82] It must, of course, be recognised that Wittgenstein would describe the suggestion that these rules are 'known' as *senseless*. This is true, but is, in a sense, just a reiteration of the paradox of the rules justifying the rules (the rules cannot be meaningfully considered, only recognised).

so far to a conflict between a sense of determinism which has been associated with answering questions using prior knowledge, and an intuitive demand for an explanation of some method by which one may freely discover those possibilities and thoughts which have not yet been apprehended. It may be useful to return to expand more fully upon this 'intuitive demand' and what it might be demanding.

One problem here, is that it is not at all clear what exactly *'free discovery*' would be. In this way we might liken this difficulty (with some trepidation perhaps) to more traditional problems of psychological freedom. In one classic rendition of the problem of free will we have, on the one hand, an apparent ability to freely choose, and on the other, the conviction that these choices will be based upon reasons. Now, suppose that we have someone who is very good at discerning good reasons, and who subsequently makes good choices; in what sense is this person's choice free? Does it make any sense to suggest that this person *could* have chosen otherwise? Can we imagine them doing so? In asking them why they chose poorly given their awareness of the reasons to do otherwise, can we imagine them explaining that they simply *chose freely*?[83] This doesn't seem at all right, and may suggest that the problem arises out of an outright misconstrual of 'freedom' from the very start.

We can see, then, that one might carry this accusation of misconstrual into an understanding of 'true discovery'. It would, however, certainly seem counter intuitive to suggest that we do not, in fact, *really* discover things (this is part of the reason why we cannot accept Plato's theory of recollection at face value); yet, at the same time, it is not altogether clear what is meant by this 'discovery'. Perhaps, though, given the strength of our intuitive understanding of discovery through enquiry, this confusion over its viability as a concept is simply disingenuous. As has been attempted in the previous section, analogy might serve to some extent in portraying the nature of interrogative discovery. An errant knight, for example, can only begin to guess at the contents of a foreboding forest, at what treasures may lie hidden within; and by treading, however gingerly, into the

[83] Cf. G. S. Stent, *Paradoxes of Free Will*, Vol.92:6, (Philadelphia, PA, American Philosophical Society, 2002), pp.160-2.

gloom, the wanderer will be confronted with discoveries. Their feet (and guesses) can take them only so far, of course, and it is the discovery itself which constitutes the final leap. There may be no conspicuous hole in this depiction of discovery, yet such analogies, as has been said, seem to fail in their account of what relates one discovery to another. Perhaps this is simply another sense (another use in another context) of 'discovery' and cannot be carried over. Yet there is a sense, is there not, of an internal wilderness; of a darkness from which the language of 'illumination' gains its force?

One might be concerned, at this point, that the freedom that is sought in the originality of thought, that which is intuitively demanded here, is not very closely related to freedoms of choice at all. The freedom of discovery is a freedom from the confines of prior knowledge. This is to say that one is free to receive new thoughts and new ideas, and is *not* to say that one is free to determine the validity or plausibility of these new ideas. To discuss this freedom of judgement is perhaps important, and difficult, but does this need to impact particularly upon our discussion of the possibility of apprehending ideas and thoughts beyond the boundaries of previous thinking? It is in this matter that Hume's principle of contiguity may shed some more light, for each step in the forest follows the last and each tree spreads its branches to touch the next. So too might we say that the peripheries of ideas overlap. It might be suggested that the initial extremity of each move in our processes of enquiry is bounded by a previous thought, and yet brings with it a constant horizon of revelation. Of course, this would seem to suggest some atomic model of thought, with thinking occurring in discrete (albeit fuzzy) packages arranged in a linear progressive fashion, and any such suggestion must be treated with great caution. This is not to mention various other problems which this linear model introduces, problems in which Meno meets Zeno, in which a present thought must be distinguished from thoughts of the past and future, and in which all these issues of continuity, separation, and simultaneity coalesce into an unfathomable knot of aporia and jumbled headaches. Of course, this species of headache is not altogether one to be avoided, and this group of difficulties are a recurrent and vital part of this discussion. Perhaps, though, it might be fair to acknowledge that freedom of judgement cannot be marginalised as related only to

some 'eventual' conclusion, but is, rather, related to a judgement of direction, and to how each step in an enquiry constitutes its own little conclusion, and must be judged accordingly.

Now, it is all well and good to speak of 'judgement', yet judgement can be many things, and it may be suspected that the distinctions and features of enquiry which have been outlined so far, between known and unknown, between synthesis and originality, are veering towards an attempt to reinvent the wheel. Deductive validity speaks of consistency within specified parameters, inductive validity speaks of probability, plausibility, or 'truth'.[84] A sigh of disappointment may suddenly seem appropriate at the introduction of 'truth', but it must be remembered that this is not a discussion of whether or not such a judgement would (or rather *could*) be accurate, but rather of the place of this judgement in the process of enquiry. It is, of course, the curiosities of induction which lead Hume to his exploration of the principles upon which arguments of this type are based, and to describe the manner in which one idea seems to be related to another. The distinction being described here, though, between synthetic and original thought, cannot be mapped so clearly onto a distinction between deductive and inductive reasoning. As has already been said, it may be most helpful to think of synthesis and originality as lying at the extremes of a continuum, and the apprehension and pursuit of original thoughts, which, to a greater or lesser extent, suffuse this continuum, is certainly not to be identified precisely with inductive inference. The apprehension of possibilities precedes the application and judgement of possibilities by which inference occurs, yet this process of pursuit and apprehension is not divorced from judgement, and here there is a distinct parallel with processes of inference.

The important thing to recognise here is that, in the ways in which certain questions may be asked and answered through an identification of consistency, it is possible to address Meno's paradox by describing the manner in which a given system, or state of

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[84] Cf. G. Priest, *Doubt Truth to be a Liar*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), p.189, in which Priest gives some account of the relationship between these two 'validities'.

prior knowledge is judged to be internally consistent, or consistent with a projected or possible reformulation. But this treatment of the paradox goes only as far as when enquiries do approach this model of synthesis or clarification, as far as the principle of original discovery is concerned, the character of our judgements must be explored further. It is through an exploration of this central principle of judgement that this current discussion approaches Plato's account of recollection, and the innate ability we possess by which we can make sense of problems, directions and solutions.

