

MENO'S PARADOX AND THE POSSIBILITY OF INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

Meno's Paradox and the Possibility of Inquiry

Plato in his *Meno* puts forward a challenge against the possibility of inquiry. This challenge has two stages, at one, Meno's questions challenge the possibility of inquiry in the case of how different kinds of knowledge about one thing are related to each other, at another, Socrates' argument is supposed to show that either possessing or lacking knowledge about an object entails that one cannot inquire into it. In this study, I present a reading arguing that these two are different challenges; the former is based on strict Socratic requirements on knowing and the latter brings up a puzzle whether inquiry is possible in a general sense. In addition to this, I will analytically discuss and evaluate different possible formulations of Socrates' argument, some are valid while others are invalid. But before discussing these topics, I will present and evaluate the accounts of Aristotle, Dominic Scott, and Gail Fine in terms of how they understand and solve Meno's Paradox. I will also investigate whether and how Ilhan Inan's theory of conceptual curiosity and the specification of the object of one's curiosity can provide any help to the puzzle of the possibility of inquiry in the *Meno*.

ÖZET

Menon Paradoksu ve Soruşturma İmkânı

Platon'un *Menon* diyalogunda soruşturmanın mümkün olup olmadığı ile ilgili bir paradoks yer almaktadır. Bu paradoks iki aşamadan oluşmaktadır, ilkinde, Menon'un soruları, bir şey hakkındaki farklı bilgi türlerinin birbiriyle nasıl ilişkili olduğu durumunda soruşturma olanağı hakkındadır, ikincisi ise, Sokrates'in argümanında, bir şeyi bildiğimiz ya da bilmediğimiz halde, onu soruşturamayacağımızı göstermeye çalışılmaktadır. Bu araştırmada, bu iki aşama, birbirinden farklı meseleler olduklarının kanaatindeyim. Menon'un soruları, bilmekle ilgili Sokrates'in gerekliliklere dayanmaktadır, halbuki Sokrates'in argümanı soruşturmanın mümkün olup olmadığını genel anlamda kastetmektedir. Aynı zamanda, Sokrates'in argümanının farklı şekilleri olduğu ortaya konulmaktadır ki bunlarından bazıları geçerli ve diğerleri geçersizdir. Bu konuları ele almadan önce, Aristoteles, Dominic Scott, ve Gail Fine'in paradoks ile ilgili görüşleri ve çözümleri de bahsedilmektedir. Bir diğer bölümde, İlhan İnan'ın kavramsal merak teorisi ve merak konusu nesnenin belirlemesi araştırmayı nasıl mümkün kılacağını ele alınmaktadır.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Meno's Paradox challenges the possibility of inquiry. Roughly speaking, for anything, one either knows it or does not know it and Meno's Paradox challenges that in either case one cannot inquire into that thing. If one knows something, there will be no need for inquiry, hence inquiry is impossible. If one does not know something, then one does not know what to look for, thus inquiry is impossible (*Meno* 80e). This is the way Socrates interprets Meno's questions in the dialogue. This argument is not implied in the conversation Socrates had with Meno. However, Meno's questions can be traced to their conversation. His questions are:

How will you look for it, Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? (M1) How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? (M2) If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know? (M3) (*Meno* 80d)

and Socrates' argument is:

Do you realize what a debater's argument you are bringing up, that a man cannot search either for what he knows or for what he does not know? He cannot search for what he knows—since he knows it, there is no need to search—nor for what he does not know, for he does not know what to look for (*Meno* 80e).

Throughout this study I call it Socrates' argument. Plato scholars unanimously agree that this argument consists of two explicit premises and one implicit. Following Gail Fine, Socrates' argument would be:

S1 For any x , one either knows x or does not know x .

S2 If one knows x , one cannot inquire into x .

S3 If one does not know x , one cannot inquire into x .

S4 Therefore, one cannot inquire into x .

The first premise is implicit and granted by the law of the excluded middle. The second and third premises are stated by Socrates. Coming to Meno's questions, he did not have these questions in his mind at the beginning of his conversation with Socrates. The above questions are developed as the result of Socratic questioning, requirements on knowing, and his recognition of deficiencies of Meno's answers – Meno's answers are considered to be problematic because they do not fit with those requirements. At the very beginning of the dialogue Meno asks Socrates whether virtue can be taught, achieved through practice, or one possesses it by nature (*Meno* 70a). If this is a genuine question for Meno and he really seeks an answer to it, then Meno is very far from M1, M2, and M3 at this point of their conversation. M1, for example, implies that if Meno does not know what virtue is, then he might not be able to inquire into the teachability of virtue. Additionally, it is important to remember that Socrates has not propounded the distinction between the knowledge of what virtue is and the knowledge of whether virtue is teachable yet, also that one cannot know the latter unless one knows the former. We will later see that Meno has no idea about this distinction and the way it supposedly works. Although we can assume that Meno might have thought that he and Socrates know what virtue is, we cannot come to conclude that his initial question about the teachability of virtue is a legitimate one, the one which is based on this distinction and Meno's knowledge of what virtue is. For Meno did not have this distinction in his mind, nor did he know what virtue is. Therefore, M1, M2, and M3 are developed later. Meno's first two questions bring up a problem known as the problem of inquiry and his last question raises a problem about discovery.¹

This study is made of four main chapters. In chapter two, I will discuss the accounts of Aristotle, Dominic Scott, and Gail Fine in terms of how they understand

¹ See Dominic Scott's book *Plato's Meno* (2006).

and attempt to solve Meno's Paradox. Aristotle discusses Meno's Paradox in *Prior Analytics* and *Posterior Analytics*. In the first book of *Posterior Analytics* Aristotle argues that in all teaching pre-existing knowledge is required, namely, in mathematics, induction, deduction, and so forth. If this is so, here his solution to Meno's Paradox is that inquiry is possible only if we possess some pre-existing knowledge. He presents another solution as well. He distinguishes between two ways of knowing something: knowing universally and knowing without qualification. He argues further that we may know one and the same thing in one way and be ignorant of it in another way. Therefore, although we know something in one way, we can inquire into it in another way.

Scott distinguishes the problem of inquiry from that of discovery in Meno's questions. On his view, Meno's first two questions ask how one can inquire into something at the first place while his last question asks how one can know what she has come to know through inquiry is the same as the one she wanted to know. For him, Meno's questions are based on a presupposition: we either know everything about an object or know nothing. He argues that these two extremes are not the only cognitive states we could have regarding an object. We can have partial knowledge of an object as well. If this is so, we can base our inquiry on the partial knowledge we already possess. This solution is called 'Partial Knowledge Solution'.

Fine agrees with Scott that Meno assumes that there are only two cognitive states possible: knowing everything about one thing or knowing nothing. But she seeks the solution to the paradox in the distinction between knowledge and true belief. On her account, by knowledge Plato means the kind of knowledge he discusses at 98a, namely true belief being accompanied by an account of the reason why. She calls it P-knowledge for Plato's understanding. At the beginning of the dialogue, when Socrates

says that he does not know whether virtue is teachable because he does not know at all what virtue is, he means, Fine argues, he has no P-knowledge of what virtue is. Meno's assumption is wrong because one can have true belief about an object in the case that knowledge is absent. In Fine's view, Plato's own account is that an inquiry can get started out of true belief (doxa). One may not have knowledge about something but has true beliefs, she can launch an inquiry into that thing. No knowledge (P-knowledge) is necessary for starting an inquiry. This solution is called 'True Belief Solution'.

In chapter three, I will discuss Ilhan Inan's theory of 'Conceptual Curiosity' in terms of how it is related to Meno's Paradox. On Inan's view, Meno's Paradox poses an important question on curiosity, namely, what are the necessary conditions for humans to become conceptually curious about a matter. Inan first argues that both Socrates' argument and Meno's questions are applicable to curiosity as well, that is, we can substitute inquiry by curiosity. If we do so, Socrates' argument and Meno's questions will pose the question how one can specify the object of her curiosity. Later, Inan introduces his theory of 'Inostensible Reference'. When the referent of a term is not known to the speaker, that term is inostensible relative to that speaker. And the way in which this term refers to an object as its referent is called inostensible reference. We can specify the object of our curiosity through an inostensible reference. The same should be the case when it comes to inquiry. That is, it is an inostensible term by which we specify the object of inquiry.

In chapters four and five I will discuss Meno's questions and Socrates' argument more elaborately. I will first discuss that Meno's questions are developed during his conversation with Socrates; they are developed as result of Socratic requirements on knowing. Meno's questions are about how different kinds of

knowledge about one thing are related to each other. Namely, not knowing what something is entails not knowing nonessential properties and instances of that thing, and vice versa. However, Socrates' argument poses a general challenge against the possibility of inquiry rather than how different kinds of knowledge are related to each other. Finally, I will present different formulations of Socrates' argument according to which there are cases in which inquiry is possible and in others it is impossible. These two chapters are the main part of this study and are much more detailed.

CHAPTER 2

OTHER PHILOSOPHERS ON MENO'S PARADOX

2.1 Aristotle on Meno's Paradox

In the *Prior Analytics* and *Posterior Analytics* Aristotle provides a solution to Meno's Paradox. In this section, I will focus on the latter to discuss his argument in terms of how he understands and attempts to solve the paradox. Aristotle's solution for Meno's Paradox in the first chapter of *Posterior Analytics* (*APst*) is presented in two versions. The first one is that to come to acquire knowledge of something, one needs to possess some relevant pre-existing knowledge. The first sentence of the *Posterior Analytics* is as follows: 'All teaching and all learning of an intellectual kind proceed from pre-existing knowledge' (*APst* 71a1-2)². Although one may say that teaching and learning are different from inquiry, they are the same in the sense that in teaching, learning, and inquiry one comes to possess the knowledge that she didn't have before. If we assume that they are the same in this way, we can substitute inquiry in Aristotle's sentence and say that 'all inquiries proceed from pre-existing knowledge'. This seems to challenge the second premise of Socrates' argument – that if one knows something, one cannot inquire into it because one doesn't need to inquire into it. The reason Socrates puts forward is that there will be no need for inquiry in such case. But the scope of inquiry is not clear in Socrates' proposed reason. It is not clear whether he means that one does not need to inquire into the very same aspects of one thing that one already knows, or one cannot inquire into its unknown aspects as well. Having said this, Socrates' reason implies that there are two possibilities about knowing one thing: either one knows

² For quoting *Posterior Analytics*, I have used Jonathan Barnes' translation.

something in all respects or knowing some aspects of that thing entails knowing its other aspects. In either case one does not need to conduct an initial inquiry into that thing. This unclarity leads us to have two readings about Aristotle's account of pre-existing knowledge. On the first reading, it seems that Aristotle believes that the pre-existing knowledge is the same knowledge one wants to learn or inquire. On the second, to be able to learn or inquire into something, one must have some different, but relevant, knowledge on which one's newly learned knowledge is going to be based. Namely, this already possessed knowledge provides a basis or specification for further inquiries. Socrates rejects the first reading. But it is unclear whether Socrates has the second reading in mind or not, whether he rejects it or not. For Aristotle pre-existing knowledge is different and separate from the one sought. He says that, for example, deduction assumes 'items which we are presumed to grasp' (*APst* 71a6) and induction proves 'something universal by way of the fact that the particular cases are plain' (*APst* 71a7-8). In the former, the sought knowledge (conclusion) is different from the pre-existing ones (premises), and in the latter, the universal knowledge (the sought one) is different from the knowledge of particular cases (the pre-existing one). Thus, Aristotle's account is that all inquiries require pre-existing knowledge, that is, one kind of knowledge is necessary for another, rather than the very same knowledge or knowledge of the same kind.

Scholars understand Aristotle's account differently. Jonathan Barnes, for example, says that by pre-existing knowledge Aristotle means that 'if **a** teaches **b** at *t* that *P*, then before *t* **b** had knowledge of something other than *P* on which his learning that *P* depends' (Barnes 1993, p. 81). This is the same as the second reading discussed in the previous paragraph. Barnes also adds that by this Aristotle means that only learned knowledge requires pre-existing knowledge, not all our knowledge, and this

implies that we don't obtain all our knowledge through learning (Barnes 1993, p. 81). Fine believes that here, in the quoted passage, Barnes thinks of 'a stepping-stone version of a foreknowledge principle' (Fine 2014, p. 180). By this principle she means that to inquire, one needs to have some relevant knowledge rather than the knowledge one wants to acquire. But she disagrees with Barnes. On her view, by prior-cognition principle (as she calls it) Aristotle doesn't aim at any superior cognition, or any knowledge in a restrictive sense. Even Aristotle doesn't aim at the kind of knowledge he himself defends – one knows that a proposition is true only if one has a good argument for it – she calls it A-knowledge, standing for the kind of knowledge that Aristotle understands. She continues:

I suggest, then, that the prior-cognition principle mentioned at the beginning of 1.1 doesn't require superior cognition or even A-knowledge. So far, then, Aristotle hasn't endorsed any version of a *foreknowledge* principle. Rather, he's endorsed a prior-cognition principle, where the *cognition* need not be knowledge. (Fine 2014, p. 191)

It seems that Fine accepts Barnes view that to inquire into something one needs to have some relevant prior cognitive state but she disagrees with him that that cognitive state should amount to knowledge.

The second version of Aristotle's solution for Meno's Paradox lies in his distinction between two ways of knowing something; universally and without qualification. Briefly, Aristotle claims that one may know something in one way but at the same time be ignorant of it in another. Consider the following argument³:

³ Barnes (1993, p. 87) formulates Aristotle's argument as follows (numbering is different from that of Barnes):

- (1) **b** knows that everything *G* is *F*;
- (2) **a** is *G*;
- (3) **b** does not know that there is such a thing as **a**.
- (4) **b** does not know that **a** is *F*.

- (a) One knows that every triangle has angles equal to two right angles.
- (b) One comes to know that this figure is a triangle.
- (c) Therefore, one knows that this figure has angles equal to two right angles.

In this example, it is taken for granted that (a) is true. But let's assume the opposite of (b) is the case. That is, one does not know that this figure is a triangle. If we do so, on Aristotle's view, (c) can be both true and false. It is true because one universally knows that this figure has angles equal to two right angles and it is false because one does not know without qualification that this figure has two right angles. Having said this, there will be two forms of (c):

- i. Therefore, one universally knows that this figure has angles equal to two right angles.
- ii. Therefore, without qualification one doesn't know that this figure has angles equal to two right angles.

Thus, on Aristotle's account, one may know the former although one doesn't know the latter. Aristotle claims further that if we don't distinguish these two ways of knowing something, the puzzle in the *Meno* will arise: 'you will learn either nothing or what you already know' (*Poa* 71a30). This disjunction is similar to Socrates's argument in the *Meno*. Given that there is only one way of knowing in (c), then in the case of not knowing that this figure has two right angles, we will learn nothing, or, in the opposite case, we will learn the very same thing. But if there are two different ways for knowing one thing at the same time, we can come to know it in one way while we already know

(5) **b** knows that **a** is *F*.

