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THE POVERTY OF SOCRATIC QUESTIONING:
ASKING AND ANSWERING IN THE MENO

Thomas D. Eisele*

I understand [philosophy] as a willingness to think not about something other than what ordinary human beings think about, but rather to learn to think undistractedly about things that ordinary human beings cannot help thinking about, or anyway cannot help having occur to them, sometimes in fantasy, sometimes as a flash across a landscape; such things, for example, as whether we can know the world as it is in itself, or whether others really know the nature of one's own experiences, or whether good and bad are relative, or whether we might not now be dreaming that we are awake, or whether modern tyrannies and weapons and spaces and speeds and art are continuous with the past of the human race or discontinuous, and hence whether the learning of the human race is not irrelevant to the problems it has brought before itself. Such thoughts are instances of that characteristic human willingness to allow questions for itself which it cannot answer with satisfaction. Cynics about philosophy, and perhaps about humanity, will find that questions without answers are empty; dogmatists will claim to have arrived at answers; philosophers after my heart will rather wish to convey the thought that while there may be no satisfying answers to such questions in certain forms, there are, so to speak, directions to answers, ways to think, that are worth the time of your life to discover. (It is a further question for me whether directions of this kind are teachable, in ways suited to what we think of as schools.)

For those of us who still claim that we teach Socratically, or who think of our teaching as being inspired by Socrates' example, it re-


This Essay examines Socratic teaching by investigating Socrates' practice in the Meno. Its companion essay, Bitter Knowledge: Socrates and Teaching by Disillusionment, examines Socratic teaching by investigating my own practice in law school today. They are meant to complement and to complicate one another, as they also are meant to extend and to supplement some of the views of Socratic teaching expressed in two earlier essays of mine: Thomas D. Eisele, Must Virtue Be Taught?, 37 J. LEGAL EDUC. 495 (1987) [hereinafter Eisele, Virtue]; and Thomas D. Eisele, "Never Mind the Manner of My Speech": The Dilemma of Socrates' Defense in the Apology, 14 LEGAL STUD. F. 253 (1990) [hereinafter Eisele, Speech].

Professors L.H. LaRue, Thomas Shaffer, and James Boyd White have offered me several generous criticisms in the best Socratic spirit of the inquiry. I dedicate this Essay to Jim White. The inspiration and example of his work have proven to be, for me, indispensable.

mains a challenge to account for whatever affinity there may be between our teaching and that of Socrates. The affinity (if any) can be elusive. Yet, trying to understand what I am doing when I teach as I do in law school continues to matter to me, and an important part of this continued interest concerns the relation that my teaching may have with that of Socrates. In this, I suppose that I am not much different from other men and women who find themselves spending much of their time in the classroom asking questions—questions that may seem as much asked of oneself as they are of one's students. It can be an odd way to spend an hour.

The strangeness of the situation is two-fold. First, the method or technique of Socratic questioning seems to be simplicity itself. What we do is simply to ask questions of others: questions about cases and statutes and rules and about the reasons for those rules or for the court's decision or for the legislature's enactment; questions about facts and what happened to the parties involved and about others who might have become involved or whose assistance in resolving the dispute might have been sought; questions about procedure and what was done to bring this dispute to the position in which we find it and about ways that might have been found to resolve or at least to prosecute it differently; and so on. How can that be revolutionary? How can that be a radical way to teach?

However we may attempt to answer such questions, we know—we can see—that this method of questioning is revolutionary, is radical. For one thing, it has radical or revolutionary results. We can see the results in our students (some of them, surely); that is, we can see the results in the way that our students learn to question the cases and statutes and rules for themselves; learn how to take the cases and statutes and rules apart analytically and to put them back together again; learn how to apply the rules and cases and how to distinguish them; and learn all the other techniques that we teach our students for working in the law. And then, too, there are some techniques of lawyering that our students learn without their being taught; they discover these techniques by themselves in their engagement with the materials and the medium of the law. Yet all of this is an anticipated benefit of teaching inspired by Socrates. We know that our students learn more than we can teach them; Socratic questioning is intended exactly to provoke them to further study and self-discovery.

For other students, the impact and rewards of Socratic teaching are less immediate. Still, there always are some students who, without seeming to have acquired the knack of what we were trying to teach them during law school, report back to us or to some colleague of ours, years later, that this or that question, uttered once a long time ago,
almost forgotten, at some point awoke that student from his or her slumbers. I think that almost every teacher during his or her career must have heard at least one such testimonial to the daunting, energizing, cumulative impact of our questioning. But, then, how can such a simple process of questioning have this seemingly disproportionate effect?

I said that the strangeness of our situation is two-fold, and the second oddity is that, when looking specifically at the effect that Socratic questioning has on students, one finds, I think, a strong element of disillusionment. How is it that we law teachers earn our living by disillusioning our students? What good is that?

In a companion Essay, I have described certain aspects of my law school teaching, saying that, in part, my teaching aims at disillusioning my students and, yet, that this is not all that my teaching aims at—there is something else again that I also try to teach. Both aspects of my teaching (the initial disillusionment, and the something else again) are intimate points of relation with Socrates' way of teaching. It is quite possible that I am wrong about this, of course, or that, in this respect, my teaching is not representative of what other law teachers do. But I do not think so; rather, I think the kinship is there, for me and for others. So, to the extent that we teachers of law truly intend to inherit the legacy of Socrates, I believe that we are asked to accept as a part of our legacy intentionally teaching so as to disillusion our students, and yet we are intending to supply them with something else as well. How can this be? What might it mean?

In the following pages, I pursue these questions, not from the vantage point of the way in which I teach in law school, but rather from the perspective of the way in which Socrates taught in the dialogues that we have inherited from Plato. For, in order to claim an affinity between what we do in law school and what Socrates did, we need a detailed description of both terms in this pairing. In this Essay, I supply an account of the Socratic side of the coin.

I. The Meno's Progress and Meno's Progress

The Meno proposes itself for study in this regard because it occu-
pies a central place in Plato's dialogues. So far as scholars have been able to date and organize the dialogues, the *Meno* comes after the period of the early dialogues (including the *Protagoras* and the *Gorgias*), and it begins the period of the middle dialogues (preceding, perhaps immediately, the *Republic*). The *Meno* also is central in the sense that it articulates the major Platonic themes that we have come to expect. First and foremost, it deals with education (as do most of the early and middle dialogues): how we are to educate the young and, in particular, whether it is possible to teach them virtue. But beyond the core question of our ability to teach or to train a young person in virtue, the *Meno* also considers the nature of knowledge and whether it is a kind of recollection; it introduces a conception of the "forms" (to be elaborated in later dialogues); it draws distinctions between sense and reason, true opinion and knowledge; and it incompletely pursues notions of justice and of what we understand justice to be. The *Meno* manages to do all of this in dialogue form—not the traditional prose of analytic treatise writing—within the compass of thirty to forty pages. It is not surprising, then, that F.H. Anderson, in the Library of Liberal Arts edition of this dialogue, begins his Introduction with this praise: "The *Meno* is described by Walter Pater as the 'most characteristic dialogue of Plato.' John Stuart Mill calls it a 'gem' among Platonic works, and most aptly, for in no other dialogue of Plato are there exhibited within comparable compass so many facets as the *Meno* contains."9

My interest in the *Meno* has less to do with the dialogue's illustration of Platonic themes, however, than with its depiction of Socrates'
teaching. It contains a vivid portrait of Socrates in action, as a teacher and a learner, a searcher and an inquirer. The dialogue opens with a discussion between Socrates and Meno; then it shifts to a much shorter exchange between Socrates and Meno's slave-boy; and this exchange is itself briefly interrupted by a short discussion between Socrates and Meno again. When Socrates finishes with the slave-boy, another brief discussion occurs between Socrates and Meno, which also is interrupted by the appearance of Anytus, an Athenian, with whom Socrates takes the time to converse. The dialogue then concludes with yet another discussion between Socrates and Meno.

The movement of the Meno can be outlined this way:

1. Socrates and Meno (pp. 23-38 (70a-82b))
2. Socrates and the Slave-Boy (pp. 38-41, 42-43 (82b-84a, 84d-85b))
   (with an interlude for Socrates and Meno, pp. 41-42 (84a-d))
3. Socrates and Meno (pp. 43-49 (85b-89e))
4. Socrates and Anytus (pp. 49-55 (90a-95a))
5. Socrates and Meno (pp. 55-61 (95a-100b))

This synoptic outline reveals that Meno is the chief character of this drama; he (or something about him that we are supposed to notice) is the subject of this dialogue. We see Meno at three different stages: first, when he meets Socrates and asks him a question; second, after Socrates has discussed some geometric figures with Meno's slave-boy; and, third, after Socrates has discussed virtue and knowledge with Anytus, a passing Athenian. So, I take the Meno’s progress to be Meno’s progress, his growth or education.

But a second theme, something else besides a simple charting of Meno’s growth, is going on simultaneously. During the course of this dialogue, Socrates converses with three people. These three people illustrate three different types of students, three different ways that people have of learning and gaining knowledge. Socrates mainly asks them questions, and his questions elicit different responses and results. As the Meno progresses, then, we see Socrates teaching three different students by talking with them and questioning them, and we also see how they are affected or unaffected by this discussion and these questions.

Let me begin with this second theme: the three different types of students. They are different types of students in the sense that they are differently prepared and differently motivated in their discussions with Socrates. In this respect, these three people are differently situated both in terms of their ability or willingness to learn and in terms of how they relate to Socrates as their teacher.

Meno begins the dialogue by putting a question to Socrates, a ques-
tion about how virtue is acquired, a question that Socrates for some reason does not like. Not answering it directly, Socrates puts Meno’s question aside and instead asks Meno a question about the nature of virtue, which Meno finds painfully easy: “There will be no difficulty, Socrates, in answering your question.” For the next few pages of dialogue, Meno then tries unsuccessfully to answer Socrates’ “easy” question.

Meno’s slave-boy, by contrast, initiates nothing; he puts no initial question to Socrates. Rather, Meno picks the slave-boy out of a crowd of surrounding servants, and Socrates asks him questions. But, once engaged by Socrates, the slave-boy, who is initially quite timid, eventually makes a claim to know something. It turns out, however, that the slave-boy’s claim to know is wrong; it is based upon a false inference. Socrates then corrects this false inference, leaving the slave-boy somewhat abashed. But Socrates, taking the slave-boy in tow, once again leads him through a maze of questions to the correct inference and allows him to draw it for himself. Emboldened, the slave-boy then is asked a further series of questions, which elicit the fact that he still does not understand. He may have made the correct inference when coached by Socrates, but his correct guess was not based on knowledge or understanding. Socrates’ questions get the slave-boy to see, then, that he still does not know what he thought he knew: “Indeed, Socrates, I do not know.”

Anytus comes along later and joins Socrates and Meno while they are engaged, once again, in their common pursuit of the question of the nature and teachability of virtue. Anytus is an important Athenian politician (who later plays a role in the trial of Socrates) and is conveniently pressed into service, as the slave-boy was. But Anytus illustrates a different cast of mind, a different educational attitude, because he is not susceptible to Socrates’ searching questions.

Socrates begins by simply asking Anytus, as a friendly bystander, for help: “Who are the teachers of virtue?” One might expect Anytus to be disposed to respond warmly to Socrates’ invitation, because Anytus shares Socrates’ low opinion of the Sophists as purported teachers of virtue.

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7. Id. at 24 (71e).
8. See id. at 24-29 (71c-75b).
9. See id. at 38 (82b).
10. See id. at 39 (82e).
11. See id. at 40 (83b-c).
12. Id. at 41 (84a).
13. See id. at 49 (89e-90a).
14. Id. at 49 (90b).
vicious, and Socrates casts his question in the form of a request—whether Anytus can help Meno find someone who can teach him (Meno) virtue. Instead of helping Meno, however, Anytus responds by castigating the Sophists; he vents his spleen:

_Ananyus:_ By Heracles, Socrates, forbear! I only hope that no friend or kinsman or acquaintance of mine, whether citizen or stranger, will ever be so mad as to allow himself to be corrupted by them [the Sophists]; for they are a manifest pest and corrupting influence to those who have to do with them.

It turns out that this invective is not worth much as advice for Meno because, when Anytus is pressed on the matter, we discover that Anytus' criticism of the Sophists is as unfounded in knowledge as the slave-boy's original inference was. Anytus admits that he really is not well-acquainted with the Sophists. This admission puzzles Socrates, as does the cavalier attitude toward knowledge and criticism that it reveals, and he says as much. How can Anytus claim to know that the Sophists are corrupt teachers of virtue when Anytus is not acquainted with the Sophists? But, unlike the slave-boy, Anytus does not see (or acknowledge) his own ignorance in this matter. "I am sure that I know what manner of men these are, whether I am acquainted with them or not."

Then, to cap it off, Anytus shuns Socrates' suggestion that perhaps some noted Athenians themselves do not know what virtue is, or, at least, that they have been unable to teach their children virtue. Anytus is offended by this Socratic suggestion; he finds it slanderous, and he refuses to entertain or to consider it by way of helping Socrates to investigate it.