It may, of course, be argued that one's sensitivity to the appropriateness of a comment is contiguous with and even identical to one's sensitivity to plausibility. Indeed, it would at least seem that consistency is a necessary precondition of likelihood, that some coherence is necessary for any meaning to be conveyed and that this meaningful structure is a prerequisite for any kind of judgement of veracity. This is not to say, of course, that, on the one hand inconsistency is immediately apparent, and that, on the other hand, likelihood is elusive. Wittgenstein is certainly very clear that both senseless and nonsensical comments can masquerade as meaningful, and that, very often, careful consideration is necessary to discern whether or not some utterance is, in fact, meaningful[85] He is right. It is far less likely, however, for such a masquerade to occur in cases where prior understanding is rich and definite, and similarly unlikely for one to be at a loss when it comes to plausibility in such cases. In this sense, bellmen and boots may seem more *plausible* and *meaningful* subjects of discussion here than they would, for example, in response to a question regarding the merits (or otherwise) of quantitative easing.

We may, though, wish to ask whether this is *only* indicative of the fact that meaningfulness and cohesion are necessary preconditions of plausibility, or does it suggest that the two are coterminous? It would perhaps be impossible to distinguish the two if one were to accept the boundaries which the linguistic philosophers would have set for meaningful discourse. It would seem that, if aesthetics, metaphysics and ethics were

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[85] Cf. C. Diamond, 'What Nonsense Might Be', in S. Shanker (ed.), *Ludwig Wittgenstein: From Philosophical Investigations to On Certainty*, (Oxford, Routledge, 2000), pp.134-5.

excluded then one could indeed feasibly reduce truth judgements to one's experience of *how* language is used, one's experience of *how* things tend to happen, and the kinds of answer which are generally acceptable. It is in this sense that judgements might be said to be based upon *trends*. It is hard to see how one would set about making any distinction between truth judgements and judgements of what is 'fitting' in terms of recognised trends, if these other subjects are excluded from meaningful discourse. It is not possible to fully engage in a debate here as to whether, or how, this limitation of the remit of philosophy is sound (or, rather, 'right'); suffice to say, that it would seem fair to suggest that questions are indeed meaningfully asked about these forsaken subjects.[86] Whether or not (meaningful) comprehensive conclusions are reached is perhaps another matter, yet further questions are certainly reached, questions which seem both pressing and wholly related to these subjects.[87]

Now, it has been noted that Hume observes that ideas are associated with one another, and we may be inclined to agree with him that this observation will not incite much in the way of doubt;[88] what has not been discussed properly, is how Hume also observes that these ideas may be associated in various ways.

> Though it be too obvious to escape observation, that different ideas are connected together; I do not find, that any philosopher has attempted to enumerate or class all the principles of association; a subject, however, that seems worthy of curiosity. To me, there appear to be only three principles of connexion among ideas, namely, *Resemblance*, *Contiguity* in time or place, and *Cause and Effect*.[89]

It is the final association which Hume explores most fully. The reason that this is raised again, is not, as it may seem, to simply present this discussion as a clumsy recapitulation

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[86] Cf. M. Meyer, *Questions and Questioning*, (Berlin, de Gruyter, 1988), pp.19-20. Meyer also gives an account of the different kinds of questions which we may encounter (or, rather, enact), and offers a more general discussion of the role of questioning in life, discourse and philosophy.

[87] Of course, the counter claim might follow that despite these questions *seeming* pressing, they are, in fact, vacuous. Since this statement would itself be 'senseless', however, and unverifiable, there seems to be no debate here beyond assertion/counter assertion. This is not the position of this paper, only that, if one were engaging with someone who held their own argument to be groundless one would be left with few options.

[88] D. Hume, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, §III:III

[89] *Ibid*, §III:II (original emphasis).

of Hume's insights, but rather, to draw attention to the importance of the role of other principles of association.[90]

It would certainly seem that, as far as any trend can be the ground to which a principle of association is anchored, this trend must appeal to the principle of resemblance. This is to say that, if one were to recognise a trend, one would, seemingly, be observing the similarity between one thing and another (albeit differentiated, chiefly, by time). Now, there are certainly social trends, patterns of behaviour, which contribute to (if not wholly form) our understanding of what counts as valid language use, what kind of responses are and are not meaningful in discourse. Yet one would be right to object that one does not consciously recall the manner in which people have and have not behaved in certain contexts of discussion in order to conduct oneself in a meaningful fashion. One does not use the word 'enquiry' by calling to mind how one has used it previously, and how it has been used by others previously, and then by judging how similar or not the situation is in which one currently finds oneself. No. Yet it may be permissible to allow for a more liberal sense of recollection here; indeed, one in which Plato's use may find its home once again. There is certainly a sense in which describing the recognition of a trend as a recollection of similarity is tautological, and one might allow for 'sensitivity' and 'passivity' to assist in our understanding of this faculty of judgement here. To see that something is similar we need not actively reflect upon its appearance; and only when things are particularly tricky would we ever need to scour our memories for prior experience.[91]

It is perhaps here that an acknowledgement of the 'psychological' complexity of this matter, and its refusal to admit to any great distinction and reduction, may be most helpful. There is certainly a sense in which all trends, indeed all meaning and reference,

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[90] Indeed Hume does discuss at some length the manner in which ideas draw one another in by some form of cognitive magnetism, and he views the issue of how one thought leads to another as being a central subject of philosophy. The importance of his *Essay* cannot be overestimated in this discussion of Meno's paradox, but rather than concentrating on the manner in which trends are believed in and 'matters of fact' associated, this discussion seeks to discuss the nature of these associations as such.

[91] Heidegger does, of course, give an account of the transparency of activities prior to their going wrong, Cf. H. L. Dreyfus, 'Responses', in M. Wrathall and J. Malpas (eds.), *Heidegger, Autheticity and Modernity: Essays in Honour of Hubert L. Dreyfus*, Vol.1, (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2000), pp.338-9.

are dependent upon a constant and (more often than not) passive ability to recognise similarity and distinction. It may be far more fruitful to think of this ability, not as a cognitive process, but rather as a persistent awareness. All that is required here, however, is the acknowledgement that judgements of similarity may be said to be fundamental to the formation of our expectations as they are exercised in enquiry (and more so than impressions of trends).

