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THE VIRTUES OF SOCRATIC IGNORANCE

I

Plato's Socrates denies that he knows. Yet he frequently claims that he does have certainty and knowledge. How can he avoid contradiction between his general stance about knowledge (that he lacks it) and his particular claims to have it?

Socrates' disavowal of knowledge is central to his defence in the *Apology*. For here he rebuts the accusation that he teaches – and thus corrupts – the young by telling the jury that he cannot teach just because he knows nothing. Hence his disavowal of knowledge is important to Socrates. Why does he make this claim? And how then can he justify engaging in any philosophical activity at all?

Yet, notoriously, Socrates appears to lay claim to some knowledge or wisdom. Thus when he disavows knowledge, he advances this as some kind of knowledge claim:

> I recognise in myself (*sunoida emautōi*) that I am not wise in either a small or a large thing (*Apol.* 21b4);
>
> I seem to be wiser than this man in so far as I do not think I know what I do not know (21d6);
>
> I recognised myself, so to speak, as knowing nothing (22d1);
>
> ...anyone who, like Socrates, knows that he is in truth worth nothing in respect of knowledge (23b3).

There is of course, a strong smell of paradox here. Perhaps Socrates is playing with words; or perhaps one or other of his claims (either that he knows nothing; or that he is wise in so far as he knows nothing) is disingenuous. Thus we might conclude that Socrates really knows; or that he really is ignorant. Why should Plato fudge the issue by giving Socrates such a muddled account of his own cognitive state?

It has been a growth industry in recent years to determine what is the status – both moral and epistemic – of Socrates' confident disavowal of knowledge.[1] The crucial issue in all this is what *grounds* Socrates might have for claiming knowledge or certainty or wisdom, which are not themselves undermined by his claims to be ignorant. These grounds, I shall argue, are both significantly different from the grounds for the disavowal, and also peculiar to Socrates in the ancient epistemological tradition. Socrates has the edge over his successors in his understanding of what knowledge might be.

II

(a) The elenchus: the epistemological dimension

Consider first why Socrates might claim that he does *not* know. Socrates' method of doing philosophy is the elenchus – the sequence of question and answer which always seems to end in *aporia*, impasse. Socrates practises the elenchus over and over again. So he and his interlocutors end up in *aporia* again and again. So far, then, Socrates

[1] See, among others, N. Gulley, *The Philosophy of Socrates* (London, 1968), p. 69; T. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 39ff.; G. Vlastos, 'Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge', *PhQ* 35 (1985), 1–31; J. H. Lesher, 'Professor Vlastos on Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge', *JHPh* 25 (1987), 275–88.

may conclude that it is true that he does not know. What is more, this truth is justified by the elenchus itself. The elenchus allows him to discern an inconsistency in his beliefs, so that he may conclude that he does not know the answer. The elenchus does not allow him to determine one overriding truth among the inconsistent set. So the consequence of the elenchus is the sense of *aporia*; and this, Socrates claims, is his own permanent state.

So does he justify his claim that he does not know by appeal to all the elenctic investigations that he has conducted in that *so far* he has turned out to know nothing? If so, his knowing that he knows nothing is a generalisation from his past elenctic experience – it is, as it were, empirical knowledge, falsifiable if a future elenchus turned out differently. 'I know nothing' is an *ad hoc* generalisation. This empirical sort of knowledge might be differentiated – in its grounds, its depth of understanding and its verifiability – from deep 'philosophical' knowledge or understanding.[2]

Is that how the nature of the elenchus is to be understood? The elenchus has four crucial features.

(i) Elenctic arguments turn out to show the inconsistency of their premiss set (e.g. among many examples, *Laches* 193e, *Euthyphro* 8e, *Prot.* 332dff.).

(ii) The inconsistency causes the participants in the elenchus to be in a state of *aporia*, impasse. This is often represented as resentment or distress on the part of the interlocutor (e.g. *Prot.* 333e, *Meno* 79eff.); hence Robinson's characterisation of the elenchus as 'personal'.[3]

(iii) The uncovering of this inconsistency is accomplished by means of a series of positive theses about the nature of knowledge (e.g. *Euthyphro* 6a, that our conclusions should be consistent).

(iv) Elenctic discussions are first-hand – that is, each protagonist is required to represent his own views, in the first-person and with sincerity (e.g. *Prot.* 331c). This is the condition which Vlastos represents as 'say what you believe'.[4]

The first feature alone, repeated over and over again, will keep producing *aporia*. So the elenchus will generate (mere) *ad hoc* knowledge of the proposition 'I know nothing' by virtue of the repetition. But the *aporia* occurs just because the participants (or at any rate Socrates) understand the rule of the elenchus, such as the thesis that inconsistent beliefs cannot be held at once (feature iii). Understanding those rules explains why the participants are aware that they are in *aporia* (feature ii); and that awareness constitutes a significant improvement *for themselves* on their previous ignorance of their ignorance (hence feature iv). The second and fourth conditions of *aporia*, then, seem to be connected with the third, for *aporia*, being self-conscious about one's own ignorance, seems to require that we can recognise what ignorance (and thus also knowledge) is. So features ii–iv seem to depend on some grasp of what would constitute knowledge, were it to turn up. If, then, Socrates' disavowal is based on recurring *aporia*, it rests upon the other features of the elenchus (ii–iv), and these suggest an *explanation* of what knowledge is.

[2] See Vlastos, 'Disavowal'; Vlastos argues that Socrates aims to contrast the infallible knowledge sought by philosophers, knowledge$_c$, with the knowledge derived from the questioning process of the elenchus, knowledge$_e$ (a Popperian, *ad hoc* knowledge). Knowledge$_c$ Socrates disclaims; and he bases his claim to do so upon the knowledge that he does in fact have, knowledge$_e$. My conclusion will suggest that the reverse is true. Compare the discussions of Platonic knowledge as understanding in M. F. Burnyeat, 'Socrates and the Jury: Paradoxes in Plato's Distinction between Knowledge and Belief', *PAS* Supplement 54 (1980), 173–91; J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford, 1981).

[3] R. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* (Oxford, 1953), p. 15.

[4] G. Vlastos, 'The Socratic Elenchus', *OSAP* 1 (1983), 35.

But if Socrates is the prime exponent of the elenctic art, then he above all must understand its rules and principles. Socrates, therefore, understands what knowledge is, at least to the extent that he can determine what it is not. This grasp of (at least the necessary) conditions of knowledge is essential to his scrutiny of the pretenders to knowledge in the *Apology*. So while he lays claim to no first-order knowledge, like that of the craftsmen, he does have some second-order knowledge: some understanding of knowledge itself.

This much may be gleaned not only from the strategy Socrates adopts in investigating the oracle, but also from his tactics. Obviously, his method of investigation is the elenchus. Now the elenchus can investigate any first-order question; and does in fact scrutinise many first-order moral hypotheses. But the conclusion of an elenchus does not rely on some first-order truth, such that it overrules the thesis under discussion. Rather, everything is up for grabs – although perhaps not up for grabs at once (otherwise no progress would be made at all). However, this appears not to be true for second-order truths: that is for the epistemological principles that underlie the structure of argument itself.[5] On the contrary, Socrates takes the rules of such a game very much for granted. As Vlastos observes, 'The logical truths governing definition, and the still more abstract ones, like the principle of non-contradiction, are never treated as elenctic theses. Only moral truths are so treated.'[6] Perhaps, then, this is the basis of Socrates' wisdom. Not only does he recognise the truth of such epistemological principles (that condition alone, of course, would not exempt them from elenctic examination) but he lays some claim to understanding them. But then if he wants to argue, not only that no-one else knows anything, but also that he himself has some wisdom, he must have not only an understanding of the necessary conditions of knowledge (understanding what knowledge is not) but also, more positively, an understanding of what knowledge is. And then, of course, if Socrates understands what knowledge is, he is perfectly justified in claiming that he is wise in not believing he knows. That wisdom will not be merely *ad hoc* or empirical, but *a priori*. Then Socrates can generalise 'I know nothing' on the basis of the elenchus just because he understands *what knowing is* (and not merely because he has not come across it yet). He reaches his conclusions, such as they are, by virtue of the *structure of knowledge*. From the elenchus he may disavow knowledge on epistemological grounds – his understanding of knowledge itself.

