

## Interpreting Memory, Forgetfulness and Testimony in Theory of Recollection

1.

Theory of recollection is arguably a first theory of innate knowledge or understanding. It is an inventive and positive idea introduced in Plato's *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*, which is promising to break the deadlock of Plato's early Socratic dialogues. In contemporary world led by Science, the significance of theory of recollection, as an ideal representation of the *pietas* of thinking, often fails to be recognized by the general. Even a scholar of Plato without profound reflections may cast doubt on recollection's philosophical value. Consequently he or she may only focus on the mathematical elements of the theory. I argue that theory of recollection is an intersection of religiousness and intelligence. Thus it can provide us with new way of thinking and experiencing the world. In addition, its discussion on rational soul can contribute to our understanding of human beings. On the surface, theory of recollection is like a mythical story: the pre-existence of immortal soul has already acquired knowledge; during the process of incarnation knowledge is forgotten despite being within the soul; in this life our soul can learn knowledge by recollecting. Obviously, on a broad sense, theory of recollection contains elements of religion and philosophy. To be more specific, its conjecture of the whole process of recollecting is constantly corresponding to the ideas of memory, forgetfulness and testimony.<sup>1</sup> In Plato's divine picture, the forgetfulness and deficiency of rational soul of human beings in comparison to divine soul is a valuable construction. However, after unveiling the mythical elements, the demonstrations of the theory of recollection including mathematical enquiries and method of hypothesis will explain its specific way of

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<sup>1</sup> The relationship between testimony and theory of recollection may be the least evident among the three ideas. Its strong tie is what makes theory of recollection exceptionally unique. I will make a full analysis of their relationship by looking into the demonstration of Plato's *Meno*.

practicing question and answer. The practice is relevant to arguments on education of different subjects. I argue that it is accountable to work of memory and testimony with a unique assumption of human soul's forgetfulness. Therefore I propose to make a new interpretation of theory of recollection that can be divided into memory, forgetfulness and testimony. Even though it appears as if derived from mythical tradition of classical times, it has the potential to reshape itself in the light of constant challenges of human beings. Born in Socratic and Platonic heritage, it will reveal its advantages of questioning and answering in comparison of empirical survey, at least in certain investigating fields. It is also an educational method that can lead us from civic environment to intelligible world without being barred by diversity of culture and distraction of high technology.

2.

I choose Plato's *Meno* as an ideal starting point. It is because the *Meno* consists in a complete structure of theory of recollection yet it is easy to approach. On one hand, the discussion on memory and forgetfulness is in the mythical story with a subsequent dream metaphor and a demonstration of mathematical enquiry. On the other hand, the power of testimony is exposed in the application of method of hypothesis at later stage of the *Meno*. Accordingly I have construed a retrospective structure for analyzing the ideas of memory, forgetfulness and testimony in theory of recollection.

To begin with, I intend to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the key conception of episteme from the end of the *Meno*. It is a philosophical goal of theory of recollection. I will argue for its own unity within the broader context of the whole dialogue. From 98a3, Socrates has made a far-reaching claim that "true doxai are of no great value until one ties them down by giving an explanation." He further claims by saying that "and that, Meno, my friend, is recollection, as we previously agreed. In the first place, they become episteme and then remain stable." Despite massive interpretations from ancient discussions to contemporary epistemology, no consensus actually exists on how we should properly understand this passage. Furthermore, few interpreters have extended to a discussion on the unity of the conception of episteme that is derived from this famous claim within the context of the *Meno* as a whole. For a very long time this passage is

regarded as an initial attempt to define knowledge as justified true belief.<sup>2</sup> In this definition, episteme is knowledge; doxa implies true belief; aitia logismos is a process of justification. In addition to knowledge, episteme approximates understanding more closely than knowledge, endorsing the distinction of the two conceptions from contemporary epistemological discussions by criteria of epistemic properties.

The conception of episteme related to knowledge cannot exhaust the ideas of knowledge of all kinds and all times. Unlike some epistemologists who only make use of the specific passage of the *Meno*, I propose to construct a truly complete argument on episteme and its unity. Only focusing on one statement in the end to determine its relation to knowledge and understanding can be restrictive and inaccurate. Thus, I will make step-by-step examination of episteme. First, I will focus almost exclusively on the episteme in comparison to true doxa from 98a3 in order to see whether this account of episteme is to some extent relevant to current epistemological debates between knowledge and understanding.<sup>3</sup> Second, while Socrates specifically contrasts episteme with true doxa in the previous passage I focus on, I suppose it is necessary to argue for the unity of episteme by analyzing various terms related to knowledge elsewhere in the *Meno*.<sup>4</sup> I do not take it for granted that all terms in the *Meno* that are generally translated into knowledge in English are of no difference from episteme of the ending session. Third, after construing episteme and its unity in a convincing way, I will turn to a necessary step of setting this conception of episteme back to the context of *Meno*. It initiates my analysis of other topics regarding theory of recollection.