Perhaps allegory is the best illustration of the importance of similarity in enquiry. When it is said that searching for whether virtue can be taught is somewhat like searching for one's keys, it is hoped that light will be shed upon the former through a consideration of the latter. But analogies can be taken too far. It is a sensitivity to *how alike things are* which enables an illumination of the subject. One might object to an analogy: one might describe it as irrelevant, if one deemed the similarity insufficient. Yet could one really claim that the irrelevance here of, say, Billiard-Makers, is due to some recognition of dissimilarity? Even if one were to claim the principle of resemblance as grounding any principle of trends or customs, it would still seem ill to describe this kind of surrealist dissonance as being founded *entirely* on such a principle. Nor is it made clear how such a mechanism would relate to originality in discovery. One might, of course, suggest that a sense of similarity would allow for an *imagination* of some sort. One might take one's prior knowledge and *imagine something like that* which one has already apprehended. This is, is it not, the kind of activity which has been described so many times through analogies of puzzles and missing shapes? Through one's ability to appreciate similarity one is able to project certain possible forms which are both alike and different from that which served as the point of projection. Is this sufficient? Can we say that there are ways in which that which we know already can tell us what to ask, and when we have an answer, and that these ways are based upon a sensitivity to cohesion and to similarity? Is it enough to say that, on the one hand we can tell when something fits, and on the other we are able to imagine things which are (to a greater or lesser extent) different from that which we are already aware of? Yes and no. Whilst it can (and should) be conceded that questions are formed and asked through the pursuit of objects which are 'a bit like this' or 'something

like that', this principle of judgement and imagination would be meaningless if viewed in isolation from judgements as to cohesion and other cognate judgements. And a judgement is not the same thing as a 'projection'; it is one thing to say that we can tell how alike two things are, it is quite another to say that, given one idea we are able, *somehow*, to cook up a new related yet original idea. Indeed, this is, in many ways, simply to restate the problem which Meno has raised. Of course, this might underplay the importance of what might otherwise seem a somewhat trite description of clarity and imagination. These principles of enquiry do give some colour and structure to the means by which we ask questions. Yet what has been described fails to dissolve the paradox; it is as if we have an understanding of taste and texture, and have failed to give any account of a sense of smell (not to mention hunger).

Perhaps it would be prudent to recognise that other capacities inform one another. If one were searching in a bag of rubble for the missing shard of an old vase, one would *feel* for the shape one had *seen*. The vase would be worn by time and the elements, and so too, very likely, would be its missing piece, so the hole to be filled would be rounded and inexact. And yet, given some time, and the luck of chancing upon the shard amidst all the others, what the eyes have seen and described to the hands, the hands may find. When, finally, the shard is set in place the pattern of the vase is complete, and a hitherto incomplete scene emerges. Perhaps, though, this takes the analogy too far. It has already been said that the kind of question in which this discussion is chiefly interested is that kind which does not admit of any promise of success, and we can hardly imagine a vase which was designed to possess a gaping hole in its side. Likewise, this analogy may only hold in cases where an enquiry is solely and knowingly dealing with prior knowledge.[92]

[92] Incidentally (which is to say: with a little less relevance), this analogy is such that one might make an argument for its being carried further. There is a manner in which a sceptical approach to any given subject could indeed view *a vase* as a wholly inappropriate image here, given the tendency for vases to express a design and purpose (whether aesthetic or functional). It would follow that subjects which do not admit of decisive conclusions or a universal coherence, fail to do so for the reason that these subjects are not *vase-like;* there is no reason to expect such coherence: the holes are just part of the overall chaos. The implication here being that, in order for coherence to make sense, the teleological aspect of this

And yet, as has been said, measure may offer some further resolution. *Similarity* goes only so far, *understanding* need not be complete, and the distinction between known and unknown, knowledge and understanding, problem solving and problem finding, may be less decisive than Meno's paradox seems, at first, to suggest.

There is a touch of irony about this 'measure'; a rumour, perhaps, of yet another aporia. After all, when one is seeking to distinguish judgements of distinction, say, from an awareness of cohesion, one must, once again, engage the faculty under scrutiny in order to do so: one must judge how distinct judgements of distinction are. If one were to distinguish a median point, a position of reasonable moderation, some judgement would still be being made, some unjustified (and unjustifiable) justification.[93] There is, however, in this paradox of judgement, another possibility for further understanding the nature of Meno's paradox. If Meno's problem does indeed highlight a genuine conflict between justification and the unknown, perhaps there is something to be said for a judgement which does not demand known criteria. Perhaps there is a way of enquiring passively which, although it does not sit *beyond* known frames of reference, can nevertheless sit *apart* from such criteria (that is to say, in ignorance of them). This subject shall be expanded upon in the final section, suffice to say that it may be fair to suggest that there is an aspect to enquiry, especially abstract enquiry, which does indeed simply sit and smell the air.

There is perhaps one more critical way in which the steps of an inquiry may be deemed relevant or irrelevant which has not yet been discussed fully, and that is in terms of curiosity.

Some attention has been given to curiosity in the context of different kinds of questions, particularly those mundane kinds of questions which might otherwise seem to

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analogy must also be relevant.

93 Whilst Carroll and Mill have both been noted for their commentaries on the problems of deductive inference (and Quine too), the contributions Michael Dummett should also be mentioned, especially in relation to Carroll and Mill. Pascal Engel does so in: P. Engel, 'Dummett, Achilles and the Tortoise', in R. E. Auxier and L. E. Hahn (eds.), *The Philosophy of Michael Dummett*, (Peru, IL, Open Court, 2007) pp.725-46, in which he discusses Carroll awareness of Mill's position and Dummett's treatment of this. This is also treated in G. Scarre, *Logic and Reality in the Philosophy of John Stuart Mill*, pp.22-3.

completely escape the problems of Meno's paradox. It has been suggested that all questions, by dint of being questions, may be subject to Meno's curiosity, for it has also been suggested that curiosity and doubt, though related, are not necessarily coterminous. 'How can this work?' does not necessarily equate to 'Does this work?'. It has also been said, though, that in situations where there is doubt, curiosity may be all the more virulent.

Now, it could certainly be raised, at this point, that the importance of this curiousness in addressing Meno's paradox is not altogether clear. How does the fairly obvious recognition that some things are more interesting than others, assist in dissolving the seeming aporia of answers needing to be known and not known before questions can be asked? Perhaps the most fitting response to this query would be that it may *not* assist in any ultimate dissolution of the problem, though it certainly seems to assist in furthering our understanding of the problem (or the chief activity which gives rise to the problem). Meno wants to know how it is that one can know what one should be talking about, and an important judgement made in determining what one should be talking about is whether or not a given subject is of interest. Now, as with the other judgements and faculties discussed so far, this one cannot be isolated from the others. There is certainly a sense in which a subject must be relevant, in the other senses discussed so far, if it is to be deemed to be of interest, but there is another sense in which a topic being interesting speaks of something parallel to, but distinct from, these judgements. If the meat of enquiry is chewed by clarification, tasted through an awareness of similarity and difference, and if there is some sense of smell by which we seek this quarry, then curiosity is the hunger which drives us.[94]

When it is said that curiosity is instrumental in determining relevance, one may be inclined to think that disinterest has been confused for critical rejection. This is to say that one might claim that disinterest has nothing to do with judgements of the relationships between lines of thought, that it is some entirely uncritical and unthinking 'emotional'

[94] Of course, it doesn't take much for this analogy to be swung off kilter; it is not, for example, immediately clear that mastication has much in common with an awareness and judgement of clarity or cohesion. Perhaps it might be said that the action of chewing breaks down the structure of victuals, and the similarity is to be found here.