(4) and (5) are contradictory if we assume that there is only one way for knowing that **a** is *F*. But Aristotle claims that in (4) **b** doesn't know that **a** is *F* in particular way whereas in (5) **b** knows that **a** is *F* universally. Therefore, since there are two different ways for knowing the same thing, (4) and (5) are not contradictory to one another.

it in another. This claim of Aristotle rejects the second premise of Socrates' argument. That is, even if one knows something, one can inquire into it and come to know it in a different way. Even if one knows something universally, one can inquire into that thing and know it without qualification. Therefore, inquiry is possible.

2.2 Dominic Scott on Meno's Paradox

On Dominic Scott's interpretation, Meno's questions pose two different problems; his first two questions are about inquiry and the last one is about discovery. He calls them 'Meno's challenge', and Socrates' argument is called 'eristic dilemma'. Apparently, on Scott's view, Meno's Paradox is made of three different stages: Meno poses two challenges: one on inquiry and another on discovery and Socrates formulates the problem of inquiry in the form of dilemma. To show how Scott differentiates between these two problems, let us quote his own version of these questions:

(M¹) And how will you inquire, Socrates, into something when you don't know at all what it is? Which of the things that you don't know will you propose as the object of your inquiry? (M²) Or even if you really stumble upon it, how will you know that this is the thing you didn't know before? (Scott 2006, p. 76)

Meno's first two questions challenge how an inquiry into something can get started. On this account, in the case of absence of any specification of the object of inquiry, M¹ brings up a challenge about the possibility of inquiry in terms of how one can start an inquiry at the first place (Scott 2006, p. 76). On Scott's understanding, the qualification 'at all' in Meno's first question plays an important and defining role. Thinking this way, it leads him to the conclusion that by this qualification Meno assumes that the inquirer is in a cognitive blank, namely, in the case of virtue Socrates and Meno himself are in a cognitive blank. If one is in a cognitive blank, she lacks any

specification of the object of inquiry. He argues further that if this total ignorance were not the case, then Meno's second question, which he takes it to be a rhetorical one, would make no sense (Scott 2006, p. 76). Meno's way of thinking is based on an assumption that knowing something entails knowing everything about it and not knowing it is the same as being in a cognitive blank. Given that Meno in fact was assuming that he and Socrates were in a cognitive blank regarding virtue, it seems that his question is a genuine challenge against the possibility of inquiry. But Scott argues that Meno was wrong in his assumption because at least in the case of virtue he and Socrates were not in a cognitive blank, they had plenty of ideas about virtue, especially in the first part of the dialogue. Coming to the second problem, M² poses a problem about completing an inquiry (Scott 2006, p. 77). The problem posed by M² is called 'the problem of discovery'. Scott argues that M² is susceptible of two readings one closely related to M¹, and another raises a deeper problem. I will discuss the problem of discovery later.

Scott's interpretation of the qualification 'at all' in the first question, it seems to me, ignores the difference between 'one does not know something at all' and 'one does not at all know what something is.' The former entails cognitive blank, total ignorance, and even it may imply that one does not know what she is ignorant of. If by not knowing 'at all' in the first question Meno means total ignorance in all respects, by this question he intends to say that inquiry in such case is impossible. The scope of 'not knowing' in the latter case is more restricted, it is about not knowing what something is, still it leaves room for other kinds of knowledge about the same thing, for example, knowledge of its properties and instances. If by 'not knowing at all what something is' Meno means that one is in a cognitive blank in all respects what that thing is, the following will be the case. Let's assume that we have some knowledge

what of one thing – for example, possess a definitional knowledge of it or know its essence – then we know completely what that thing is. Otherwise, we will be in a cognitive blank about what it is. Unlike to Scott’s account, on my understanding, in Meno’s first question the qualification ‘at all’ includes only ‘what it is’. If by this qualification Meno means ‘cognitive blank’ in his question, then this cognitive state is applicable only to what something is. This cognitive state is more limited, narrower, and does not entail that one lacks other kinds of knowledge about that thing. If this is so, on Meno’s view, regarding what something is we either know it completely or are in a cognitive blank.

Coming to partial knowledge of what something is, it seems to me that we cannot partially know what something is, rather the so-called partial knowledge of what something is is not saying anything about what that thing is although this can be some partial knowledge about that thing. That is, knowledge what is not divisible into parts in the sense that knowing each part by its own provides some partial knowledge of what that thing is. For example, in the context of the discussions in the *Meno*, let’s take that knowing that ‘justice’ and ‘moderation’ are necessary for knowing what virtue is, and knowing this much does not amount to a full knowledge of what virtue is. It seems to me that knowing this much is not the same as partially knowing what virtue is. For if one doesn’t fully know what virtue is, she doesn’t know what virtue is as she did not know before, mere knowledge of its parts provides no help for knowing what that thing is, still one doesn’t know what that thing is. On my view if one knows that ‘justice’ and ‘moderation’ are necessary for knowing what virtue is, she has some partial knowledge about virtue, but not partial knowledge of what that thing is. On this account, a complete knowledge of what something is can be a partial knowledge about that thing. Nonetheless, by ‘at all’ in his first question Meno does not mean a total

ignorance about one thing, rather he thinks of not knowing what something is. As I will argue in the next chapters, on my view, Meno assumes that if one does not know what something is, one cannot know, inquire into other properties and instances of that thing as well. This is a different account from that of Scott which he takes 'at all' to be including one's ignorance about something in all respects. Scott's reading of the qualification 'at all' does not pay attention to the priority of knowledge what in Meno's questions. This difference is important in terms of answering Meno's questions. For example, we can argue that even though one doesn't know what something is, one can be in a position to inquire into nonessential properties of that thing. In the case of virtue, for example, assume that knowing that 'justice' and 'moderation' are necessary for knowing what virtue is, and this much knowledge does not amount to what virtue is. The knowledge of these two features would be enough for one to distinguishably know virtue and attribute some nonessential properties to virtue, e.g., virtue is teachable. That is, we can know properties of one thing although we may not know what that thing is.

For Scott M^2 brings up a problem about discovery. This is not a problem about how an inquiry begins, rather this is a problem how one can complete an inquiry. Namely, M^2 asks how one can discover that her obtained knowledge is the one she wished to have and wanted to inquire into. On Scott's reading, M^2 can be read in two ways. On the first one, it is closely related to and continuous with the problem posed by M^1 , in Scott's words: 'if you are in a cognitive blank about some object, you cannot make a discovery about it by means of inquiry' (Scott 2006, p. 77). The point here is that if one is in a total ignorance regarding something, she cannot inquire into it, if so, she cannot discover if it is the same thing that she wanted to inquire into. Scott makes his point as following:

Meno asks us to envisage a situation where you are attempting to assert that one thing (that you have just stumbled upon, x) is another thing (that you started out with, y). But this is impossible: you may be able to grasp x , but since you have never had any specification of y , how can you make any sense of the statement ' x is y '? (Scott 2006, p. 77)

According to this, if one is in a cognitive blank, one has no specification of y and she is in no position to start an inquiry into it. Even though one may meet with x which in fact is the same as y , one cannot know that x is y . One cannot discover that what she knows now is the same as the one she wanted to know and inquire into.

On the second reading of M^2 , even in the case of having an initial specification of the object of inquiry, which allows us to start an inquiry, we cannot discover that the result of our inquiry is the right answer. It is important to remember that here we are not in a cognitive blank at the beginning of our inquiry. It is possible that our initial specification matches with the result of our inquiry. This implies that our initial specification plays a significant role in the way in which our inquiry ends up with an outcome. If this is so, Scott argues, if we don't know that our specification is a correct one, how can we know that the result of our inquiry is the right answer? (Scott 2006, p. 83) This argument will be clearer in the case that the object of our inquiry can be specified by a true belief. Assume that we can start an inquiry with true beliefs and the outcome of our inquiry matches with our initial true beliefs. If our initial true beliefs do not amount to knowledge, we cannot know that the outcome of our inquiry is the right answer. Although true beliefs play a crucial role in determining the result of inquiry, this does not mean that we also know that the outcome of inquiry is the one we desired it as a right answer. Therefore, according to this reading, even if we solve the problem of the specification of the object of inquiry, we may not be able to discover that the right answer is obtained.

Coming to Socrates' eristic dilemma, For Scott this is continuous with and re-articulation of Meno's questions with one additional point and ignoring the problem of discovery. S¹ is the additional point in Socrates' re-articulation:

S¹ If you know the object already you cannot genuinely inquire into it.

S² If you do not know it you cannot inquire, because you do not even know what you are inquiring into.

[Implicit premise: S³ Either you know something or you do not.]

S⁴ Therefore you cannot inquire into any object. (Scott 2006, p. 78)

As we see, the schematic way in which Scott formulates Socrates' eristic dilemma has nothing special, here he understands the argument as other Plato scholars do. On his view, the dilemma is based on a false dichotomy. The first premise to be true, the notion 'know' must mean that the subject knows everything about the object of inquiry, namely, she has a complete knowledge about it. On the other hand, the second premise presupposes the opposite case; the notion 'do not know' means that one is in a cognitive blank regarding the object of inquiry. In either case, we will not be able to inquire into anything. But, Scott argues, these two extremes are not the only possible cognitive states we could possess. We can know something partially, possess partial grasp of it. If this is the case, in the first premise although we know something partially, still we can inquire into parts of an object that we don't know. In the second premise, although we don't know some features of an object, still we may have a grasp of it that we can base our inquiry on them. In either way inquiry is possible. According to this solution, the object of inquiry is specified by our partial knowledge about that object.

2.3 Gail Fine on Meno's Paradox

Among Plato's scholars, no one can match with Gail Fine in terms of the depth and details of their works on Meno's Paradox. Her book *The possibility of inquiry: Meno's Paradox from Socrates to Sextus* (2014) provides a comprehensive study of the

paradox. She takes Meno's questions and Socrates' argument together to be called Meno's Paradox. Since Meno's Paradox challenges the possibility of inquiry, Fine first defines what she means by inquiry: 'On one familiar account, inquiry is a systematic, goal-directed search for knowledge, or information, one doesn't have (Fine 2014, p. 4).' According to this definition, the inquirer needs to be able to specify the object of inquiry as her target, to which her search must be directed. In this regard, Fine looks at Meno's question in terms of whether any inquiry requires foreknowledge or not. Such foreknowledge may be the ground on which one can specify the object of her inquiry.

Foreknowledge can be understood in different ways. On Fine's view, there are two kinds of foreknowledge: stepping-stone and a matching version (Fine 2014, p. 12). According to the former kind, one to be able to inquire into something, she needs only to have some relevant knowledge about the same thing. According to the latter kind, one must know the very same thing that she inquires into. Given that inquiry as defined above, matching version of foreknowledge would be unnecessary because one inquires into something only if she doesn't know it. Contrary to the purpose of an inquiry, matching version foreknowledge implies that the inquirer already knows the matter she wants to inquire into. Fine later argues that, on Plato's view, even one does not need to have a stepping-stone foreknowledge for inquiry into something because instead of any kind of knowledge some true beliefs might suffice to start an inquiry. Both kinds of foreknowledge are knowledge, but Fine thinks that to start an inquiry there is no need for our cognitive state to amount to knowledge, lower cognitive states such as true belief can be sufficient.

Given that any kind of foreknowledge is not required for an inquiry, then the question is how one specifies her object of inquiry. On Fine's account, we need to take another important distinction into account:

Here there are two relevant issues, one about cognitive condition and one about content. What cognitive condition does one need to be in, to be in a position to inquire? And what sort of content must be available to one, if one is to be able to fix a target to aim at? (Fine 2014, p. 75-76)

Fine thinks that Meno's questions do not presuppose that for one to be able to inquire into something there should be some content available to her, rather he focuses on what cognitive condition is required for starting an inquiry. Meno assumes that, regarding virtue, he and Socrates are in a cognitive blank and that is why they cannot inquire into what virtue is. If so, there is an underlying assumption behind Meno's questions: he thinks being in a cognitive blank is the only alternative for knowing.

Like Scott, Fine takes Meno's questions to raise two different problems although she does not make an explicit distinction as Scott does. To avoid confusion, let us repeat Meno's question once again, divided into three separate questions, in Fine's view:

How will you look for it, Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? (M1) How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? (M2) If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know? (M3) (*Meno* 80d)

On Fine's understanding, M1 asks, given that Socrates does not at all know what virtue is, how he can inquire into it. M2 explains why this is problematic, namely, how one can aim at her object of inquiry if she does not at all know what it is. This leads her to think that Meno is committed to a foreknowledge principle whereas Socrates isn't. Meno thinks that to inquire into something, one needs to know what that thing is in

the sense that the inquirer needs not to be in a cognitive blank regarding that thing (Fine 2014, p. 78). On Meno's view, if one wants to inquire into what virtue is, one can start an inquiry into it only if she is not in a cognitive blank, she must already have some knowledge about what virtue is. We can see that Meno's foreknowledge principle is a kind of stepping-stone rather than matching version. Meno does not ask how you can inquire into a matter if you do not know the very matter. Fine thinks that Socrates is not committed to any kind of foreknowledge principle, for he thinks that some prior-familiarity would be sufficient for a dialectical inquiry. This prior-familiarity does not need to amount to knowledge, it can be a lower cognitive state.

Like Scott, Fine thinks that M3 is different from the other two questions. It is about the end of an inquiry. In her example, let us take that virtue is x, y, and z. One comes to the view that 'virtue is x, y, and z'. M3 asks if one does not know what virtue is at the first place, how she will know that what she came across to is in fact describing what virtue is.

There is an argument underlying Meno's questions, Fine argues. She formulates Meno's questions in the form of an argument as following (Fine 2014, p. 81):

- (1) Socrates doesn't at all know what virtue is.
- (2) If one doesn't at all know what virtue is, one can't specify it in such a way that one has a target to aim at.
- (3) If one can't specify the target one is aiming at, one can't inquire.
- (4) If one can't specify the target one is aiming at, then, even if one finds what one was looking for but didn't know, one won't know, or realize, one has done so.
- (5) Therefore, Socrates can't inquire into virtue; and even if he finds what he was looking for, he won't know, or realize, that he has done so.

The first premise is based on Socrates' claim at the beginning of the dialogue, in response to Meno's initial question – whether virtue is teachable – Socrates says that he does not at all know what virtue is. The second and third premises refer to M1 and M2 showing how inquiry is impossible. The fourth premise is in accordance with M3, it shows that if one has no specification of the object of her inquiry, at a later time even though she comes across it, she cannot know that she has found what she wanted to seek. The conclusion of the argument is putting forward both the problem of inquiry and the problem of discovery.

Fine thinks that Meno is mistaken because he misunderstands Socrates' claim; by not knowing at all what virtue is he thinks that Socrates is in a cognitive blank. She agrees with Scott on this account. (Again, she also ignores the distinction between total ignorance about something and not knowing at all what that thing is.) During the dialogue Socrates says a plenty of things about virtue, thus, he is not in a cognitive blank. If this is so, then 'does not at all know' in (1) is not the same as being in a cognitive blank. If being in a cognitive blank is not the only alternative for knowing, then, on this reading, (2) is false; even though one doesn't know what something is, still one may possess some cognitive state which can be sufficient for the specification of the object of one's inquiry. Having said this, there are two different readings of 'not knowing' in the above argument: in the first premise we cannot ascribe 'cognitive blank' to Socrates because he has plenty of ideas about virtue and the second premise implies that Meno takes Socrates to be in a cognitive blank. That is, the argument is equivocated.