I said that these three students differ in their cast of mind, their attitude toward learning or education. Part of their difference is their motivation: Meno _wants_ to know, he _wants_ to learn. The dialogue begins with his questioning Socrates. In a sense, one can say that Meno's question about virtue is the motivating question of the _Meno_. The fact that he does not know what to do with his own question, that he does not know how to pursue it on his own, is less important than the fact that the question is his own, that he came up with it by listening to himself, by harkening to some doubt or quibble in himself. Is this not

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15. See _id._ at 50 (91a-b).
16. _Id._ at 50-51 (91c).
17. See _id._ at 51-52 (92b-c).
18. See _id._ at 52 (92b-c).
19. _Id._ (92c).
20. See _id._ at 53-54 (93c-95a).
what we hope to teach our students to do by way of Socratic questioning—how to pursue their own questions, how to make the most of them?

If we agree that Meno’s question is the motivating question of the dialogue, then we must immediately acknowledge the other side of that fact, namely, that Meno does not know what to do with his own question. And this ignorance is a part of what Socrates brings out in the first few pages of the dialogue. He shows Meno not only that he (Meno) does not have an acceptable or adequate answer to his own question (that is not so bad in itself; the same is true of many of us many times), but, more importantly, that Meno does not realize this about himself. When Meno puts his question to Socrates, he is unaware of this failing in himself, in his knowledge. This may be one reason why Socrates refuses the question about virtue as it is originally put to him by Meno. He does not refuse the topic of virtue—its nature or its teachability—indeed, Socrates is obsessed with such matters. But he does refuse the form and tone of Meno’s question, the attitude in which it is asked.

Socrates’ refusal to answer Meno’s question as asked is as positive as it is negative, because it leads to a concerted investigation into the nature and teachability of virtue. It does so, however, only in so far as Meno is willing to take up these matters in a form and with an attitude that Socrates finds proper. This may strike some people as being hopelessly paternalistic of Socrates, but I take it to be an essential element of anything that we might call “teaching.” Teaching requires that a student be able to participate with the teacher, be able to see or take or accept what the teacher says as significant, valuable, or worthwhile. Teaching also requires a willingness and an ability on the part of the teacher to say, “This is proper; that is not.” And the teacher must also be able to show its propriety, to demonstrate it, in his or her actions, in his or her teaching, to the satisfaction of the student. The student must see how this test of the experiment, how this development of the equation or proof, how this interpretation of doctrine or rule or statute, how this reading of the case or text or poem, makes sense in the context of the materials with which they—teacher and student—are working. The teacher must be able to make sense out of these materials—legal sense, literary sense, or philosophical sense—and the student must be able to follow this educative activity. And then the student must go on to make his or her own constructions, constructions that themselves make acceptable sense out of the very same materials.

This conveyance of a sense of propriety—in the questions one asks, in the ways in which one pursues them, in the answers that one finds
acceptable or satisfying—is inherent in teaching. Meno's education in this dialogue consists in the fact that he learns to seek as Socrates seeks, learns to inquire as Socrates inquires. And yet, Socrates ultimately leaves Meno on his own, to inquire for himself and on his own behalf (and on behalf of others) into these matters that are puzzling him.

So, while Socrates refuses Meno's opening question as it is initially presented to him, Socrates also shows Meno a way to put Meno's own question fruitfully—a way to translate it, or to understand it, that can be fruitfully followed out and investigated (if not exactly to an answer, then at least to a conclusion). And through it all, despite several setbacks and even reprimands from Socrates, Meno never totally gives up, never leaves the discussion or inquiry. Certainly, he is daunted by some of Socrates' methods and his tough questions. Often Meno does not know what to say or do in response to Socrates' questions or to one of the many impasses they reach in their inquiry into virtue. (But then, neither does Socrates always know what to say or do.) The point remains that Meno never calls it quits; he perseveres.

Anytus, on the other hand, does not want to know. He not only does not want to know about virtue, but he essentially refuses to listen to whatever Socrates has to say. Eventually he leaves in a huff over what he imagines to have been Socrates' defamation of some of the rich, important, and famous men and families of Athens.21 (It seems patent that Plato is relying upon his audience's presumed knowledge of Anytus' later participation in the trial against Socrates, where Anytus presented to the jury the charges leveled by the politicians against Socrates.22) Anytus never shows himself to be open to Socrates' questions; the concerns that Socrates has about the possible teachability of virtue and its essence or nature leave Anytus cold—or closed. He has nothing to do with them.

Furthermore, Anytus has no questions of his own. He hates the Sophists with a passion, perhaps a passion as great as Socrates' disdain for them. But Anytus' passion is based on nothing: no knowledge, no experience, no acquaintance with the Sophists. Anytus knows what he thinks, but not why he thinks as he does; and he seems not to be quizzical about the whys and wherefores of his opinions. With such a student, nothing works; a teacher can do nothing with him. (But perhaps

21. See id. at 55 (95a).
it is the teacher.\textsuperscript{23} Then the question becomes whether another teacher can reach this student, can do a better job of inspiring or provoking the student. While this possibility is a faint one, it may help to account for the fact that, at the very end of the dialogue, Socrates implores Meno, now that he has been taught the Socratic method, to seek out Anytus and to show him the way, to try to awaken him to these same questions and concerns.\textsuperscript{24} Perhaps Meno can do what Socrates was unable to do. I doubt it.)

The slave-boy, in the middle of the dialogue, also splits the difference between the two opposites of Meno and Anytus. Meno's slave-boy is neither like Meno in initiating any inquiry with Socrates, in wanting to know, nor is he akin to Anytus in not wanting to know. Rather, the slave-boy is like Anytus in his initial passiveness, his self-satisfaction with his state of knowledge—even if it turns out to be a state of ignorance—and yet, he also is like Meno in that, once provoked by Socrates' questions, the slave-boy is willing to learn. Thus, the slave-boy starts in a passive mode and then changes into an active learner, an active seeker. If Meno can be said to want to know, and Anytus not to want to know, then the slave-boy can be said to be open to knowledge, to its possibility or possible acquisition, although he does not know how to begin. He is there, he is passive, he is comfortable in his supposed knowledge, or even in his ignorance—but he can be provoked.

If we say, then, that the slave-boy can be provoked, that Meno can be taught (even though he thinks he already knows the answers to the questions that Socrates initially asks him), and that Anytus cannot be taught (because he is not interested in learning, in being taught, and thus cannot be provoked into inquiry by Socrates' questions), this suggests another important difference among these three types of students: their relative receptivity to Socratic questioning.

Even though Meno thinks that he knows, he is able to recognize

\begin{footnotes}
\item[23] This is the converse of the point made earlier regarding the requirement that the student be able to take what the teacher says as significant, important, or worthwhile. See supra p. 228. Here we are looking at the teacher, who needs to be able to take the student's response as significant. Otherwise, as Stanley Cavell puts it, the student will not learn (at least, not from this teacher):

\begin{quote}
If my teacher of French will not accept what I say and do as what he says and does, perhaps treating my American accent with tacit contempt, then I will not learn French (from him). But what happens if "my elders", all of them (those bigger people from whom I learn to use words), will not accept what I say and do as what they say and do? Must they? Is it only natural for them to? Is it their responsibility?
\end{quote}

\end{footnotes}
from his stumbling, bumbling responses to Socrates' questions that he does not know, or at least that he needs help, needs teaching. Meno is receptive to Socrates' questions, although it takes him a while to get their drift. (This is shown in a crucial sequence of exchanges in the dialogue, to which we shall return.28)

The slave-boy, on the other hand, does not necessarily think in the beginning that he knows at all; he is quite shy and hesitant in Socrates' presence. But Socrates manages to draw him out, and gradually the slave-boy gains enough confidence in his ability to answer Socrates' question that he then ventures an opinion, one that he claims is based on knowledge—which claim is then shown to be wrong. Dashed, the slave-boy retreats into silence. But he still is willing and able to be reached again by Socrates, who by careful questioning again draws the slave-boy out of his shell and leads him to the correct inference, to the right answer: Socrates leads him to knowledge.

Whatever knowledge is gained by Meno and the slave-boy is due not only to Socrates' estimable art of asking the right questions, but also to Meno's and the slave-boy's receptivity to Socrates' questions. These two students are praiseworthy in their resourceful receptivity, their willingness to entertain questions. Meno is, of course, the central study here, and his perseverance in the face of Socrates' sustained criticism deserves credit. But the slave-boy also merits praise. He may not be a self-starter, the way that Meno seems to be, and the slave-boy may be a bit timid, but he is, nonetheless, brave in facing Socrates' relentless questioning and in continuing to volunteer answers, to offer responses, even when they are offered with trepidation.

Compared to either Meno or the slave-boy, Anytus is unreceptive to Socrates' questions. It is not that he rejects them out of hand, or that he refuses to listen, because initially Anytus participates with Socrates. But even Anytus' initial responses seem perfunctory;28 and, after Socrates scorns Anytus' criticism of the Sophists (as being unfounded in knowledge) and begins to question Anytus as to the ability of important Athenians to teach their children to be virtuous, Anytus' responses become churlish. Anytus finds such questions scandalous, an affront to the good families of Athens, and eventually refuses to hear them.27 He is not receptive to Socratic questions, or to inquiry, or to learning.

25. See infra pp. 239-42.
27. See id. at 52-54 (92c-95a).
II. When Two Go Together: The Nature of Socratic Inquiry

I began the previous Section by saying that Meno is the central character in this dialogue and that throughout it we are meant to see something about him (call it his "education"). But, since then, I have been surveying three types of students as embodied by Meno, the slave-boy, and Anytus. Perhaps I can now say the following with some warrant: Meno wants to learn, but is initially unaware of his ignorance; the slave-boy does not begin by wanting to learn, but it turns out that he is willing to listen to Socrates' questions and to give them a try; and Anytus neither wants to learn nor is he willing to listen or to be provoked into inquiry by Socrates' questions. This would be one expansion of my earlier remark that these three people are differently situated in terms of their ability or willingness to learn and in terms of how they relate to Socrates as their teacher.

As their teacher, Socrates is trying to show these students (with varying degrees of success) how to inquire into matters that they may find puzzling or that they may be provoked to begin questioning and, for this purpose, is trying to teach them the method of inquiry that he has developed. We can read the Meno, then, not simply as an illustration of Meno's growth and education—although surely it is that—but also as a dialogue that illustrates the Socratic method in action. And, of course, since the Socratic method is a means of education, these are really two sides of the same phenomenon: Socrates uses his method as a way of educating Meno, and his education of Meno exemplifies the Socratic method.

Perhaps the first thing to note about the Socratic method of inquiry is that it requires two or more people talking with one another, sharing their views and thoughts, their words and ideas, trying to express things to their own satisfaction and to the satisfaction of the other person involved. During this intense conversational process, each of the participants is urged to be candid, to say what he or she really thinks, feels, or believes. (As Socrates remarks once to the slave-boy, "Very good; I like to hear you say what you think." Each participant also is asked to be brutally honest in assessing himself or herself and his or her conversational partner, either when a flaw is found or when conviction is reached. To discover that either of the partners in inquiry is talking nonsense, or does not mean what he or she says, or does not

28. See supra p. 225.
29. See id.
know what he or she is saying, is to be refuted (what Socrates calls “elenchus”\(^{31}\)). So, Socratic inquiry is shared inquiry. It does not work alone and is not meant to work alone.\(^{32}\) Why?

31. I am talking here in general terms about the “Socratic method” and “Socratic inquiry,” and I might appropriately be asked to specify what exactly these terms mean. For example, Professor L.H. LaRue has put to me the distinction that elenchus is not so much a method of inquiry as it is a method of testing, testing the truth and consistency of one’s beliefs and claims. On this understanding of Socratic method, the initial inquiry is bent on evoking assertions or claims, which then are tested by the elenchic method of argument and refutation. If the assertions pass this test and do not stand refuted or are not found to be inconsistent, then they are likely to be true.

But there is a sense, of course, in which the activity of elenchic argument and refutation can be said to be “inquiry,” because to test the truth or falsity of an assertion or claim is to inquire into its truth or falsity. In addition, and perhaps more to the point, I find myself wanting to say that the process or activity of elenchic argument and testing is one way to inquire into the knowledge that a person has. If we try to refute ourselves or the assertion or claim of another person and end up doing so, then we discover something about ourselves or about that other person—namely, that we (or he or she) did not know. This is an addition to our knowledge (either of ourselves or of another). On the other hand, if we try to refute ourselves (or another) and end up not being able to do so, then we discover that probably we do (or the other does) know what we claim (or he or she claimed) to know. So, again, this is an addition to our knowledge (either of ourselves or of another). So, in this respect, have we not used the elenchic method to inquire into the state of knowledge of a person? See infra note 78.

On the nature of elenchus in Socrates’ dialectical method, James Boyd White says the following:

The one who claims to know knows nothing after all. This is the elenchus, or refutation, of which Socrates repeatedly speaks, and it is the heart of dialectic. It results in a mortification or humiliation of a special kind, for one is mortified by the invocation not of new facts or ideas but of what one already knows or claims to know. One part of the self is appealed to against another part, and in the process a previously unknown self-contradiction is revealed.