response to a subject.[95] There is certainly a sense in which relevance depends upon a judgement in relation to existing material (X is or is not relevant *to* Y), whereas interest may be entirely (and validly) tangential. If one were having a conversation about, say, bakery, it would be forgiveable to spontaneously express an interest in boots; there need be no pretence of relevance, a change of subject may be welcome. This example would, however, underplay the importance and role of curiosity more specifically in the processes of enquiry. There is another sense in which curiosity is instrumental in the judgement of the *importance* of an introduced subject. It may, in this way, be permissible to discuss *relevance* in terms of importance, a significance not defined by specific or immediately perceived criteria, but rather by a broader sense of value and purpose. It is not uncommon for various subjects of more abstract enquiry (we may say philosophical enquiry) to be met with objections based on a lack of understanding, not of a primarily analytical nature, but rather of a motivational character. In this way one might deem the subject of virtue and its teaching to be of great interest whilst one may object to the subject of enquiry *as such* as being of little or no interest. Pedantry too, as was raised at the outset of this discussion, is a common criticism levelled in this manner, and is perhaps the best illustration and qualifier of 'curiosity' as it is discussed here.

As well as it having been said that pedantry can be an unfair accusation, it has also been suggested that it may be an accurate one. Similarly it has been said that some subjects do indeed inspire less curiosity in certain contexts. Such suggestions may inspire two particular concerns: how exactly pedantry is related to curiosity, and (less importantly) how curiosity as an attribute of an enquirer may relate to the *curiousness* of that which is enquired after.

It may be helpful, in regards to the former point (and even more broadly), to recount a comment of Bernard Williams' from a conversation with Bryan Magee on the pedantry of Linguistic Philosophy:

> Well, the answer to that is that some of it, of course, was: Some of it was pedantic,

[95] 'Emotional' is placed in inverted commas for the reason that it is not only dangerously misleading to contrast a word like this with words like 'rational', but, more often than not, absurd.

> footling and boring. But at all times and in all eras, and whoever's doing it, at least ninety per cent of philosophy, on a generous estimate, is not much good, and is never going to to be of any interest much to anybody later on except historians. That's true of many subjects, but it's perhaps specially true about philosophy. So it's not surprising that a lot of linguistic philosophy wasn't much good - because a lot of philosophy of any kind isn't much good. Linguistic philosophy did have a special way of being bad, which was being footling, frivolous and pedantic, instead of being pompous, empty and boring as a lot of other philosophy is. There are two ways in which philosophy can be bad: it can either be pedantic or it can be bogus. Linguistic philosophy made a speciality of being bad by being pedantic... But that apart, if you go beyond the bad examples, the charge is not true. What is read as the frivolity of worrying about what sentences actually mean was an essential and constitutive part of that kind of self-understanding about language – ringing it to hear exactly what note the sentence makes – which we referred to before.[96]

There is a sense, of course, in which this pedantry could be seen as bad on account of its being unenlightening; in focusing stringently upon minor details of language it may, whilst not being logically invalid, nevertheless be vacuous and unoriginal. This is not the sum total of what is being spoken of here as curiousness. Answers and questions may indeed be boring for being recapitulative, they may also be boring for being dry or clumsy in their expression, but there is another more important sense in which pedantry may be objected to for being simply less interesting than some other line of (what would be viewed as) more pressing enquiry. An enquiry may be entered into with the express purpose of exploring, say, the nature of teaching virtue, and whilst one disputant may feel a pressing need (in pursuing this subject) to make a parallel enquiry of the meaning of key terms used in doing so, another may view such asides as essentially tangential and boring.

Now, whilst Williams is certainly right to suggest that much linguistic philosophy is indeed pedantic, it may not only be so for the reason of being a poor specimen of its type, it may also be exercised in inappropriate contexts. We can well imagine various everyday situations, perhaps even emergencies, in which the discussion of the precise meanings of words might rightly be objected to. Pedantry is not solely constituted by the quality of its authorship, it may simply be aimed at subjects which, in the context of the given discussion, are of less interest. In this discussion of relevance it is the suggestion that

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[96] B. Magee, *Talking Philosophy: Dialogues with Fifteen Leading Philosophers*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001), pp.121-2.

'There are two ways in which philosophy can be bad: it can either be pedantic or it can be bogus', which is itself of greatest interest. Both answers and questions may be deemed irrelevant for being either inaccurate, as has been discussed formerly, or uninteresting. An interest in the exactness of language, or at least the care which is taken over what one means to communicate and the means by which one does so, is a breed of curiosity. There are others, which may similarly be exercised to varying degrees of abstraction and focus, and, indeed, it is this focus which may best define the curiosity which is being spoken of here as critical in enquiry. This is a desire and judgement which is perhaps most characteristically exercised in terms of abstraction and generalisation, but also more broadly simply in terms of possible objects of attention and enquiry.

As with every distinction hitherto noted, this definition of curiosity cannot (and should not) be cast absolutely. The interdependence and indeterminacy inherent in these interrogative principles are, perhaps, of as much importance as their differences. To claim that any subject matter is irrelevant is to simultaneously remark upon both its validity, its category and its curiousness. It would be meaningless to divorce pedantry, or, we may say, *precision*, from a desire for accuracy and validity; though we may fruitfully speak of all these targets in terms of combined sensitivities.

Another response may be that: given the extended and probing nature of enquiry, a critical aspect of asking and answering questions is constituted, not only by a desire to do this in the first place, but also by an ongoing impetus and judgement, both of which may be spoken of most accurately in terms of 'curiosity'.

This qualification of 'curiosity' may in turn go some way to qualifying 'curiousness'. Of course, a point has been made, throughout this discussion, of avoiding the perils of subject/object distinctions and the potential pitfalls of verificationism. Yet, once again, it is impossible (or at least very unwise) to wholly sever two fundamentally conjoined and mutually defining ideas. Whether or not questions or answers can or cannot be interesting as *dinge an sich*, is (it shall be declared in a maddeningly circular fashion) of decidedly digressive consequence, what is important is that curiosity, indeed enquiry in general, is

directional.[97]

It is, however, at this point that the nature of curiosity may best be discussed in terms of conclusions, or, as may more interestingly be the case *inconclusions*. It is the position of this paper that as enquiries become increasingly abstract and general, then so too do the possibilities of valid avenues of query become exponentially more numerous and varied, and in these circumstances curiosity plays a significant role in determining the course of an enquiry.

How (not) to conclude?