Coming to Socrates' dilemma, Fine takes it as a reformulation of Meno's questions in the form of an argument whose two premises are explicitly stated by

Socrates, plus one implicit premise. The implicit premise is true by the law of the excluded middle. The structure of the argument is as follows (Fine 2014, p. 87):

- (S1) For any x , one either knows, or does not know, x .
- (S2) If one knows x , one cannot inquire into x .
- (S3) If one does not know x , one cannot inquire into x .
- (S4) Therefore, for any x , one cannot inquire into x .

S1 can be an instance of the law of the excluded middle but it does not say how the two sides of the disjunction should be conceived. It only says that the two sides of the disjunction are excluding one another. After evaluating two possible formulations of the argument, Fine comes with the following formulation (Fine 2014, p. 90):

p or q

p implies r

q implies r

Therefore r

As we see in the structure of the argument above, S1 is the same as ‘ p or not p ’ rather than ‘ p or q ’. The former can be the case only if not knowing in S3 means ‘being in a cognitive blank’ and knowing in S2 means ‘not being in a cognitive blank’. The same goes with knowing in S2: if it means ‘complete knowledge’, then not knowing in S3 should mean ‘not complete knowledge’. Either way makes the argument invalid. If we take knowing as complete knowledge, then not knowing means some partial grasp which might be sufficient for the specification of the object of inquiry. Moreover, if we take not knowing as being in a cognitive blank, then knowing means not being in a cognitive blank, although one has some grasp of an object, there is room for inquiry into its unknown aspects. Nonetheless, in S1 neither ‘being in a cognitive blank or not being in a cognitive blank’ nor ‘knowing completely or not knowing completely’ is

the case. That is why Fine takes S1 to be a disjunction of two excluding items which are not the negation of each other.

Socrates' reply is stated in three stages, Fine says. At the first, Socrates puts forward the recollection theory, a theory that he ascribes to priests and priestesses, and he takes it to be true. According to this theory, humans' souls recollect what once they knew but forgot at birth. On this account, learning is recollecting. At the second stage, Socrates through the examination of a slave boy on a geometrical issue attempts to show that the slave boy recollects himself rather than being taught by Socrates. At the third stage, Socrates re-states the recollection theory. Although Fine thinks that the recollection theory is Socrates' reply to Meno's Paradox, namely, inquiry is possible through recollection, but she doesn't think that this is Plato's answer as well. For Plato knowledge is obtainable from pre-existing true beliefs. As we saw in the previous section, this is different from Scott's account. Scott thinks that we specify the object of our inquiry through our partial knowledge about that thing but Fine thinks that there's no need for any knowledge, such specification can be based on some true beliefs. Anywhere in the dialogue Plato ascribes not knowing to Socrates, he means the conception of knowledge that is stated at 98a, namely a true belief being accompanied by an account of the reason why. She calls this as P-knowledge for Plato's understanding at 98a. Nonetheless, when Socrates says that he does not know what virtue is, he means that he does not have P-knowledge of what virtue is. Lacking P-knowledge does not mean one is in a cognitive blank. One may have true beliefs, as Socrates thinks that the slave boy has true beliefs during his examination. An inquiry that is based on and starts off from some true beliefs is going to amount to knowledge.

CHAPTER 3

MENO'S PARADOX AND INOSTENSIBLE CONCEPTUALIZATION

Ilhan Inan discusses Meno's Paradox in the first chapter of his book, *Philosophy of Curiosity* (2012). He neither provides his own specific reading of Meno's Paradox nor attempts to solve it *qua* paradox, rather he focuses on how his arguments for development of his theory of conceptual curiosity make a way to the general question of the possibility of inquiry. On my understanding, Inan believes that Meno's Paradox implicitly poses an important question on how a being becomes curious (Inan 2012, p. 16) and his theory of 'Inostensible Reference' and, at the stage of conceptualization, his theory of 'Inostensible Conceptualization' show how one specifies the object of her inquiry, which this specification of the object of inquiry may lead one to inquire into that object (Inan 2012, p. 32). In this chapter, I will first discuss Inan's view, how the question of inquiry and discovery this is posed by Meno's Paradox is related to the question of conceptual curiosity and then I will inquire into how his theory of 'Inostensible Reference' shows that inquiry is possible.

In the very beginning of the first chapter of *Philosophy of Curiosity* Inan says: 'The issue I wish to raise is this: What kind of mental, conceptual, and linguistic abilities allow us to be curious?' (Inan 2012, P. 17) He argues that this question is addressed by Meno's Paradox (Inan 2012, p. 16). In *Meno*, both Meno's questions and Socrates' argument challenge the possibility of inquiry rather than that of curiosity but on Inan's view we can substitute 'curiosity' with 'inquiry' and see that these two are applicable to curiosity as well. So, Meno's questions would be:

And how can you be curious, Socrates, about something when you don't know at all what it is? Which of the things that you don't know will you propose as the object of your curiosity? Or even if you really

stumble upon it, how will you ever know that this is the thing which you were curious about? (Inan 2012, p. 18)

And Socrates' argument would be:

I know, Meno, what you mean; but just see what an eristic argument you are introducing—that it is impossible for someone to be curious about what he knows or does not know; he wouldn't be curious about what he knows, since he already knows it, there is no need for such a person to be curious; nor about what he doesn't know, because he doesn't know what he is curious about. (Inan 2012, p. 18)

This substitution does not mean that the original and modified versions pose the very same questions in all respects, but they are common in the sense that each requires the subject to conceptualize, express, and put forward what she doesn't know. In other words, the question is how the object of inquiry and discovery is specified. That is, given that one doesn't know a certain thing, then the question is how one conceptualizes this unknown matter as the object of her inquiry and, similarly, how one conceptualizes this matter as the object of her curiosity. According to one reading, we may think that Meno's Paradox challenges or questions what makes an inquiry possible in the sense that the paradox focuses on what the necessary conditions of an inquiry are. On Inan's account:

Oddly enough one of the central philosophical questions on curiosity is buried in a famous passage in a text that is more than two millennia old. This short intriguing passage is in Plato's *Meno* and has gone down in history as "Meno's Paradox". It implicitly addresses what I take to be one of the most fundamental questions on curiosity: What are the necessary conditions for a being to become curious? Giving an account of this will enable us to understand the nature of curiosity better, and, most importantly, it will reveal how curiosity requires a certain way in which we use language. (Inan 2012, p. 16)

Given that the question of curiosity is different from that of inquiry, it seems to me, still they are related to each other, and to Meno's Paradox. Both one's pre-curiosity and pre-inquiry mental state or/and cognitive state play role for one to become curious or be in a position to start an inquiry.

For Inan curiosity is a mental state. Not following the way in which he develops and discusses his arguments, it seems to me that, if we take curiosity to be a mental state, roughly we may distinguish four different mental states: (1) being curious; (2) pre-curiosity; (3) not being curious; and (4) satisfied curiosity. Their examples are as following, respectively.

- i. One is curious where the hottest place in Turkey in 2022 is.
- ii. One might be curious about the hottest places in each country in 2022. Assume that there is a country which she is fully ignorant of its existence, that is, she has no conceptualization of this country. In this case, I take it that this person possesses a pre-curiosity mental state regarding the hottest place in this particular country in 2022.
- iii. One does know that there is a place hotter than all other places in Turkey in 2022, which she doesn't know where that place is, but she has no interest to know where that place is. Thus, although she has the required conceptual and linguistic abilities, and is aware of her ignorance, still she is not curious where the hottest place in Turkey in 2022 is.
- iv. After investigating the records, a previously curious person comes to know a specific place as the hottest place in Turkey in 2022.

This is not the way in which Inan puts the issue forth. He characterizes one's curiosity as this: '... only when awareness of ignorance concerning a specific matter is accompanied by a certain kind of interest in that matter could it result in curiosity' (Inan 2012, p. 126). He argues further that to be conceptually curious, one needs to have conceptual and linguistic ability to conceptualize and express the unknown in linguistic terms (Inan 2012, p. 130). Having this way of characterization of conceptual

curiosity in mind, I will investigate how we can understand both Meno's questions and Socrates' argument in terms of the four mental states mentioned above.

At first glance, Meno's questions regarding curiosity, would be asking how one can move from a pre-curiosity mental state to one of curiosity.⁴ In the example above, (ii), the subject is fully ignorant of the existence of a specific country.⁵ According to the characterization of conceptual curiosity quoted above, in example (ii) it is highly likely that the subject has the interest and the linguistic ability for expressing the unknown, the hottest place in this particular unknown country in 2022. The awareness of ignorance is the missing element here. If this is so, on this reading, it may be plausible to reduce Meno's questions on curiosity to a question on the awareness of one's ignorance. If a person is unaware of her ignorance concerning a matter, she is in no position to be interested in that matter, nor is she able to conceptualize and express the unknown in linguistic terms. Having said this, it seems that awareness of ignorance has a more pivotal role than the other two elements when we take curiosity as a mental state into account. Thus, according to this reading, in a pre-curiosity mental state one may be unaware of her ignorance, and this fact makes one unable to possess the other two elements as well, interest in the matter and linguistic ability for conceptualization of the unknown. And Meno's questions ask how one comes to become aware of her ignorance about a certain matter if one does not at all know that matter. It is important to remember that we are investigating Meno's questions in the context of curiosity and in terms of different mental states, rather than

⁴ Here I don't investigate Meno's questions (M1-M3) separately, rather I take them to ask the following question: If one does not know something, how can she be curious about that thing?

⁵ We can assume that the subject might know various things regarding that country, but these things are not presented to her as belonging to that particular country. For example, she may have some knowledge about a mountain which is in this country while she thinks that it is located in a different country. Given this kind of states, I think this person is in a pre-curiosity mental state in the case of where the hottest place in this country is.

the context of inquiry. Nonetheless, if this reading is the case, Meno's questions bring up a problem about how one become aware of her ignorance.

Another reading is that Meno's questions ask how one can move from a not-being curious mental state, (3), to a mental state of curiosity, (1). Assume that at t one is not interested in knowing where the hottest place in Turkey in 2022 is, but the same person at $t + 1$ becomes interested in knowing where the hottest place in Turkey in 2022 is. She doesn't yet know where the hottest place in Turkey in 2022 is. Assume further that she is conceptually and linguistically able to conceptualize and express what she doesn't know. Here the main question is how one gets interested in knowing something of which one is currently ignorant. It is easily imaginable that there can be a variety of reasons for one to get interested in knowing something of which she is currently ignorant. It seems clear to me that Meno's questions are not about how one gets interested in something one doesn't know. Any answer to the question how one becomes interested in a matter provides no help for knowing how one becomes curious. Rather 'interest' is a mere necessary condition for being conceptually curious; 'interest' by its own does not have a defining role in the process of how one becomes curious. Having interest in a certain matter explains how one becomes curious about that matter but how one gets interested in it is a different question. My argument is that an answer to the latter has nothing to say about the process through which one becomes curious, rather it only shows that the 'interest' element is present. We can assume that two individuals share curiosity about the same matter, thus both are interested in that matter, but it is not necessary that both should have become interested in the same way. Each can have their own reasons for becoming interested in the same matter. Investigating what those reasons are would provide no help for answering the question how one becomes curious.

Now let us apply Socrates's argument to curiosity. To do so, let us take C1, C2, C3, and C4 to stand for the argument's premises and conclusion in terms of curiosity:

C1: For any x , one either knows x or does not know x .

C2: If one knows x , one cannot become curious about x .

C3: If one doesn't know x , one cannot become curious about x .

C4: Therefore, one cannot become curious about x .

It seems to me that this argument is very unclear in a number of respects. Notions 'knows' and 'doesn't know', for example, are vague, if one knows something, one may have knowledge of it, or may have some true beliefs about it, or some familiarity with it, and so forth. The same is true about 'doesn't know'; if one doesn't know something, one may be fully ignorant of it, or may have some beliefs indistinguishably mixed of true and false ones, and so forth. Regarding curiosity, is C1 a relevant premise in this argument and is it a true premise in virtue of being an instance of the law of the excluded middle? Having these controversies in mind, I would like to take the notion 'knows' in its broader and less precise sense, that is, if one has some grasp of a matter which enables her to have some conceptualization of that matter, then she has some knowledge of that matter. On the other hand, the notion 'does not know' would be that one has no conceptualization of that matter.

Coming to the second premise, if one's curiosity is satisfied—one has a satisfied curiosity mental state—then there's no need for one to become curious, therefore, C2 is a true premise. On the other hand, the notion 'knows' in the antecedent of C2 can be understood in the sense stated above, namely, one may have some grasp of a matter and this fact enables her to have some conceptualization of that matter. (Since we modify Socrates' original argument and apply it to curiosity, there is no sharp reason

or clue for us on which we can base our interpretation and understanding of ‘knows’ and ‘does not know’.) We can think further that the conceptualization of the known aspects of one thing can help us to conceptualize and express its unknown aspect(s). Besides this, one may be interested in those aspects which one is currently ignorant of. That is, one can be curious of them, consequently, C2 is a false premise consisting of a false consequent, namely, one has some conceptualization of some features of a matter but at the same time she is curious about the same matter, or at least is curious about some other aspects of the same matter. Thus, it really depends on how we understand the notion ‘knows’ in this premise. If we understand it as a mental state characterized as satisfied curiosity, then C2 is a true premise. Otherwise, on other understandings, the premise can appear to be false.

The third premise, C3, is ambiguous because it is unclear whether this premise corresponds to a mental state of curiosity, (1); or to a pre-curiosity mental state, (2); or to lack of curiosity mental state, (3). I will discuss each possibility as following:

- i. If (1) is the case, then C3 is false. For example, one is curious where the hottest place in Turkey in 2022 is. This implies that this person doesn’t know where the hottest place in Turkey in 2022 is. If so, then C3 is false because it has a true antecedent and a false consequent.
- ii. If (2) is the case, at first glance, C3 is likely to be a true premise because in a pre-curiosity mental state both one doesn’t know the object of which she might later become curious about, and one isn’t actually curious about that object. But this can be very misleading in the sense that the words ‘curious’ and ‘curiosity’ can be equivocated. It is not clear that in the consequent of C3, the notion ‘cannot become curious’, which can be rephrased as ‘unable to become curious’, is the same as being in a ‘pre-curiosity mental state’ in all respects. It

seems that the latter always entails the former, but the opposite way is not the case.

- iii. In a sharp way, (3) neither verifies C3 nor falsifies it. In (3), one doesn't know where the hottest place in Turkey in 2022 is and at the same time this person isn't curious about this place because she has no interest in knowing it. There is no causal relation between her ignorance and her uncurious mental state, also the former does not provide an epistemic reason for the latter. In this example one's lack of curiosity is caused by her lack of interest in the topic, not by her ignorance.