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<sup>2</sup> Dominic Scott has argued for this way of interpretation in Scott, D. (2005). The version of Gail Fine in this category of interpretation is a rigorous defense in Fine, G. (2004), pp. 41–81. As a matter of fact, it is a popular way of interpretation of knowledge as justified true belief, for it is endorsed by many other philosophers.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Fine made a summary of her arguments that Socrates is not discussing understanding: contemporary epistemology is a large umbrella, and Plato's views fit comfortably under it. Ivi.

<sup>4</sup> I will conduct an analysis of a variety of terms of knowledge that can be connected to the *Meno* in other Platonic dialogues for the next chapter of *Meno*'s unity in extension.

3.

Recent years have seen a speedy development of contemporary epistemologists' theories on nature and value of understanding that is seen as a cognitive achievement distinct from knowledge. In fact, understanding is often treated as a more valuable cognitive achievement than knowledge for varied reasons. For instance, Duncan Pritchard (2009) makes it clear that it is actually cognitive achievements that are distinctively valuable rather than knowledge and understanding is a kind of cognitive achievement. For *Meno*, if we take each expression related to knowledge to be equivocal, generally it is prone to realize a necessity of make a distinction between different kinds of knowledge. Gail Fine, in rejection to dual epistemology of Vlastos' style, has made a distinction between two levels of knowledge: lower and higher.<sup>5</sup> In Hugh Benson's latest work he suggests that we should generalize all these accounts into distinction between ordinary and robust knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Those claims from Socrates in the *Meno*, that episteme is the goal of their rational inquiries with a starting point of true doxa, and that episteme is possibly equal to virtue, could be very different in interpretation if we take in contemporary thinking on knowledge and understanding. After we work out a satisfactory interpretation of episteme as a key conception by taking in contemporary epistemology, it is necessary to return to the broader context of the *Meno* to test its warranty. At this stage, the central question is whether Socrates' account of episteme is more charitably taken as an account of understanding than an account of knowledge. It requires a substantive reconstruction of episteme with a focus on clarifying the condition as *aitias logismos*. Reconstruction of this key conception will not only strongly support *Meno*'s unity in ancient philosophy's landscape, but also generate even more insightful ideas to those who have special interest in studying knowledge and understanding. It is unable to go too far to make any conclusive claim that Socrates' account of episteme definitely belonging to the realm of understanding within recent epistemological discussion. However, the textual legitimate and philosophical acquirements may imply that it is charitably allowed to make this interpretation.

It is time to consider the conception of episteme in itself from Socrates' claim that episteme of a certain thing is acquired by working out

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<sup>5</sup> Ivi.

<sup>6</sup> Benson (2015).

explanation.<sup>7</sup> The core feature of those who have acquired episteme of a certain thing is that they have worked out explanation of the truth of the thing and how it is fitted into the domain of interrelated things. It crucially requires them to acquire the nature of the fundamental things of the domain and the nature of the relations of interrelated things. Those who have acquired episteme of a certain thing are in possession of a synoptic view of the way where the interrelated things can be fitted into the relevant domain. Insofar, episteme of a certain fact, on the basis of priority of definitional knowledge, requires that one grasps how the truth of this fact together with the natures of the more fundamental facts of the domain and the nature of their relations. If the fact is wholly grounded in a subset of those more fundamental facts of the domain to which the fact belongs, the episteme does not require grasping any irrelevant fundamental facts. For the current interpretation it is warranted that people can have episteme of a certain thing without grasping of the entire domain to which the certain thing belongs. Recalling my question of the passage of 85e1-3 where Socrates suggests that the attempt in geometry will be helpful with knowledge of other disciplines, the idea of entirety of a certain domain seems not to be a precondition if we are convinced by Socrates' claim. What's more, I will take Socrates' claim at 85e1-3 as a supplementary to explain one implicit point in my interpretation that episteme could be acquired of discrete domains that these domains are not necessarily share any fundamental facts in nature and even in absolute isolation from each other. Thus Socrates' claim inspires us to consider what he means that the epistemic practice in geometry can be essential to other domains of different disciplines, while one can have episteme in the domain of geometry without having episteme of biology and vice versa. According to Socrates, episteme is domain specific as is reflected in his discussion with the slave boy on geometry and conversation with Meno on virtue with application of method of hypothesis. Despite the plain claim of Socrates that the slave boy may first grasp episteme of diagonal line then episteme of geometry and subsequently episteme of other disciplines, I suppose that this frequency with a starting point of geometry is not unchangeable in the course of pursuing episteme of a certain thing in other people's cases. Since I am focusing on the episteme in itself of the