> Ryght so there com a knyght unto Arthure, and seyde, 'Knyght full of thought and slepy, tell me if thou saw any stronge beeste passe thys way.' 'Such one saw I' seyde Kynge Arthure, 'that ys paste nye two myle. What wolde ye with that beeste?' seyde Arthure. 'Sir, I have folowed that beste longe and kylde myne horse, so wolde God I had another to folow my queste.'
>
> Ryght so com one with the Kyngis horse; and whan the knyght saw the horse he prayde the Kynge to gyff hym the horse, 'for I have folowed this queste thys twelvemonthe, and othir I shall encheve hym othir blede of the beste bloode in my body.' (Whos name was Kynge Pellynor that tyme folowed the Questynge Beste – and afftir hys dethe Sir Palomydes folowed hit.) 'Sir knyght,' seyd the Kynge 'leve that queste and suffir me to have hit, and I woll folow hit anothir twelvemonth.'
>
> 'A, foole!' seyde the kynge unto Arthure, 'hit ys in vayne thy desire, for hit shall never be encheved but by me other by my nexte kynne.' And terewithe he sterte unto the Kyngis horse and mownted into the sadyl, and seyde, 'Gramercy – for this horse ys myne owne!'
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> - Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*.[98]

It may seem as though the business of really explaining how we judge answers

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[97] Thomas Upham gives an account of curiosity (which is also a curious account) in his *Mental Philosophy* which makes claims in some ways similar to those made here, though he speaks of curiosity in quite stark terms of instinct and volition: T. C. Upham, *Mental Philosophy*, Vol.2, (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1869), pp.154-5.

[98] T. Mallory, *Le Morte Darthur*, (London, Norton, 2004), p.31. For an explanation of, and elaboration upon, the theme of the beast in Le Morte Darthur, and its particular pertinence to this discussion as it occurs in that text, see Stephen Shepherd's note (as it appears in the Norton editon) included in the appendix.

should be tackled properly at this stage. This section shall, in fact, largely be concerned with how *not* to conclude. This 'not concluding' shall be discussed in two senses: beginning, as Plato suggests, already knowing the answer, and beginning and continuing with no particular expectation that any final or exhaustive conclusion shall ever be reached.

Of course, one cannot know altogether what to expect. This is the point of the paradox. Yet one point of this discussion has been to highlight that, for enquiry, one need not know *altogether*. Up till now, suggestions regarding the potentially Sisyphean nature of certain enquiries may have seemed to assert the possibility of questioning whilst having no expectations whatsoever. This is not the case. As has been said, the idea of asking a question about something about which one knows absolutely nothing is absurd. The necessity, however, of knowing *something* about the subject of one's enquiry does not necessitate expecting any kind of satisfying or comprehensive conclusion and one's expectations (as aforementioned) may be hugely vague. This does raise the possibility of discovering (as Wittgensteinians so delight in doing) that a question has in fact been aimed into nothingness all along, and the realisation dawns that there is no conclusion to be had and that the question was in some way faulty. This is not really what is being talked about here. Quite frankly, the event of proclaiming a question faulty, or, at least, its target nonexistant, is a species of conclusion; to conclude that there is no answer is one way of putting the matter to bed. This discussion seeks to explore those questions which appear to be unbedable, for which the horizon does not dissipate, but constantly shifts, revealing more and not less, where every answer takes the shape of another question.

No secret has been made here of the paradox(es) which this current discussion faces. How could it possibly be said that any enquiry is Sisyphean? Surely one could only know that one's enquiry was endless if one had reached that non-existant end (which would be a contradiction).[99] Of course, it might be suggested that something can be known to be impossible without having been experienced as such. This line of thought is,

[99] The term 'Sisyphean' and its use here is expanded upon below.

however, once again, in grave danger of drifting into the realms some sort of analytic/synthetic distinction. If we were to decide that certain enquiries were, by definition, unanswerable, then we would have a hard time categorising any such activities as anything other than the aforementioned species of empty and fruitless activities exposed by the Wittgensteinians. At the very least the enquiry would not, in the strictest sense, be inconclusive. Apart from this it may be asserted that, given that many of these more abstract questions, of metaphysics, of ethics, of epistemology have been asked for at least two and a half thousand years, it is reasonable to assume that they cannot be extinguished.[100] There may be ways (in a Ciceronian, academic-sceptical sort of fashion) of grounding this sort of 'reasonable', historically based assumption, but they don't matter here particularly. This discussion is, it shall be recalled, not directly concerned with trends. It is more important to recognise, in this instance, that, whilst the historical response does not address the problem of needing to know a conclusion before an enquiry can be judged as conclusionless, this problem supposes that a conclusion is that which must be desired in forming the expectations necessary for enquiry.[101]

It is here that the possibility of desires and expectations for a broader *understanding* may be most enlightening. It has been suggested that Meno may not, in fact, doubt whether or not questions can be answered, he may, rather, (given that he has similarly unshakable beliefs in the dominion of logic) simply desire a better understanding of *how it is* that enquiry can be. This is not to suggest a desire merely for a mechanical account of questioning, nor a step by step instruction of how it is achieved. What is meant by an understanding of how enquiry can be is, rather, a detailed and cohesive overview of the ways in which questions are carried out and (as is central to this cohesion) the manner in which these ways conform to, and are consistent with, the demands of other parallel beliefs (particularly those which constitute the axioms of logic/reason/sense etc.). In a certain (predictably self-referential) sense, this is a desire and expectation for that which

[100] Cf. P. Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy*, M. Chase (tr.), (London, Harvard University Press, 2002), pp.1-4.

[101] The view of endless curiosity which is expressed here closely mirrors the position of Popper in relation to the constant revelations of science. K. R. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, (London, Routledge, 2004), p.281

has been attempted and described by the bulk of this current discussion. Now, there is obviously a way in which this 'broad understanding' could simply be viewed as another form of conclusion. The breadth or vagueness of an answer does not discount its being an answer, and a state of understanding, however general, may still represent a satisfactory conclusion to a process of enquiry. In what sense, then, does a relatively nondescript desire for, and occasional achievement of, understanding represent an inconclusive state? It is here that curiosity may return to the lists.