(b) Aporia: the psychological dimension

The elenctic arguments end up in *aporia*, and *aporia* is the recurrent state of Socrates' mind (cf. *Meno* 80c9; *Prot.* 361c; *Lysis* 222c2, d7; *Laches* 200e5, etc.). But he is no sceptic. For Socrates does not only understand knowledge, he recognises what state he is in *vis-à-vis* knowledge. That is, he has applied both his discovery that he knows nothing and his understanding (of knowledge) to the state of his own mind. So he is *self-conscious* about his own ignorance. In this respect he is better off than anyone else.

Both at *Apol.* 21b, where Socrates is reduced to *aporia* by the oracle, and in many other contexts, where he has the same effect on others, the *aporia* is characterised as self-conscious.[7] Ignorance is a vacuous state of mind of which one may be completely

[5] I am pleased to find that this contrast was independently suggested by Kraut, *Socrates and the State* (Princeton, 1984), pp. 273ff.

[6] 'Elenchus', 33.

[7] See here my longer discussion of *aporia* in 'Impasse and Explanation: from the *Lysis* to the *Phaedo*', *AGPh* (forthcoming 1988).

unaware; but *aporia* forces itself upon our attention (cf. e.g. *Apol.* 23d4; *Charm.* 169c; *Lach.* 196b2). This gives it an emotional dimension which Plato stresses over and over again; the English expression 'self-conscious' is likewise ambivalent, since it describes both a cognitive and an emotional state.[8] So the person in *aporia* feels a sense of shame (e.g. *Charm.* 169c3; *Lach.* 196b2), or of anger, of resentment or bewilderment – with the notable exception of Socrates, who openly and even eagerly affirms his own *aporia* (cf. e.g. *Charm.* 165b8, 166c7ff.; 169c). At *Meno* 80aff. when Meno deplores Socrates' effects upon his interlocutors, Socrates points out how much of an improvement Meno's *aporia* is on his previous condition of thinking that he knew what he did not (84a–b). Likewise from his encounter with the craftsmen (*Apol.* 22d) Socrates emerges with a sense of his own ignorance which then generates the positive – or even outrageous – conclusion that he is wiser than everyone else. Even, therefore, if the sense of *aporia* is the only product of elenctic inquiry, that does not make the elenchus pointless or even sceptical.

There is a close connection, then, between Socrates' confidence in his own ignorance ('I know that I know nothing'?) and his deep sense of *aporia*. He is superior to everyone else, it appears, just because he is self-aware. This self-awareness gives Socrates psychological grounds for his knowledge or wisdom or certainty of his own ignorance.

The *Apology* is about Socrates' knowledge of ignorance. By contrast, in the closing passages of the *Charmides* we find an analysis of 'the knowledge of knowledge'. The *Charmides*, without hesitation, cashes 'self-knowledge' as knowledge of what one does or does not know – awareness of the scope of one's knowledge:

> For if (said Critias) someone had knowledge which knew itself, then he would be such as whatever it was he had. So when someone has speed, he is speedy, when someone has beauty he is beautiful, and when someone has knowledge which knows itself, then, I suppose, he will be a self-knower.
> I do not dispute, said Socrates, that when someone has what knows itself, then he knows himself. But why should someone who has that, know what he does and does not know?
> Because, Socrates, that is the same as himself. (169e1–170a1)

The *Charmides* is, like all the early Socratic dialogues, cast in an aporetic mould. Thus Socrates is afraid lest unawares he may think he knows something while in fact he does not, 166d; compare the declaration of *aporia* at 169a, c and Socrates' closing pessimism, 175a9ff. Each stage in the argument is bracketed by declarations of doubt – and this of course serves further to emphasise the careful structure of these twelve Stephanus pages. As a consequence, the argument is not merely an indecisive discussion of 'knowledge of knowledge', it also sheds light on the nature and the utility of Socrates' wisdom in ignorance. For the location of the discussion in the aporetic context shows up both the connection and the contrast between the Socratic disavowal and the account of *sōphrosunē* as 'knowledge of knowledge'.

The *Charmides* is searching for a definition of the virtue of *sōphrosunē*. At 164d Critias brings in the Delphic inscription 'know thyself', and suggests that this is the right account to be given of *sōphrosunē*. Socrates glosses this as the thesis that *sōphrosunē* is knowledge of oneself (165cff.). But he recasts Critias' suggestion to give '*sōphrosunē* is the knowledge of other knowledges and itself' (166c) – that is, it is the knowledge of what one knows and what one does not know: this is knowing oneself (167a). From the outset, then, the argument contains several different definientia for *sōphrosunē*.

[8] G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London, 1963), p. 150.

(1) Know thyself. This is taken to be equivalent to:

(2) Self-knowledge. This is glossed as:

(3) Knowledge of knowledge. This is glossed in turn as:

(4) Knowledge of what one does or does not know.

These are contrasted with:

(5*) I am in *aporia*, I do not think I know: this is the Socratic attitude reiterated and contrasted with the examined thesis throughout.

The investigation of the thesis takes two parts. The first shows that 'knowledge of knowledge' is either trivial or anomalous to other types of knowledge. The second shows that 'knowledge of knowledge' cannot be a definition of *sōphrosunē*, because it fails to offer any teleological account of that virtue; and that is a primary requirement of any definition of any virtue. I shall argue that both of these analyses illuminate the Socratic disavowal of knowledge, and his modest claims about his own moral excellence.

First of all consider the attack upon the expression 'knowledge of knowledge' (166e–171c). Four arguments are marshalled against it, to show that this knowledge is unlike any other.

(a) The self-referential nature of this knowledge is not shared by any other faculty (167bff.).

(b) Such self-reference gives rise to contradictions (e.g. younger and older than oneself) if it is universalised (168ff.).

(c) How can one account for the nature of what is known, if this knowledge is self-referential? (168dff.).

(d) What is the object of such knowledge? Surely it is, in fact, the object of some other knowledge (170) so that 'knowledge of knowledge' collapses into just 'knowledge' (171aff.).

The conclusion of these arguments, however, is not to show that there is no such thing as 'knowledge of knowledge'. The formal puzzle is the inscrutable disanalogy between 'knowledge of knowledge' and, say, 'knowledge of medicine'.[9] The argument proceeds by showing the superiority of other knowledge (such as craft-knowledge) over knowledge of knowledge. And yet the attack on the craftsmen of *Apology* should make us wary of this conclusion that craft-knowledge is better than knowing oneself, whatever that may be. Informally, and embedded more deeply into the structure of the discussion, is the undoubtedly real contrast between self-knowledge and 'knowledge of medicine': a contrast invited by the sense of *aporia*, and further emphasised by the connection explicitly made between 'knowledge of knowledge' and the Delphic 'know thyself'. This is made clear by objections (c) and (d), which lead the argument to impasse by assuming that any knowledge must have an external real object, just as a craft does. This assumption, however, runs contrary to the Delphic maxim, since 'thyself' is precisely not such an external object; and Delphic maxims, as the *Apology* reminds us, have a way of turning out true. So this stretch of the argument goes to show, firstly, that there may indeed be a disanalogy between knowledge of knowledge and craft-knowledge; and secondly that such a disanalogy may lie in the nature of the object of the knowledge.