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<sup>7</sup> Notice that I have already modified the previous interpretation as giving explanation because I realize that giving explanation and working out explanation are different in the sense of difficulty and complexity.

*Meno*, I am not denying that it may turn out to be the case as Socrates considers the reality of a single unified domain. In a single unified domain, a certain single thing sets of certain entities have explanatory power of all other things.

If we reconsider the case of the slave boy demonstration, the question remains how the slave boy can acquire episteme of diagonal line. Socrates has presented interrelated propositions concerning diagonal line of the domain of geometry. The nature of diagonal line is at least in part grounded in the propositions made in the course of proving them. Socrates may suggest that part of what is required to apprehend the propositions of the nature of diagonal line is an accurate grasp of the role they play in explaining these diverse derivable propositions. If the conditions were changed, such as drawing rectangle instead of square, it depends on whether the slave boy does grasp episteme of diagonal line to see if he could adequately grasp interrelations of the diversely conditioned propositions regarding the nature of diagonal line. At 88b9-11 I have discovered a passage of which the different English translations seem to imply a textual dispute. The translation that I have chose is: the same is true of moderation and mental quickness; when they are learned and disciplined with understanding they are beneficial, but without understanding they are harmful?<sup>8</sup> On reading the whole text I realize that the way the particular conception used by Socrates in this specific passage of the *Meno* does not appear anywhere else in the *Meno*, although it does not mean that this conception is not connected to any other epistemic conception such as episteme at the end of the *Meno*. This passage has made a comparison of the different states of with vous and without vous. Admittedly, in the context the discussion here Socrates is not directly arguing for the meaning of episteme. He is actually making a value judgment of the beneficial and the harmful. As a matter of fact, Socrates is discussing conception of relatively fundamental facts belonging to the domain of phronesis that appears at 88b4, immediately following the usage of episteme in the same passage. At current stage I try to make it clear that the usage of vous at 88b9-11 with regard to conceptions of the domain of phronesis is not accidental. Corresponding to the discussion of the *Republic*, it seems to be another

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<sup>8</sup> Trans. by G.M.A. Grube, from Plato (1997).

convincing textual evidence that *vous* is not only closely related to episteme but is highly likely to be a kind of episteme. In connection with this topic, someone may highlight that Aristotle in *Posterior Analytic* 2.19 claims that the cognitive grasp we have of first principle is *vous* and not episteme in a strict sense. On the contrary, Benson has provided another part of *Posterior Analytic* with his purpose to show that his so-called robust Platonic conception of knowledge is what Aristotle appears to have in mind in writing *Posterior Analytics* 1.2.71b9–25. Although I hold a different view from Benson’s reconstruction of robust Platonic conception of knowledge, I find the passage he has quoted would be a good response for my interpretation to the doubt about the relation between Platonic and Aristotelian thoughts on episteme. Furthermore, it will offer some insights that are helpful with my discussion on the relation among episteme, knowledge and understanding:

We think we understand something *simpliciter* (and not in the sophistical way, incidentally) when we think we know of the explanation because of which the object holds that it is its explanation, and also that it is not possible for it to be otherwise. It is plain, then, that to understand is something of this sort. And indeed, people who do not understand think they are in such a condition, and those who do understand actually are. Hence if there is understanding *simpliciter* of something it is impossible for it to be otherwise. Whether there is also another type of understanding we shall say later: here we assert that we do know things through demonstrations. By a demonstration I mean a scientific deduction; and by scientific I mean a deduction by possessing which we understand something. If to understand something is what we have posited it to be, then demonstrative understanding in particular must proceed from items which are true and primitive and immediate and more familiar than and prior to and explanatory of the conclusions. (In this way the principles will also be appropriate to what is being proved.) There can be a deduction even if these conditions are not met, but there cannot be a demonstration—for it will not bring about understanding.<sup>9</sup>

According to Benson, it is the robust nature of Platonic (and Aristotelian) knowledge that leads to requiring elaboration. It is also noteworthy that Barnes chooses to translate episteme and its cognates as “understanding” precisely to highlight the robust nature of Aristotelian knowledge.<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 1.2.71b9–25; Barnes trans.