What of the direction of curiosity? Can it so easily be denied that there is an important distinction to be made between perpetual curiosity and inexhaustible curiousness? It may be that it is one thing to say that there are people who are insatiably curious about particular (or indeed all) subjects, and quite another to say that there are subjects which, however well explored, are always fascinating and (we may say with some caution) mysterious. It may be fair to wish to avoid disputes regarding the subjectivity of interest, but the issue cannot be glossed over. Now, it may seem that much of what has been said here has suggested that abstract topics are (by their very nature) unrelentingly interesting. This is not exactly so. The problem here may lie in viewing such 'topics' as objects of enquiry in themselves, rather than species *of* enquiry. Some attention has been given, of course, to the manner in which enquiries may differ in *kind*, and yet, as always, some care has also been taken to stress the similarities between these different activities. The important issue here is that, rather than *subjects*, or *topics,* which are inexhaustibly curious, there may instead be certain kinds of questions which, partly due to the breadth of their focus, inevitably lead to further questions. This would not represent a static fascination or idle curiosity, but rather a fluid and continuously revealing activity: an activity which, despite its fluidity, possesses direction. The suggestion would be, then, that these kinds of questions are those which are characterised by, not only their abstraction and generality, but also, and concomitantly, the curiosity driving them. This position may, of course, lead to some fairly sweeping corollaries: it would certainly seem to follow from this suggestion that only very curious people will be interested by these abstract kinds of questions. Perhaps such a corollary is acceptable. Ultimately it might be fair to say that this

sort of relentless enquiry lies on an extreme point of the scale, the opposite end of which is occupied by firmly reflective equational enquiries. As such the paradox glares most fiercely at these perpetually curious activities, and may only be able to be addressed so far as it might be said that one is never quite sure what to ask, or what one is looking for, and that both seem to shift and warp through a drive for discovery and the winds of inspiration.

A distinction must be drawn between this inconclusiveness and aimlessness. The suggestion is not being made that the point of asking philosophical questions is simply to ask philosophical questions, this really would be an idle curiosity; rather, it is being suggested that the asking of these questions requires an awareness of and desire for targets which themselves constitute only steps in the processes of other questions. For this reason 'Sisyphean' is, in an important way, the wrong word. This word suggests, and is often synonymous with, futility and pointlessness. In another (and, here, even more important) way this word is just right, as it suggests *compulsion*.

Admittedly one might view the compulsion of Sisyphus as being of a somewhat unsavoury flavour, yet compulsion it nevertheless is. To suggest that, given the knowledge that his task is unending, Sisyphus should abandon his task, is to miss the point. The task may be inexorable, but it is not without motivation, and though he is compelled, he is not an unthinking zombie, he retains will in the matter. Indeed, whilst this discussion cannot wholly concede that 'The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart', there have been few comments on the damned king more insightful than Camus' observation that 'one must imagine Sisyphus happy'.[102] Stone hauling is Sisyphus' lot; inexhaustible, abstract questioning is the curious mind's.[103]

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[102] A. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, (London, Penguin Books, 2005), p. 119.

[103] It is in this recognition of the fundamental nature of curiosity that Dietmar Görlitz remarks: 'The act of concluding interrupts or prematurely stylizes all inquiring activity in an open and, in many ways, still undefined field of research. Discrepancies whet curiosity.' D. Görlitz, 'Stories of Barbican: Real and Retold', in D. Görlitz and J. F. Wohlwill (eds.), *Curiosity, Imagination and Play: On the Development of Spontaneous Cognitive and Motivational Processes*, (Hillsdale, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1987), p.351.

Perhaps happy is the wrong word. Content, may be better, though as far as this essay is concerned Εὐδαιμονία is best. There is certainly a struggle which takes place, and this is closely akin to the struggle of recollection. When a word sits just on the tip of the tongue there is the sensation of almost thinking something, a dreadful gnawing of the mind as it sweeps blindly in the direction of a faint odour. Meno is right, the unknown (or the largely unknown) surrounds us; to wade ever deeper into its vastness can be an arduous task, yet this is the only fitting activity for the curious mind. Otherwise the spirit would not be well.[104] Doubtless Camus is right that there is an absurdity in these struggles, hovering as they do on the edge of contradiction and paradox, negotiating their own strictures with greater or lesser elegance. And surely he is right that this struggle should be embraced; yet not, we may think, as a rebellion against the darkness, but rather in navigation of it.[105] This absurdity is not overwhelming, it is not enveloping, it would hardly be absurd if it were; there is a real and tangible illumination which takes place in the practice of this compelling struggle. Rudolf Carnap expresses something of this in his account of Wittgenstein at their first meeting:

> When he started to formulate his view of some philosophical problem, we often felt the internal struggle that occurred in him at that very moment, a struggle by which he tried to penetrate from darkness to light under an intense and painful strain, which was even visible on his most expressive face. When finally, sometimes after a prolonged arduous effort, his answer came forth, his statement stood before us like a newly created piece of art or a divine revelation.[106]

Yet how does this account of curiosity, compulsion, and endless abstraction assist in understanding further how this darkness is given shape? What is this faint odour which is detected by the mind and followed so strenuously into the abyss? And surely, to suggest that this compulsion possesses perpetual questioning as its target is to neglect the sheer and undeniable importance of *truth* as the goal of curiosity and enquiry.

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[104] On Eudaimonia (and its reading here as 'well spirited') Cf. D. Roochnik, *Retreiving the Ancients: An Introduction to Greek Philosophy*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 2004), p.202. Roochnik finds a similarly literal translation to be satisfying.

[105] Cf. J. McKee, 'Exile, Revolt and Redemption: The Writings of Albert Camus', in H. Bloom (ed.), *Albert Camus*, (Broomall, PA, Chelsea House, 2003), pp.60-1.

[106] R. Carnap, 'Intellectual Autobiography', in P. A. Schlipp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap*, (La Salle, Ill., Open Court, 1963), p.25.

When each new step teeters on the brink of paradox, and when contradictions are negotiated only through 'moderation', one may begin to become suspicious of some pretty wobbly logic. Does this entire discussion rely upon some weakened notion of dialetheism? Is the 'moderation' which has hitherto anchored this debate simply an affront to the Law of Non-Contradiction? This discussion has taken, and will continue to take, the best way of speaking of these unspeakables as that which is practised in terms of 'meaning', and of 'sense'. Although it has been suggested that there is more valid discussion to be had in these abstruse realms than some linguistic philosophy might allow for, it has not been denied that there is a wall of meaninglessness around which all talk must ply its merry way. It would be unhelpful and confusing to imagine that this discussion of Meno's paradox seeks to uphold some standard of infinite comprehensibility, rather it seeks to explore, as much as is possible, those farthest reaches of meaning which found, rather than confound, enquiry. There is certainly a way in which the absurdity of the move from unknown to known, of the way in which not understood is only partially defined, only partially detected, is inexpressible. More than this: there is a sense in which these ineffable limits of enquiry constitute the ultimate sustainer of curiosity, a sense, it might be said, in which these limits are the zenith of Sisyphus' inclination. As any question nears the marches of meaninglessness it becomes ever more general, ever more relevant to every other enquiry, and so, with nowhere else to go, curiosity drives the mind to pastures new.