So in showing how ordinary models of knowledge, or of other psychic states, are insufficient for self-knowledge, the *Charmides* suggests that we should, as the arguments against self-knowledge do not, focus with more attention upon the

[9] Mario Mignucci offered a similar account of the *Charmides* in a seminar on 'Plato's Theory of Relations', London University, 1988.

involvement of the *self* in such knowledge. Critias' hypothesis contains the germ of the Socratic idea – inspired as he is, after all, by Delphi, 164ff. – without any deep understanding of what self-knowledge might be. And the phrasing of the *Apology*'s disavowal, *sunoida emautōi*, is echoed at *Charm.* 166d1, *emauton diereunōimēn* (and that, like the mentions of Delphi, has a Hercalitean ring, DK 22 B 101, *edizēsamēn emeōuton*). So both the *Charmides* and the *Apology* consider the question of knowing what you do and do not know.

Return to the *Apology*. Socrates goes about examining the oracle that said that no-one was wiser than him by investigating the Athenians, sure that many of them must be wiser than he is. He scrutinises three groups of pretenders to knowledge – the politicians, the poets and the craftsmen. Neither the politicans nor the poets know; either (particularly in the case of the politicians) because what they claim to know is false, or because they are unable to explain what they say. Any assertion, Socrates implies, that is either false or inexplicable cannot be an expression of knowledge.

The craftsmen, however, are different. For they do have access to truths, and can explain them, so they do know them (22d3–4). However, they imagine that because they know the objects of their craft, they also know other important things; and these other things they do not know. Consequently, their *ignorance of the scope* of their knowledge impairs their knowledge itself. So Socrates concedes that they do know something. In that case, however, why do they not win the knowledge-competition with Socrates, and refute the oracle? How does Socrates justify the conclusion that the craftsmen are no better off than the others when it comes to knowledge? The craftsmen vitiate their claim to knowledge by being unaware of the scope of what they do and do not know; and arguably if they cannot tell the difference, they could hardly be said to know at all. Socrates, by contrast, does have just that awareness of the scope of his knowledge. That is, there Socrates draws a direct inference from the failure of the craftsmen's knowledge to recognise its own scope, to their failure to be wiser than he is; conversely, even his minimal awareness of his own ignorance allows him to defeat the craftsmen. Somewhow, then, being aware of the scope of what you know is intrinsic to the business of knowing as Socrates conceives it.

Both the *Charmides* and the *Apology* claim, thus, that knowing that I know, or that I do not know, is connected somehow to my knowledge of my self. That is, the epistemological grounds for the disavowal (understanding the scope of what I do and do not know) here come together with the psychological grounds (self-consciousness). This is explicit in the *Charmides*. Equally, it is implicit in the centrality of the first person in the *Apology* – in Socrates' disavowal of knowledge, in the elenchus and in the feeling of *aporia*. Although puzzlement is to some degree an observable state – and Plato often caricatures its physical manifestations, the dropped jaw, the mumbling, the blushing – being aware that one is puzzled seems to be something only grasped by oneself. Likewise, only Socrates himself is able to say whether he knows that he knows nothing; even although he may infer – from their mistaken inflation of their own knowledge discovered in the direct confrontations of the elenchus – that his interlocutors do not know either that they do not know or what it is that they do not know (cf. *Apol.* 29a4–b6).

It is a mark of Socratic procedure that it involves first-person reflection on one's cognitive state: this is characteristic of the elenchus ('say what you believe'), of *aporia* and of the disavowal of knowledge itself. So elenctic debate is always *private*, a reflection on the beliefs actually held by each person; and the aporetic conclusions of the arguments attack just the belief-sets of the interlocutors, not of anyone else. Consequently the interlocutors must feel the *aporia in themselves*, since it is their own

declarations that are under attack. The effect of the elenchus is not to establish some one of the premisses, but to create this self-conscious awareness of *aporia*.

But if *aporia* is self-conscious, then it forces reflection upon the argument that provoked it. And that argument – the elenchus – rests on opinions held sincerely by the interlocutors. So the awareness of *aporia* leads us to scrutinise *our own* opinions – leads us into introspection on both our beliefs and their grounds. That activity is essentially private, since no-one else can directly inspect my sincerity or the body of my beliefs: Socrates, indeed, can only provoke his interlocutors into conducting such an introspection for themselves.

But this aspect of the elenchus invites a contrast between having a belief, and being aware that I have the belief – and that contrast corresponds exactly to the edge Socrates has over the Athenians. The Socratic disavowal of knowledge, that is, is a superior cognitive state (to mere ignorance, or to having a skill) because it is self-aware; and that self-awareness is private and privileged, deriving as it does from introspection (obeying the injunction 'know thyself').

Here, I think, two initial contrasts are in order. I bet my friend that United will win the cup. 'What odds will you give me?' she asks. I reflect that I have excellent grounds for my belief that United will win, so I offer appropriately excellent odds in her favour. Firstly, we may distinguish between the external object of knowledge (United winning the Cup) and its internal object (my certainty that United will win the Cup) by virtue of a contrast between observation and introspection; or between the external world and the self. But the issue is confused in such cases because the internal object (my certainty) has itself an intensional object (United winning the Cup) rather than being self-contained. So if the external object fails (United loses), so does the internal state (of confidence) and the introspection turns out false. If, however, there are cases where internal objects are not in turn connected to external ones, perhaps introspection would here be veridical.

Secondly, not all external knowledge claims are accompanied by introspection; when I say 'United will win the Cup', I may not have indulged in any reflection on my own cognitive state at all. Introspection, then, is something which, if it can sensibly be done at all, must be done deliberately; and perhaps it may even be done unsuccessfully. At any rate, Socrates might coherently claim that the craftsmen had failed because they had not even attempted introspection or self-consciousness when they made their claim to know.

These two considerations suggest, to begin with, that if introspection does happen, it might be separable from knowledge claims about external items. Moreover, it might be thought that successful introspection focused on the internal object alone might have a good claim to truth. This, I suggest, is what Socrates claims when he denies that he has any external object of knowledge; and yet recognises that he is indeed wiser than anyone else. So if his superiority over the craftsmen lies just in his self-consciousness, as the *Apology* tells us, then all his knowledge will somehow be reducible to that self-consciousness.

Socratic knowledge, then, has two dimensions. The first is epistemological – the conditions for knowledge itself that tell us whether, and what, we know (here we have the formal features of the elenchus and the question of the scope of knowledge in the *Apology* and the *Charmides*). The second is psychological, expressed as self-consciousness (the *aporia*) or self-knowledge (the Delphic oracle and the *Charmides*). But for Socrates, apparently, these two dimensions coincide in his first person disavowal of knowledge. That is self-consciousness (*aporia*); self-knowledge (*Charmides*); and knowledge of knowledge or ignorance (*Apology*).

III

Notoriously, despite the disavowal of knowledge, Socrates does sometimes make substantial and pointed knowledge claims (as opposed to cases where the use seems to be simply a manner of speech, or trivial, e.g. at *Apol.* 20e) – for example:

> [On whether death is an evil] To do wrong and to disobey the superior, whether god or man, I know that this is bad and shameful. Compared to the evils which I know are evil, I shall never fear nor flee those which I do not know whether they might also be good. (*Apology* 29b)

> Indeed I say this not through knowledge, but by guesswork; but that true belief and knowledge are different is not something I guess. Rather, if I would say that I know anything, – and that would be rare – I would put this among the things that I know. (*Meno* 98b)

The first passage seems directly to contradict Socrates' claims not to have knowledge about moral matters. However, an alternative interpretation is readily available. Socrates may be depending here, not so much on some moral conviction of his own, but on the assumption that 'the superior', whether god or man, knows what he is talking about. So it is a consequence of Socrates' views *about knowledge* that he knows that disobeying a superior is a bad thing: that, he argues (via the epexegetic *kai*), is doing injustice. (The same interpretation will account for *Apol.* 37b–d.)