[A] dialectical refutation (elenchos) requires that one make the other agree with what one says . . . . What matters between us is not the other witnesses who can be brought forward to support your view or mine but whether you can make me your witness or I can make you mine. For dialectic to exert its full force upon the individual mind, complete frankness is essential, a kind of shamelessness in saying what one really thinks.

JAMES BOYD WHITE, WHEN WORDS LOSE THEIR MEANING 95, 102 (1984).

For a further discussion about elenchus, see Eisele, Speech, supra note *, at 274-75.

32. Socrates emphasizes this aspect of his inquiry several times throughout the dialogue. For example, he discreetly but firmly draws Meno’s attention to the fact that their investigation is a shared effort when he says, “I have no objection to join with you in the inquiry.” Jowett & Anderson, supra note 3, at 36 (80d). Or, again, Socrates gently reminds Meno of what they are about when he asks, “[S]hall you and I make an effort to inquire together into the nature of virtue?” Id. at 45 (86c).

The same is true of Socrates’ effort in talking with Meno’s slave-boy. “Mark now the further development. I shall only ask him, and not teach him, and he shall share the inquiry with me.” Id. at 42 (84c-d). Since Socrates’ discussion with Meno’s slave-boy is itself a shared inquiry, it would not work, it would not be worth doing (because it would not illustrate what Socrates wants to show Meno and because it would not be educative for the slave-boy), were it not truly shared by both of them.
I believe that Socrates works together with others because he realizes that, in philosophy, we are working with our ordinary thoughts about ordinary things (as Stanley Cavell reminds us in the motto to this Essay\(^{33}\)). Or, as G.M. Young was fond of saying, following Maitland, our work in the humanities—such as history, law, and philosophy—deals with our “common thoughts of common things.”\(^{34}\) And other people are as much a source of knowledge and information about these matters as we are; their views, their minds, their conceptions, are as revelatory as ours are of the theories or constructions that we may possess on such matters. What we wish to learn about is something common to all of us, and in this respect it is something that we share (or that we are capable of sharing). It is a part of our common inheritance as human beings, a shared possession, or at least a shared object, of knowledge and experience. In the \textit{Meno}, the inquiry happens to be focused upon the nature and the attributes of virtue: what it is, how human beings gain or lose or exemplify it, how it can be transmitted between generations, and so forth. But the question pursued by Socrates might just as easily be the nature and extent of our knowledge, or what piety is and how we act piously or impiously, or what human courage amounts to, or how we become wise and what good wisdom is to us, or what the nature of happiness is, or how power is a part of human life and society and the ways in which power can be distinguished from justice or law, or any of a number of other topics of inquiry. All of these may be said to name philosophical topics, no doubt, but they are topics of philosophical thought, inquiry, and discussion because they are common concerns of human beings, things about which we humans periodically and unpredictably come to be struck, confused, intrigued, or puzzled. The specific topic for philosophical attention, for Socratic inquiry, makes little difference; what matters is that the chosen topic is of genuine interest or puzzlement to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{33.} \textit{Cavell, supra} note 1, at 9. Another relevant comment from Cavell is the following: [T]he ordinary world . . . may not be all there is, but it is important enough: morality is in that world, and so are force and love; so is art and a part of knowledge (the part which is about that world); and so is religion (wherever God is).
\end{itemize}

\begin{itemize}
\item Some mathematics and science, no doubt, are not.
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\item \textit{Stanley Cavell, Must We Mean What We Say?}, in \textit{MUST WE MEAN WHAT WE SAY?}, 1, 40 (1969).
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\item As to the ordinariness or commonness of Socrates’ topics, see Eisele, \textit{Speech, supra} note *, at 268.
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\item \textbf{34.} G.M. Young, \textit{Maitland}, in \textit{DAYLIGHT AND CHAMPAIGN}, 288, 290 (1937) (“Law, as [Maitland] understood it, is fundamentally a system of common thought about common things.”); \textit{Frederic W. Maitland, The Hide, in DOMESDAY BOOK AND BEYOND}, 357, 520 (1897) (“Above all, by slow degrees the thoughts of our forefathers, their common thoughts about common things, will have become thinkable once more.”).
\end{itemize}
us, to those of us engaged in the inquiry. (And since the given topic intrigues or attracts us, disturbs or distracts us, it is as accurate to say that the topic picks us as it is to say that we "choose" it.)

In such a context, no one of us is better situated or equipped than anyone else; what we wish to know is exactly something about our common inheritance. This is one reason why Socrates denies himself to no one.\textsuperscript{30} If someone approaches Socrates and asks him a question, this questioner has Socrates' attention (not necessarily his respect or assent, but his attention). And this also seems to be why Socrates takes his interlocutors where, where, and as he finds them. Yes, Socrates wants to make them better (more acute, more sensitive to the contents and limits of their lives); yes, he wishes to educate them in the ways of his Socratic method of inquiry. But, still, Socrates begins with the truly humble feeling that he can learn from anyone, from everyone. He can. We can too, if we know how, if we will learn how (from him).

The Socratic way of inquiring philosophically into matters of common knowledge that continue to befuddle and perplex us is to seek to formulate an adequate definition of the topic in question. We do this, according to Socrates, by offering definitions of the topic at hand and then testing these definitions for their adequacy. Regardless of whether one agrees with Socrates' attempt to find an acceptable definition of the essence of virtue (and I do not agree with it), it is clear that the main point of his effort in this dialogue is to goad Meno into offering to the two of them Meno's own thoughts and words on the nature of virtue. Timidity in this regard is no virtue. A refusal by Meno to participate (as Anytus later refuses to help) must end the inquiry. It is Meno's choice.

Initially, it appears that Meno refuses Socrates' implicit offer to teach him, because Meno cannot seem to grasp Socrates' way of asking and answering questions. So, even if Meno wants to learn, it is not at all clear that he shall be able to learn from Socrates. It seems more clear, in fact, that Meno cannot learn from Socrates, because Meno's fumbling attempts to answer Socrates' questions come to nothing. In contrast, even though the slave-boy does not signal any initial desire to learn, he still manages to learn from Socrates because he shows himself

\textsuperscript{35} Some time ago, I said the following about this aspect of Socrates' teaching:

A part of the virtue of Socrates that I see displayed in the \textit{Protagoras} is his ability to call upon his capacity for inquiry in aid of anyone—this seems true friendship indeed. He is a stranger to no one deliberately—unless they estrange themselves from him or his methods.

Eisele, \textit{Virtue}, supra note *, at 498. I made some additional comments about Socrates' openness to discussion with anyone, and about his habit of befriending his interlocutors, in Eisele, \textit{Speech}, supra note *, at 264, 267-68.
capable of joining in the inquiry with Socrates and responding fruitfully to his questions. (In fairness to Meno, however, it might be said that Socrates’ questions put to Meno, about the nature of virtue, are a good deal more difficult than Socrates’ questions put to the slave-boy, about basic arithmetic and certain geometrical figures.) So, as suggested in the preceding Section, while “wanting to learn” may be necessary for education to take place, alone it is not sufficient. Wanting to learn must also be supplemented with “receptivity”—an openness to or welcoming of one’s own doubts or quibbles, of someone else’s questions, or perhaps of the world’s own mysteries. We then may ask: In what does Meno’s receptivity consist? How does he manage to join together with Socrates to gain and share an education?

Meno opens the dialogue by asking how virtue is learned or acquired. Socrates suggests that Meno begins with the wrong question. In his opening exchange with Meno, Socrates claims that in order to know the attributes of anything (quale), one first must know what the thing is, its nature or essence (quid). So the primary question becomes not how virtue is learned or acquired (as Meno wishes to inquire), but rather what virtue is. Socrates’ first advice is this: Ask first things first.

Now, it seems possible to question the wisdom and the necessity of proceeding as Socrates advises, in part because it is not clear how we can determine the essence of an object or of a phenomenon without also, simultaneously as it were, determining or knowing its attributes or qualities. So Meno’s inquiry into one of the attributes of virtue (how we learn or acquire it) might well make sense to pursue; at least, I do not think that, in the abstract, we can rule it out ab initio. But we are not working in the abstract here; instead, we are working in the concrete context of this specific dialogue. And, in order to make this initial question of Meno’s a sensible project of inquiry here and now,

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37. Id. at 24 (71b). Eventually, Socrates drops this demand because Meno simply refuses to heed it. But Socrates still manages to make the point that, by his lights, this is taking things backwards:

Socrates: Had I the command of you as well as of myself, Meno, I would not have inquired whether virtue is given by instruction or not, until we had first ascertained “what it is.” But as you think only of controlling me who am your slave, and never of controlling yourself—such being your notion of freedom—I must yield to you, for you are irresistible. And therefore I have now to inquire into the qualities of a thing of which I do not as yet know the nature. At any rate, will you condescend a little and allow the question “Whether virtue is given by instruction, or in any other way,” to be argued upon hypothesis?

Id. at 45 (86d-e). This point about taking the relative topics in the wrong order is reiterated by Socrates in the very last speech in the dialogue. See id. at 61 (100b).
its proponent, Meno, would have to make an argument that would take account of Socrates' distinction between *quale* and *quid* and would have to show Socrates where he is wrong or misguided in his assumption (that the essence of a thing must be defined before we can learn about its attributes). But Meno makes no such argument. He makes no attempt to refute or respond to Socrates' assumption because, as his responses to Socrates' opening question reveal, Meno does not understand either Socrates' question about the nature of virtue or the assumption behind it.

Meno begins, then, in a state of ignorance—ignorance trebled, really, because he is ignorant (1) as to Socrates' method of asking questions, (2) as to the nature of virtue itself, and (3) as to his own ignorance about these matters. Meno's main problem is the third point; he does not realize that he is ignorant. So Socrates must make Meno's ignorance apparent to him, must make it live for him. As Meno's consciousness of his ignorance increases, so too does his receptivity to Socrates' questions (not his responsiveness to those questions, but his receptivity to the doubt that they express). He entertains them more—even if he finds himself less able to answer them.

The synoptic outline proposed at the beginning of Section I of this Essay emphasizes the side of the *Meno* that involves the education of the three different students. Yet a slightly different outline of the dialogue would characterize the movement of the *Meno* in terms of the series of stages, or the different turns and developments, in the Socratic inquiry that Meno experiences as he is educated into the Socratic method. These stages or developments are the following:

1. The Ethos of Asking and Answering (pp. 23-31 (70a-76e))
2. We Discover Our Own Ignorance—and Disillusionment Ensues (pp. 31-36 (77a-80d))
3. How Is Inquiry into the Unknown Possible? We Must "Re-Collect" Our Knowledge and Use It As Our Guide (pp. 36-45 (80d-86c))
4. A Renewal of the Search, a Renewal of Inquiry (pp. 45-49 (86c-89e))
5. When A Student Does Not Wish to Inquire (pp. 49-55 (90a-95a))
6. Back to the Initial Question: Can Virtue Be Taught? (pp. 55-61 (95a-100b))

The first stage in this second outline of the *Meno* is the stage where Socrates tries to teach Meno how to ask and answer questions about

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38. See supra p. 225.
virtue. Even when Meno seems to get the hang of the technique of asking and answering questions in the spirit of Socrates, he does not leave the scene, because he still is required by Socrates to give a helpful definition of virtue. This is the second stage in Socratic inquiry. And at this stage Meno once again fails: he does not manage to give an acceptable definition of virtue. When Meno proves unable to do this—although Socrates has already shown him how to give an acceptable definition of figure or shape—Meno sinks into disillusionment. Then, at the third stage in the dialogue, Socrates turns to Meno’s slave-boy, and Socrates takes him through the same process of disillusionment. But the third stage does not stop here, at disillusionment. Rather, having shown the slave-boy that he does not know what he thinks he knows, Socrates proceeds to show him that he does still know enough to enable him (the slave-boy) to answer some of Socrates’ questions about arithmetic and geometric figures. So, Socrates shows the slave-boy that he (the boy) has the wherewithal necessary for answering the questions put to him by Socrates. And this teaches a lesson to Meno as well, not only because Meno is an onlooker at this Socratic demonstration, but, more importantly, because Meno has been revealed (to himself and to others) to be in the same position as the slave-boy. They both must learn to inquire into the matters puzzling or confounding them, and their inquiry must come from positions in which they have had to admit and express their own ignorance:

Meno: ... For my soul and my tongue are really torpid, and I do not know how to answer you. 39

Boy: Indeed, Socrates, I do not know. 40

The full lesson is, however, that each of them can go on to inquire, to learn, to know, what he needs to know. With resources tested and hope renewed, Meno and Socrates return to the hunt for an adequate definition of the nature and attributes of virtue.

III. Beginning With Questions, Seeking Definitive Answers

Socratic questioning pursues a very deliberate and careful progression, from doubt to doubt and question to question, leading to disillusionment, then leading out of disillusionment into renewal. I now want to trace more specifically some of the steps in this Socratic progression, starting at the beginning of the dialogue.