The notion 'does not know' in the antecedent of C3 can be understood in a broader sense of the notion as stated above: if one doesn't know a matter, one does not have any conceptualization of that matter. This can be the result of either one's lack of awareness of her ignorance or her conceptual and linguistic inability for conceptualization and expression of the unknown. As stated previously, a pre-curiosity mental state is reducible to lack of awareness of ignorance, and in turn the latter implies lack of interest in a matter and conceptualization of that matter as the unknown.

To sum up, the question of the possibility of inquiry posed by Meno's Paradox is closely related to the question of how a person becomes curious. On my understanding and analysis of Inan's account, although he may disagree, in the case of Meno's questions, the question on curiosity is reducible to a question on awareness of one's ignorance. Any answer to the question of awareness of ignorance is a step further towards the problem of curiosity and that of inquiry. On the other hand, Socrates' argument is more controversial and less clear, it is subject to different ways of interpretation. The key notions of the argument such as 'knows' and 'does not know' can ambiguously correspond to different mental states. Therefore, it is very difficult

to conclude whether the modified version of Socrates' argument is a sound one or not, and which understanding is the better one.

The discussion above has hopefully showed that Meno's Paradox is applicable to curiosity as well; it poses similar questions on curiosity as it does on inquiry. Inan rejects the main proposed solutions for the paradox in the literature. Inan aims to show how these solutions fail to solve a general problem of inquiry rather than how they fail to provide solutions for Meno's Paradox. Socrates' reply constitutes the first solution. At 81b in *Meno* Socrates discusses a theory that he had heard from priests and priestesses. This theory is known as Plato's Recollection Theory. According to this theory, learning is nothing but recollecting what the human soul knew prenatally and forgot at birth. The human soul can inquire into matters through recollection and, consequently, acquire knowledge. But on Inan's view:

The Recollection Solution simply provides the location of the sought knowledge when we are engaged in an inquiry (namely, the soul), but the problem posed by the Paradox is not merely about where to look for something when engaged in an inquiry, rather it is a paradox about how it is possible to look for something in the first place.... However, other than that, it does not even touch on the Paradox, unless it provides us with what the specification is that allows us to start an inquiry by attempting to recollect it and also allows us to recognize it when we have in fact revealed it. (Inan 2012, p. 21)

He argues further that this solution is only a partial account since it does not provide an explanation of how an inquiry gets started at the first place. Given this solution, its application to curiosity should be the case as well. We can obviously see that this is not the case when it comes to empirical matters. We don't come to have empirical knowledge through our soul, neither we forget our empirical knowledge at birth – we don't at all possess such knowledge at birth – to recollect. Coming to a priori matters, on Inan's view, this solution is problematic and implausible when we take it into account from a contemporary point of view. From a contemporary perspective, a priori

knowledge is different from the kind of knowledge that Plato thinks that the human's soul recollects.

The next proposed solution is called True Doxa Solution. Given that doxa is taken as propositional belief, according to this solution, having true beliefs about an object would provide a base for the specification of the object of inquiry and, accordingly, one can start an inquiry. It is in virtue of true beliefs that an inquiry becomes possible. On the contrary, on Inan's view, True Doxa Solution doesn't work as it is supposed to do. Inquiry into something presupposes that one doesn't know that thing and this solution suggests that such an inquiry can be based on true beliefs about the object of inquiry. If so, Inan says, at the same time one may have both true and false beliefs about that thing and having mere true beliefs would not be sufficient for one to pick true beliefs out and base her inquiry on them. Besides having true beliefs, one needs to know that they are true as well (Inan 2012, p. 23). Otherwise, one can pick false beliefs out instead of true ones. The same thing would be applicable in the case of curiosity. It is implausible to think that we become curious about an object only if we have true beliefs about that object, our curiosity can arise from false beliefs as well, not necessarily only from true ones.

The third solution is called Partial Knowledge Solution. This solution aims to reject a presupposition that there are only two cognitive states concerning an object: one may know everything about an object or is in a total ignorance concerning that object. If this presupposition were the case, then one would either know everything about an object or know nothing. Contrary to these two extremes, Partial Knowledge Solution suggests that one can know something partially, if so, then there will be a room for inquiry into other unknown parts of that thing and this inquiry gets started on the basis of that partial knowledge. Nonetheless, to be able to inquire into something,

one must have some partial knowledge of that thing, the thing which constitutes the object of one's inquiry. This solution is not applicable to propositional knowledge, rather we can have only partial objectual knowledge of an entity, namely, knowledge of the very object itself. If we can only have partial knowledge of the objectual kind, this kind of knowledge must be *de re*, the knowledge which involves the very object of inquiry. In turn, the latter entails that the object of inquiry must exist because we cannot have *de re* knowledge of non-existent entities. If this is so, Partial Knowledge Solution doesn't work in the way it is supposed to do; in the case of non-existent entities, it provides no help for the specification of the object of our inquiry. Nonetheless, Partial Knowledge Solution also fails to give an answer to the general question how an inquiry gets started.

Instead of these solutions, Inan introduces his account of 'Inostensible Conceptualization' although he doesn't mean that this account would solve the problem of inquiry posed by Meno's Paradox. He rather attempts to show how one's curiosity is expressible and the object of one's curiosity is referred to by an inostensible term. Before discussing this issue, let us have a brief discussion about two kinds of curiosity. As stated previously, for Inan curiosity is a mental state. There are two kinds of curiosity: 'instinctive curiosity' and 'conceptual curiosity' (Inan 2010, p. 30). We share the former kind of curiosity with non-human animals and pre-language babies, but the second kind is special to normal adults who have mastered in a natural language. As stated before, to be conceptually curious, one must fulfil all the three elements of the following characterization: be aware of her ignorance, have a certain interest in that matter, and have the linguistic ability to express the unknown. Inan puts forward two main theses on this kind of curiosity. The first one is as following:

My central thesis is that curiosity is always intentional, as the term is at times used within the philosophy of mind, namely that it is a mental

state that is always directed towards a particular object, in the logical sense of the term (Inan 2010, p. 33).

Later he distinguishes a strong sense of intentionality, as a mental state, from a weaker one. The former sense requires the object of curiosity to exist while the latter doesn't imply such a thing. On Inan's view, conceptual curiosity is intentional in terms of the weaker sense, that is, there is no need for the object of curiosity to exist. Besides this, Inan believes that the unknown object of curiosity is expressible by a definite description, this constitutes his second thesis on conceptual curiosity:

So my second main thesis is that every instance of curiosity involves the conceptualization of an unknown particular that could be expressed by a definite description. Given that the one who is curious, will not know the referent of that term, which is exactly what allows him to be curious, it follows that such a term will have to be inostensible for the curious person (Inan 2010, p. 33).

To sum up, on Inan's account, conceptual curiosity is intentional, which doesn't require its object to exist, and is expressed by a definite description that the object to which it refers is not ostensible for the person who is curious.

The discussion in the previous paragraph takes us to the important distinction between two ways of reference of a term⁶ to an object as its referent: Ostensible Reference and Inostensible Reference (Inan 2012, p. 33). Roughly, relative to the speaker, terms refer to their referents either in an ostensible way or in an inostensible way. If the speaker knows the object that a term refers to, this is an ostensible reference. There are a bunch of examples that Inan takes them to be ostensible for himself: Socrates, number 9, the table in front of him (Inan 2012, p. 33). That is, the objects that these terms refer to are all known for the speaker, their referents are

⁶ Inan clarifies what he means by a 'term': 'By a "term" I mean any linguistic expression that we use to talk about or refer to something. By a "complex term" I mean any such expression that is made up of words and has logical parts.' (Inan 2012, p. 32-33)

ostensible. If the speaker does not know the object that a term refers to, this is an inostensible reference. Inan provides plenty of examples: one is ‘the last thing Russell said before he died’ (Inan 2012, p. 33). If one doesn’t know the last thing Russel said before he died, the referent of this definite description is inostensible for that person. The referent of this term may be completely ostensible to someone else given that this person knows the last thing Russell said before he died. It is not the purpose of this chapter to take all details into account. Rather this chapter investigates and discusses whether and how the theory of ‘Inostensible Conceptualization’ provides any help to the puzzle of the possibility of inquiry in the *Meno*.

From the above discussion it follows that we express our curiosity through an inostensible term, and the way in which this kind of term supposedly refers to an object as its referent is called inostensible reference. The referent of an inostensible term is unknown to the speaker. The speaker is curious about the very object which falls under the referent of an inostensible term. Nonetheless, the referent of an inostensible term is the same as the object of one’s curiosity. If this is so, the way in which an inostensible term plays a role is indeed the way in which the object of curiosity is specified. To generalize, let’s assume that someone is curious about x , that is, this person is aware of her ignorance about x , interested in x , and has the required linguistic ability to express her curiosity through a definite description which supposedly refers to x . The whole process will be:

- i. S is curious about x (assume that all conditions for being curious obtain).
- ii. S expresses her curiosity through a term, usually a definite description, which supposedly refers to x . Thus, at this stage the definite description is inostensible relative to S.

From (i) and (ii) it follows that:

iii. x is unknown to S , namely, x is inostensible to S .

There is one more condition in Inan's account:

iv. Our inostensible term can fail to refer to x as an existent entity.

From (iii) and (iv) we can conclude that a curious person whose curiosity is not satisfied is not in a position to know whether her constructed inostensible term refers to an existing entity or fails, namely, the term refers to an object or refers to nothing. Still this person is able to have an intentional mental state and can be conceptually curious of an entity toward which her curious mental state is directed. In Inan's example, mathematicians before Euclid could have thought that there are finite prime numbers, if so, they could have been curious what is the last prime number (Inan 2012, p. 27). Their curiosity could have motivated them to inquire into the last prime number. As Euclid did, after inquiring they could come to the conclusion that there is no last prime number. That is, their inostensible term 'the last prime number' fails to refer to an object, in other words, it refers to a non-existent entity.

On Inan's view, our ability for constructing terms that refer to objects which are inostensible to us is what enables us to specify the object of our curiosity and inquiry. If this is so, this argument supposedly provides a solution for the problem of inquiry whereas the previously mentioned solutions fail. As discussed above, True Doxa Solution fails because possessing mere true beliefs would not be sufficient for distinguishing true beliefs from false one. In this case one may base her inquiry on false beliefs while thinking they are true beliefs. Unlike this, an inostensible term, which is the linguistic form of one's inostensible concept, is not subject to truth or falsity. The conceptualization of an unknown is expressible by an inostensible term and the concept that is expressed this way can be neither true nor false. Only a proposition can be true or false. Partial Knowledge Solution fails because we cannot

have partial knowledge of a non-existent entity whereas we can be curious about and inquire into this kind of entities. Additionally, in many cases we need to have *de re* partial knowledge of an object in order to be able to inquire into it, as discussed above, we cannot have *de re* knowledge of non-existent entities. Contrary to this, by constructing an inostensible term we can direct our mind to an entity which doesn't exist.

Up to here, we discussed that a mental state of curiosity is intentionally directed toward an object, this object is unknown to the person who is curious, and this curiosity is expressible through a definite description that refers to an object inostensibly. Such a definite description is an inostensible term. The referent of an inostensible term is the same as the object of one's curiosity. That is, the object of one's curiosity is specified through inostensible reference. To satisfy our curiosity, we may start an inquiry into it. If so, the object of our curiosity will be the same as the object of our inquiry; for in both cases, we are ignorant of the very same object and want to find out what it is. This means that the object of an inquiry that comes out of curiosity is specified through inostensible reference. Given that these lines of argument are taken for granted, contrary to the challenge brought up by Meno's Paradox, inquiry into a matter of which we are ignorant is possible.

CHAPTER 4

MENO'S PARADOX AS TWO PROBLEMS OF INQUIRY

4.1 Introduction

The possibility of inquiry is challenged in Plato's *Meno*. This challenge has two stages, at the first Socrates' interlocutor Meno asks three questions, at the second Socrates puts forward an argument. Taken together, they are called Meno's Paradox in the secondary literature.⁷ Meno's questions are these⁸:

How will you look for it, Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? (M1) How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? (M2) If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know? (M3) (*Meno* 80d)⁹

Socrates first says that he knows what Meno wants to say, then in a blameful sense asks a rhetorical question to him that if he realizes what an eristic argument he is bringing up. Socrates immediately puts forward an argument in order to show that Meno's questions are such eristic, though we can see that his account is very different from that of Meno. Socrates' argument is as follows:

Do you realize what a debater's argument you are bringing up, that a man cannot search either for what he knows or for what he does not know? He cannot search for what he knows—since he knows it, there is no need to search—nor for what he does not know, for he does not know what to look for (*Meno* 80e).

Prima facie reading of both passages would suggest that it is impossible for one to inquire into something, at least the possibility of inquiry is subject to being questioned.

⁷ For example, as we saw in chapter two, Gail Fines calls the first one as Meno's questions and the second as Socrates' dilemma which their conjunction is called as Meno's Paradox (Fine 2014, p. 1).

⁸ On Scott's view, as discussed in chapter two, these questions consist of two related points, rather than three points, which he later labels each as the problem of inquiry and the problem of discovery.

⁹ All quotations from Plato's dialogues are from John M. Cooper's edition.

However, this is a hasty conclusion and both passages, if taken out of their contexts in the dialogue, are very vague. It seems to me that Meno's questions need to be understood in accordance with the way his conversation with Socrates proceeds in the first part of the dialogue. And we need to understand Socrates' argument in accordance with his proposed solution to the puzzle that this argument brings up. Instead of giving a summary of the whole dialogue, in this chapter I will focus on the main issues that end up in Meno's questions and, on the other hand, I will discuss that Socrates' proposed solution may provide us significant clues for understanding his own problem of inquiry. Having said this, it then seems that the problem that Meno's questions raise is different from that of Socrates' argument. In this chapter I will show how they differ from one another.

4.2 The priority of knowledge what¹⁰

The *Meno* abruptly starts off with a question concerning how virtue is acquired if the acquisition of virtue can be the case at all (*Meno* 70a). Meno asks:

Can you tell me, Socrates, can virtue be taught? Or is it not teachable but the result of practice, or is it neither of these, but men possess it by nature or in some other way?

I call this question Meno's initial question. I am not concerned about the possible ways of acquiring virtue that Meno counts in this question, rather the way Socrates approaches to, or understands Meno's question shapes my interest. In response to Meno, Socrates says that he does not know the answer because he does not know what virtue is at all (*Meno* 71a-b). He continues with the example that if one doesn't know who Meno is, then one does not know if Meno is rich, or any other feature he might possess (*Meno* 71b). This Socratic way of response to Meno's initial question has a

¹⁰ This phrase belongs to Gail Fine.

significant implication that we cannot know a property of something without priorly knowing what that thing is. Apart from metaphysical discussions over the distinction between essential and nonessential properties of one thing, Socrates' reply implies that there are two types of knowledge about something, knowing what it is and knowing that it possesses such and such properties. They are related, one can derive from Socrates' claim, in the way that the former is more basic in the sense that, first, it epistemically comes prior to the latter and, second, the former is necessary for the latter. Socrates' explanation is not clear whether he defends the priority of knowledge what, or its necessity for knowledge of property. Another possibility is that he means both. On the contrary, Socrates provides no ground on which we can decide which one is the case. Another related problem is that Socrates doesn't provide any explication about how such a priority /necessity-relation exists between these two types of knowledge.