<sup>10</sup> Barnes (1994) chooses to translate episteme and its cognates as “understanding” in order to highlight the robust nature of Aristotelian knowledge.

detailed analysis of the relation between Platonic and Aristotelian views on episteme is not necessary in my discussion, but Barnes' choice of understanding as a result of higher grasp of the conceptions may shed light on the discussion of knowledge and understanding.

4.

Compared to the relatively fruitful result of geometrical demonstration with Meno's slave boy, it is in need of an investigation about what kind of process of inquiry can actually or mostly represent the process of working out testimony in the ending part of the *Meno*. In analyzing the first third section briefly, it becomes clear that the nature of virtue plays a fundamental role in determining whether a putative virtue is virtue and accordingly the properties of virtue. Even though the idea of testimony is not explicitly introduced to Meno during his inquiry with Socrates, chances remain that Socrates takes giving explanation of some specific facts to be trying to know the truths of these facts and to discover correlated facts that can ground the specific facts in more fundamental facts of nature of the virtue. Socrates may practice this on purpose with Meno through method of hypothesis. I adopt the strategy of analyzing the demonstration of slave boy as a single demonstration at the first stage. That is, I will treat it independently from other different inquiries of different topics of the *Meno* but focus on its methods involved in the domain of geometry. The demonstration of slave boy is particularly a useful practice since it provides a case of a slave boy who is undoubtedly lost memory of any episteme of pre-existent life including any form of method of hypothesis. His instructor Socrates who appears to be equipped with episteme of diagonal line instead of merely true doxa of virtue. If we trust Socrates and our own ability of understanding, we may hope to find out exactly how the boy acquires true doxa firstly and then turns to a right route of aiming at episteme. This demonstration provides an opportunity for us to examine what Socrates actually thinks what the process of giving testimony of the domain of geometry is that can bring about episteme. It goes one step further to arouse our curiosities and confusions towards the fact that Socrates who is clear of this process in geometry does not successfully apply it to the topic of virtue.



Why, then, could he insist that the process of testimony will lead to episteme at the end of the *Meno*?<sup>11</sup>

From 82b1, Socrates suggests an impressively dramatic way to prove a process of recollection as learning for Meno by engaging in a discussion on geometry with a slave boy. Many details from the demonstration are still in need of careful re-examination if we want to develop the interpretation of recollection. After all, in the conclusive part of this particular demonstration with a slave boy, Socrates' claim on how the boy's doxa can turn into episteme is apparently similar to his supplementary claim in the end of the *Meno*: he will have true doxai in him which have only to be awakened by questioning to become epistemai (86a8-9). If we recollect what Socrates says at 98a3-8, it is not hard to realize the explicit difference between the specific conclusion of the case with slave boy and the conclusion in general. At 98a3-8, the condition of turning true doxa into episteme is, according to my own interpretation, giving convincing testimony. As to 86a8-9, the specific condition regarding the slave boy is questioning. In no way is 86a8-9 an accidental statement since I find this claim similar to Socrates' own saying earlier before:

And at this moment those doxai have just been stirred up in him, like a dream; but if he were repeatedly asked these same questions in a various ways, you know he will have in the end as accurate an apprehension<sup>12</sup> of them as anyone... Without anyone having taught him, and only through questions put to him, he will apprehend, recovering the episteme out of himself?<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> As I have mentioned previously, the answer to this question requires a careful examination of the elements of the claim of episteme from the end, such as the property of stability. The stability is belonging to the episteme of some fact itself instead of the person who is in possession of the episteme. That may help to explain why Socrates cannot directly apply his exploring process of geometry knowledge to his inquiry of virtue. The ultimate difference lies in the different domains of knowledge instead of the levels of knowledge falling into categories of properties or natures. However, this explanation can be very risky because it may do harm to our understanding of Plato's creation of philosophical methods or current philosophers' future attempt to establish Platonic methodology.

<sup>12</sup> For the current section it would be misleading if I simply used understanding to translate the Greek word because it does not represent that I have already preferred the notion of understanding to the notion of knowledge before the comprehensive discussion. That is why it may be helpful to use a neutral word of apprehension.