40. Id. at 41 (84a).
Meno’s opening question to Socrates assumes that both of them already know what virtue is (Socrates’ “quid”), and now Meno is simply asking Socrates to explain to him one of the attributes of virtue (Socrates’ “quale”): Namely, is virtue gained by teaching or is it instead a natural acquisition? Socrates sees the assumption implicit in Meno’s question and tries to get Meno to see it too. Socrates does not think that he himself knows what virtue is and, furthermore, does not think that Meno knows either:

And I myself, Meno, living as I do in this region of poverty, am as poor as the rest of the world, and I confess with shame that I know literally nothing about virtue; and when I do not know the “quid” of anything, how can I know the “quale”? . . . Not only that, my dear boy, but you may say further that I have never known of any one else who did, in my judgment.\(^41\)

In the face of this challenge, Meno ignores the assumption implicit in Socrates’ distinction between quale and quid (about which, as I said above, Meno might have effectively challenged Socrates), and he instead simply proclaims that both Gorgias and he know what virtue is. Socrates remains skeptical of this claim, but urges Meno to prove him wrong:

By the gods, Meno, be generous and tell me what you say that virtue is; for I shall be truly delighted to find that I have been mistaken, and that you and Gorgias do really have this knowledge [of what virtue is], although I have been just saying that I have never found anybody who had.\(^42\)

Meno’s response to Socrates is arrogance itself: “There will be no difficulty, Socrates, in answering your question. Let us take first the virtue of a man . . .”\(^43\) But Socrates rejects Meno’s attempted definition of virtue, because it purports to define what virtue is in various entities, while it fails to state what virtue is in and of itself. “How fortunate I am, Meno! When I ask you for one virtue, you present me with a swarm of them, which are in your keeping.”\(^44\)

After Socrates’ rejection of Meno’s attempted definition, it dawns on Meno that perhaps he does not know what he thinks he knows, that perhaps he does not understand quite as much as he thinks he does, about the nature of virtue. The specific doubt that Meno expresses, however, is that he does not yet fully grasp Socrates’ question: “I am beginning to understand; but I do not as yet take hold of the question

\(^{41}\) Id. at 23-24 (71b-c).
\(^{42}\) Id. at 24 (71d).
\(^{43}\) Id. (71c).
\(^{44}\) Id. at 25 (72a).
as I could wish." This is only the beginning of doubt dawning on Meno, and all that he announces is his doubt about whether he understands Socrates' question. Meno does not say that, due to Socrates' questioning, he now doubts whether he understands what virtue is. That second doubt will come later, but it takes several more passes at the question, at Socrates' challenge to Meno (to tell him what virtue is), before Meno comes to realize that he does not know how to answer Socrates' questions. And it is only after that realization, some pages farther along, that Meno comes to realize that perhaps he does not even know what virtue is.

Having humbled Meno, Socrates tries to show him what kind of questions he is asking and how they might be answered.

Socrates: ... Could you not answer that question, Meno? I wish that you would try; the attempt will be good practice with a view to the answer about virtue.
Meno: I would rather that you answer, Socrates.
Socrates: Shall I indulge you?
Meno: By all means.
Socrates: And then you will tell me about virtue?
Meno: I will.
Socrates: Then I must do my best, for there is a prize to be won.46

... Socrates: You are outrageous, Meno, in thus plaguing a poor old man to give you an answer, when you will not take the trouble of remembering what is Gorgias' definition of virtue.
Meno: When you have told me what I ask, I will tell you, Socrates.47

It is only at this point in the dialogue, a half-dozen pages into it, that Meno begins to understand that Socrates' questions are different from the question with which Meno began. He is beginning to gain an appreciation of the precision of Socratic questioning and the elusiveness of Socratic definitions (which are what Socrates expects as useful answers to his questions).

Since Socrates seems to think that these kinds of questions can have satisfactory answers and that such answers come in the form of definitions, definitions are what he seeks from Meno, and they are the type of answer that Socrates himself tries to supply.48 Socrates may or may

45. Id. (72d).
46. Id. at 29 (75a-b).
47. Id. at 30 (76a-b).
48. Socrates (or perhaps it is Plato) seems to assume that our knowledge of something—here, virtue—is or should always be expressible in the form of a definition. If we truly know what x is, then we should be able to define x. Consequently, Socrates' characteristic questions are requests for definitions (of virtue, of courage, of prudence, of piety, of wisdom, of
not be well-advised to seek definitions in answer to the kind of questions that he entertains. The more important point for us to see, however, is that Socrates' search for definitions is opposed to the kind of answer that the Sophists offer: a bold and grandiose rhetorical flourish that tells us nothing, that only pretends to be based in knowledge or wisdom. Socrates realizes that Meno expected his original question to have an answer of the kind that Gorgias has taught him to expect. “[Gorgias] has taught you the habit of answering questions in a grand and bold style, which becomes those who know, and is the style in which he himself answers all comers.” But Socrates teaches Meno that this is a mistaken expectation, because it settles for an answer that is useless or uninformative. (This is an example of what I meant earlier when I said that a teacher teaches a sense of propriety, one that, among other things, assesses the value and the utility of the answers that a person finds acceptable or that he or she settles for.)

The difference between Socrates’ way of answering and Gorgias’ way of answering is illustrated when Socrates offers Meno a definition of “what figure [or shape] is.” Meno finds Socrates’ definition ludicrously simple, lacking profundity or philosophical seriousness. This is a part of Meno’s ignorance, however, as Socrates goes on to show Meno. When Socrates proposes a different answer to the question, “What is figure?” (an answer formulated in the style of answer given by Gorgias), Meno shouts his approval. “That, Socrates, appears to me to be an admirable answer.” But Socrates denies the worth of the answer he has just produced. Such an answer may be comforting to justice, of knowledge, and so forth).

This is not how I proceed in law school, nor is it (I believe) how most of us teach in law school. My own practice does sometimes rely upon a request for a definition, granted: How are we to understand “possession,” or “reasonable,” or “reliance” (and so forth) here? But, more often, I test the knowledge of my students either by asking them to describe a case, a legal rule, or a statute, or by asking them to explain one. And asking for such descriptions and explanations is not tantamount to a request for a definition. Nonetheless, I think that such descriptions and explanations do (sometimes) adequately express the knowledge that we possess of these matters, of the law (and its workings).

This does not respond fully to Socrates’ assumption that our knowledge of such matters can be expressed in definitions, of course, but I think that it suggests one possible line of response that might be successfully developed. The entire topic of the nature of Socrates’ questions and what he meant to elicit by asking them is worth further study. Beginnings on this topic have been made as follows: Gerasimos X. Santas, Socrates: Philosophy in Plato’s Early Dialogues 59-96 (1979); Gregory Vlastos, What did Socrates Understand by His “What is F?” Question?, in Platonic Studies 410, 410-17 (2d ed. 1981). As to the topic of how our knowledge of certain matters can be expressed, see infra notes 59, 61.

49. Jowett & Anderson, supra note 3, at 23 (70b-c).
50. See supra pp. 228-29.
52. Id. at 31 (76d).
Meno, but that is because it fits his preconception of what such an answer should look or sound like. That is why Meno accepts it, not because it is true or useful.

Socrates: The answer, Meno, was in the orthodox solemn vein, and therefore was more acceptable to you than the other answer [that Socrates offered] about figure.

Meno: Yes.

Socrates: And yet, . . . I cannot help thinking that the other [answer] was the better; and I am sure that you would be of the same opinion if you would only stay and be initiated, and were not compelled, as you said yesterday, to go away before the mysteries.88

The surprise is that Meno does stay, and he is initiated into the intricacies of the Socratic method. It is a method that depends, at one and the same time, on disillusionment and something else again.

IV. FIRST COMES DISILLUSIONMENT: MENO AND THE SLAVE-BOY

The first twenty pages of the Meno trace a deepening puzzlement on the part of Meno, as he is initiated into the intricacies of Socratic questioning. This puzzlement eventuates in Meno's disillusionment. But Socrates does not end his teaching there. He goes on, rather, to duplicate this disillusionment in Meno's slave-boy (thereby showing Meno that we all—the high, the low, and the middle—share this aspect of the human condition), and then he further shows both Meno and the slave-boy a way out of their disillusionment, by means of their own knowledge and know-how (such as they are, such as they stand). And this last lesson teaches the same moral as the first, namely, that we all—the high, the low, and the middle—share this aspect of the human condition. So, both the disillusionment and the know-how shared by Meno and the slave-boy simultaneously name human threats and human promises: they negatively threaten us with all of the problems associated with human limitation and failure, and yet they also positively promise us the powers associated with human possibility and capacity. How are we to negotiate this treacherous terrain? Socrates does it by discussing these problems with others, by inquiring into these matters in the company of another.

When two go together in the course of Socratic inquiry, we find out what they share. What human beings share, basically, is their ignorance and an ability to overcome it, an ability to learn (not an ability to learn everything they want to learn, but perhaps to learn whatever

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88. Id. at 31 (76e).
they may need to know). It is the peculiar genius of the early and middle dialogues of Plato, which I think portray Socrates at his best, that they teach two interrelated lessons about human ignorance and limitation:

1. You do not know what you think you know.
2. You know more (or other) than what you think (you know).\(^\text{54}\)

The first lesson is a lesson in disillusionment, as I understand it, because it typically concerns a matter about which we all seemingly know, or should know. How is it that we do not in fact know—as Socrates keeps showing us, and then reminding us—something that we think we should (or do) know? It is disillusioning to conjure up such a question. But the other side of Socrates’ teaching is that, given an awareness of our ignorance, we also must acknowledge that we do in fact know more (or other) than what we think we know. So there is hope for us yet; and this I take to be Socrates’ second lesson, the “something else” he offers us.

Let us begin with the first lesson that Socrates teaches: we do not know what we think we know. I said that this discovery leads to disillusionment. It is disillusioning to learn that something that we think we know and perhaps even think to be a matter of common knowledge—an epistemological possession that we share in common—is, in fact, something that we do not know at all. Typically, in the early and middle dialogues, Socrates orchestrates this insight by claiming not to know about a given phenomenon, whereas Socrates’ interlocutor or student claims to know all about that same phenomenon. Then, when Socrates shows his interlocutor that he (the interlocutor) does not know any more or any better than Socrates, the two of them are reduced to the same position or status, namely, that of not knowing. They have achieved Socratic ignorance. So the operative Socratic insight is that we all start from ignorance.

But the Socratic position for the initiation of inquiry is not only one of not knowing, but also one of wanting to know, wanting to learn. With the aid of Socrates’ preparation by means of intense questioning, we are confused or perplexed about something in the world, in others, or in ourselves, or for some other reason we are interested in something, and this propels us into taking an interest in the matter at hand, prompting us to inquire into it. So, for example, when Meno begins by asking Socrates a question about an attribute of virtue, he suggests

\(^{54}\) These two lessons of Socratic teaching are the twin themes of my companion essay. For a further development of these twin themes and a more explicit connection of them to law school teaching today, see Eisele, supra note 2, at 603-19.
(and he thinks) that he knows what virtue is. And when Socrates ends his response by saying that neither he nor anyone else that he has ever met knows what virtue is, this astonishes Meno. But when Meno's efforts to disprove Socrates are all rejected, with what appear to Meno's satisfaction to be good reasons for rejection, this shakes Meno's confidence. It is meant to do so, of course, because Socrates is trying to show Meno that his confidence in his own knowledge—in his claim to know what virtue is—is misplaced. Socrates accomplishes this revelation by revealing Meno's own confusion or perplexity: Socrates shows Meno the confusion that exists in Meno's own mind and in his many attempted definitions of virtue. By asking Meno apparently simple and straightforward questions that he is unable to answer, questions that Meno himself feels to be fair, ones that he feels he should be able to answer if he truly does know what virtue is, Socrates reveals to Meno his own confusion and perplexity. Meno thought that he knew what virtue was, but it turns out that he did not.

The maxim found at the Delphic oracle, “Know thyself,” is more complicated to apply and more difficult to honor in practice than we might believe. As to Meno, this Delphic injunction prescribes a three-part project, because Meno begins with his ignorance “trebled”: (1) He is ignorant as to the nature of Socratic questions and how they need to be answered (or the kind of answer that they expect or require); (2) he also is ignorant as to the nature or essence of virtue—at least he is unable to produce a definition of virtue that Socrates and he

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55. It is reported that this saying was inscribed over the threshold of the temple at Delphi:

[A]t Delphi the educational power of Greek religion reached its maximum, and spread from there far beyond the frontiers of Hellas. The wise sayings of sages were dedicated to Apollo and inscribed in his temple, since their worldly wisdom was only a reflection of his divine wisdom. And at his door his worshippers saw the command Know thyself—the doctrine of sophrosyne, by which men learn to remember the limits of human power and ambition, expressed in the legislative form that was characteristic of the age.

1 Werner Jaeger, Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture 167 (Gilbert Highet trans., 2d ed. 1945) (footnote omitted).