Now, what of truth and justification? Whether a question is abstract or mundane, inexhaustible or highly specific, it must apparently have at its core some pursuit of the truth. Surely, both understanding and knowledge must be concerned with *the way things actually are*. To seek to understand the process of asking questions without giving due attention to ideas of truth and justification would seem to be decidedly deficient. Any basic awareness of relevance would supposedly make this much apparent. Perhaps, though, it is enough to treat this undeniably important aspect of enquiry in a relatively irreducible fashion. Might it not be enough to agree that, yes, truth and justification are indeed what all knowledge and understanding possess at their core? Should we just take

Plato's advice and assume that a mutual understanding of terms can be enough to get by on?[107]

Now, it would certainly seem fair to suggest that clear thinking need not accompany imaginative thinking and that both are important in enquiry. It must also be said, however, that both imagination and inspiration seem to have been spoken of in relation to the same process of apprehending new thoughts or ideas and that there is an important difference between the two. The division that has been discussed between active and passive principles of enquiry may correspond to this difference. This is not to say that one may occur in isolation from the other, for (at the risk of constant repetition) this sort of division is not being entertained here. Rather, it might be said that imagination and inspiration may represent the active and passive sides of the same interrogative coin. It may also be wise to recognise that the distinction between clarity of thought and the ability to recognise similarity and difference (which has hitherto been discussed in terms of imagination) are similarly conjoined. It might even be suggested that this latter distinction is a false one since a recognition of distinction *is*, in certain senses, also a bringing in to focus. Perhaps it may be fair to suggest that both are to be identified under a broader awareness of form and that it is this faculty which is central to enquiry (and, indeed, all thinking). Of course, as the image of the anagram illustrates, these faculties which permit an awareness of validity must be accompanied by both an ability to imagine or be inspired, and also an awareness of and, or, at the very least, a *desire for* truth.

It would indeed be foolish to discuss these psychological and epistemological characteristics of enquiry without giving due recognition to this pursuit of an awareness of reality. Of course, this kind of recognition is at least important for the insight it grants into Plato's approach to the problem of enquiry. Plato's recollection is, after all, a form of justification, but it is more than this, it is an innate ability to recognise the truth and to escape the transient or flimsy state of 'true opinions' which are granted only by the grace

[107] ΜΝΩ:§75d.

of the gods.[108] Of course, to agree that we do in fact possess some innate ability by which we may recognise truth would be to agree that the paradox is impotent, and this discussion cannot agree with Plato to this degree. Perhaps it might be enough to say that a *desire for* this apprehension of reality is necessary, and that some ability to discern the direction in which one's desire may be is concurrently vital. Any further pursuit of this central and determining principle of enquiry will (aptly enough) inevitably lead in directions which would seem tangential. So, it may be forgiven, for the time being, to take a vaguely realist stance, not only in sympathy with Plato, but also in recognition of the necessity for the roles that justification and a desire for truth play in asking questions.

Possibilities, Spontaneity and The End.

And what if a Ciceronian, Humian kind of approach were best, and understanding were just a process of collecting possibilities? Perhaps the moderation necessary in understanding is just the acceptance that there is a limit to understanding, and to conviction, and that there is no ultimate criterion by which to decide between these possibilities. One understands a subject better when one has explored all of the possible answers and weighed their respective likelihoods. Really, there is plenty in this sceptical conception of understanding which is perfectly compatible with what has hitherto been suggested, yet it may neglect the cohesion of which understanding can speak. Likelihood is itself tempered by one's impressions of a universal web of likelihoods; and as was said in relation to Wittgenstein's insight, these must, *and do,* contain certainties.

It may be helpful, though, to take from this stark, if lucid, weighing of possibilities, an image of enquiry as very frequently being a matter of justifying what is already believed. When all is said and done, more often than not it is not the answer which is missing but the justification and the broader understanding.

It may be argued that written enquiry occupies an unnatural place in the world of question asking, though it will be suggested here that it may act as a particularly salient

[108] *Ibid,* §:100b.

model for a far larger world of wondering. Few authors portray more aptly the dialectic nature which written enquiry can take than Plato, and though its end will always coexist with its beginning, the discussion is not false. The characters may be fictional, and the words invented, but the justification is real, the struggle is no less palpable. It is the in-between, with its world of possibilities, which remains fluid. Though each sentence, each word, may be set in place, there is a life in the relationships and a fluidity which demands exploration. So too do lived questions take so often the space between knowns as their destination. Abstract enquiry can be accused of circularity, and there are certainly paradoxes aplenty, but is circularity such a poor fate when there is so much room between two points? Perhaps this suggestion dives too soon back into the pool of contradiction, and the combination of Zeno and Meno may be too much to swallow. Yet the helpfulness of the possibility model may be to demonstrate the comprehensibility of the decimals in an otherwise irrational number.

Of course, it would be somewhat contradictory to espouse anything terminal here. It may be that an understanding of understanding as being both endlessly diverging and endlessly detailed is entirely consistent and it may be that this possibility does itself represent a constituent part of understanding the manner in which we ask (at least some) questions. As far as this current discussion is concerned, the most pressing issues facing an understanding of enquiry are not the tangled, axiomatic conundrums of reason (at least not independently), but rather the manner in which this activity of asking questions, and particularly of asking philosophical questions is ultimately achieved; for achieved it is. And it cannot be denied that a significant portion of Meno's problem can be addressed in those cases where we do indeed already know the answer we so earnestly ponder over, and that it is, rather, that we seek to *understand* this answer, to view it, justified in relation to a wider context. Of course, the paradox is not entirely addressed; there are, as has been said, still leaps to be made in justification, still faculties which are engaged in the movement from known to unknown. 'Those cases where we do indeed already know the answer' may bare a closer relationship to those cases in which we do not than first appears to be the case. When the answer is already partially described by the question (though

only partially), the answer seems to differ very little from any other stage of justification and understanding which lies between the question and it. In the end, though, the plughole can be circled only so many times before the plummet, and there is always something missing. When enquiry is actually achieved the unknown is not forced into view through logical coaxing; the odour of illumination does not arise inevitably, the actuality is far more visceral.