The passage from the *Meno* is easier to interpret (if this passage may be accounted Socratic at all). Here Socrates makes no particular moral claim. Instead, in a highly sceptical context, he makes a positive claim about knowing the difference between knowledge and true belief.

The evidence suggests, then, that while Socrates denies having any first-order knowledge, he does have second-order principles, which explain what knowledge is. This, after all, is revealed in his own declarations in the *Apology* where, as we have seen, his account of his own life sets out the conditions of knowledge as he understands it. Now since it is his self-consciousness, as I have argued, that makes him superior to the craftsmen, and since that superiority also consists in his knowing the scope of his own knowledge, then those second-order principles must be either derived from, or identical with, that self-consciousness.

Recall the *Charmides* account of self-knowledge (169e). Here Critias equates – and Socrates does not dispute the equation – knowing what you do and do not know, with knowledge of oneself. This suggests that Socrates may have seen 'knowing what I do and do not know' and 'knowing myself' as equivalent. But I have suggested that 'knowing what one does and does not know' occurs in the self-conscious state of *aporia*. So Socrates associates what we would call 'self-knowledge' with 'self-consciousness' and generates an epistemological account of 'self'. Then if we recall the way in which the *Charmides* attacks self-knowledge, by arguing that it is an odd type of knowledge, and one which lacks the usual objects, then its equivalence to 'knowing what I do and do not know' may begin to make sense. For after all, the understanding of knowledge may readily be thought not to be object-oriented; but rather to be just the type of understanding that is, if you like, introspective of the subject. It is, then, entirely appropriate to suppose, not only that self-knowledge is a very queer bird; but also that this is what supplies the second-order principles that govern knowledge itself.

The thesis that Socrates observes different levels of discourse in his disavowal of knowledge supposes that the two levels are not two different points on a single linear progression, but rather two different progressions altogether, two separate continua. So, if we allow a contrast between 'knowledge' and 'knowledge of knowledge' we are

not thereby at risk of a regress, 'knowledge of knowledge of knowledge...' For the initial contrast suggests, not that knowledge implies knowledge of knowledge (which would generate the regress), but rather that there are two distinct and contrasted levels or types of object for knowledge. Now while knowledge at the object level must be backed up by knowledge at the introspective level, the reverse is not so; and moreover there is no further requirement that any knowledge be governed by some other knowledge on a higher level.

So one may progress at the higher (introspective) level of knowledge without making progress at the first; and although true knowledge at the object level requires a proper knowledge of knowledge, once the latter is acquired it will not be increased by an increase of knowledge at the object level. In this sense, then, the two levels are independent (as 'I know that I know nothing' requires).

So the entire content of the Socratic disavowal insists that it makes good sense to distinguish between knowing what we do and do not know and knowing some external fact. That is, Socrates' account of his investigation into his own and others' cognitive condition points to the difference between knowing that I know nothing and knowing about, for example, carpentry. The confrontation between Socrates and the craftsmen rests upon this distinction; and relies thus on a view that the knowledge of knowledge and ignorance is neither vacuous nor subject to a vicious regress.

IV

Two questions then arise.

Firstly, does Socrates tell us anything illuminating about the self – or is he merely the ancestor of the 'myth of the ghost in the machine' which modern behaviourists have repudiated with such vigour? Or, to put the question a different way, what sort of things does one discover, when one 'searches oneself' as both Heraclitus and Socrates urge us to do?

And secondly, can Socrates explain why knowledge should matter, why it is worth dying for? Pertinently, the second arm of the *Charmides* investigation turns to the value of 'knowledge of knowledge'. Here again, a strong contrast is made between 'knowledge of knowledge' and Socratic *aporia*, which offers us no real moral security. That will only arrive when we come to know the right and the good (this, we may recall from the *Apology*, is what Socrates disavows, 21d); then, and then alone, will we have sufficient knowledge for happiness (171dff.). This security is Socrates' dream for virtue (173a); for then the knower could never be mistaken. Once again, however, the frame brings us up short; such infallibility is certainly not Socrates' – for he insists that he is afraid of absurdity at every turn. So the knowledge of knowledge that is discussed in the text is not a virtue which Socrates possesses. What use, we are prompted to ask, is the *aporia* in which he makes us sit?

Now if this introspection (the disavowal of knowledge, the elenchus, particularly its fourth feature – investigation of the sincere beliefs of the participants, and the *aporia*) is equivalent to self-knowledge, then the disavowal of knowledge tells us about Socrates' view of the 'self'. For Socrates explains the self, as I have argued, exclusively in cognitive terms. He allows no argument for introspection of feelings (despite the *aporia*), and no suggestion that the self might be complex. On the contrary, the Socratic self is a simple mind, which can think or know or make mistakes; but which is not prone to conflict because it lacks any complexity. Self-knowledge is the knowledge of one's own ignorance or knowledge just because the self is (such as to be) a knower and nothing else.

And that, of course, is a characteristically Socratic view of the self – as brief reflection upon Socratic ethics will show. In the *Protagoras* (351ff.) Socrates argues for the impossibility of the phenomenon of *akrasia*, on the grounds that any supposed weakness of the will can only be accounted for as a mistake in computation. Such an account of practical reasoning only makes sense if Socrates supposes that the self is essentially reason, and nothing else – free from the psychological conflict outlined in Plato's account of action in *Rep.* 4. That is, Socrates' epistemology is perfectly consistent with his ethics, because both aspects of his philosophy assume a simple account of the self. Self-identity for Socrates is just the identity or persistence of the cognitive element in man.

The question I asked was what one discovered by investigating one's self. The answer, it transpires, is a complex one, which connects in Socratic fashion the notions of the self, of the scope of one's knowledge and of the nature of knowledge itself. If the self is just a cognitive entity, then introspection into it will give some view of cognition. If that, then, results (as in the case of Socrates) in knowing the scope of what one does or does not know, such knowledge must, on central Socratic principles, be based upon understanding what knowledge is. That is, it is a prerequisite for understanding what we know that we understand what knowing is; and that understanding is given by knowledge of the self. In this way, self-consciousness, self-knowledge and the knowledge of what I do and do not know cohere.

If this reconstruction is correct, Socrates possesses higher-order knowledge, while denying that he has knowledge at the object level. Why is second-order knowledge worth having at all? After all, value is in the world – it is at the object-level, since it is here that 'goods' are experienced. So if Socrates' knowledge does not occur at that level, how can it be valuable? What is the point of disavowing knowledge, or feeling the nastiness of *aporia*? Unless Socrates can show that the knowledge that he has (of his own ignorance) is superior to the knowledge that he has not (such as the skill of the doctor), and worth having, then his claim to be wiser than the doctor, and better off, will collapse into vacuity.

Socrates' position, it turns out, is somewhat of a curate's egg. Since he disavows substantial moral knowledge (indeed, he gets moral security only second-hand, from the *daimonion*), then he cannot be completely happy. Of course, were he, or anyone, to have such first-order knowledge, and if we concede the Socratic arguments about happiness elsewhere, then he would meet that condition for knowledge completely.