In The Apology, Socrates justifies his teaching method in part by saying that he was told that the Delphic oracle said that no one was wiser than Socrates. See Plato, supra note 22, at 25 (21a). Yet Socrates knew that he did not know. Putting these together—he knew himself well enough to know that he was ignorant, and the oracle said that no one was wiser than he—this seems to mean (and meant to Socrates) that all of his interlocutors failed to know what they thought they knew. So Socrates takes as one of his purposes in life the effort to show others that they do not know what they think they know.

The Delphic saying, “Know thyself,” also comes under Socratic scrutiny in the Charmides and the Protagoras. See Plato, Charmides, in Laches and Charmides 51, 76, 80 (165a, 167a) (Rosamond Kent Sprague trans., Library of Liberal Arts 1973); Plato, Protagoras 46 (343b) (Benjamin Jowett & Martin Ostwald trans., Library of Liberal Arts 1956).

56. See supra p. 237.
can accept as satisfactory or adequate; and (3) he does not know initially that he is ignorant in either of these respects.

Socrates' insistence on the idea that any object or phenomenon has a defining nature or essence, and that we must be able to state a definition of that nature or essence if we claim to know what it is (or, more positively, if we ever are truly to know what the nature or essence of the object or phenomenon is), is the anvil on which Meno's arrogance is crushed:

Socrates: ... Why, did I not ask you to tell me the nature of virtue as a whole? And you are very far from telling me this, but declare every action to be virtue which is done with a part of virtue, as though you had told me and I must already know the whole of virtue, and this, too, when frittered away into little pieces. And, therefore, my dear Meno, I fear that I must begin again and repeat the same question: What is virtue?\

It is Meno's continued claim to know the nature of virtue, and yet his continued inability to articulate a definition that satisfies either Socrates or himself, one that holds up under their combined critical inspection, that reduces Meno to disillusionment. He fails to support his claim to know, because he does not know what he thinks he knows. His recognition of this fact leads to frustration and disillusionment, expressed this way:

Socrates: Then begin again, and answer me. What, according to you and your friend Gorgias, is the definition of virtue?
Meno: O Socrates, I used to be told, before I knew you, that you were always doubting yourself and making others doubt; and now you are casting your spells over me, and I am simply getting bewitched and enchanted, and am at my wit's end. And if I may venture to make a jest upon you, you seem to me both in your appearance and in your power over others to be very like the flat torpedo fish, who torpifies [stuns, numbs] those who come near him and touch him, as you have now torpified me, I think. For my soul and my tongue are really torpid, and I do not know how to answer you; and though I have been delivered of an infinite variety of speeches [by the Sophists] about virtue before now, and to many persons—and very good ones they were, as I thought—at this moment I cannot even say what virtue is.

Not every failure of knowledge leads to disillusionment. But once Meno thinks that he has understood Socrates' question, and then gamely tries to comply with the demand for a definition, Meno seems

58. Id. at 35-36 (79e-80b).
to be in the best possible position to succeed. He knows what is now being asked of him, he knows the phenomenon in question, and still he finds himself unable to say what virtue is! Well, that refutation produces more than mere discouragement. It makes a person feel that he or she just does not know what he or she claims to know. (It may even make a person skeptical of anyone's claim to know anything at all; this is how skepticism gets started.\(^60\)) For someone in the position of Meno, who has claimed to know what virtue is and has claimed to understand what Socrates is asking, the result of this entire process is disillusionment.

Meno's word for disillusionment is "torpification,"\(^60\) which is unusual, but I think that one can see the kind of experience that he is trying to capture. He feels as though Socrates has cast a spell over him; he feels bewitched and enchanted; he is at his wit's end. In a sense, he still knows that he knows what virtue is (or he still thinks that he knows what virtue is), and yet he always seems to find himself unable to say what it is, to express the knowledge that he has (or thinks he has).\(^61\) This makes him too numb to think or speak. And

59. Why, in such circumstances, do we not think instead that perhaps virtue cannot be known or described as we seem to think or to assume that it can? In this sense, virtue may not be defined as we seem to think of its being defined; yet perhaps in another sense it can be known or described. (I have said more about the possibility of Socratic definition, and of other types of definition, in Eisele, *Virtue*, supra note 2, at 498-501.)

We do not take this alternative route because, I suppose, it seems so obvious to us that we do know what virtue is, and equally obvious what this knowledge consists in and how to go about defining or expressing it. Wittgenstein, for one, is at pains to get us to consider the road not taken. His entire programme of explicating our shared knowledge by means of the criteria we possess and the grammatical structure or schema that those criteria trace, is aimed at making available to us—making us conscious of—the knowledge that we actually possess and how (the sense in which) we actually possess it. Places to begin reading in this alternative vision of our knowledge include the following: *Cavell*, supra note 23; *Ludwig Wittgenstein, On Certainty* (Denis Paul & G.E.M. Anscombe trans., 1969); *Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations §§ 78, 90, 147-51, 371-74* (G.E.M. Anscombe trans., 3d ed. 1969). For further remarks on disillusionment and skepticism, see Eisele, *supra* note 2, at 602, 613.

60. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that "torpification" is Jowett's word for translating Meno's experience. The other three translators of the *Meno* whose translations I have consulted instead speak of Meno's "perplexity" and the fact that Socrates' questioning makes him "numb." (These translators do also speak, however, in terms of Meno's being "bewitched" and "beguiled," in terms of "magic" and "witchcraft," and in terms of "enchantment.") See Allen, *supra* note 3, at 162; Grube, *supra* note 3, at 12-13; Brown & Guthrie, *supra* note 3, at 30-31.

61. Perhaps the classic formulation of this perplexity—thinking that one knows, but also, at the same time, doubting that one knows or fearing that one does not know—is St. Augustine's. In his *Confessions*, he voices the dilemma this way:

> What is time? Who can easily and briefly explain this? Who can comprehend this even in thought, so as to express it in a word? Yet what do we discuss more familiarly and knowingly in conversation than time? Surely we understand it when we talk about it, and also understand it when we hear others talk about it.

> What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to

HeinOnline -- 63 U. Cin. L. Rev. 246 1994-1995
then the disillusionment comes. He not only does not know what to say ("For my soul and my tongue are really torpid, and I do not know how to answer you"); he no longer knows whether he even knows what virtue is ("at this moment I cannot even say what virtue is"). He is full of doubt.

This makes two of them. In announcing that he now doubts whether he knows what virtue is, Meno has only arrived at the same position of ignorance already reached and acknowledged by Socrates at the beginning of the dialogue. "And I myself, Meno, living as I do in this region of poverty, am as poor as the rest of the world, and I confess with shame that I know literally nothing about virtue." The shame in Socrates' confession of his ignorance is an expression of the sheer fact that he knows nothing about virtue. He has no excuse for his ignorance, because he has had the time and the ability to find out what he needs to know about virtue. But beyond this expression, there is no shame in Socrates' admission; it is this very recognition of one's own ignorance (an admission or recognition that paradoxically announces an increase in one's self-knowledge) that makes possible whatever knowledge, or progress toward knowledge, any subsequent inquiry may achieve.

Socrates insists on this need to recognize one's own ignorance as the pre-condition to joining Meno in an inquiry into the nature of virtue. And, since Meno now shares Socrates' perplexity and his admitted ignorance on the topic of virtue, perhaps they are prepared to inquire further, together:

Socrates: . . . As to my being a torpedo, if the torpedo is torpid as well as the cause of torpidity [numbness, perplexity] in others, then indeed I am a torpedo, but not otherwise; for I perplex others, not because I am clear, but because I am utterly perplexed myself. And now I know not what virtue is, and you seem to be in the same case, although you did once perhaps know, before you touched me. How-

someone who does ask me, I do not know. . . .


So long as you do not ask me to articulate my knowledge, I know it. But as soon as you put me on the spot, I lose my knowledge of it. How can our knowledge be so fleeting, so fragile, so unavailable when we most need it? So it is that disillusionment with human knowledge seems to alternate with a pugnacious willfulness that one still knows what he or she claims to know (thereby expressing our unwillingness to acknowledge our limits, or our ignorance). Wittgenstein and Cavell both comment helpfully on St. Augustine's expression of this phenomenon. See STANLEY CAVELL, ENDING THE WAITING GAME, IN MUST WE MEAN WHAT WE SAY? 115, 126 (1969); WITTGENSTEIN, PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS, supra note 59, at ¶ 89; see also supra note 48.

ever, I have no objection to join with you in the inquiry.  

Socrates recognizes that he shares the ignorance common to all human beings (hence, his avowal that "I am utterly perplexed myself" and that "you [Meno] seem to be in the same case"): their condition is a shared one. To call this condition "ignorance" is slightly misleading, because it is as much a kind of knowledge as it is a lack of knowledge. Because of the truthfulness and candor of Socrates' questioning and his willingness to admit his own ignorance, he reveals to himself and to others a perplexity that already existed, a confusion that existed but that heretofore had gone unknown or unacknowledged. This realization is a kind of knowledge, not ignorance. Meno, for example, is now conscious of his ignorance and seems to be able to admit it in front of others. Whereas before he thought that he knew what virtue was, but apparently did not know, now he at least knows that he does not know (what virtue is). So, by learning the limits of his knowledge, he has gained something valuable. He has gained knowledge (about himself) by learning where his knowledge ends. And it is exactly such knowledge of one's ignorance that Socrates finds energizing, or empowering.

Meno's slave-boy gains knowledge of his own ignorance by means of the same treatment from Socrates that Meno received: questioning leading to perplexity; confusion leading to the slave-boy's tenuous claim to know something; refutation of the boy's claim leading to his disillusionment. In the following, Socrates summarizes the boy's educational initiation into disillusionment and what it has gained him:

Socrates: Do you see, Meno, what advances he [the slave-boy] has made in his power of recollection? He did not know at first, and he does not know now, what is the side of a figure of eight feet; but then he thought that he knew, and answered confidently as if he knew, and had no difficulty; now he has a difficulty, and neither knows nor fancies that he knows.

Meno: True.

Socrates: Is he not better off in knowing his ignorance?

Meno: I think that he is.

Socrates: If we have made him doubt, and given him the "torpedo's shock," have we done him any harm?

Meno: I think not.

Socrates: We have certainly, as would seem, assisted him in some degree to the discovery of the truth; and now he will wish to remedy his ignorance, but then he would have been ready to tell all the world again and again that the double space should have a double side.

Meno: True.

63. Id. at 36 (88c-d).
Socrates: But do you suppose that he would ever have inquired into or learned what he fancied that he knew, though he was really ignorant of it, until he had fallen into perplexity under the idea that he did not know, and desired to know?

Meno: I think not, Socrates.

Socrates: Then he was the better for the torpedo's touch?

Meno: I think so.64

Socrates' claim is that the slave-boy would never have been moved to inquire into these matters of geometry and mathematical knowledge, had it not been for 'Socrates. He led the boy to confront and to acknowledge his own ignorance in such matters. It is this confrontation that generates the desire to know or the "wanting to know" that earlier I said is an essential element in making this inquiry possible, and effective.65 So, it seems that Meno and his slave-boy find, just as Socrates does, the knowledge of their own ignorance to be energizing, or empowering.

V. RECOLLECTION AS THE RESPONSE TO DISILLUSIONMENT

If the knowledge of one's own ignorance prepares the stage for further Socratic inquiry, prepares one to inquire further into the mysteries with which we are perplexed, this is only half of the story. As I said above, Socrates offers us dual lessons, only one of which is our disillusionment with our own ignorance.66 Disillusionment is hardly apt to motivate us to inquire further—it implies despair,67 not invigoration, and, if left alone, it leads not to inquiry but to a kind of Thoreauvian "quiet desperation."68 For, if we prove ignorant of things that we (used to) think common knowledge, what point is there in

64. Id. at 41-42 (84a-c).
66. See supra p. 243.
67. That the meaning of disillusionment contains complicated negative and positive connotations is a topic I discuss more fully in my companion essay. See Eisele, supra note 2, at 612. (I want to thank Professor Thomas Shaffer for convincing me that this complexity needs to be handled with more care than I had initially given it.)

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. From the desperate city you go into the desperate country, and have to console yourself with the bravery of minks and muskrats. A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work. But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things.

Id.
undertaking further inquiry? What point is there in trying to improve ourselves or our knowledge, when it seems so desperately out of our reach?

This is what Meno would like to know, and he expresses this point after Socrates has led him to disillusionment. "And how will you inquire, Socrates, into that which you do not know? What will you put forth as the subject of inquiry? And if you find what you want, how will you ever know that this is the thing which you did not know?"69

Faced with their joint perplexity, what are they to do? Meno wants to give up, because he thinks that it is impossible to learn what they wish to learn—the nature of virtue. How can we know what we are looking for—much less recognize it if and when we find it—when we do not know in the first place what it is (what its nature or essence is)? It is this challenge from Meno that launches Socrates into his celebrated discussion with Meno's slave-boy.