Scott believes that Socrates' response to Meno's initial question appeals implicitly to a metaphysical distinction between essential and nonessential properties of an object. But why is such a distinction related to, or necessary for the explanation that knowing a property of something requires knowing what that thing is? He calls this as the 'priority of definition'. Scott says: 'If this is already implicitly at work at 71b, we only have to add one further assumption to derive the priority of definition: the essence is what explains the non-essential attributes (Scott 2006, p. 21).' He even goes further; if this interpretation is taken for granted, that if the principle of the priority of definition really appeals to the distinction between essence and nonessential properties of one thing, this is an undeveloped version of Aristotle's account of the distinction between 'essence' of something and its 'necessary accidents'. On Aristotle's account, Scott says, necessary accidents are some features that are not part

of essence but are dependent on it for their explanation. The example Scott gives is this: having three sides is the essence of a triangle, but the property that its angles make 180° is not part of its essence, rather it follows from essence. This seems to be very similar to Socrates' claim that he does not know that virtue is teachable because he does not know what virtue is. That is, Socrates doesn't know the essence of virtue and lacking this knowledge causes him to be unable to know, explain whether virtue is teachable. There is another point that Scott brings up and that is, then, how we should understand the analogy that if one does not know who Meno is, one cannot know if he is rich. On Scott's view, it is questionable whether Socrates believes that Meno as a particular has essence which explains his attributes. To come to know that Meno is rich, one may only need to know some identifying features of him that differentiate him from other individuals (Scott 2006, p. 21). If this is so, we can easily conclude that this analogy is put forward only for pedagogical purposes, to make Meno understand the principle of the priority of definition.

Gail Fine has a different approach to Socrates' response. Although she agrees that one can think that the metaphysical distinction between essential and nonessential properties of an object underlies the principle of the priority of knowledge what, on her view, we have no reason that Plato defends such a distinction at all. She says:

Without knowing how if at all Plato distinguishes essential from nonessential properties, and what he takes to be examples of each, it's difficult to know whether the distinction he has in mind between what something is and what it is like is meant to be the distinction between the essential and the nonessential properties of a thing. Unfortunately, he doesn't provide an explicit account of essential or nonessential properties (Fine 2014, p. 35).

In the *Meno* Plato never attempts to distinguish these two types of properties. There is only one thing because of which we may think that Socrates has such a distinction in

mind. He claims that to know what something is, one must know one and the same form common to all instances of that thing (*Meno* 72c). This claim is frequently repeated in the dialogue. It would be very difficult to assume that by ‘one and the same form’ Socrates means the essence of an object. There might be objects whose instances may have more than one and the same form in common, consequently, does it have more than one essence? Having said this, it would be better not to say that Socrates has such a distinction in his mind when he responded Meno’s initial question.

On Fine’s interpretation, Plato’s point is about different kinds of knowledge, rather than different types of property. That is, the principle of ‘the priority of knowledge what’ implies that one kind of knowledge depends on another kind of knowledge. She argues further that Plato by the knowledge of what something is means the kind of knowledge which he defines at 98a, a true belief being accompanied by an account of the reason why. She calls this as P-knowledge for Plato’s understanding at 98a. She formulates Socrates’ response as this: ‘If one doesn’t know what x is, one can’t know anything about x (Fine 2014, p. 34).’ On this account, when Socrates says that he does not know that virtue is teachable because he does not know what virtue is, he means that he has no P-knowledge of what virtue is and that is the reason for his ignorance about the teachability of virtue. Thus, according to this reading, although one may have some grasp of what something is (has no P-knowledge of), still, one cannot know what that thing is like.

To my understanding, Socrates’ claim can be dealt to be very commonsensical, at least at this stage of the dialogue. For he tries to make his point through the example that if one does not know who Meno is, one cannot know if Meno is rich. This is an ordinary case. It seems to me that we can distinguish two senses of knowledge what,

in the case of its relation to knowledge of property, from one another. On a stronger reading, by ‘knowledge what’ Plato may aim at a philosophical knowledge or understanding of what something really is, perhaps knowledge of its essence. On a weaker reading, Plato may only want to identify the object in order to be able to attribute a feature to it, some identifying and distinguishing grasp is required¹¹. This second reading fits with the example that to know if Meno is rich, one needs to know who Meno is. In the *Theaetetus*, to provide an example of a good definition, Socrates defines clay as ‘earth mixed with liquid’ (*Theaetetus* 147c). Let’s take this definition to describe the essence of clay and one has P-knowledge of it. That is, one P-knows what clay is. This encompasses both Scott and Fine’s accounts. Assume further, being easily shapable is a nonessential property of clay. Then, the question is how P-knowledge of essence of clay is related, in terms of priority and necessity, to the knowledge that clay is easily shapable. It seems to me that the latter does not follow from, nor is entailed by, P-knowledge of the essence of clay¹². Rather P-knowledge of the essence of clay only plays the role of identification. That is, when we say that clay is easily shapable, we attribute the property ‘easily shapable’ to something specified, clay. Such an attribution is possible only if the object is already identified. To be able to attribute richness to Meno, we need to identifiably know who Meno is. Another example showing that identifiably knowing an object may be sufficient for inquiry into attributes of that thing takes place at the beginning of the slave boy examination. At

¹¹ Given above distinction, we can think of two possibilities. One is that we can have both stronger and weaker senses of knowledge of what something is and, depending on the purpose of our inquiry, we may need one or both; another is that in some cases we can have only the stronger sense of knowledge of what something is, but in others we can have only the weaker sense of knowledge of what something is. For example, for knowing what virtue is, we can know it only in the stronger sense but for knowing who Meno is, we can know him only in the weaker sense.

¹² In Scott’s example, the (nonessential) property ‘angles of a triangle make 180°’ depends on another (essential) property ‘a triangle has three sides.’ From a metaphysical point of view this may be the case, but from an epistemic point of view it can be disputed that the knowledge ‘angles of a triangle make 180°’ follows from the knowledge ‘a triangle is three-sided’.

82b Socrates asks the slave boy if he knows that a square figure is like the one which, apparently, Socrates had drawn in sand and was pointing at it. When the slave boy says that he does know, Socrates continues asking his questions about square which are different from its definition or essence. This shows that if one identifiably knows an object, still there is a room for inquiry into that object and one can attribute some features to it.

Definitional knowledge of an object is another approach to knowledge what. In this approach, to define what something is, we may count necessary and sufficient conditions of that thing. Again, I think, a definition of an object is some knowledge about that object that helps us to identifiably know that object and distinguish it from others, and this enables us to attribute some properties to it. Although definitional knowledge is very precise in the sense that it says exactly what a thing is, there is no necessity that our knowledge of properties of the same thing follows from our knowledge of necessary and sufficient conditions of that thing, from our definitional knowledge.

Inan's theory of Inostensible Reference, I think, plays a similar role, namely, an inostensible term directs us to identify the object that the term supposedly refers to. When an inostensible term becomes ostensible to us, we come to identifiably know the referred object. For example, let's take the following terms to be inostensible for us: 'the definition of triangle' and 'the sum of angles of a triangle'. Assume that the former refers to definitional knowledge of a triangle. When we come to possess that knowledge, the term becomes ostensible to us, we come to have some identifying knowledge of triangle. To know the referent of the latter, we can clearly see that it does not follow from the definitional knowledge of triangle. The referent of the latter is 180° , it is not deduced from the definitional knowledge of triangle, rather through

the definitional knowledge of triangle we can identify an object, triangle in this case, and then become able to attribute a property to that object, 180° as the sum of the angles of a triangle in this case.

To sum up, all these different approaches are common in one thing: They enable us to identifiably know the object of inquiry. When an object is identifiably known, a subject can attribute some other properties, both essential and nonessential, to it. We can identifiably know an object in different ways: knowing some properties of it (both essential and nonessential); knowing its essence or its definition (in terms of knowing its necessary and sufficient conditions); and when an inostensible reference turns to an ostensible one.

4.3 How are Meno's questions developed?

In the previous section we saw that in response to Meno's initial question, whether virtue can be taught, Socrates not only claims that he does not know whether virtue can be taught, he also says that he does not have any knowledge of what virtue is. He even goes further: 'If I do not know what something is, how could I know what qualities it possesses?' (*Meno* 71b) A straightforward reading of this claim is that knowing what something is is a necessary precondition for knowing what properties that thing possesses. Gail Fine calls this relation as the principle of 'the priority of knowledge what' (Fine 2014, p. 32). This is the first point (or, Socratic requirement on knowing) Meno comes across with in his conversation with Socrates, which he did not assume while asking his initial question about the teachability of virtue, albeit he might have been thinking that he knows what virtue is.

The second point arises from Meno's first attempt to answer the question what virtue is. Meno counts different virtues (or, different instances of virtue) for different

types of people, one for men, another for women, and so on (*Meno* 71e). Speaking generally, he answers the question what x is by naming some or all x -things. This is not what Socrates looks for; he seeks one and the same form for all of them. In the example of bees, Meno comes to agree that although they are various and different in many respects, but they are the same in being bees (*Meno* 72b). Socrates continues:

The same is true in the case of the virtues. Even if they are many and various, all of them have one and the same form which makes them virtues, and it is right to look to this when one is asked to make clear what virtue is (*Meno* 72c).

That is, to know what virtue is, one should look for one and the same form common to all virtuous actions which makes them virtuous. If this Socratic requirement on knowing what virtue is is the case, then Meno's answer that there is virtue for every type of individual and action is incorrect. Like the case of bees, Meno is expected to provide an answer that all virtues are the same in being virtue. Briefly, Meno's answer to Socrates' question what virtue is does not meet with Socratic requirement on knowing, that one and the same form common to all x -things is required. To put it differently, naming some or all x -things does not say anything about what x is.

Three types of knowledge are hinted in these two points: For instance, in the case of a chair:

- (a) Knowledge of what a chair is;
- (b) Knowledge of the fact that thing over there is a chair, namely, it is an instance of chair; and
- (c) Knowledge of the fact that a chair has four legs.

The relation between (a) and (c) is in accordance with the principle of the priority of knowledge what. Socrates' claim clearly implies that to know whether a thing possesses a specific property, one should first know what that thing is. To know the fact that a chair has four legs, prior to this, one needs to know what a chair is. (a) and

(b) are related in a different way: One knows what a chair is if and only if one knows what is common to all chairs. The argument will roughly be as this. To come to know, or to recognize whether this thing over there is a chair, one should first know what a chair is. To know what a chair is, one should first know one and the same form of all chairs, including the one over there if it is indeed a chair, which makes them chair. This is a biconditional relation while the one between (a) and (c) is one-sided conditional relation in the way that if (a) is the case, then so is (c). Socrates speaks of one and the same form common to all x -things which makes them x . One may think of a property which is not only common to all x -things but is shared with something non- x too. For example, assume that having leg(s) is a common property of all chairs, but one may believe that tables have the same property. Thus, it is an important point to emphasize on that Socrates has a narrower form in his mind when he speaks of one and the same form, the one by which all x -things are made x .

Socrates and Meno say nothing about the relation between (b) and (c). Assume, someone knows that ‘a chair has four legs’, and she sees that ‘the thing over there is four-legged’. Given these pieces of knowledge, then the question is: Can she know/conclude that the thing over there is a chair? Evidently, no. Another case one might think of is this. Assume that a blind person knows or has been told that the thing over there is a chair. Then, the question is: Can she know/conclude that the thing over there is four-legged? Again, no. It seems that these two types of knowledge, (b) and (c), do not entail one another and are related through (a). That is, speaking generally, if one knows that ‘ x is F ’ and ‘ y has the property F ’, then it is not necessary that one also knows ‘ y is an x ’. In other words, the former propositions might be insufficient to justify the truth of the latter one, although we can assume that y is in fact an x . On the other hand, if one knows that ‘ y is an x ’, then it is not necessary that one also knows

‘y has the property F’ even though y may in fact have the property F. For the validity of both cases, one must first know ‘what x is’. Knowing what x is entails both knowing whether something is an x, and knowing whether x is F.

To sum up, first, Meno asks whether virtue can be taught, Socrates argues that they must first know what virtue is, second, Meno counts different and various virtues, Socrates seeks one and the same form which makes them virtue. Meno did not have the first point in his mind when he asked his initial question, nor did he the second point when he attempted to answer Socrates’ question what virtue is. I think both points are very significant in the development of Meno’s questions, M1, M2, and M3.

Meno attempts to answer the question what virtue is for two more times, trying to define virtue in accordance with Socratic requirements on knowing. In his next attempt he defines virtue as ‘to be able to rule over people’ (*Meno* 73d). This is a better answer than counting different instances of virtuous actions, or different virtues for every type of person. Socrates evaluates this definition, if it is one and the same form which makes all people virtuous. Socrates immediately finds out that this definition is not applicable to slaves and children; if one is a slave, he cannot rule over people, on the other hand, if one can rule over people, he is not a slave anymore (*Meno* 73d). Given this definition, the question is what kind of ruling is the case; should it be just and moderate? Meno agrees that it should be, for ‘justice is virtue’ (*Meno* 73e). Socrates here speaks of the distinction between virtue and an instance of virtue. Is justice virtue, or a virtue? Meno does not grasp what Socrates means so (*Meno* 73e). This distinction is very similar to the one between knowing what x is and knowing if something is an x-thing. As stated previously, Meno did not know this important distinction at the moment of asking his initial question. This distinction between ‘justice is virtue’ and ‘justice is a virtue’ requires some illustration to make Meno

understand it. For example, round is as much shape as straight is, at the same time neither round nor straight is the same as shape but each is a shape (*Meno* 74e). Given this illustrative example, Meno is expected to clarify if justice is the same as virtue or it is a virtue. On the contrary, Meno fails to provide such an answer which satisfies Socratic requirements on knowing what virtue is; his definition does not include all people, and some properties like being just and moderate are missing from this defined virtue.

In his final attempt Meno answers the question what virtue is as ‘to desire beautiful things and have the power to acquire them’ (*Meno* 77b). This answer also fails to satisfy Socratic requirements on knowing. The argument briefly is this. Bad things harm people. If one knows that something is bad, she does not desire it. Therefore, everyone desires good things, beautiful things. (This is a very short summary of Socrates’ argument in *Meno*, 77b – 78b) Thus, no one is better, consequently not more virtuous, than another at desiring good things. If this is so, we need to look for virtue in the second part of Meno’s definition, in the power of acquiring good things. By good things Meno accepts that he means wealth, health, and so forth (*Meno* 78c). Would it be still virtuous if one acquired wealth through ways like stealing or heredity? There is no need to repeat the argument that any action which is accompanied with justice and moderation, or some other qualities is virtuous, otherwise it would not be virtue. The second part of Meno’s definition also does not refer to such qualities, and the whole answer is very far from giving one and the same form applicable to all virtuous people. Hence Meno’s final attempt also fails.