The knowledge that Socrates does have, second-order knowledge, falls far short of this perfection just because it lacks the substance of the object level. Nonetheless, there are two areas where Socrates suggests that this kind of knowledge does have some contribution to make to our lives.

Firstly, we have seen that there is a close connection between Socrates' knowledge and the Delphic maxim 'know thyself'. But then, since the latter is construed as some kind of moral maxim, there must be some moral content to Socratic self-consciousness, and hence, via traditional Socratic moves, it must be valuable. It requires a certain amount of imagination, however, to fill out the argument that Socrates might offer to support the connection; in the *Charmides*, after all, he glosses over this point.

Perhaps he might argue that, since the self is the soul, then to know oneself is to know the best and most important part of oneself. But then knowledge of the best of oneself will be one's best knowledge, so self-knowledge must be a good thing. However the argument might go, one consequence of it should be observed. If Socrates is to claim that there is some direct value in second-order knowledge, he

must do so without recourse to a consequential or instrumental account of happiness (such as the thesis that happiness is the maximisation of goods); for that would invoke the object-level. Rather, he must look to the notion that happiness is the good state of the soul; and on that account we may readily see sense in the value he sets upon self-knowledge.

Secondly, Socrates might point to the prudence of obeying someone who knows better than you do (as at *Apol.* 29b). This thesis, I argued above, was derived from a general epistemological principle which Socrates has as a result of his second-order knowledge. Suppose we understand first-order knowledge – that it is reliable and predictable; and suppose that as a consequence we understand who is a first-order knower. Then assume (as both Socrates and Plato do) that such a knower will exercise disinterested benevolence. Then it is obviously prudent to follow the advice of such a person. Likewise, the state of *aporia* is to be recommended because in it, by recognising that we don't know whatever it is we thought we did know, we are not tempted to follow our own advice, since we now realise that it is misguided. So the advantage of second-order knowledge is a derivative one (being able to locate and grasp the utility of first-order knowers), but an advantage nonetheless. It should be observed, however, that the account of value here differs from the previous one; for here the utility of second-order knowledge rests on its ability to pick out first-order knowers. That will be useful, not so that we may become first-order knowers, but so that we may follow their advice. In that case, the view of happiness tends to be one where it lies in the accumulation of goods, rather than in the internal state of the soul – for that is not readily transmissible in the same way.

But then that draws attention to a peculiar feature of self-consciousness itself. If first-order knowledge is a matter of 'truth with reasons', or understanding, then it is, albeit laboriously, transmissible. For example, suppose we came across a shuttle-maker who really did understand his craft (and, we may suppose, its limitations): such a man would be able to teach someone else to be a shuttle-maker too, given time and an apt pupil. Knowledge of this sort, surely, is theoretically teachable. Self-consciousness, however, is not transmissible in the same way – or at all. After all, my self-consciousness is nothing to do with yours, so that by instructing you in the details of my self-consciousness I may be no nearer to making you self-conscious than I would be by trying to teach you the art of making shuttles. To induce *you* to be self-conscious, *my* saying 'I know that I know nothing' is beside the point. For that misses the fundamental first-person character of self-consciousness. To induce you to be self-conscious, I must somehow or other get you to say ... 'I know that I know nothing', for example. And that is not done by teaching or the transmission of information, but by more complex and subtle psychological means (such as the use of *aporia* or paradox). And it is on that business Socrates is engaged. Whether he succeeds or fails, he will not be teaching. So if we understand Socrates' mission as inducing others to have the same self-awareness as himself, then we should not expect him to teach. It follows from this, that Socrates' disavowal of knowledge, argued for in the complex way I have outlined, constitutes a serious defence against the charge against him. For if his analysis of second-order knowledge as self-consciousness is correct, then he cannot be a teacher. The *Apology* demonstrates, therefore, not only that Socrates does not, but also that he cannot teach.

Does self-consciousness matter when it comes to knowing? Consideration of three later paradoxes might lead us to conclude that Socrates was right.

V

Meno's paradox might be classified as a watershed in the development of Plato's epistemology, since it is this paradox that first introduces the theory of *anamnēsis*, along with all its metaphysical baggage developed in the *Republic*.

How do we find things out? Can we inquire? At *Meno* 80d–e Meno issues this challenge to Socrates:

> ME. And in what way, Socrates, will you look for that of which you do not know at all what it is? What sort of thing from among those things which you do not know will you posit to look into? Or indeed, even if you come across it as much as you like, how will you know that this is the thing which you did not know?
> SO. I know what you mean, Meno. Do you see what a contentious argument you are conjuring up, that it is not possible for a man to inquire either into the things he knows or into the things he does not know? For he would not look for the things which he knows – for he knows them, and has no need for such inquiry – nor what he does not know – for he does not know what he is looking for. (80d5–e5)

That Meno's question is a paradox is clear. 'Can we inquire?' is damaging only if the answer is 'No'. But the question itself is an inquiry. So 'Can we inquire?' is self-referential, and thus a counter-example to 'No'. Yet the paradox cuts both ways, for there are grounds for saying 'No'.

Meno asks whether we can inquire into/look for something of which we are altogether ignorant; and then how, should we come across it, we know that this is what we sought. Socrates reformulates this as a dilemma:

(i) Either we know something or we do not.
(ii) If we know it, we need not seek to find it out.
(iii) If we do not know it, we do not know what to look for.

The dilemma is exhaustive, at (i). Consequently, since both (ii) and (iii) look plausible, we have prima facie grounds for denying the possibility of inquiry. The task that faces Socrates, then, is to explain how inquiry gets off the ground, whether it be into what is known, or into what is unknown. So either he must account for the acquisition of knowledge *de novo*, and deny (iii), or he must argue that somehow whatever becomes known is known (in some other sense – latently perhaps) all along – thus equivocating on 'know', denying (ii) and evading the trap of (i).

To explain how inquiry begins, we might suggest that it is caused by an agent, an event or an object external to the inquirer; or that it is initiated by the inquirer himself; or both. Thus either inquiry has a cause, from without; or it has a reason, from within; or both. Suppose it is caused – how can an external cause be sufficient to account for the workings of the mind, apparently a quite different order of reality? Suppose, on the other hand, that inquiry is up to the inquirer – how does this reason for inquiring come into being, *de novo*?

It might seem obvious (to us, if not to Socrates) that inquiry is indeed caused, triggered by an external object. Provided that we concede that there are real objects, there is no additional difficulty in supposing that those objects act on us, affect our cognition. There is no need to go and look for the tree in the quad, it is just there, it causes us to perceive it, to be cognisant of it. Thus the real world is the 'agent' of inquiry, we merely suffer as we perceive and think; nothing is up to us. However, this account of inquiry is trickier than it appears. For even if sensa are given, inquiry needs more than mere sensa – it needs a general conceptual apparatus to rise above the given to the puzzling. Thus we need some source of curiosity, of the question mark. And moreover, sensa may be contributing causes of inquiry, but they alone will not

supply enough information for inquiry to begin. At the very least the mind itself must be able to assimilate one phenomenon to another, in order to arrive, for example, at the question, 'Is this the same object?'.

Perhaps, then, direct sensa could be supplemented by a source of the general concepts that inquiry requires – let us add an external agent, a teacher who can inform our empirical data, who can tell us of the common terms, such as 'same' and 'different', that we need for thought. At the same time the teacher can formulate the questions, force us to inquire.