The therapy for disillusionment, according to Socrates, is recollection, and his discussion with the slave-boy is frequently cited as an early expression of Plato's doctrine of "recollection." This Platonic doctrine attempts to explain how the immortal soul can first possess and then recollect knowledge that it has acquired in its earlier existence and acquaintance with the world (and with the Forms):

Socrates: . . . The soul, then, as being immortal, and having been born again many times, and having seen all things that exist, whether in this world or in the world below, has knowledge of them all; and it is no wonder that she [the soul] should be able to call to remembrance all that she ever knew about virtue and about everything; for as all nature is akin, and the soul has learned all things, there is no difficulty in her eliciting, or as men say "learning," out of a single recollection, all the rest, if a man is strenuous and does not faint; for all inquiry and all learning is but recollection.70

I can best make sense out of the claim that "all inquiry and all learning is but recollection" by understanding it, not as it may fit or illustrate one of Plato's metaphysical doctrines, but rather as a trope, a figure of speech, meant to capture the sense and extent to which our knowledge of any matter comes from the human activity of reconstructing or recapturing it (recounting it, or re-collecting it) from our own experience.

69. Jowett & Anderson, supra note 3, at 36 (80d). Meno's question, which many have called a paradox, has received considerable attention in the secondary literature on Socrates and Plato. For starters, I recommend the following two essays: Bernard Phillips, The Significance of Meno's Paradox, in Plato's Meno: Text and Criticism 77 (Alexander Sesonske & Noel Fleming eds., 1965); Michael Welbourne, Meno's Paradox, 61 PHILOSOPHY 229 (1986).

70. Jowett & Anderson, supra note 3, at 37 (81c-d).
To begin with, it is important to remember that Socrates and his interlocutors investigate matters of common knowledge, objects or phenomena that are constituents of our ordinary experience and language: virtue, knowledge, belief, courage, wisdom, piety, power, justice, education, and so on. These are shared by all human beings, and this sharing is a part of what makes them appropriate subjects for philosophical inquiry (Socratic inquiry). As to matters of common knowledge or experience, Wittgenstein said: "[I]t is . . . of the essence of our investigation that we do not seek to learn anything new by it. We want to understand something that is already in plain view. For this is what we seem in some sense not to understand." This is not the most transparent comment ever made on philosophical method, but I understand its denial of wanting to learn anything "new" to be a way of forcing us to face what we share in our experience and life. We are, that is, to try to engage with this common experience first, rather than always to look for something else that supposedly underlies or explains the initial phenomenon confronting us.

In philosophies that proceed on the basis of ordinary language and experience (as Wittgenstein’s and Socrates’ philosophies do), looking always at what we say and feel and think and claim as the primary data with which philosophy has to work (as, emphatically, Socratic inquiry does), we are not trying to seek some explanation of these data that appeals to anything outside of them or underlying them (as though we normally have access to such external causes or underlying structures). We seek, instead, to understand the data that themselves constitute our lives, our world, our minds, our ideas and ideals. These are what we find ourselves in confusion or perplexity over. Philosophical confusion concerns what we make of our own experience and our own world (or, more typically, what we fail to make of them), and in this respect, it makes no sense to attempt to understand our conceptions about (or our confusions over) our ordinary experience and world by going outside of them (or behind them, or beneath them). Such alternatives postpone these problems or substitute new problems for old ones; they do not solve the problems with which we begin (the ones that initially motivated us and our philosophical inquiry) and from which we possibly never rid ourselves. These old problems are the ones about which Stanley Cavell speaks in the motto to this Essay:

things that ordinary human beings cannot help thinking about, or anyway cannot help having occur to them, sometimes in fantasy, sometimes as a flash across a landscape; such things, for example, as

71. WITTGENSTEIN, PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS. supra note 59, at § 89, ¶ b.
whether we can know the world as it is in itself, or whether others really know the nature of one's own experiences, or whether good and bad are relative, or whether we might not now be dreaming that we are awake. 72

So we want to make sense out of the very data of our consciousness or experience.

We may or may not already have enough data of this kind; 73 sometimes Wittgensteinian or Socratic investigations seek additional data, sometimes a re-organization or re-assessment of the old data. But the philosophical problem remains that we do not yet understand the data that we already have—we experience these things, but we do not yet understand them. Paradoxically, they are ours, but they are not ours. We “have” them, but we do not yet “possess” them in a firm or clear mental grasp. What we seek in a philosophical investigation inspired in a Socratic or Wittgensteinian mood is a better view of, a better understanding of, the experiential data that we already have.

In this respect, Socrates’ call to remembrance, to recollect something that we already know—in the sense that we are already familiar with it, although we do not yet know it, because we do not yet appreciate it or its significance—is a call to make ourselves aware of something about which we are not yet as conscious as we should be. Such a conception of the philosopher’s task pictures us as being in need of coming-to-our-senses; this is the essence of Socratic inquiry. So, disillusionment is meant to lead to recollection.

VI. WORKING WITH WHAT WE HAVE: THE EXAMPLE OF THE SLAVE-BOY

The slave-boy is chosen from several attendants accompanying Meno, and his only attributes about which Socrates asks are his nativity and his native language. “He is Greek, and speaks Greek, does he not?” 74 These are all the tools, all the capacities, that Socrates requires of him: he needs only to be a native speaker of this natural language. In the exchange between Socrates and the slave-boy, there are at issue

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72. CAVELL, supra note 1, at 9.
73. This is to say that we have all the data that we need in our own lives and experiences; nothing more exotic or esoteric need be sought (as Wittgenstein says, see supra note 71 and accompanying text). But this is not to say that philosophy as a discipline or tradition has always made use of these data. The fact that traditional philosophy has not, in fact, made use of the data available to it is one of the insights stated and demonstrated in J.L. Austin’s work. See, e.g., J.L. Austin, A Plea for Excuses, in PHILOSOPHICAL PAPERS 123, 128-37 (J.O. Urmson & G.J. Warnock eds., 1961).
74. JOWETT & ANDERSON, supra note 3, at 38 (82b).
certain matters of basic mathematical knowledge, concepts of arithmetic and geometry that seem to be among the common inheritance of all human beings. But, just as Socrates' method of questioning the slave-boy is similar to that used by Socrates on Meno, the end result is similar too: the boy is refuted in his claim to know. This explicit parallel in the dialogue—between Meno's fate and the slave-boy's fate at the hands of Socrates and his questioning—seems to me intended to teach the lesson that Meno and the slave-boy are basically in the same position, one of unconscious ignorance, of which each is made aware by means of Socrates' questions.

The exchange between Socrates and the slave-boy begins as follows:

Socrates: Tell me, boy, do you know that a figure like this is a square?
Boy: I do.
Socrates: And you know that a square figure has these four lines equal?
Boy: Certainly.
Socrates: And these lines which I have drawn through the middle of the square are also equal?
Boy: Yes.
Socrates: A square may be of any size?
Boy: Certainly.\(^7\)

This is tepid stuff, and it continues in pretty much the same vein, except that the slave-boy gradually comes to speak a little more, to give some answers that require a bit more calculation or thinking.

Socrates: And how many are twice two feet? Count and tell me.
Boy: Four, Socrates.
Socrates: And might there not be another square twice as large as this, and having like this the lines equal?
Boy: Yes.
Socrates: And of how many feet will that be?
Boy: Of eight feet.
Socrates: And now try and tell the length of the line which forms the side of that double square: this is two feet—what will that be?
Boy: Clearly, Socrates, it will be double.
Socrates: Do you observe, Meno, that I am not teaching the boy anything, but only asking him questions; and now he fancies that he knows how long a line is necessary in order to produce a figure of eight square feet; does he not?\(^8\)

Reading this exchange, I cannot agree with Socrates' account of

\(^7\) Id. at 38 (82b-c).
\(^8\) Id. at 39 (82d-e).
what is happening here: "I am not teaching the boy anything, but only asking him questions . . . ." Socrates is asking the slave-boy what lawyers would call leading questions (the questions suggest the answers that the questioner wishes the answerer to give), and the slave-boy answers with a few words, essentially expressing his assent to what Socrates has said. This shows nothing about the soul's recollection of prior knowledge (and very few readers take it to do so). What it does show, however, is Socrates teaching the slave-boy about two different kinds of knowledge that he possesses (without knowing it).

First, Socrates is making explicit to the slave-boy certain implications of arithmetic and geometrical figures, implications that follow from the mathematical knowledge that the boy has (as stated or expressed in the propositions that Socrates puts to him). For example,

77. In his collection of essays on the Meno, Malcolm Brown says that there is "nearly universal doubt about . . . [whether] Socrates' interrogation [is] fair, or . . . [instead, whether] it resor[s] to questions 'blatantly leading.'" Brown & Guthrie, supra note 3, at xv. Brown goes on to ask: "[E]ven if it was fair, does the lesson support the momentous consequences (about the soul's ante-natal condition, about recollection) that Plato seems to be attaching to it?" Id.

On the other side, Professor Allen suggests that the charge of "asking leading questions" is unfairly made against Socrates:

It is often objected that Socrates' questions to the slave are leading questions, and thus his example in no way indicates that learning is recollection. But this objection is confused. A leading question is one which suggests its own answer, and so defined, many of Socrates' questions are clearly leading. But it is relevant to observe that, in matters mathematical, the mind of the boy is capable of being led. In the law of evidence, which deals with empirical fact, leading questions are open to objection on the ground that they may cause a witness to acquiesce in a false suggestion. But this is clearly irrelevant when questions deal with a complex geometrical proof. No false suggestions have been planted; the evidentiary problem does not arise.

Allen, supra note 3, at 143. Professor Allen may be right in so far as his answer goes, but does it go far enough? The problem with using leading questions in this context is not that Socrates might mislead the slave-boy into acquiescing in a false suggestion that the slave-boy might not otherwise accept. That is, we are not trying to protect the slave-boy here from having this threatened "acquiescence" held against him, as might occur in a court of law regarding an "admission against interest" that a party in the slave-boy's position might make. Rather, we are trying to determine whether the answers that the slave-boy gives in response to Socrates' questions are produced by the boy because he, in fact, possesses some inherent knowledge of these matters, or instead are produced because he is merely facile enough to read and reproduce the answers suggested to him by Socrates' "leading" questions. As to this latter concern, I do not see that Professor Allen's response is satisfactory.

How we are to understand Socrates' interrogation of the slave-boy remains problematic, as does its relation to the more general theme of learning and recollection. Interested readers might wish to consult the following: Malcolm Brown, Plato Disapproves of the Slave-Boy's Answer, in Brown & Guthrie, supra note 3, at 198, 198-242; Julius Moravcsik, Learning as Recollection, in 1 Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays 53, 53-69 (Gregory Vlastos ed., 1971); Gregory Vlastos, Anamnesis in the Meno, 4 Dialogue 143 (1965).

78. Again, Professor Allen has a helpful comment:

[If] learning and inquiry are recollection, then to inquire is to bring to explicit
when the boy says, in response to one of Socrates' formulations, "That is evident," I find myself wanting to add: Now it is evident to you awareness what is already implicitly known. If this is true, the primary function of education and teaching is not to impart information, but to rid the soul of false beliefs which cloud vision and cause blindness; if the doctrine of Recollection is true, education in some primary sense is a process of refutation, and inherently Socratic.

Allen, supra note 3, at 142. Allen's suggestion is that learning and inquiry, from Socrates' perspective, are inextricably connected to both the negative use of elenchus and the positive use of recollection. I agree and said so earlier. See supra note 31. But this claim still stands in need of some additional comment.

The Socratic method of inquiry consists of many activities: asking for definitions, hypothesizing cases, investigating examples, using arguments, imagining possible actions or events, telling stories, stating or inventing myths, and so on. But central to Socrates' way of inquiring into things are two strands: elenchus (the activity of trying to get someone to refute or to convict himself or herself by way of his or her own words), and recollection (the activity of trying to get someone to realize or to recognize something by bringing it to consciousness, by registering it consciously). Elenchus has a negative aim in that it aims at teaching us that we do not know what we think we know. But, as I suggested before, see supra note 31, this lesson itself has a positive aspect, because learning that we do not know what we think we know is itself a positive lesson; it is a case of positive knowledge, because it reveals to us one of the limits of our knowledge. To know that we do not know is to know something positive about ourselves; it is a net gain in self-knowledge. Similarly, recollection has a positive aim in that it aims at teaching us that we know more (or other) than what we think we know. But, again, there is a negative side to this knowledge, because what we eventually recollect may conflict with what we thought we knew. And, to the extent that we fail to recollect what is sought after, we learn that we do not know (or share) these things in common, or we learn that something is still blocking our access to this purported knowledge. So the dual aspects of Socratic inquiry—negative and positive, elenchus and recollection—run deep, and their relationship is complex.

This dual aspect of Socratic inquiry is expressed below by my undergraduate philosophy teacher, Jon Moline:

It is important to distinguish between Socratic elenchus and recollection. Elenchus is a method of testing and refuting false opinions. Recollection is a process by which answerers are held to be able to supply true opinions on matters on which they have not been instructed. Recollection explains how the Socratic method or any other method is able to bring people into a condition of episteme. It is not itself a method, but rather a very tentative notion of the ontological and psychological basis on which philosophical methods can work.