To sum up, Meno’s attempts all fail for the same reason; they do not meet Socratic requirements on knowing. These requirements are as following. First, to know whether something possesses a specific property, one should first know what that very

thing is. Second, to know what something is, one needs to know one and the same form which makes (various and many objects instances of) that very thing, in a narrow sense which excludes other things. The latter implies that to distinguish whether an entity is an instance of something, one must first know what that thing is. It seems to me that this is a more basic paradox implicit in the dialogue which Meno's Paradox is based on. To reject the second, we should have already rejected the first. Additionally, Meno's questions are based on this paradox, otherwise M1, M2, and M3 are unclear, and we cannot not know what Meno means by asking them. Now I will try to show that Meno's later questions are developed and came out as results of his conversation with Socrates.

4.4 Meno's questions

In this section I provide an analysis of Meno's questions. This analysis, I think, can be resulted from above discussions but has no grounding force for further discussions in the next sections.

Meno's first question is this:

(M1) How will you look for it, Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is?

We can restate this question as follows: In the case that one does not know (at all) what x is, then the question is how one will look for x . There are some important points about M1 and its restatement. First, this is not a claim showing that inquiry is impossible. At least the impossibility of inquiry is not a direct implication of M1. This is a question about, not an argument against, the possibility of inquiry. Second, M1 is an open question, requires an answer. Third, there are two excluding, possible answers to the question whether one can look for x or not, negative, and positive

(a) One cannot look for x . Thus, Inquiry is impossible.

(b) One can look for x . If so, then how can an inquiry get started?

It would be a rush understanding if one by M1 understood that this question implies that inquiry is impossible. Now I take both (a) and (b) into account, looking how they can be traced to the dialogue. If (a) is the case, then the argument will be as following:

- i. One does not know what x is.
- ii. If one does not know what x is, one cannot inquire into x .
- iii. Therefore, one cannot inquire into x .

Inquiry into x may mean both looking for some attributes of x , that x if F , and inquiring into what x is, giving a definition of x . The first premise is presumed in the sense that provides reason why one wants to inquire into something at the first place. The second premise of the argument is based on Socratic requirement on knowing, namely, to know whether virtue is teachable one should first know what virtue is. Concludingly, knowing what x is is a necessary pre-condition for knowing anything else about x . To inquire into x may mean either one wants to know what x is or one wants to know whether a proposition about x is true, in the case of propositional knowledge of x . In the first case, the second premise would be: 'If one does not know what x is, one cannot inquire into what x is.' In the second case, the same premise would be: 'If one does not know what x is, one cannot inquire into whether x is F .' Therefore, the conclusion may be interpreted that one can inquire neither into what x is nor into whether x is F . It seems to me that this is not an argument proving that inquiry is not possible, rather this plays a kind of explicatory role about how the argument will look like if it is really the case.

If (b) is the case, then Meno asks a genuine question: How can one inquire into x given that one does not know what x is? In the dialogue, as discussed previously, Meno learns that to know whether a thing is indeed an x -thing, one must first know

what x is. Moreover, to know what x is, one must know what is common among all x -things, in the narrower sense. Thus, not-knowing what x is entails not-knowing what is common to all x -things, and vice versa. There is a biconditional relation:

One knows what x is *if and only if* one knows what is common to all x -things.

The negation of one side entails the denial of the other. Given this argument, Meno asks how one can inquire into x . That is, in the first case, if one does not know what x is, then the question is how one can start an inquiry into whether a thing is indeed an x -thing and into the common feature of all x -things, in the second, if one does not know what is common among all x -things which makes them x , then the question is how one can know what x is. In other words, Meno may attempt to ask, given one does not know one side of the biconditional, then how one can inquire into another side in a separate and independent way.

Coming to Meno's second question:

(M2) How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all?

We can restate this question as follows: In the case that one does not know what x is, then the question is how one will aim to search for x . A rough understanding of this question is that one does not know what x is and this fact entails that one does not know that x is unknown to him. To put the second part differently, one does not know that x is one of the things she does not know. Namely, one cannot pick x to inquire into it. The key point here is that not knowing what something is entails that one does not know that very thing is unknown to her. Assume that x is a member of a set whose all n members are unknown to one, then in the case of not knowing what x is, one cannot pick x among other elements to inquire into it. We can imagine that one could pick another member rather than x while thinking that it is x , or correctly pick x but could not know whether it is x or not. Since M2 is a question, an open one, in a direct way it

is not conclusive that in the case of not knowing what x is, one cannot aim to look for x . Like M1, there are two excluding, possible answers to M2:

(c) One cannot aim to inquire into x .

(d) One can aim to inquire into x .

If (c) is the case, the argument will be as follows:

- i. One does not know what x is.
- ii. If one does not know what x is, one does know that x is unknown to one.
- iii. If one does not know that x is unknown to one, then one cannot aim to inquire into x .
- iv. Therefore, one cannot aim to inquire into x .

It is important to keep in mind that for Plato knowing what x is, at least in *Meno*, is the same as knowing what is common to all x -things which makes them x , and to know whether a thing is an x -thing one must first know what x is. According to this reading, the consequent of the second premise is true in the sense that one neither knows what x is nor knows that her object of inquiry is an x -thing. We need to make a distinction between that the object of inquiry is unknown and that one does not know whether x is the object of her inquiry. In both cases one cannot aim to inquire into x . In the first, one does not know if she inquires into something at all and, in the second, one does not know if x is the object of her inquiry. Therefore, one cannot aim to inquire into x .

If (d) is the case, then M2 is a genuine question how can one aim to look for something? It seems to me that the condition of ‘not knowing at all what x is’ does not play such an important role here. For it is a general question asking how an inquirer specifies her object of inquiry. Furthermore, the specification of the object of inquiry

in all conditions will be the same if by ‘the object of inquiry’ we mean the thing unknown to us and what we want to know.

Meno’s third question is this:

(M3) If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know?

We can restate M3 as following: In the case that one does not know what x is and, in some way, comes to meet with x , then the question is how one will recognize that what she met is x . In the literature this is called as the problem of discovery. Like M1 and M2, M3 is not an argument against the possibility of discovering what x is; it is a question requiring an answer. Hence, there are two excluding, possible answers to this question:

(e) One cannot recognize that what she met is x .

(f) One can recognize that what she met is x .

In both, it is assumed that one does not know what x is before she comes to meet with x . If (e) is the case, the argument will be as follows. For example, one may not know x and y at the same time. Assume, one meets with some knowledge which in fact describes what x is. Within the context of Socratic requirements on knowing this may mean that one comes to meet with one and the same form applicable to a group of objects which makes each of them a member of that group and gathers them under one group. Since Socrates thinks of a narrower sense of ‘one and the same form’, we can think further that this one and the same form provides reason for one to exclude other different objects from this group. Both x and y are unknown, given this, how can one know that this ‘one and the same form’ describes what x is and not what y is? It seems to me that (e) implies that there is no way to know that that one and the same form

refers to x . Although x is the same as that form but knowing that such a relation exists may require some other knowledge, a higher level one.

If (f) is the case, M3 is a genuine question asking, namely, how one can come to know that the knowledge which in fact describes what x is refers to x and not y .

4.5 Meno's Paradox as two problems of inquiry

After proposing the principle of the priority of knowledge what, instead of investigating how virtue is obtained, as discussed in previous sections, Socrates first wants to inquire into what virtue is. Meno names a virtue for men, another for women, and so on. In response to Meno's answer, Socrates puts forward another significant claim. Socrates seeks 'one and the same form' because of which all virtues are virtue. Generally, to know what something is, we need to know one and the same form common to all instances of that thing. Scott calls it as 'Unitarian Assumption' and Fine calls it as 'Oneness Assumption'. Apparently, Socrates' claim is that counting different kinds of virtue provides no help for knowing what virtue itself is; rather one common form is sought. Socrates mentions various examples: bees are the same in being bees, there is one thing common to all of them because of which they are bees (*Meno* 72b); strength and size are the same in men and women, there is not one strength for men, another for women, it's similar in the case of size (*Meno* 72e). Therefore, Meno's response doesn't answer the question what virtue is.

There are similar and related lines of argument in the *Theaetetus*. There Socrates asks the question what knowledge is to Theaetetus. In response, like Meno, Theaetetus counts geometry, cobbling, and other crafts to be knowledge (*Theaetetus* 146d). Socrates complains that this was not asked. In the *Theaetetus* (147b) Socrates proposes a further account which one cannot explicitly see in the *Meno*:

SOC: And so a man who does not know what knowledge is will not understand 'knowledge of shoes' either?

THEA: No, he won't.

SOC: Then a man who is ignorant of what knowledge is will not understand what cobbling is, or any other craft?

THEA: That is so.

According to this passage, one cannot know the virtue of a woman or that of a man if one doesn't know what virtue is. It has two significant implications. First, for example, if a woman does not know what virtue is, then she will not know that among many virtues which one is the especial virtue by which women become virtuous, to put differently, she won't know how women become virtuous. Second, assume that Meno is right that women's virtue is to manage household affairs, then she will not know what the management of the household affairs is. These two points can be disputed whether they are Plato's accounts or not. But it would not be false to say that for Plato, both in the *Meno* and in the *Theaetetus*, counting different instances of something is not the answer to the question what that thing is, one thing common to all of them is required; and that one cannot know instances of one thing in the case that one does not know what that very thing is.

To sum up, Socrates proposes two important claims which Meno was not aware of before, and the latter then tries to fit his next answers accordingly. The first claim is that knowing any attribute of one thing requires knowing what that thing is, we can think of either the stronger or the weaker sense of the role that knowledge what may play in relation to knowledge of properties. Second claim is that to answer the question what something is, we must look for one and the same form common to all instances of that thing. The latter claim also implies that one cannot know any instances of one thing in the case that one does not know what that thing is.

Now Meno attempts to provide an answer to the question what virtue is which fits with above Socratic requirements. Here I don't discuss Meno's second and third

answers and Socrates' refutation of them. I think the above discussions will provide us good enough ground to understand what Meno's three questions mean. When Meno's second and third answers are refuted, he asks three questions regarding how one can possess any knowledge about something if one lacks another kind of knowledge. The arguments which underly Meno's questions are as following:

- i. If Socrates doesn't know what virtue is, he cannot know if virtue is teachable (the principle of the priority of knowledge what/definition).
- ii. Socrates claims that he doesn't know what virtue is.
- iii. Therefore, Socrates cannot know whether virtue is teachable (generally and in other words, Socrates cannot inquire into attributes of virtue).

The second argument is as follows:

- i. Socrates does not know what virtue is.
- ii. To know what virtue is, Socrates must know what is one and the same form common to all virtuous things (oneness/unitarian assumption).
- iii. If Socrates does not know what virtue is, Socrates cannot know whether a thing is virtuous (in other words, whether it is an instance of virtue).
- iv. If Socrates does not know instances of virtue, Socrates cannot know what is one and the same form common to all those instances – the latter means that Socrates cannot know what virtue is.
- v. Therefore, Socrates cannot inquire into what are instances of virtue and, consequently, into one and the same form common to them, that is, nor into what virtue is.

The combined conclusion of both arguments is that if Socrates does not know what virtue is, then he can know neither the instances of virtue nor its properties. Since Socrates claims that he does not know what virtue is, then its consequent is the case.

If Socrates does not know instances of virtue and its properties, then he cannot inquire into one and the same form common to all instances of virtue. It follows that Socrates cannot inquire about virtue in all respects. That is, for Socrates it is impossible to inquire into anything about virtue, what virtue is, instances and properties of virtue.

Coming to Meno's questions, M1, M2, and M3 must be understood under the light of above discussions, that how different kinds of knowledge about one thing are related to each other. We can easily see that Socrates' claim means that his ignorance about what something is causes him not to be able to inquire into properties and instances of that thing. If this is so, his ignorance about the properties and instances of something causes him not to be able to inquire into what that thing is. Then, M1 questions the possibility of starting an inquiry in the case that not knowing what something is entails that one cannot inquire into properties and instances of that thing. M2 questions how one can aim to start an inquiry into something in the case that everything about that thing (what it is, its instances and properties) is unknown to one. M3 is more complicated than the other two. By M3 I understand that the principle of the priority of knowledge what/definition and oneness assumption do not suffice for knowing that the obtained knowledge is the one sought. Meno's questions are about how different kinds of knowledge about one thing are related to one another. So, for knowing Q, one must first know P.¹³ Assume that one doesn't know both P and Q, only knows that such a relation exists between them, and wants to inquire into Q. M1 claims that inquiry into Q is impossible and M2 says that there is no way for one to take Q as the object of her inquiry. M3 says that even though one somehow meets with Q, still it's subject to question that how one can know that what she met is Q. For

¹³ Each of P and Q can be either the knowledge of what something is or the knowledge of properties and instances of that thing.

example, the proposition ‘if P, then Q’ is that if one does not know one and the same form common to all instances of x , one doesn’t know what x is. Assume that one comes to meet with some knowledge describing what x is, then the question is how one can know that this knowledge is the same as the knowledge of one and the same form common to all instances of x . The latter is the sought knowledge. To be certain that they are the same, the principle of the priority of knowledge what and oneness assumption do not provide any help, some high-level knowledge/principle may be required.

Coming to Socrates’ argument, the first point I think we need to mention is that the terms ‘restatement’ and ‘reformulation’ may not be very appropriate for Socrates’ argument relating to Meno’ questions, although they have been frequently used in the secondary literature. Unlike them, I prefer the term ‘interpretation’ because Socrates’ argument does not fully overlap with Meno’s questions to be a full restatement or a reformulation of them, still, to some extent, refers to the same problem raised by Meno’s questions. Socrates’ argument has two explicit and one implicit premises:

- S1 For any x , one either knows x or does not know x (implicit premise based on the principle of excluded middle).
- S2 If one knows x , one cannot inquire into x .
- S3 If one does not know x , one cannot inquire into x .
- S4 Therefore, one cannot inquire into x .

The first premise is usually taken for granted, Socrates himself also says something very close to S1: ‘... that a man cannot search either for what he knows or for what he does not know’ (*Meno* 80e). Although this does not say that there are only two possible, but excluding cognitive states, knowing something or not-knowing something, it shows that Socrates might have had something similar in his mind. The

second and third premises are explicitly stated by Socrates. To defend S2, Socrates says that in this state one does not need to inquire into what one already knows. For S3 Socrates says that in this case one even does not know what to look for, that is, the object of one's inquiry is unknown. Socrates' reason for S2 is plausible in the sense that one does not need to inquire into the very same thing one already knows, but it may be disputed that although one knows something about an object one still can inquire into its other features. The reason for S3 is not clear. Socrates' statement of S3 looks like this: if one does not know x, one does not know if x is the object of her inquiry, therefore, one cannot inquire into x. It is not clear how the antecedent of this conditional entails its consequent. On Scott and Fine's views, if not-knowing is meant that one is in a cognitive blank, then one has no idea about the object of her inquiry. However, a more plausible account would be this: if one doesn't know what the object of her inquiry is, one cannot know, inquire into that very thing. But this is not what Socrates claims.