But are there any teachers? And how did the teachers find out the things they would teach us? If teachers teach, they know. If a teacher knows, he must have come to know – or else have had knowledge all along. If he acquired it, how? If he had it all along, then perhaps there is no coming to know at all. Perhaps he was taught – but then what of his teacher? What of the first teacher – was he taught, or did he find out some other way? The teachers invite a regress – or they demand that inquiry *de novo* be given an alternative explanation. Plato responds to the danger of regress here by having Socrates claim that all teaching is recollection, and thus something that the pupil does for himself, merely prompted by his interlocutor. So when Socrates comes to demonstrate his theory of recollection by questioning the slave, he insists that he only asks questions, never teaches (*Meno* 85d; cf. *Theaet.* 150bff.); otherwise, he says, he would be found to contradict himself (82a2ff.).

If neither sensa nor teachers are sufficient, then perhaps inquiry starts within the inquirer, perhaps it is explained, not by a causal mechanism, but by the reasons of the inquiring agent. And such is Plato's preferred answer, that recollection and inquiry come 'from within' (in the *Meno* there is a sequence of stages, 82b7, e4; 84a3–d2; 85b8–d13; cf. *Phaedo* 74aff.). Thus inquiry may be triggered by external events – phenomena or questions – but its true explanation is that it is up to the inquirer himself. So inquiry must involve the a priori, the non-empirical, in such a way that it is genuinely prior to, or independent of the empirical input. That non-empirical element in inquiry is, apparently, supplied by recollection,[10] since the knowledge 'of all things' is in the mind all the time (this is to suspend judgement on the question of how that knowledge got there). Somehow or other, the fact that the mind is full, rather than empty, is thought to guarantee the possibility of inquiry, no longer *de novo*, but *de novo* for this incarnation.

Plato's theory of recollection, then, deals with the paradox of inquiry by suggesting that the inquirer has latent knowledge (innate or acquired in some previous incarnation) which is then realised in the process of inquiry; in the terms of Meno's argument, the inquirer knows, in some sense, what he is looking for all the time.

Two aspects of Plato's solution to Meno's paradox might still trouble us. Firstly, the theory of *anamnēsis*, understood as a theory of innate ideas, renders the mind curiously passive, and makes the initiation of inquiry still look like one element in a coherent causal chain, rather than something which is decided on by the mind, for reasons of its own. This problem is even more acute if we suppose that the ideas are

[10] The exact interpretation of the theory of *anamnēsis* is, of course, highly controversial; cf. e.g. Vlastos, 'Anamnesis in the *Meno*', *Dialogue* 4 (1965), 143–67; A. Nehamas, 'Meno's Paradox and Socrates as a Teacher', *OSAP* 3 (1985), 1–30; J. Moravcsik, 'Learning as Recollection' in Vlastos (ed.), *Plato I* (New York; 1971), pp. 53–69. However, I am inclined to suppose that the theory is designed to answer the worrying question of 'How does inquiry get off the ground?' (with some kind of account of the conceptual structure of the mind) as well as to explain the psychological questions 'What makes us curious?' and 'How do we recognise the answer to a question?'. I have benefited here from discussion with Dominic Scott, who does not agree with me.

acquired by the mind in some earlier encounter with the separate forms (there is, of course, no mention of separate forms in the *Meno*). In that encounter, perhaps, the forms acted on the mind, rather as if the mind perceived them, so that the ideas are acquired in a quasi-perceptual way. Here again, the mind's role would be entirely passive.

Secondly, one feature of Meno's paradox remains unexplained. When Meno first introduces his paradox, it has two arms (*Meno* 80d5ff.): the first concerns the beginnings of inquiry, but the second asks how we know when we reach our goal. This question is not explicitly answered in the discussion that follows. What is the significance of this omission? Obviously enough, Meno's second arm concerns a different stage of the process of discovery than the first – for here we are considering not the beginning of the inquiry, but its end. And the question is a second order one, not on a par with the first. The first wondered how to formulate the object of our inquiry. The second asks not how to proceed with our inquiry, nor how to complete it, but rather how to recognise the completion. The question, that is, concerns, not knowing the answer, but *knowing that we know* the answer. If this question can be answered at all, then the answer must lie either in the object of knowledge, or in its subject. As before, 'knowing that we know' will have a cause (external) or a reason (internal to the mind). What answer would Plato give?[11]

First, a little *recusatio*. I shall not here discuss the nature of the 'unhypothesised beginning' in *Republic* 6, although it seems to me that a case could be made for saying that here 'knowing that you know', or verification, is explained by the causal action of the 'unhypothesised beginning' (the form of the good?) on the knowing mind. But the problem turns up again in Plato's late period, in the *Theaetetus*, a dialogue dominated by the revivified influence of Socrates. One of the pressing problems of this work is the explanation of falsehood; and it has this interest in common with other dialogues of the late period, the *Sophist*, the *Philebus* and the *Cratylus*.[12] However, the approach of the *Theaetetus* differs from the others. In the *Sophist*, for example, the problem of falsehood is approached from the logical or semantic end in order to rescue the possibility of 'saying what is not'. In the *Theaetetus*, the problem is not a logical one, but psychological. Socrates starts from an epistemological puzzle with clear echoes of Meno's paradox (how can someone make a mistake about what they know; or about what they do not know, 188aff.). Then he launches the two images, of the wax tablet and the aviary, in order to explain how someone might come to make a mistake, in particular – and this is the effect of the initial dilemma about knowing and not knowing – to explain how someone might make an identity mistake.

The wax tablet (191aff.) suggests an image for making mistakes whereby the mismatch of perception and knowledge can be explained. But, Socrates objects (195e), this still fails to account for mistakes such as '5+7 = 11', mistakes that we know to occur. To explain mistakes of such a purely theoretical kind (vide *auta pente kai hepta*, 196a2, and Theaetetus' response, 196b3) Socrates offers a new image, that of the aviary (196dff.).

Suppose that knowing is like having an aviary in one's head, full of birds. Having the aviary accounts for the knowledge that one has, but is not presently using. To use it, we need to grasp one of the birds from the cage; and that bird then represents the knowledge actively present in the mind. Mistakes, Socrates then suggests, are caused

[11] We have, of course, now gone beyond material that can be classified as Socratic.

[12] For the dating of the *Cratylus*, see my 'Putting the *Cratylus* in its Place', *CQ* 36 (1986), 124–50.

when we get hold of the wrong bird; this then represents a false judgement. Now the analogy collapses when it cannot explain *how*, given that we know each bird in our aviary, we make the wrong grab (199cff.). If having a bird is knowing, how can that knowledge explain our ignorance, our getting the wrong bird (199d)? Morover the image of grabbing our 'latent' birds does not explain either why we have in mind which bird to grab, or how we know which is the right one when the grab has happened. So the bird-catcher needs to know which bird is which, independent of the presence of the birds in the aviary; and he needs to be able to confirm this knowledge once the grab has taken place.

The bird-catcher, that is, needs to know the scope and nature of his knowledge, just as Socrates had specified. But that knowledge cannot itself be a bird, or be a character of the birds already captured (see the difficulty attached to specifying some birds as 'ignorances', 199e). For if the knowledge thus devolves on the objects, once again there is no room in the causal mechanism for explaining falsehood. The temptation, of course, is to explain this knowledge in terms not of some character of the birds, but of some capacity of the bird-catcher (a 'homunculus' interpretation); and this is suggested by the intentional language used to describe him (e.g. *hamartōn*, 199b3, *epicheirei*, 199b7, *hēgēsetai*, 200a3). But then we either explain the mind of the homunculus in terms equivalent to the aviary, thus inviting a regress (cf. the explicit conclusion drawn by Socrates, 200b5–c4), or we are at a loss to explain the difference between the knowledge of the homunculus and the knowledge represented by the aviary. Without some specification of the mind (the homunculus) independent of its objects, the image of the aviary comes to grief.