<sup>13</sup> Socrates, *Meno*, 85c8-d1.

Compared to the later statement, the passage at 85c8-d1 has presented more details with regard to the specific process of the slave boy's possible change. Similarly, Socrates has used a dream-awakening metaphor in order to describe the difference between possessing true doxa only and dealing true doxa with questions in both passages. Instead of merely questioning, Socrates emphasize at 85c8-d1 that the boy has to be questioned many times and in various ways. What's more, he also implies that this slave boy could have episteme ultimately and accurately<sup>14</sup> no less than anyone else maybe of different identities and status. By coordinating the three passages of true doxa and episteme, we may realize more questions. Is the process of questioning as a first-hand demonstration comprehensively equal to the process of testimony? If not, what is the relation between these two claims of Socrates? One rapid answer to the question might be that the process of questioning is a temporary statement not as accurate as the process of testimony since Socrates has to consider the practical condition of the slave boy. At least the hope still exists, that we may grasp the meaning of testimony through re-examining the slave boy demonstration and avoid the worry that a certain differentiation would affect the dialogue's unity.

There is a major watershed of the boy's epistemic and psychological state in the slave boy demonstration. At 84c8-10 Socrates reminds Meno to pay attention to the boy's change from being numb to coming out of perplexity. Being numb and coming out of perplexity are referring to the two stages of the geometrical discussion. There are some key points I wish to address here that I has not yet discovered in other analysis of the slave boy demonstration. Firstly, I assume that Socrates is not in full control of the whole twists and turnings during the temporary demonstration. Of course he may be able to make quick adjustments according to frequently changing situations. However, it does not assure that all the steps he has shown to Meno are necessary with regard to the central topic of turning true doxa into episteme. Secondly, while we place a great emphasis on the specific process from true

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<sup>14</sup> It is possible that someone finds it to be problematic if we take the adverb as precisely or accurately in Socrates' statement for granted and fail to see its implication that episteme may be admits of degree of accuracy. This restrictive condition as precisely is rarely seen in later discussion of episteme. It is not necessary to interpret it in the way that it is directly related to episteme.

doxa to episteme instead of the slave boy's grasp of true doxa, I have another assumption that it fails to be self-evident to us readers of what is exactly the fact or say object of which Socrates intends the slave boy to pursue episteme in this case. Having a precise understanding of the object of episteme in the slave demonstration will help us to analyze how Socrates has designed questions accordingly in order to test the slave boy. I have discovered an interesting example to illustrate this point. At 82e4-5, Socrates tells Meno that the slave boy believes that he has knowledge of the lengths of the line on which an eight-foot figure is based. The following discussion with the slave boy shows that he does not have that knowledge. When it comes to the ending part of the slave boy demonstration, what Socrates has shown to the slave boy is actually that in his drawing the line called diagonal is the line on which an eight-foot figure is based. But it fails to prove that the boy actually has true doxa of the length of the line on which an eight-foot figure is based since we can easily find the evidences in the previous discussion of the boy's efforts in arithmetic. According to Socrates, by the end of his discussion with the slave boy, the boy has already acquired some true doxa ready for next step of becoming episteme. Insofar as I can discover, the boy has acquired propositions that diagonal line is the line on which the double figure is based by being questioned. Although the boy's ability of calculation is significant for him to gain many true doxai in the previous discussion, Socrates does not help him to set up a goal as the length of the line on which an eight-foot square is based. To be precise, I argue that Socrates has set up a long-term goal for the slave boy to grasp the episteme of diagonal line, according to Socrates' knowledge of recollection. So we can expect that what the slave boy would use to enhance his apprehension of the episteme of diagonal line is the selected series of the propositions instead of all the questions that Socrates has presented to him.

Now that I have argue for what Socrates is likely to have in mind as a goal for slave boy to pursue in the form of episteme of diagonal line, I will turn to look into the details of Socrates' questions to see if he is not teaching the slave boy at all.