Socrates' argument supposedly challenges the possibility of inquiry, that inquiry is not possible, but he himself thinks the opposite. On his account, answering Meno's Paradox, one can inquire by recollecting. This is called Plato's Theory of Recollection in the secondary literature. Briefly, Plato's theory of recollection in the *Meno* is as following. The idea of the immortality of the humans' soul is claimed by priests, priestesses, and poets, Socrates says. Socrates takes this assumption for granted, he thinks that these people are wise and what they have said is true and beautiful. By the immortality of the soul, they mean that at one point it dies and at another it is reborn but never gets destroyed, thus, the human soul always exists. If this is so, the human soul has seen everything in this world and underworld (*Meno* 81b-d). Human beings recollect what once they knew but have forgotten at birth. Learning (inquiry) is the

same as recollecting (*Meno* 81d). After he said this, for the sake of Meno's quest of how recollection works, Socrates examines one of Meno's slave boys. Meno says that the slave boy has not received any geometrical education and Socrates asks questions about a geometrical issue to him in order to show that he recollects the answers and Socrates does not teach him. During the examination, the slave boy first thinks that he knows the correct answer while he in fact doesn't; he then comes to realize that he doesn't know; and at the end he gives a correct answer. Socrates calls his correct answer as true doxa which was within him (*Meno* 85c). He claims further that if they keep asking questions, the slave boy will move from the state of possessing true doxa to the state of having knowledge. If this is the case, his knowledge was acquired at some time different from his present life (because he never received geometrical education during his current life) or he has always known (*Meno* 85d). Socrates continues:

Then if the truth about reality is always in our soul, the soul would be immortal so that you should always confidently try to seek out and recollect what you do not know at present—that is, what you do not recollect? (*Meno* 86b)

If the slave boy examination proves that he always possessed knowledge in his soul, both at the time when he was not a human being and when he became, this means that the soul always existed too. Since our soul is the place of the truth about reality, we must seek knowledge within ourselves. Concludingly, Socrates tries to argue that through recollection one can inquire into something and the conclusion of his argument is false.

Peculiarly, Socrates' solution targets none of the premises, rather he argues that the conclusion of the argument is false. Shortly after proposing his argument, Socrates says that the argument is not sound. To show why this is the case, Socrates introduces the recollection theory. Given the recollection theory, Socrates wants to show that

inquiry is possible. If so, S4 is false. Socrates' reply has two stages: first, the introduction of the recollection theory which is based on the assumption that human soul is immortal and, second, the examination of the slave boy in order to show that we acquire knowledge through recollection. In the end of the slave boy examination Socrates says:

So the man who does not know has within himself true opinions about the things that he does not know? These opinions have now just been stirred up like a dream, but if he were repeatedly asked these same questions in various ways, you know that in the end his knowledge about these things would be as accurate as anyone's. (*Meno* 85c-d)

Here Socrates claims that through questioning one's true beliefs (doxas) can end up in knowledge. Having said this, Socrates' solution to the problem of inquiry that his own argument brings up has two significant aspects. First, one can come to have knowledge of something through recollection. Second, one's cognitive state can elevate from a state of true doxas to a state of knowledge. It seems to me that, having an overall understanding, the recollection theory doesn't target any of the premises, it only claims that inquiry is possible, thus, it claims that the conclusion of the argument is false. On the other hand, there is no reason to assume that by not-knowing in S3 Socrates means true doxa. This theory neither refers to Meno's questions in the sense that it shows that even though one may lack one kind of knowledge about something, still one can come to look for another kind of knowledge about it. Moreover, in the case of true doxa, it's unclear whether knowledge is obtained only if one first has true doxa, or one can recollect and know something without having some preceding true doxas.

Meno's questions raise a problem about the possibility of inquiry which is based on the idea of how different kinds of knowledge about one thing are related to one another while Socrates's solution focuses only on the process of how one acquires knowledge. Meno's challenge comes out of Socratic requirements on definitional

knowledge of what something is and its relation to the knowledge of properties and instances. David Erbey in his article ‘Meno’s Paradox in Context’ presents a similar understanding:

Meno’s challenge raises problems specifically about acquiring the sort of knowledge that Socrates asked for earlier: knowledge grounded in explanatory definitions. The challenge points to the fact that, given Socrates’ stringent requirements on definitions and on knowledge, we seem to have no way to formulate or identify correct definitions (Erbey 2014, p. 2).

On my view, Meno’s questions do not simply challenge the acquisition of correct definitions, rather they target the role that definitional knowledge is supposed to play in relation to knowledge of instances and properties of something. So, the puzzle that Meno’s questions bring up says that if one lacks one kind of knowledge about something, she would not be able to know something else about that same thing. But Socrates approaches in the way that if one does not know something about an object, independent of any other knowledge, one can inquire into (recollect) it. The recollection theory is a doctrine about the process of acquiring knowledge through which we can learn and possess explicit knowledge. Assume the following kinds of knowledge about x :

- (a) Knowledge of what x is.
- (b) Knowledge of x is F .
- (c) Knowledge of y is an (instance of) x .

It seems to me that Meno’s questions are based on the assumption that ‘one knows (a) if and only if one knows (b) and (c)’. In (b), F can be either essential or nonessential property of x . Addition to this, another assumption is that (a), (b), and (c) constitute our whole knowledge about x . So, Meno’s questions raise the puzzle that in the case of not knowing any side of the biconditional how we can inquire into anything about x . Socrates’ argument can be put as follows: one either possesses (a) or lacks (a), in

either case one cannot inquire into what x is. This applies to (b) and (c) as well. Socrates claims that through recollection, supposedly independent of (b) and (c), one can come to know what x is. Again, through recollection, supposedly independent of (a) and (c), one can come to know that x is F. The same goes with (c). We can assume that we may recollect one of above kinds of knowledge through another one, that is, possessing one kind may prompt us to recollect another kind. But Meno's puzzle challenges the possibility of acquiring one kind of knowledge in the absence of another, it is not about how granted knowledge provides help for acquiring new knowledge, rather it is about the consequences that come out of lacking some knowledge about one thing.

CHAPTER 5

SOCRATES' ARGUMENT

5.1 The distinction between knowledge and true belief (doxa)

In the previous chapter, I claimed that Meno's questions were developed as results of his conversation with Socrates. The key point which his questions were based on was the distinction between knowledge of 'what x is' and knowledge of 'whether x is F'. Without this distinction and its implications, it is difficult to understand what Meno's questions mean. There is another significant distinction Socrates discusses almost at the end of the dialogue, the distinction between knowledge and true belief, which plays equally important role. Before coming to Socrates' reformulation of Meno's question, I think, it would be helpful to discuss this distinction first, for this makes us to get a full grasp of Socrates' argument. I assume that Socrates was aware of this latter distinction when he interpreted Meno's questions. Even if he was not, we could take it into account, for it would help us with a full understanding of all possible forms of the argument. I will later show that some forms are reasonable, some are defended by Socrates, some are rejected, and some are ambiguous.

The discussion of the distinction between knowledge and true belief arises out of Socrates' investigation about Meno's initial question whether virtue is teachable or not. The argument roughly is as follows. A thing is teachable if and only if it is knowledge. If something is teachable, there are teachers of it. There is no teacher of virtue (Socrates and Anytus count many Athenians who were known to be the best of men but had not taught their virtue to their own sons, thus there is no teacher of virtue (*Meno* 90c – 94e)). Therefore, virtue is not teachable. If this is so, virtue is not

knowledge (*Meno* 98d-e). That virtue is knowledge is important in the sense that Socrates previously assumed that only knowledge encompasses good and beneficial things (*Meno* 87d). Some lines later Socrates comes to conclude that all qualities in themselves are neither beneficial nor harmful, it is their being accompanied with wisdom that makes them beneficial or harmful (*Meno* 88d). On the contrary, Socrates, Anytus, and Meno conclude that virtue is not knowledge because there is no teacher of it, similarly, no learner of it. Later Socrates says: ‘we were right to agree that good men must be beneficent, and that this could not be otherwise’ (*Meno* 96e). By good men he means virtuous ones. If this is so, and given that virtue is not knowledge, then the question is how can someone virtuous be beneficent? This means that there should be something other than knowledge which also gives us correct guidance.

True belief can also give us correct guidance, Socrates claims. For example, one may not know the way to Larissa but have mere true belief. One with true belief can lead us to Larissa as well as the one who knows the way (*Meno* 97a). If virtue is not beneficial for being knowledge, then we may conclude that it is true belief which, on the one hand, leads us correctly as knowledge is supposed to do and, on the other, it is not teachable. Here I do not discuss this distinction with many details. Briefly, Socrates says that knowledge is like the statues of Daedalus which are tied down to prevent them from running away (*Meno* 97e). Socrates explains the difference between knowledge and true belief (opinion) as follows:

What am I thinking of when I say this? True opinions. For true opinions, as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all they do is good, but they are not willing to remain long, and they escape from a man’s mind, so that they are not worth much until one ties them down by (giving) an account of the reason why. And that, Meno, my friend, is recollection, as we previously agreed. After they are tied down, in the first place they become knowledge, and then they remain in place (*Meno* 97e – 98a).

Although knowledge is more reliable in guiding one's action, it is likely that true belief can guide one as well as knowledge does. Given that virtue is not teachable, thus it is not knowledge, and true belief can guide humans to be good and beneficial, then one can conclude that virtue is true belief.

5.2 Socrates' interpretation of Meno's questions

Socrates' interpretation does not fully overlap with Meno's questions, but it is a more direct argument against the possibility of inquiry. When Meno asked M1-M3 Socrates said:

I know what you want to say, Meno. Do you realize what a debater's argument you are bringing up, that a man cannot search either for what he knows or for what he does not know? He cannot search for what he knows—since he knows it, there is no need to search—nor for what he does not know, for he does not know what to look for. (*Meno* 80e)

Not stated by Socrates, but there is one more, but implicit, premise for this argument, as the principle of excluded middle: For every x , one either knows x or does not know x . Socrates' argument will be as follows.

- S1 For any x , one either knows x or does not know x .
- S2 If one knows x , one cannot inquire into x .
- S3 If one does not know x , one cannot inquire into x .
- S4 Therefore, one cannot inquire into x .

Socrates' interpretation can be understood in two different ways: the word 'knows' understood in terms of the distinction between knowledge and true belief; and in terms of the distinction between knowing whether x if F and knowing what x is. The first distinction would not be understandable to Meno at the moment he asks his questions because until that moment it was not discussed anywhere in the dialogue, nor there is any reason to think that Meno himself had some grasp of it. Meno is aware of the

second distinction, it was discussed several times before. To have a comprehensive understanding of Socrates' argument, I think, we need to discuss the key words of the argument in terms of these two distinctions. Then, in the light of these distinctions there will be four different forms of S1:

- (1) For any x , one either knows what x is, or does not know what x is.
- (2) For any x , one either has a true belief about what x is, or has a mere belief what x is.
- (3) For any x , one either knows that x is F , or does not know that x is F .
- (4) For any x , one either truly believes that x is F , or merely believes that x is F .

One can also think of different conjunctions instead of disjunctions, which will increase the number of the forms of S1. For example, one may truly believe what x is but does not know what x is. There are two reasons that show why this way of thinking is incorrect. First, if it is a conjunction, it cannot be a premise for Socrates' argument because it is not in accordance with the principle of the excluded middle. Second, in (1) and (3) 'does not know' already entails 'truly believes', 'falsely believes', 'merely believes', and 'to be in a cognitive blank'. Thus, in (2) and (4) 'not knowing' is a granted condition. Another condition is that no inquiry can be based on a false belief and a cognitive blank. Given these conditions, we can think of cognitive states in which one either truly believes that something is so or merely believes that it is so, in the latter state the truth value of such belief is indeterminate. Socrates argued that true belief can be as a good guide as knowledge is, hence, it is important to investigate whether true beliefs and beliefs with indeterminate truth value can provide such guidance or not.

The same distinctions are applicable to S2 and S3. Different forms of S2 are as follows:

- (5) If one knows what x is, one cannot inquire into what x is.
- (6) If one knows what x is, one cannot inquire into whether x is F .
- (7) If one has a true belief about what x is, one cannot inquire into what x is.
- (8) If one has a true belief about what x is, one cannot inquire into whether x is F .

In the first four forms of S2 for starting an inquiry one may know or truly believe *what x is*, but in the next four forms knowing or truly believing *that x is F* constitute the antecedent of the conditionals.

- (9) If one knows that x is F , one cannot inquire into what x is.
- (10) If one knows that x is F , one cannot inquire into whether x is F .
- (11) If one has a true belief that x is F , one cannot inquire into what x is.
- (12) If one has a true belief that x is F , one cannot inquire into whether x is F .

The third premise of Socrates' argument, S3, also has eight forms.

- (13) If one does not know what x is, one cannot inquire into what x is.
- (14) If one does not know what x is, one cannot inquire into whether x is F .
- (15) If one merely believes what x is, one cannot inquire into what x is.
- (16) If one merely believes what x is, one cannot inquire into whether x is F .

It is evident that the possession of false beliefs cannot provide any ground for an inquiry. Thus, 'falsely believing' is not the case in premises (15) and (16); instead, the indeterminate state of 'merely believing' plays such a role. In this case, one only believes something about x , falsely or truly, but does not know whether her belief refers to x at all or not, in other words, one does not know if x is indeed the object of her belief. Although this indeterminateness is not the opposite of 'truly believes', it is good enough to shake one's confidence about her belief, in the sense whether this belief can be a base for an inquiry or not. The remaining four forms are:

- (17) If one does not know that x is F , one cannot inquire into what x is.

(18) If one does not know that x is F , one cannot inquire into whether x is F .

(19) If one merely believes that x is F , one cannot inquire into what x is.

(20) If one merely believes that x is F , one cannot inquire into whether x is F .

Although S4 rejects the possibility of inquiry, different combinations of above forms of S1, S2, and S3 are going to constitute various and different arguments, and respectively different conclusions. There are eight different formulations of the argument, I will briefly discuss each of them.

Formulation 1

S1 (1) For any x , one either knows what x is, or does not know what x is.

S2 (5) If one knows what x is, one cannot inquire into what x is.

S3 (13) If one does not know what x is, one cannot inquire into what x is.

S4 Therefore, one cannot inquire into what x is.

In this formulation, S2 persists in the way Socrates defends it, that there will be no need to inquire into what x is. Unlike S2, it seems to me that the relation between the antecedent and the consequent of S3 is vague; there is no clear reason proving that not knowing what x is entails the impossibility of inquiry into what x is. In the dialogue Socrates argues that in this case one does not know what to look for (*Meno* 80e). If so, one of the following conditionals might be the case:

(a) If one does not know what x is, then one does not know that she looks for x .