Reconsider the image of the aviary in terms of the Socratic paradox of knowledge. Socrates wishes to contrast substantive, first-order understanding with the second-order grasp of the scope and the nature of knowledge. Either knowledge is subject-oriented or it is object-oriented. Now the aviary in the mind represents the objects of knowledge, analogous to the objects of perception (real physical objects) which appear in the wax tablet image. The bird-catcher, however, needs to know both how and what to grab, so that he needs to know what he knows, and what it is to know it (so that, for example, he can discriminate between right and wrong grabs); that would be supplied by second order, subject-oriented knowledge of knowledge. So the Socratic paradox would preserve the contrast between the contents of the mind and the mind's manipulation and awareness of those contents, which is vital to the success of the image of the aviary.

If Plato does not retain the differences in cognitive level suggested by Socrates, the *Theaetetus*' attempt to understand the workings of the mind is bound to fail. For without that difference, the aviary is either reduced to a crude and unsatisfactory mechanism or it risks a regress of homunculi and their aviaries. But, on the other hand, if the cognitive imagery of the *Theaetetus* is true to its Socratic framework, then we may read its conclusion the opposite way. On this reading, the *aporia* of the argument is designed to show that views like the aviary are unsatisfactory just because they ignore the Socratic lesson. So the *Theaetetus* would offer an expansion of the Socratic view that knowing cannot be understood merely in terms of its objective content; for the knowledge of knowledge is a vital condition for knowing.

VI

A pair of passages in Aristotle have been thought to show that Aristotle is interested in the problem of self-consciousness:

Since we perceive that we see and hear, it must be by sight that we perceive that we see, or by something else. But the same (faculty) will perceive the sight and the underlying colour. So there will be either two faculties for the same thing or the faculty will perceive itself. Further, if the perception of sight is different [*sc.* from sight] then either it will go to infinity or some faculty will be [perceptive] of itself... (*De An.* 425b12–17)

There is also some common faculty which follows them all [*sc.* the special senses] by which someone perceives that he sees and hears (for it is not with sight that one perceives that one sees; and one judges and is able to judge that sweet things are different from white not by taste nor by sight nor both, but by some common part of all the sense organs...). (*De Somn.* 455a16–20)

Aristotle's problem in these passages appears to be a twofold one: firstly to explain how we perceive the 'common sensibles' (motion, rest etc., *De An.* 425a14ff.) and the differences between the special sensibles; and secondly to explain how we perceive that we see, hear etc. For present purposes let us concentrate upon the second of these problems.

There appear to be three main lines of interpretation of the passage. The traditional view has been that Aristotle is here concerned with self-consciousness in general. Thus, for example, Hamlyn criticises Aristotle's treatment for failing to give sufficient weight to 'the concept of self-consciousness, itself involving the notion of a subject or person who perceives and is aware of doing so'.[13] Against this, on the one hand, Kosman[14] suggests that Aristotle is worried about how *we are aware* that we see, hear, etc., when the surrounding air, while it is affected by the perceived object, does not perceive it at all. So Aristotle's problem boils down to how to distinguish between perceivers and non-perceivers in an environment which affects them both. This Kosman interprets as a limited 'pre-reflective' self-consciousness defined as the identity of the perceiving mind and the forms of the sensible objects. On the other hand, Osborne[15] argues that Aristotle is worried about how we perceive that we are seeing, and not hearing (now). The solution which Aristotle requires, she argues, is that there is a common faculty which can distinguish between cases of seeing and hearing; and this common faculty is then doing exactly the same job as it does when it distinguishes between the different objects of different senses – so that the twofold problem at the beginning of the chapter turns out to be a single difficulty, to be answered by postulating the common sense.

All three of these interpretations of Aristotle's account of 'perceiving that we see' focus, among other things, upon how much emphasis Aristotle puts upon the role of the intellect (*nous*) in perception. He has already given us a causal account of the physical process of perception which relies upon the view that the sense-object affects the organ of perception, so that the perceiver plays a passive role in the entire operation. Now, apparently, he wishes to make some concessions to the way in which the intellect becomes involved. Nonetheless, the causal account so dominates, that, on any interpretation, the intellect plays a minimal rôle.

When Aristotle comes to consider intellect apart from the operations of perception, he affirms a strong analogy between perception and the operations of intellect (e.g. at 429a13). In so far as his analysis of perception is largely object-oriented, it is hardly surprising that his account of intellect emphasises its passive role. Thus *De An.* III.4 is largely occupied with an analysis of how the intellect can be described as *topon eidōn*

[13] D. W. Hamlyn, *Aristotle's De Anima Books II and III* (Oxford, 1968), p. 122.

[14] L. A. Kosman, 'Perceiving that We Perceive: *On the Soul* III.2', *PR* 84 (1975), 499–519.

[15] C. Osborne, 'Aristotle, *de Anima* 3.2: How Do We Perceive that We See and Hear?', *CQ* 33 (1983), 401–11.

(429a28), and concerns itself with intellect as a potentiality. However, towards the end of the chapter, Aristotle introduces a new question:

> Someone might wonder... whether intellect itself can be thought. For either (i) intellect will belong to everything else (unless it is thought through something else) and what is thought will be something single in form, or (ii) it will have something mixed in it which will make it thought like everything else. (429b26–9)

Aristotle's worry appears to be whether anything that thinks can be thought, as such; so that the *aporia* is about the mutual implications of the properties 'thinking' and 'thought'. The discussion has a highly metaphysical air, and bears a strong resemblance to the puzzles to be found elsewhere in Aristotle about the coincidence of action and passion of any sort in any item (e.g. *G.C.* 1.7, *Phys.* 7.1). So the initial question needs to be filled out as 'can intellect, when it is thinking, think itself?'; the parenthesis makes it clear that we are not here concerned with intellect being thought incidentally, that is by something else. The question is then cashed as a dilemma: (i) either everything that is thought thinks, (ii) or else intellect has two parts, the thinking part and the thought part, which is thought like anything else is. And in what follows, Aristotle avoids the apparent absurdity of (i) and prefers a complicated version of (ii). He suggests that mind is thought potentially; but only actually when it is in fact thinking; and at that stage (by virtue of the account of intellect and form already canvassed earlier in the chapter) the thinking intellect and the thoughts are in fact identical. The objects of thought, by contrast, which have matter, are only thought potentially, and thus are not actually identical with the thinking intellect; so everything thought does not actually also think (430a6).

As the details of this argument make clear, Aristotle's account of intellect and thinking is bound by the same pair of assumptions as his account of perception: firstly that the processes of the intellect occur all at the same level (there is no contrast between the object-level and a higher level of intellection); and secondly that they are to be explained largely by appeal to their object, not their subject. He wishes to claim that intellect is aware that it thinks (by perception, *EN* 1170aa30, or by thought, e.g. *Met.* 1074b33ff.). But his reasons for making this claim are consistently ontological or metaphysical ones, rather than reasons derived from the philosophy of mind. Thus, for example, in the *EN* passage cited, he equates perceiving that we walk, perceiving that we think and perceiving that we are, and argues for a teleological interpretation of the last. And in the *Metaphysics* passage he uses the notion that thought becomes its objects to argue for the self-thinking nature of the unmoved mover; this satisfies the requirement (1074b34) that the object of the unmoved mover's thought must, for teleological reasons, be the best; so it is itself. Likewise, the account of active intellect which he puts foward in *De An.* 3.5 has no psychological depth. Requirements of the priority of actuality over potentiality demand that there be active as well as passive intellect. Clearly active intellect must in its activities be independent of passive intellect, otherwise it would not be prior. Clearly, also, it must be independent of the objects of thought, both because otherwise active intellect would be posterior to passive, and also because otherwise intellect would not have an independent status as a natural entity (the assumption of 430a10) at all. Yet once the faculties of intellect have been explained in terms of their objects, on the analogy of and continuous with the account of perception, no specification of active intellect is possible beyond such a bare and formal account.