Furthermore, if Socrates is not teaching, I carry on an investigation about whether the slave boy is truly practicing self-inquiry during the whole process. By comparing Socrates and the slave boy we may see to the difference between the person who is in possession of episteme of a certain fact and the person who is merely in possession of true doxa. As I implicitly

state before, the strategy that Socrates has adopted in the slave boy demonstration seems not to be a standard way of teaching geometry or learning geometry by oneself with existent materials of the discipline, especially considering the way in which these progressive questions are organized by Socrates. It is Socrates who draws a two-foot by two-foot square and all the subsequent details of the picture during the whole process. In the starting stages at 82e2-83e10, the slave boy offers two suggestions for the answer to the question that on which line a square with double the area of the drawn one is based. His suggests are rejected. At 84d3-85b7, Socrates uses additional questions to help the slave boy with the hope of further acquiring the episteme. Most of the time Socrates is construing questions in need of judgmental answers. That is, Socrates is responsible for drawing pictures and construing propositions, while the slave boy simply provides his answer as either yes or no. Almost all the other questions not falling into this category are questions of calculation. It is shown that the slave boy has grasped the basic skill of basic calculation. Taking 82d3 as an example, Socrates requires the slave boy to work it out and tell him. True or false questions must be distinguished from those questions that require someone to work them out. At 83d2, it is Socrates who first offers a hint of the comparative relation of length then asks the slave boy to answer a question of 'how long'. Despite the fact that the slave boy is capable to give his answers to the two types of Socrates' questions, it remains unclear whether he does have a true doxa of the propositions all the time or he sometimes offers a right answer as the result of epistemic luck. Even if he does have a true doxa each time he hears of Socrates' true or false questions, it is questionable whether he is capable to follow the whole process of proving and construe any propositions on his own. Till the end of the slave boy's discussion with Socrates, he never presents any questions or answers that have independently explanatory power. Answering true or false questions, analyzing propositions and casting relevant questions to the original one can represent different levels of apprehension of the original question. Since this demonstration for Meno cannot provide warranted evidence that during the questionings slave boy is avoiding coincidence or luck to give right answers. At the same time, it is not sufficient to prove that he can develop his apprehension of the propositions of diagonal lines if Socrates is not around. It would be worst if it step-by-step questioning remain unclear to slave boy

while Socrates himself has a good idea of what is really going on. Regarding this one may answer that it may not be a serious problem because all we need is to focus on the later stage of turning true doxa into episteme, which means that we need not to worry about the process of acquiring true doxa. It is helpful to a certain extent but the worry can remain when I turn to consider the conclusive end of turning slave boy's true doxa into episteme. My question is how slave boy alone can set out to question a totally different proposition presented to him in the future? At first sight, it seems to be a different question from the one about how he can make his true doxa become episteme because the two questions are referring to different stages of the questioning. But it is not the case. The slave boy still has to face the problem of setting out questioning during the process of turning true doxa into episteme. If he fails to have a future goal of episteme, he may quickly forget how Socrates proposes the questions to him or even the content of the specific questions. It will result in a meaningless process of learning as regard to the slave boy. If we compare Socrates' claim at 85c9-d1 to 86a5 now, we will realize that the distinction of the two parts cannot be easily ignored for its significance. At 85c9-d1, Socrates mentions the condition that the boy needs to be asked questions repeatedly in various ways. At 86a5, he claims that slave boy will be awakened by questioning. Being asked questions in various ways undoubtedly belongs to the process of questioning. However, it cannot be confirmed which way of questioning is the core method suggested by Socrates: being questioned by oneself or being questioned by others again. Fortunately, Socrates has offered a detail of 'in various ways' that may allow a good way to interpret it considering the goal of acquiring episteme. From the discussion above I expect that the method of questioning in various ways may develop one's ability of testimony instead of merely giving any kind of explanation.

As I stress preliminarily, the conclusive discussion about the slave boy demonstration between Socrates and Meno is partly echoed in the end of the whole dialogue. For the slave boy to acquire episteme of diagonal line, it is possible but not necessary for him to go over the same stages such as reconsidering his wrong answers in between the discussion and reflecting on why he has gone wrong at that time. Going through the process of questioning again means trying to develop his capability of working out explanation by construing questions of progressive chains and answering them. On clarifying this, I wish to look back at the final stage of the slave