A close examination of the arguments in the *Meno* will confirm that elenchus is finished at 84a, before recollection begins. Elenchus removes the false opinion that one already has episteme and thus has no need to inquire (to embark on the process of recollection that Plato identifies with inquiry). Elenchus culminates in aporia (perplexity) and in the realization that one does not understand what one thought one did. Inquiry with the slave boy begins at 84d. At 84c, Socrates points out to Meno that as a result of the perplexity the boy now feels, he "will discover something by inquiring with me." Only at 85c does the boy "recover true opinion out of himself," that is, recollect. Clearly elenchus by itself was no more sufficient for attaining episteme in Plato's view in the *Meno* than it was later in the *Sophist.*


(and to all of us), but only because Socrates has shown you (and us) how it can be derived from the preceding propositions that he has stated. For our educational benefit, Socrates is eliciting something implicit in the mathematical knowledge that you have; but it is the teacher's act of eliciting these implications that makes them evident to you (and to us). Before, as the boy's mathematical knowledge stood, it was not evident to him what his knowledge implied.

Socrates also is formulating these implications into additional mathematical propositions, to which he then asks the slave-boy's assent. The boy gives it. But this does not show that the slave-boy was himself capable of formulating those same propositions (even though they derived from knowledge that he had). He may have possessed this knowledge in the sense that he could recognize the truth of these propositions or implications once they were stated or formulated for him by Socrates, but this does not mean that the slave-boy's knowledge was enough, in itself, to enable him to state or to formulate these propositions or implications for himself or on his own. It was not; he could not do it. Whatever mathematical knowledge he possessed, it was dormant until awoken by Socrates' questioning and stimulated into use by Socrates' prompting.

Second, Socrates shows the slave-boy how to go on with certain mathematical series concerning arithmetic and geometrical figures (what happens when one doubles the sides of a square, how to determine the area of a square, and so forth). Socrates is doing this, for example, when he asks the boy, "Try and see if you can tell me how much it [the length of a side of a square] will be." In this respect, Socrates is showing the slave-boy how to use the basic mathematical knowledge that he possesses to generate new geometrical constructs. It is not, however, that the boy's basic mathematical knowledge is alive to him or something upon which he can immediately call. Rather, it takes an awakening of the boy's knowledge by means of Socrates' questioning in order for the boy to get into the swing of things, to get the hang of things. Gradually, eventually, the boy is able to generate some of his own answers to Socrates' questions. Of course, they are nothing more than basic answers to basic questions. Yet the boy is provoked by Socrates' reminders and exercises into re-invigorating his dormant knowledge of mathematical functions, computations, and operations, into renewing his mathematical know-how to the point where he can put it to use.

So I do not agree with Socrates' remark, "I am not teaching the boy

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80. Id. at 40 (83e).
anything, but only asking him questions” 81—as though “only” asking questions could not possibly amount to teaching! Socrates is doing the work here: he is eliciting and stating the implied propositions for the slave-boy’s assent; he is formulating the rules for the slave-boy’s application; he is showing the slave-boy how to go on constructing different, yet related, geometrical figures and what their mathematical relations are as a consequence of those constructions. To elicit, to state, to formulate, to express: these activities are a part of teaching. So, eliciting the implications of the boy’s mathematical knowledge, generating propositions to which the boy assents, and re-awakening the boy’s powers of mathematical know-how (however modest they prove to be), all of these activities amount to teaching the boy something. 82

Taking what students have and showing them what, in fact, it is that they possess, as well as testing what they can do with it and experimenting with the possibilities and permutations of the material at hand, teaches those students a form of self-knowledge (since it is about themselves and their resources). But such lessons also teach these students a form of knowledge about the world and their profession or their medium (since it also is about the world’s possibilities, or those of their chosen profession or medium). And these lessons teach a third thing too. In addition to the reminders and examples that the teacher is giving to his or her students, the repeated invitations to remember what they know and to watch what happens when we do this, the teacher also is trying to get the students to collect their wits about themselves and to use these materials for themselves. This is the part of the Socratic lesson that intends to re-invigorate the students, to re-new them through disillusioning them.

Socrates makes the slave-boy’s mathematical knowledge explicit and articulate. But he also expands and extends it, because by tying these new insights and expressions to the old mathematical knowledge and propositions that the boy possesses, Socrates is integrating them and re-constituting the slave-boy’s (modest) body of mathematical knowledge.

81. Id. at 39 (82e).

82. This is not so different from what we do in law school or from what many philosophers do in proceeding Socratically in their classrooms. One main activity of such teaching is to elicit statements, answers, questions, and concerns from one’s students, and then to examine these for their meaning, which includes their implications, their assumptions, and their consequences. By so doing, we try to teach our students some of the implications of the things that they say (or are initially willing to say and believe) about cases, statutes, or regulations that they have been assigned to read and study. We also try to show our students how to go on with some of the knowledge that they already have (the techniques of reading and of criticizing, for example, that they bring to the cases, statutes, or other legal texts). If these activities of questioning, parsing, and eliciting the implications (et cetera) truly qualify as “not teaching [our students] anything,” then perhaps we do not teach anything in law school. (I deny it.)
In this respect, the boy is learning that knowledge is of a piece, that it is systematic, and that one can build or extend the system by eliciting its implications and by generating new propositions, formulae, or constructs. Sometimes the system will absorb or incorporate these additions, and sometimes these additions will modify or even revolutionize the system. The relation is symbiotic or internal between the parts and the whole.

All of this activity or process of recollection is the second lesson that Socrates teaches, as stated earlier, the matching twin to his first lesson in disillusionment. This second lesson teaches that we know more (or other) than what we think we know. It is a reminder of our prodigious resources, a call to remember the things that we have learned and the ways that we have learned them, a call to make ourselves conscious of the techniques and skills and tools that we have at our control for making sense of the world and coming to terms with it. Our knowledge and our know-how constitute a system that generates knowledge (not merely collects it)—if we realize how to inquire into its connections, relations, and implications and thereby inquire further into the world of our common experience (which is a system, as Kant showed us). To the extent that we inhabit this system of knowledge, of language, of culture, of a world, we “know” it already and possess it already. But to the extent that we remain unaware of or unconscious to any aspects of the system, leave them unmastered or unexplored, then we must re-collect these aspects if we are truly to know and to possess them, to understand them and to be able to put them to use.

83. Once again, Professor Allen is helpful:

What is meant by Socrates’ claim that all nature is suggenes—“akin,” or interconnected—... [is] that by learning one single thing, we can recover all the rest (81d). The theory of Recollection is not only a theory of inquiry but also one of inference. A single bit of genuine knowledge can serve as the terminal link in a golden chain by which we can, Zeus-like, draw to ourselves the whole of intelligible reality.

Allen, supra note 3, at 143-44.

84. See supra p. 243. Peter Winch summarizes this Socratic lesson in a way congenial to my reading of the Meno when he says the following:

When, in Plato’s dialogue Meno, Socrates introduced the slave boy to Pythagoras’ Theorem not by telling him the answer to the problem but by eliciting the answer from him, that is not just a rhetorical device either. The suggestion... is that each of us has within him or herself the resources for answering the question: a point which Plato expressed picturesquely in terms of ‘recollection.’ The further suggestion is that... no one truly has the answer who has not arrived at it for him or herself.

PETER WINCH, Who is my Neighbour?, in TRYING TO MAKE SENSE 154, 156-57 (1987).

85. This is what Wittgenstein means to be studying in his philosophical investigations of what he calls our “criteria” and our “grammar” or “grammatical knowledge.” See supra note 59.
We recollect them by questioning them and by inquiring into them. This is what Socrates teaches the slave-boy, and it is such knowledge that he promises all of us. It is the antidote to his other lesson, that of disillusionment.

Socrates' understanding of philosophical inquiry is that it is a matter of traveling from the known to the unknown; you travel from what you know to what you do not know. And if you travel well, doing what you need to do with what you have, then you will end by having domesticated the unknown (in so far as you can do so). But how do you get from one to the other? Socrates' answer is that you begin with what you have, what you possess, what you can do—your knowledge, skills, capacities, and aptitudes—and then you pursue your questions and your doubts, wherever they may lead you, applying to them the techniques of knowledge-acquisition that you have. Different people may well differ in the techniques, skills, or capacities that they have; this matters less, however, than the fact that each person traveling the road of knowledge must exert himself or herself to the maximum. The attempt to learn must be made vigorously and strenuously, that is, conscientiously. As Socrates puts it in his prefatory remark to the exchange with the slave-boy, "there is no difficulty in ... learning, out of a single recollection, all the rest, if a man is strenuous and does not faint." 86 The work required is that of tracing and tying down the numerous strands that, bound together, constitute the system of our knowledge (such as it is).

This last point, about gaining knowledge by tying things down to our systematic understandings and resources as they stand, comes out best in the dialogue toward its end, after Socrates has finished his discussions with the slave-boy and with the interloper Anytus and is back asking questions of Meno and joining him in mutual pursuit of the answers. After a long discussion investigating whether or not virtue is knowledge, Socrates seems to suggest that even if virtue is not knowledge, and even if knowledge of virtue is not possible, or at least is not possessed by a person, that person can still act virtuously. 87 When asked how this is possible, Socrates says that true opinions, even if they do not amount to knowledge, can and often do guide our actions, and when they do, they lead to our acting virtuously. "Then true opinion is as good a guide to correct action as knowledge; and that was the point which we omitted in our speculation about the nature of virtue, when we said that knowledge only is the guide of right action; whereas there

86. Jowett & Anderson, supra note 3, at 37 (81d).
87. See id. at 46 (87d).
is also right opinion.88

The fact that true opinions are insecure or unsteady does not mean that they are any the less true; rather, it only means that they are less stable than our knowledge, than things about which we, in fact, know. (Less stable perhaps because, while we may believe them to be true, we do not know them to be true, so they seem more transitory, or our possession of them is more fleeting.) Socrates then searches for an explanation of this difference between the unsteadiness of true opinions and the steadiness of knowledge, and he finds it in the fact that, according to him, our true opinions, even though true, are not “tied down,” whereas knowledge is tied down to the reason(s) we have for it (and being tied down to reason is what makes knowledge so much more valuable than opinion, so much more useful as a guide to our actions).

Socrates: I mean to say that they [certain works of art] are not very valuable possessions if they are at liberty, for they will walk off like runaway slaves; but when fastened, they are of great value, for they are really beautiful works of art. Now this is an illustration of the nature of true opinions: while they abide with us they are beautiful and fruitful, but they run away out of the human soul, and do not remain long, and therefore they are not of much value until they are fastened by the tie of the cause [i.e., until they are tied down by giving an account of the reason(s) for them]; and this fastening of them, friend Meno, is recollection, as you and I have agreed to call it. But when they are bound, in the first place, they have the nature of knowledge; and, in the second place, they are abiding. And this is why knowledge is more honorable and excellent than true opinion, because fastened by a chain [of reasoning].89

Socrates says that “this fastening of them [our opinions], friend Meno, is recollection, as you and I have agreed to call it.”90 If this is true, then I understand Socrates’ emphasis on recollection as the response to disillusionment in this way: When we are led to acknowledge our ignorance by means of the negative side of Socratic method (his “elenchus”), we are asked not to quit in despair, but rather to renew ourselves in the home of knowledge that we possess. Our common knowledge, our common experience, our ordinary language—these are the things that we all share and possess, and they are our ways of learning what we need to know. They are the structures that we inhabit and the abodes in which we take refuge in this world. Each in-

88. Id. at 58 (97b-c).
89. Id. at 58-59 (97e-98a).
90. Id. at 58 (98a).
Inquiry is a journey into the unknown from these inhabitations, but that is exactly why inquiry is necessary, and productive: because the world remains to be domesticated, to be brought under the rule of reason (in so far as it can be). Our method of inquiry is our way of tying down the unknown, of connecting the unknown with what we already know. We are asked by Socrates to remember what we already know, to test it critically, to reduce it to what we can rely upon or are sure of, and then to use it as our means of gaining new knowledge, more knowledge. The positive side of Socratic inquiry (his "recollection") is the way that we learn how to tie our opinions down, to anchor them in whatever knowledge we have inherited or accumulated (from our parents, from others, from our language and our culture, from our own experience). It teaches us to question things, and then to seek answers to the questions that we have asked.

VII. "YOU AND I ARE NOT GOOD FOR MUCH": POVERTY AND PERSEVERANCE

Socrates: I am afraid, Meno, that you and I are not good for much, and that Gorgias has been as poor an educator of you as Prodicus has been of me. Certainly we shall have to look to ourselves, and try to find someone who will help in some way or other to improve us.\textsuperscript{91}

The first twenty pages of the Meno take us from questioning to perplexity, from disillusionment to recollection. Up to this point in the dialogue, Socrates has been trying to teach his method of inquiry to Meno, first by practicing his art of disillusionment on Meno himself, and then by duplicating that feat with Meno's slave-boy. But, since the initial disillusionment leaves Meno wondering what the point or purpose is to any inquiry into the unknown (Meno's challenge: "[H]ow will you inquire, Socrates, into that which you do not know?\textsuperscript{92}"), Socrates is forced to respond to Meno's question about the point of persevering in their inquiry. If we can say that Socrates responds by evoking similar disillusionment in the slave-boy, and then bringing him out of it by showing him (and Meno) that each person still knows much (because their knowledge is based upon learning by "recollection"), then Socrates has shown that this inquiry into the unknown is worthwhile. So the point becomes one of getting back to the inquiry, and getting back to the inquiry at hand is what the second half of the dialogue does.