None of these passages betrays any awareness of the possibility that thinking about thinking might be different in type or in level from just thinking; nor any notion that subject-oriented thought might be significant for any reason other than the puzzle

about coincident action and passion that it might offer. For by abandoning the possibility of self-consciousness in the object-oriented account of perceiving that we see, Aristotle has closed off from himself Socrates' insight that there may be a real, not just a formal, difference between the mind and its objects. And it is for this reason that he may be convicted of the charge that he has no real philosophy of mind.

VII

An argument about the Stoic wise man has come down to us as the 'elusive argument' (formulated first, perhaps, by Euboulides, D.L. 2.108).

> ... the difficulty about the self-elusive man, who does not yet recognise that he has become wise, but is ignorant and doubts that his progress, which he achieved little by little as over a long period of time he dismissed some things and added others, should come upon him unnoticed and without fuss, like (the end of) a journey. (Plutarch, *Quomodo quis suos in virtute sentiat profectus*, 75d = *SVF* iii.539)

> For if the good is perceptible, and is greatly different from evil, how can it not be supremely absurd for a man who becomes good from being evil to be unaware of the fact, and not to recognise goodness when it is present, but instead to think that evil is in him? For either no-one who has all the virtues can be ignorant of it, or doubt it; or else the difference between virtue and vice is small and altogether indiscernible... (Plutarch, *de Stoic. repugn.* 1042f–43a)

> ... But also, to speak generally, they make the good an insignificant and weak thing, if when it is present it does not make itself felt. For according to the Stoics the good is not imperceptible by nature; but rather Chrysippus, in the works *On the End*, makes the good perceptible, and, as he thinks, he also proves it to be so. But then we are left to conclude that it escapes perception through its weakness and smallness whenever it is not recognised to be present and eludes those who have it. (Plutarch, *de comm. not.* 1062b–c)

The wise man, according to Stoic doctrine, makes an instantaneous transition from ignorance to wisdom, vice to virtue (*SVF* iii.530, 539). At that instant, he becomes totally wise; and until that instant, he is not wise at all. The puzzle is then to decide when he knows that he is wise. After all, says Chrysippus, since being wise is a good thing, as such it must be perceptible. So there must be a time at which the wise man perceives that he is wise. When is that?

There are three distinct possibilities. (a) Perhaps this occurs at the moment he becomes wise. At such a moment, we may suppose, he learns the last truth of the corpus, and thus switches from being ignorant to being wise. Now it is impossible that he should learn these two truths in one moment (*SVF* iii.541). So the truth that he is a wise man must be itself the last truth in the corpus. But then it is not a truth at all, for until the wise man has all the truths of the corpus he is not wise. (b) Or perhaps the perception that he is wise postdates the last truth of the corpus. In that case the wise man does not know all the truths when he becomes wise – so that he lacks wisdom in this vital respect, and is therefore not wise (on Stoic principles) at all. (c) Or perhaps the fact that he is wise is insignificant, so that whether or not he perceives it is a matter of indifference to the total wisdom of the wise man. But then being wise, and being good, is a matter of insignificance – and the whole of Stoic ethics collapses.

The source of the difficulty appears to be a trio of premisses:

(i) The knowledge of the wise man is complete (cf. *SVF* iii.548)

(ii) Knowing is not the same as knowing that I know.

(iii) Two things cannot become known at once.

The purpose of the elusive argument in the Hellenistic period was, I take it, to

attack (i), which represents the central Stoic doctrine of the wise man.[16] It does so by using a pair of assumptions about knowledge, (ii) and (iii).

First of all, (ii) appears innocuous enough; it is at least plausible to suggest (as Socrates appears to do) that there is a difference between 'knowing' and 'knowing that you know'. However, as the evidence from Plutarch makes clear, the Stoics wish to argue that 'knowing that I am wise' counts as recognising a good; and that it is therefore a case of perception. But then if the truths which the wise man possesses are likewise cases of perception (at any rate in some specialised sense), then 'knowing' and 'knowing that I know' will be of the same simple type (that is, perception or cataleptic impression). So there can be no difference of *level, or of source*, between the truths 'I am a wise man' and 'There is a toadstool'. So if there is progress from one to the other, then that progress must be linear, on the same continuum.

This assumption also lies behind (iii), the thesis that you cannot come to know two things at once. At the object level, we might assert (iii) with confidence; and it derives its plausibility, I suggest, from ontological considerations (if this object is different from that, then knowing this one is different from knowing that). Now the Stoic view is fundamentally ontological; after all, the Stoic account of truth is underpinned by realism and a connected theory of perception. So although we might come to know two truths from the same perception (cf. Sextus Empiricus, *M.* 7.242), two different perceptions could not simultaneously generate two different truths, for perceptions must be sequential. And, as we have seen, the difficulty of the elusive argument derives from the insistence that the good is perceptible (because it is real). So if the wise man comes to know the last truth of the corpus by perception and he perceives that he is a wise man, the perceptions will differ, and so they must be sequential, not simultaneous. Alternatively, if the thesis that he is a wise man is an inference the sage draws from reflecting on the body of truths he does have, then this inference must be posterior to the acquisition of all those other truths. As a consequence the elusive argument works; and was relieved, it seems, only by conceding that there is a little while during which the wisdom of the wise man escapes his notice (cf. *SVF* iii.540).

'However its effectiveness against the Stoics rested on their assumption that complete self-knowledge is an attainable goal, and I would guess that the original paradox had as its target the Socratic commendation of self-knowledge.'[17] Socrates, I submit, is not vulnerable to the elusive argument, for two reasons.

Firstly, the *Apology* suggests a structure for knowledge wherein knowing implies knowing that you know; otherwise you have no claim to know at all. Thus, knowledge is a complex, not a simple matter, and no straight non-identity claim such as (ii) is, on Socrates' view, plausible. A little reflection suffices to see that there is some power to his claim; after all, if we wish to allow any mileage at all to the idea of 'knowing that I know', we surely cannot dissociate it altogether, as the elusive argument would do, from the knowledge that is its intensional object.

Secondly, and consequently, (iii) is similarly suspect. For, as I have suggested, (iii) relies on a linear conception of cognitive progress, and one which is dominated by ontological considerations. Yet Socrates has offered the suggestion that only one of the 'knowledges' in question is at the object level; the other, by contrast, is subject oriented, self-conscious and formal. But if the two 'knowledges' are thus at different

[16] Cf. G. B. Kerferd, 'What Does the Stoic Wise Man Know?', in J. M. Rist (ed), *The Stoics* (Berkeley; 1978).

[17] D. N. Sedley, 'Diodorus Cronus and Hellenistic Philosophy', *PCPS* 203 (1977), 95.

levels, and different in source, there is no reason to suppose that they cannot occur at the same time.

The mistake, then, that the elusive argument makes, is to suppose that progress from 'knowing' to 'knowing that I know' is linear, on the same continuum; Socrates would argue that this is to misunderstand the difference, not only in object, but also in source, between 'knowing' and 'knowing that I know'. Socrates would, instead, embrace a different paradox. His epistemology makes central the notion of the self. So, he must argue, no-one is wise until they know that they are wise. So 'that he is wise' only becomes the object of 'he knows' as he knows it; and before that, it is false. So the wise man who does not know that he knows is ignorant; and the ignorant man who knows only that he knows nothing is wise. That man is no Stoic, but Socrates.[18]

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