boy demonstration again in detail because the particular manner in which the slave may acquire his potentiality of pursuing episteme is very important to evaluate the epistemic status as clear as possible. Socrates' claim at 85c8-d1 suggests that the slave boy has acquired a certain kind of true doxa that is in a manner being both particularly reliable and illuminating among the set of true doxa of the slave boy. Even though the slave boy himself may find his apprehension insufficient to provide any further explanatory power at this stage, the current true doxa of his own has been well justified thanks to the efforts of Socrates and the boy. Socrates fails to enlighten Meno about why he insists that this boy only acquires true doxa from their geometrical discussion. He jumps fast to the next conclusion that the boy can make use of his true doxa and carry on the task of episteme in various ways of questioning. Although we are told about the method as questioning in various ways, it seems to be difficult for us to infer from the method to know precisely why this boy only acquires true doxa. This question has been left until the very end of the dialogue. If I apply my own interpretation to the slave boy demonstration, then the reason is that the slave boy has not worked out explanation of the geometrical theorems related to diagonal line. Rather, it is even indefinite if he can work out progressive questions independently to acquire the explanation. One way to understand this problem is that the slave boy only works out something approximates to the form of explanation through Socrates' intentional implications but it is not sufficient before a proper reformulation of the essentials of the explanation. This way of understanding has revealed the insufficiency of the slave boy. So the slave boy needs to spare more cognitive efforts to recollect and grasp what Socrates has just presented to him with undiscovered hints. Another way to understand why the slave boy is temporarily unable to acquire episteme is that Socrates has decided before their discussion that he will not present the slave boy with any traces of the explanation of any theorem. In this regard, it is not necessary for the slave boy to stick to the outdated information that has already completed its task in the previous discussion. By developing his own ability of asking questions he must turn to substantial additional information. Not only the context of the dialogue as a whole<sup>15</sup>, but also the relevant details of the demonstration<sup>16</sup> shows that the

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<sup>15</sup> It is particularly referring to the ending discussion on true doxa and episteme.

second way is better representing Socrates' considerations. In the first place, we may recollect Socrates' position when he discusses the questions of virtue with Meno. He has commitment to the priority of the nature or essences of things. I note that Socrates does not appeal to the natures of any geometrical theorems and notions in a way where these theorems and notions do any explanatory work. In addition, Socrates does not either show any explanatory power of the theorems and notions to the slave boy or requires the boy to provide any detailed answer of explanatory power. What I mean is that he does not single out a class of details concerning the nature of the different figures. Those figures do play an important role since Socrates turns to drawing pictures on the scene. He simply appeals to the fact that a line drawn from one corner of a square to the opposite corner divides the square into two equal triangles. Actually this statement holds of the nature of various figures of the picture, but Socrates does not make them play explanatory role in a perspicuous way or stress the importance role of any other explanatory facts. I cast a doubt on the fact that by using pictures during the whole process it will add difficulty for us to tell the difference between perceptual acquirements and results of serious considerations. Possibly it is exactly his strategy when he is discussing with a slave boy. The perceptual acquirements of two equal figures are relatively easy if we recall the difficult topic of equality or symmetry discussed in epistemic sense. So even if Socrates clearly understands that the natures of some facts can be explanatorily basic, as we do, Socrates does not implore the slave boy to grasp the natures of the relevant notions beforehand in order to participate in the discussion. Otherwise we can expect that it is almost impossible to conduct the discussion because a full range of geometrical facts would be required to clarify before the true doxa of diagonal line. It is not suitable for a temporary attempt to display the entire "picture" of geometry. If the slave boy is inspired by his discussion with Socrates and determined to pursue geometry all by himself, he may have to practice asking and answering further questions on what square is, what equality means and so on so forth. He may practice geometrical reasoning to grasp the nature of fundamental conceptions of geometry in the first place. If he manages to grasp facts about the natures of the fundamental conceptions of

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<sup>16</sup> For example, as I discussed before, it is obvious that Socrates has told the slave boy some important propositions by questioning but he does not present any kind of explanation to the boy during the back-and-forth process.

geometry and their relations to the natures of more fundamental objects, the grasped facts about the natures of the fundamental conceptions of geometry will be granted the explanatory power. The slave boy will not need the drawn picture of square. Socrates' discussion shows no strict distinction between proofs that only prove a certain theorem is true from proofs that can also explain why a the theorem is true in mathematics. It can be very risky if I add too large a burden to Socrates' claim from his discussion with Meno on the slave boy demonstration, that through questioning repeatedly in various ways the slave boy will acquire episteme of the specific geometrical notion. Most readers of the *Meno* would agree that Socrates does not mean that the slave boy must experience the same questions again and again. But it remains disputative about to what extent the slave boy can acquire episteme of diagonal line in the process of attempting to grasp a great many related theorems and notions of geometry. It may be too high a requirement that he has to be widely and deeply questioned so that he can grasp all the way back to all the fundamental conceptions implied in his previous discussion with Socrates.