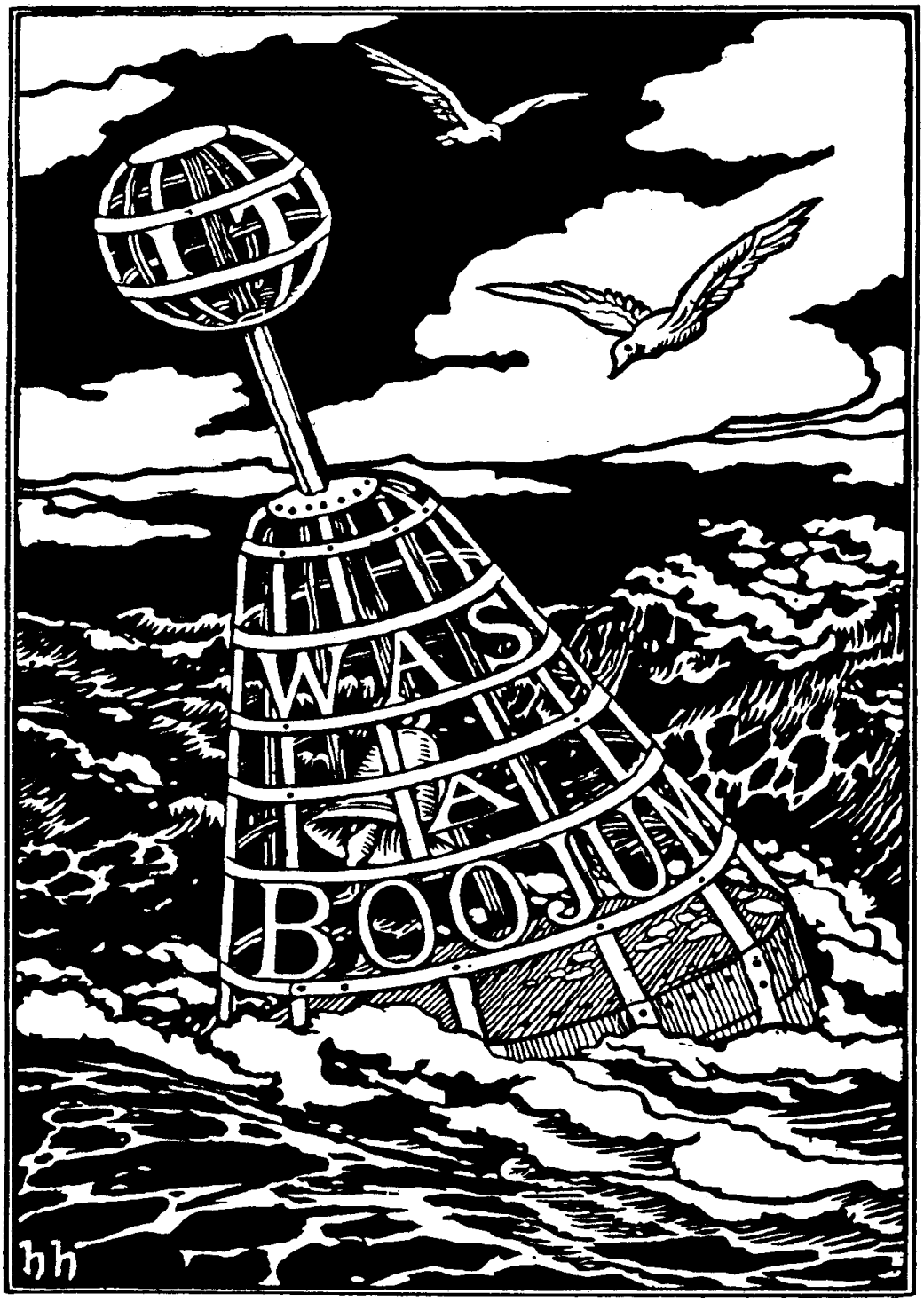
It is too easy (not to mention too wrong) to imagine the enquirer as an helpless wretch, flailing about in the dark in vain hope. This is not the way of it. There is certainly obscurity and meaninglessness, and to venture into the liminal space between this and the already apprehended world of possibility can be laborious, but helpless it is not. Just as when one pricks one's ears for the faintest of sounds, just as one quiets the other faculties in order to do so, so too is the edge of understanding a silent place. This is not a struggle of ferocity, it is a stolid advance against a whirlwind of confusion and incomprehension.

If so much poetic refrain were not already too much, it might be forgiveable to make further anthropological observations and remark upon the manner in which a thinker will close her eyes, furrow her brow; upon, in fact, how the process itself will be patently visible on her 'most expressive face'.[109] And so 'passivity' and 'activity' must be returned to. If there were any straightforward reply which this discussion could offer Meno, it would be that there are many things which can be, and are done in focusing upon and reaching the unknown; many processes of judgement, of scrutiny, of clarification, yet there is, in the end an aspect of the unknown against which activity will not avail you, for which an openness and receptiveness is necessary. There is a balance to be had within the compulsion of curiosity: this implacable determination and its encouragement to strike forth, and the malleable stillness necessary for a reception of the unknown. These are, of course, *once again*, not separable approaches, but rather, complementary and concurrent aspects of the same state, a kind of intrepid and meditative stoicism. Revelation and imagination cannot be severed from one another.

[109] R. Carnap, 'Intellectual Autobiography', p.25.

Analysis cannot escape this less concrete description of enquiry, and perhaps some of the absurdity of the limits of analysis and the other active aspects of asking questions comes not from their own inherent foibles, but rather from the sheer, unavoidable confusion of all mental phenomena. When it is said that this or that faculty both is and is not distinct from another, this is not some anti-analytical, wishy-washy way of avoiding the logical difficulties of epistemology by disregarding its fundamental laws, rather it is a common sense observation about the intractable stickiness of thoughts, moods, and all the other ways of being that crop up in asking questions. Distinction is the stuff of language, the stuff of thinking, it is the onion in the sauce, but this sauce does not come without a pinch of salt.

Distinction, of course, is where things end, and whilst it is prudent to say that many questions proceed without hope of a terminal conclusion it is not right to say that they have no limits. Limits form the basis of identity *and* of compatibility, and questions cannot do without them. So too must a discussion as a whole be judged not to repeat but to reinforce, not to ramble but to reach a natural point of closure. Satisfaction, of course, is not to be sought for solely in this cessation, for it contributes only its due part to the much broader understanding. Nevertheless, for the achievement of this understanding, the importance cannot be underestimated of a sound judgement of an appropriate end.



Appendix

Stephen H. A. Shepherd on Malory's beast:

Malory's choice for the name of this creature is ingeniously multivalent and enhances its enigmatic status: the name invokes not only the sound of hounds' baying made by the beast but also the beast's involvement in a knight's quest, a quest of rather vague origin and motivation and one that we are told Pellynor will not achieve (likewise, Palomydes's later taking up of the quest is seemingly arbitrary and remains unresolved). There is also the suggestion that the beast is on its own quest, whatever that may be. Perhaps in both circumstances we are to be reminded that subjectively the quest and questor cannot really be dissociated and that the relationship can exist without a terminal purpose. In the French, by contrast, the name *Beste Glatisant* refers only to the sound made by the creature, and the knight who pursues it has a determinant mission: a legend claims that the best knight of his bloodline will kill the beast, and he seeks to know if he is that knight.

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