(b) If one doesn't know that she looks for x , then one cannot inquire into what x is.

S3 is more likely to be the same as the first conditional. Again, the relation between not knowing what x is and (not) knowing that x is the object of inquiry is unclear. The second conditional is more plausible; one may conclude that in the case of not knowing that x is the object of one's inquiry, one cannot know what x is. Its consequent is the same as the antecedent of S3 and its antecedent is the reason Socrates mentions to

defend S3. Neither Socrates nor Meno think that they do not know what the object of their inquiry is, they inquire into virtue. Thus, the second conditional is neither a substitute for S3 nor can be an additional premise for the argument in Formulation 1. However, we can understand how the antecedent of S3, if it is taken for granted, implies the consequent of S3 in the way that to know what x is, we must first know one and the same form of all x -things which makes them x . To know the latter, we must first know what x is. If S3 is understood in this sense, the argument is valid. (There is a problem with this way of understanding S3: this is how Meno understands the problem, not Socrates.) Otherwise, S3 of the argument remains vague, indeterminate, thus, the conclusion. Therefore, the argument is not clearly conclusive. On the one hand, S3 is true in terms of the reading provided above, that there is no way of inquiry for knowing what x is in the case that one does not know what x is. On the other hand, Plato provides no clear and definite reason that the antecedent of S3 entails, necessitates its consequent. Considering these two points, this formulation of the argument remains controversial.

Formulation 2

- S1 (1) For any x , one either knows what x is, or does not know what x is.
 S2 (6) If one knows what x is, one cannot inquire into whether x is F.
 S3 (14) If one does not know what x is, one cannot inquire into whether x is F.
 S4 Therefore, one cannot inquire into whether x is F.

This formulation of the argument is the most evident in the dialogue; Socrates clearly speaks of S2 and S3. Socrates rejects S2. Contrary to the claim in the second premise, he argues that if one does not know what something is, one cannot know what qualities it possesses. (*Meno* 71b) Knowledge of what x is provides sufficient ground for inquiry into whether x is F. Therefore, S2 of this formulation is false. Meno understands this

point exactly in this way. S3 is a central claim of Socrates in the *Meno*. Since Socrates does not know what virtue is, he cannot know whether virtue is teachable (*Meno* 71a). Reading S2 and S3 in this Socratic way, the former is false whereas the latter is true, thus the conclusion is not supported by the premises. For, even if one knows what x is, there will still be a room for inquiry into whether x is F . This formulation of the argument is invalid, hence inquiry into whether x is F is possible.

Formulation 3

- S1 (2) For any x , one either has a true belief about what x is, or has a mere belief what x is.
- S2 (7) If one has a true belief about what x is, one cannot inquire into what x is.
- S3 (15) If one has a mere belief about what x is, one cannot inquire into what x is.
- S4 Therefore, one cannot inquire into what x is.

By ‘a mere belief’ I mean that one possesses a belief about x but has no idea whether her belief is true or false. This also includes beliefs whose truth value can never be known and those that are not exposed yet whether they are true or false. Then, S1 should be interpreted in the following way: One neither knows what x is nor is in a cognitive blank but possesses some belief(s) about what x is. Socrates rejects S2 in two different places. First, after Meno’s slave comes to provide a correct answer, Socrates says:

These opinions have now just been stirred up like a dream, but if he were repeatedly asked these same questions in various ways, you know that in the end his knowledge about these things would be as accurate as anyone’s. (*Meno* 85c-d)

This passage rejects the consequent of S2 of Formulation 3. In S2 it is claimed that even though one has a true belief about what x is, one cannot inquire into and come to

know the very thing she has true belief about. But Socrates claims that if their inquiry is pursued by asking similar questions, the slave boy will come to know the very thing that he truly believes now. Second, as stated before, for Socrates true belief can be as a good guide as knowledge is; both someone who possesses a true belief about and someone who knows how get to Larissa can guide us correctly (*Meno* 97a). Both claims reject that true belief is insufficient for starting an inquiry. It seems to me that both claims mutually support each other. If the example of the way to Larissa proves that a true belief provides as good guidance as knowledge does, then we can conclude that an inquiry can be based on a true belief. That is, assume one possesses only true belief(s) how to get to Larissa and actually goes there, if so, her cognitive state elevates from a state of true belief to a state of knowing how to get to Larissa. True belief ends up with knowledge. Slave boy's examination and Socrates' claim that he will come to know what he truly believes now show that one can elevate from a lower cognitive state to a higher one, and finally to knowledge.

The third premise, S3, is tricky in the sense that there is no clear distinction between true belief and mere belief. Is there any way for a believer to distinguish her true beliefs from those others? If there is one, then one's true beliefs would be knowledge. If there is no such a way, isn't it better to say that only knowledge entails true beliefs, and an undistinguished true belief is a mere belief? Plato says nothing about mere beliefs in *Meno*, consequently, S3 of this formulation is neither rejected nor accepted in the dialogue. However, by mere beliefs, distinct from strongly true beliefs, I think of beliefs whose truth value can never be known; beliefs whose truth value has not yet been exposed; and beliefs whose believer has no reason for its being true nor against its falsity. Having these three examples or ways of understanding in mind, I think, one can argue both for and against S3, in the sense that in some cases

this premise is true and in others false. But in the previous paragraph we already rejected the second premise, S2, and as its result the conclusion of the argument is false. That is, given that one truly believes what x is, one can inquire into what x is.

Formulation 4

- S1 (2) For any x , one either has a true belief about what x is or has a mere belief what x is.
- S2 (8) If one has a true belief about what x is, one cannot inquire into whether x is F.
- S3 (16) If one has a mere belief about what x is, one cannot inquire into whether x is F.
- S4 Therefore, one cannot inquire into whether x is F.

This formulation of the argument is similar to the previous one. There are two points about S2 we need to say. First, as discussed in formulation 2, Socrates thinks that knowledge of what x is always precedes knowledge of that x is F – we can generalize it that any cognitive state about what x is precedes the same cognitive state about that x is F. The point is that the way in which these two kinds of knowledge, cognitive states are ordered in S2 is opposed by Socrates in the dialogue. Second, as it was argued in Formulation 3, in two places Socrates rejects the assumption that a true belief cannot end up with knowledge. Both in the slave boy examination and in the case of way to Larissa Socrates argued that an inquiry can be based on a true belief. Considering these two points, we can easily see that S2 of this formulation is false, hence, one can inquire into whether x is F if one has a true belief about what x is. The first point is true about S3 as well; that ‘what x is’ precedes ‘whether x is F’. However, the ‘mere belief’ problem persists. Although we may possess beliefs of the kind, there’s no clue in the dialogue whether Plato defends or rejects that an inquiry cannot be based on mere

beliefs. Again, one can argue that both could be the case, mere belief can be the base of an inquiry, and sometimes it cannot. Since we showed that S2 is false, then the conclusion of the argument is not supported by its premises. Consequently, the conclusion is false; one can inquire into whether x is F in the case one truly believes what x is.

Formulation 5

S1 (3) For any x , one either knows that x is F, or does not know that x is F.

S2 (9) If one knows that x is F, one cannot inquire into what x is.

S3 (17) If one does not know that x is F, one cannot inquire into what x is.

S4 Therefore, one cannot inquire into what x is.

This argument is about a case in which one may know whether x is F but does not know what x is, and she wants to inquire into what x is. This is contradictory to Socrates' claim: One cannot know whether x is F unless one knows what x is. Therefore, we can read S1 in Socratic sense that the left disjunct is false. If so, then we need to investigate whether S3 is true or not. Before that let's assume that the opposite of Socrates' claim is the case, that without knowing what x is, one may know whether x is F. To know what x is, as discussed previously, is to come to know one and the same form common to all x -things which makes them x . Then, F could be either that one form or some nonessential property. If the former is the case, then one knows what x is and there will be no need for inquiry into what x is. If the latter is the case, Socrates clearly argues against it, moreover, a nonessential property may be attributed to one x -thing but not to another. That is, knowing F as nonessential property of x -things does not provide a ground for inquiry into what x is. Therefore, according to this reading S2 is a true premise. There are two points about S3 we need to investigate. First, can an inquiry into what x is be based on, guided by the knowledge whether x is F? In

previous lines we saw that it cannot. Second, given that one possesses a cognitive state other than knowing, then the question is: Can one inquire into what x is? In formulation 4 we saw that one can inquire into what x is if one possesses some true belief. Not knowing that x is F implies that one may truly believe that x is F . This is not a step further for proving that S3 is false; for an inquiry into what x is cannot be based on any information, true belief, and knowledge of that x is F . The third premise of this argument is true. Thus, the conclusion is true, and the argument is valid.

Formulation 6

- S1 (3) For any x , one either knows that x is F , or does not know that x is F .
- S2 (10) If one knows that x is F , one cannot inquire into whether x is F .
- S3 (18) If one does not know that x is F , one cannot inquire into whether x is F .
- S4 Therefore, one cannot inquire into whether x is F .

In this argument we assume that one does not know what x is. As discussed in the previous argument, Socrates rejects the claim that even though one does not know what x is, one can inquire into whether x is F . That is, the left disjunct of S1 and the antecedent of S2 cannot be the case. Moreover, assume that the opposite is the case, S2 is true in the sense that there will be no need to inquire into whether x is F , one already knows it. S3 is true in the sense if one does not know both what x is and that x is F , one lacks any ground for inquiry into whether x is F . Another assumption is that one may know, or have true belief about another property of x rather than F and this may provide ground for inquiry into whether x is F . But in the example of chair, we showed that it is far from truth. That is, one's knowledge of the fact that 'the thing over there is four-legged' does not entail that 'the thing over there is a chair'. I take both kinds to be different versions of knowledge of 'that x is F '. Thus, the conclusion is granted. That is, in the case that one does not know what x is, if one knows that x is

F, there is no need for inquiry, and if one does not know whether x is F, one lacks ground for inquiry into whether x is F.

Formulation 7

- S1 (4) For any x , one either has a true belief that x is F, or merely belief that x is F.
- S2 (11) If one has a true belief that x is F, one cannot inquire into what x is.
- S3 (19) If one has a mere belief that x is F, one cannot inquire into what x is.
- S4 Therefore, one cannot inquire into what x is.

Does the first premise, S1, mean that one does not know whether x is F, neither knows nor possesses any true belief about what x is, nor is in cognitive blank. This is not contradictory to Socrates' claim that one cannot know that x is F if one does not know what x is. One may not know, but has a true belief that x is F even though one does not know what x is. Thus, any disjunct of S1 can be the case. In the second premise, as discussed before, an inquiry can be based on true belief. However, any cognitive state about 'that x is F' cannot lead one to knowledge of 'what x is'. This makes S2 a true premise, that is, if one has a true belief that x is F, one cannot inquire into what x is. We can understand the third premise in the same way. Mere belief is weaker than true belief and knowledge; if the latter fails to provide ground for inquiry, so does the former. Nonetheless, all the premises of the argument are true and prove that, given the above conditions, one cannot inquire into what x is.

Formulation 8

- S1 (4) For any x , one either has a true belief that x is F, or a mere belief that x is F.
- S2 (12) If one has a true belief that x is F, one cannot inquire into whether x is F.

S3 (20) If one has a mere belief that x is F, one cannot inquire into whether x is F

S4 Therefore, one cannot inquire into whether x is F.

The first premise of this argument is the same as that of the previous formulation. That is, we understand it in the sense that one lacks knowledge that x is F, what x is, also does not have true belief about what x is and one is not in cognitive blank. The second premise is false in the sense that, as discussed before, an inquiry can be based on true belief, for instance, a true belief about the way to Larissa can provide the same guidance as knowledge does. The third premise is likely to be true; one is not confident about his belief if it is true or false, even if one comes to possess some knowledge based on this mere belief, one cannot know her inquiry is reliable. Since the second premise is false, so is the conclusion, this argument is invalid. One can inquire into whether x is F in the case one truly believes whether x is F.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In this study I have taken Meno's Paradox into account from an analytical point of view. The arguments and analyses in this study are based on my take and understanding of the original texts although they are not textual interpretations by any means. Plato's *Meno* is the main text and the source of Meno's Paradox. In chapter four and five I have presented an analysis of Meno's questions and Socrates' argument. To do so, instead of rejecting or defending the arguments of the dialogue I have benefited from them for my analyses. Nonetheless, this study provides an analysis of different issues regarding Meno's Paradox out of its textual and historical contexts, especially out of the context of Platonic philosophy.

In chapter two the views of three philosophers have been discussed. Aristotle rejects the conclusion that inquiry is impossible; inquiry is possible through pre-existing knowledge. Addition to this, Aristotle argues that even though we may know something in a universal way, we may be ignorant of it in a particular way. Namely, in the case of knowing something, still there is a room for inquiry into the very thing. Dominic Scott propounds the 'Partial Knowledge' solution according to which we can specify the object of our inquiry through having partial knowledge of that thing. On Gail Fine's view, the object of inquiry can be specified by possessing true beliefs. Then we can elevate our cognitive state from a state of true belief to that of knowledge. This is called True Belief Solution.

Chapter three has been dedicated to the first chapter of Ilhan Inan's *Philosophy of Curiosity*. Inan's account is important in the sense that he takes the issue into account from a fresh perspective. He is concerned about a general problem of inquiry

although he discusses it in relation to the problem of curiosity. On his account, Meno's Paradox raises an important and fundamental question of how a person becomes curious about a certain matter. We saw that Meno's questions and Socrates' argument pose similar questions about curiosity as they do about inquiry, namely, how a person's pre-curiosity mental state regarding a certain thing plays a role to become curious about it. Meno's Paradox poses the question how one comes to inquire into something given that she does not know it. Both in the case of inquiry and that of curiosity one needs to specify the object into which she intends to inquire or become curious about. Inan thinks that we can specify the object of our curiosity through inostensible reference. Curiosity entails not knowing as does so inquiry. The object of our curiosity is the same object we may want to inquire into. If the object of curiosity is specified through inostensible reference, the same is the case with inquiry.

In the next chapter I have discussed two theses. First, Meno's questions are developed during his conversation with Socrates, they are the outcome of Socratic requirements on knowing. Second, the problem that is brought up by Meno's questions is different from that of Socrates' argument. The former is mainly about the relation among different kinds of knowledge about one thing and the latter poses a general problem about the possibility of inquiry. The first problem is based on two Socratic requirements: the principle of the priority of knowledge what and the oneness assumption. The combination of these two results into the problem that Meno questions bring up. Socrates' argument is an interpretation of Meno's questions and poses a general question about the possibility of inquiry in both cases of knowing something and not knowing it. Socrates' argument can be understood in terms of the distinction between two kinds of knowledge, namely, 'what x is' and 'whether x is F ', on the one hand, and the distinction between knowledge and true belief, on the other.

To do so, there will be eight different formulations of Socrates's argument. Since each formulation is an argument, we need to take them into account separately and evaluate them whether they are valid or not. As we saw in chapter five, some of these arguments are valid whereas others are invalid.

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