\textsuperscript{91} Id. at 57 (96d-e).
\textsuperscript{92} Id. at 36 (80d).
But the second half of the *Meno* is strangely anticlimactic. It reprises many of the questions raised and pursued in the first half (especially *Meno*'s question: Is virtue taught, is it learned by practice, or is it a natural inheritance?) and it adds some new questions (in particular, from Socrates: Is virtue knowledge? If so, then who teaches it?). But a reader can still wonder whether very much progress is made toward reaching an answer to any of these questions. It is in this respect, I think, in its evident failure to reach satisfying answers, that a reader can find the second half of the *Meno* to be disappointing. Yet, as disappointing as it may be, the second half of the dialogue seems to me to have its own important purposes, chief among them, producing the very disappointment that we feel when the inquiry ends inconclusively.

What this disappointment forces upon us is a recognition that the Socratic method of questioning and inquiry, even when used properly, does not guarantee success. Pursuing his method is appropriate when we are in doubt, but using his method of inquiry does not promise that we shall ever achieve the knowledge that we seek. This is the poverty of Socrates' method of inquiry, the poverty of Socratic questioning.\(^{93}\)

This impoverishment appears at the very beginning of the *Meno*, when Meno first asks his question of Socrates and receives what, to his way of thinking, is a very strange response.

*Meno*: Can you tell me, Socrates, whether virtue is acquired by teaching or by practice; or if neither by teaching nor practice, then whether it comes to man by nature, or in what other way?

*Socrates*: O Meno, there was a time when the Thessalians were famous among the other Hellenes only for their riches and their riding; but now, if I am not mistaken, they are equally famous for their wisdom, especially at Larissa, which is the native city of your friend Aristippus. And this is Gorgias’ doing; for when he came there, the flower of the Aleuadae, among them your admirer Aristippus, and the other chiefs of the Thessalians, fell in love with his wisdom. And he has taught you the habit of answering questions in a grand and bold style in which he himself answers all comers; and any Hellene who likes may ask him anything. How different is our lot! my dear Meno. Here at Athens, there is a dearth of the commodity, and all

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93. At his trial, Socrates relies upon his personal or economic poverty as an indicator that he speaks the truth. See PLATO, supra note 22, at 28, 37 (23c, 31b-c). He does what he does—inquires philosophically into things—without regard for personal profit or gain. Here I am trying to tie this claim of poverty to the sense in which his method can also be said to be (philosophically) impoverished, and this too is a claim for its truthfulness.

The poverty of method in Socrates is, I think, another point of intimacy between him and Wittgenstein. For some thoughts on the "poverty" of Wittgenstein's method, see STANLEY CAVELL, THIS NEW YET UNAPPROACHABLE AMERICA 70-72 (1989).
wisdom seems to have emigrated from us to you. I am certain that if you were to ask any Athenian whether virtue was natural or acquired, he would laugh in your face and say: "Stranger, you have far too good an opinion of me if you think that I can answer your question. For I literally do not know what virtue is, and much less whether it is acquired by teaching or not." And I myself, Meno, living as I do in this region of poverty, am as poor as the rest of the world, and I confess with shame that I know literally nothing about virtue; and when I do not know the "quid" of anything, how can I know the "quale"? How, if I knew nothing at all of Meno, could I tell if he was fair or the opposite of fair; rich and noble, or the reverse of rich and noble? Do you think that I could?

Meno: No, indeed. But are you in earnest, Socrates, in saying that you do not know what virtue is? And am I to carry back this report of you to Thessaly?

Socrates: Not only that, my dear boy, but you may say further that I have never known of anyone else who did, in my judgment.

Socrates wants Meno to understand that, while Socrates cannot offer him an answer of the kind that he (Meno) has been taught by Gorgias to expect to such questions, Socrates may be able to offer Meno something else. If it then turns out that Meno takes this "something else" offered by Socrates to be a pittance, something that is apt to appear impoverished when compared to the grandiose answers offered by the Sophists, that would be Meno's loss. At least, this is the way that I understand Socrates' long response to Meno's opening question, with its emphasis on his inability to answer in the way or the style to which Meno seems to have become accustomed:

[Gorgias] has taught you the habit of answering questions in a grand and bold style, which becomes those who know, and is the style in which he himself answers all comers; and any Hellene who likes may ask him anything. How different is our lot! my dear Meno. Here at Athens, there is a dearth of the commodity, and all wisdom seems to have emigrated from us to you.

Given his admission as to a "dearth" of wisdom, however, Socrates does not simply leave the discussion or give up the question. Rather, what he goes on to do—and this is the life of the dialogue—is to teach Meno a different way to ask the questions that are bothering him and, thus, a way to look for a different kind of answer.

Is this an impoverished view of philosophy, of what philosophy offers us and the wisdom (such as it is) that it makes available to us? To

95. Id. at 23 (70b-71a).
this question, I think that Socrates would unabashedly answer, "Yes." While he is dogged in his perseverance, in his seeking of answers to the questions that we ask ourselves (or, more often, the questions that he helps us to see that we need to ask ourselves), this does not mean that Socrates therefore believes that final answers are available. A fundamental aspect of Socrates' practice is getting us to see that such answers are not available or possible; and yet, even so, despite this fact, or in its very light, what we need to do is to continue to seek the answers that we do have available, the answers that are possible. Socrates' questions are questions that we humans seem fated to ask ourselves; and yet, we do not seem to know what kinds of answer they may have—or even whether these kinds of questions have answers at all. As Cavell puts it, "Such thoughts are instances of that characteristic human willingness to allow questions for itself which it cannot answer with satisfaction."

Answers to such questions do not come once and for all, but rather serially or sequentially (when they come at all). And what may prove to be a satisfactory answer on one occasion or in one context may prove to be less than satisfactory on another occasion or in another context. And this fact—as to the fragility and specificity of answers, their fitness only for a particular purpose in a given context—may require us to go farther, or to change directions, when certain perennial questions arise once again for us. But then, we should know this if we have studied Socrates' example, because doggedness in the pursuit of acceptable answers to necessary questions is what Socrates teaches. (If some see this as an impoverished way to proceed, Socrates might grant their point, but only on his understanding of what constitutes both the promise and the poverty of his teaching and of what it achieves.)

At the end of the Meno, Socrates and Meno arrive at the following inconclusive conclusion:

Socrates: ... To sum up our inquiry—the result seems to be, if we are at all right in our view, that virtue is neither natural nor acquired, but an instinct given by God to the virtuous. Nor is the instinct accompanied by reason ... 

Socrates: Then, Meno, the conclusion is that virtue comes to the virtuous by divine dispensation. But we shall never know the certain truth until, before asking how virtue is given, we inquire into the actual nature of virtue. I fear that I must go away, but do you, now that you are persuaded yourself, persuade our friend Anytus. And do

96. Cavell, supra note 1, at 9.
not let him be so exasperated; if you can conciliate him, you will have done good service to the Athenian people.88

It would be a mistake to take Socrates' concluding comments on the source of virtue ("that virtue is neither natural nor acquired, but an instinct given by God to the virtuous"; "that virtue comes to the virtuous by divine dispensation") as though they were meant to be a final answer, or meant to explain virtue. Rather, by resorting to this sort of gesture—virtue just appears on the scene, as though it were a gift from above—Socrates is saying that he does not have an explanation of virtue's source. What he offers us in closing is a myth—nothing less, nothing more—and the promise of further inquiry if we seek more enlightenment. "But we shall never know the certain truth until, before asking how virtue is given, we inquire into the actual nature of virtue."89 Right now, as the matter stands, for all we know, virtue is (or might be) the gift of God, divine inspiration. This is hardly an account of its source or origin; it is an apostrophe indicating that some more work needs to be done before we can render any acceptable or satisfying account of the source of virtue. As it stands, we do not yet understand virtue well enough to explain its source. And perhaps we never shall.

The poverty of Socrates' method is the fact that it does not promise or ensure conclusive results. It may seek them, but it does not promise or ensure them. All that it promises is that life is worth questioning, that it repays questioning, and that it is worth our time to pursue the questions that we have or discover. Asking questions—some good, some not so good (good or not good in terms of their aptness or their timeliness)—and then responding to them appropriately, in a productive yet humble way, is at the heart of this dialogue and at the heart of Socrates' teaching. And by the end of the dialogue, I think, Socrates has shown us that his way of questioning is his faith, his hope for the future. This is what he puts his trust in; this is what he invests himself in.

I said at the beginning of this Section that the second half of the dialogue is strangely anticlimactic, and yet it seems to have its important purposes. I have tried to detail one of these purposes in the past few pages, but there is one additional purpose of the second half of this dialogue to which I would like to draw attention. We know that, normally, Socrates does not claim to know anything. So it is startling to find, at the beginning and the end of the second half of the dialogue,

98. Id. (100b).
99. Id. (100b).
two unusually forthright and bold statements of Socrates' beliefs. Here we have Socrates claiming to know, not just one, but two things.

His first credo comes at the end of his examination of the slave-boy, when Meno and Socrates are discussing what that examination has shown. The second credo comes at the end of the dialogue, as Meno and Socrates are completing their entire discussion:

Socrates: And I, Meno, like what I am saying. Some things I have said of which I am not altogether confident. But that we shall be better and braver and less helpless if we think that we ought to inquire than we should have been if we indulged in the idle fancy that there was no knowing and no use in seeking to know what we do not know—that is a theme upon which I am ready to fight, in word and deed, to the utmost of my power.\textsuperscript{100}

Socrates: I, too, speak rather in ignorance; I only conjecture. And yet that knowledge differs from true opinion is no matter of conjecture with me. There are not many things which I profess to know, but this is most certainly one of them.\textsuperscript{101}

Socrates is willing to say, to claim to know, this: (1) that it is better for us to think that we ought to inquire into things that we do not know, and (2) that knowledge differs from true opinion. These two credos of Socrates do not promise that knowledge is possible for us, or that we shall gain knowledge if we inquire into that which we do not know. They only say that it is better for us to believe that we ought to inquire, and that knowledge does differ from true belief.

The moral of Socrates' two credos is worked out in detail in Socrates' discussion with Anytus, who only appears in the second half of the dialogue. It is not otherwise clear why Plato needs to introduce another interlocutor at this point in the dialogue, but if we understand Anytus to be an exemplar of the negation of Socrates' two credos, then perhaps we shall see his usefulness. Socrates' first credo says that it is better for us to believe in the efficacy of inquiry; but, as I said earlier while discussing Anytus' role as one of the three students, Anytus does not believe in the efficacy of Socratic inquiry.\textsuperscript{102} In fact, he barely participates with Socrates' questioning, and he quickly leaves the discussion when he thinks that Socrates is defaming his fellow Athenians. On Anytus' model, inquiry is not good for us, but rather dangerous.

Socrates thinks differently. I do not say that he thinks that inquiry is either easy or pleasant for us, and I doubt that he would deny its dan-

\textsuperscript{100} Id. at 44-45 (86b-c).
\textsuperscript{101} Id. at 59 (98b).
\textsuperscript{102} See supra pp. 226-27, 229, 231.
gerous consequences (not after his trial). But I do believe that Socrates would recommend inquiry to us despite its dangers (or perhaps he would have seen them as an inevitable cost of inquiry). In any event, Socrates asks that we believe in the efficacy of inquiry. We are to stick to it, to try again to understand that about which we are ignorant. This is a counsel to perseverance; as it also is one of hope.

Anytus also denies (in practice) Socrates' second credo, the difference between knowledge and true opinion. For example, whereas Anytus may be quite correct in his belief that the Sophists are corrupters of youth and that the Sophists do not teach virtue to their students (a belief that was discussed in Section I of this Essay), Anytus does not bother to tie this opinion down to the rest of his knowledge by inquiring into it. This cavalier attitude toward the basis of his purportedly true opinion (Anytus' claim to know about the Sophists) is what astonishes Socrates: "You must be a diviner, Anytus, for I really cannot make out, judging from your own words, how, if you are not acquainted with them, you know about them." Anytus acts as though true opinion—if his opinion of the Sophists is true—is just as good, just as solid or reliable, as knowledge. And this Socrates denies.

Anytus' willingness to accept true belief as being as good as knowledge contravenes Socrates' second credo, and it is the point on which the dialogue closes. If we truly wish to tie our opinions down—be they about virtue or some other topic—then, once again, we shall have to inquire into them and the matter at hand. We shall have to question them. For Socrates, and apparently for those of us who try to follow his example in our teaching, there is no other way.

103. See supra pp. 226-27, 229.