I suggest the epistemological requirement for the slave boy should be located in between the two extremes, since the first one is insufficient and the second one is easy to go bold and unpractical. After all, Socrates' claims there, despite their significance, are not clear. We may hope that Socrates actually means that what the slave boy needs is to be questioned a little more with exceptionally enlightening questions to secure his grasp of additional information and accordingly theorems. It would be a difficult question if we simply consider Socrates' claim after the slave boy demonstration in isolation. What we have for reference is actually his simple claims saying that the slave boy must experience the further process of questioning, in combination of the demonstration where he has shown his way of questioning the slave boy. Again, it leads to another important point that I have mentioned before about the relation between the condition of questioning and the condition of working out explanation. At this stage, I suppose that the method of questioning will help the boy to develop the ability to work out explanation of the theorems of diagonal line, and subsequently he will reach episteme of nature of diagonal line. To avoid the objection that Socrates may think that the boy only needs very few



questions to acquire episteme from true doxa, I find it useful to stress my interpretation of where the boy needs to develop ability of questioning in two senses instead of merely being questioned. He needs to learn to take control of his own questioning process. Moreover, if Socrates really agrees that the boy will only need few questions, it reflects that Socrates does not take the slave boy demonstration seriously enough. And it may not be a good idea to coordinate his claims for the slave boy demonstration together with the key claim at the end of the dialogue. If it is an acceptable interpretation, Socrates' related claims from two parts of the *Meno* could be fitted together with a focus on how we can make clear of the meaning of working out explanation of natures of a certain conception. In terms of objects of explanation, it is still necessary to stress the difference between geometrical conceptions and virtue. The relevance of the three claims from Socrates could be a proof regarding the dialogue's unity. In the meanwhile, taking advantage of the broader context of the *Meno* to clarify the process of questioning is also a good practice for arguing for the unity.

I want to quickly add one further points of the slave boy demonstration. First, at 85e1-3, what Socrates asks Meno has drawn my special attention: or has someone taught him geometry? You see, he can do the same as this with all geometry and all other knowledge. Now, can anyone have taught him all this? I do not think that this quotation used to attract many interpreters, compared to the well-known claims about true doxa and episteme. The noteworthy part of the quotation is what Socrates says that the slave boy can do the same as this with all geometry as well as knowledge of other disciplines. Derived from this judgment the slave boy should be able to learn by himself more than true doxa of a certain aspect of the geometry. It also implies that what he can acquire in geometry is closely connecting to knowledge of other disciplines. Could we extend this wide range to the knowledge of virtue? At least the statement of Socrates here shows no conflict with the possibility of connecting to inquiry on virtue. It can also explain why Socrates has chosen geometrical topic for the special demonstration. However, a possible objection to this supposition is that Socrates himself often claims that he knows nothing except the fact that he does not know. To be accurate enough, in Plato's *Meno* he does not know what virtue is. If he believes that the slave boy can take advantage of his learning in geometry and further do the same thing for every branch of knowledge including virtue. Why cannot Socrates himself follow the same

route? Socrates, who acts as an excellent instructor with grasp of geometrical knowledge, is supposed to be in a better position than the slave boy to apply the same method to the inquiry of other disciplines. At this stage I recollect Pindar's Pythian 8: creatures of a day. What is someone? What is no one? Man is the dream of a shadow. But when the brilliance given by Zeus comes, a shining light is on man, and a gentle lifetime.<sup>17</sup> It is one of the most celebrated and yet mysterious lines of Pindar, generally considered as the best poet of Greek lyric. It was written to honour the victory of a young wrestler. The reason why I quote it at the ending part of a philosophical paper is its potential connection to the philosophical questions and methods of theory of recollection in the *Meno*. The human fortune's vicissitudes might be associated with the brilliance of the gods. It remains undecided whether the lines are positive or not, but more importantly, I suppose that through its poetic language it may have formal parallel with philosophical construction in the *Meno*.

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<sup>17</sup> Trans. by Nagy, (2000), pp.97.

*Abstract:*

The essay is a new attempt to interpret theory of recollection in the context of “the pietas of thinking”. It will explore the different stages of theory of recollection in the *Meno* with a focus on making enquiry of the conception of episteme. The key conception of episteme is significant in new interpretation of theory of recollection. Its relationship of knowledge and understanding is also decided in the discussion. The essay argues that theory of recollection can be divided into elements of memory, forgetfulness and testimony. Moreover, this division is in accordance with the known elements of mythical story, slave boy demonstration, method of hypothesis in theory of recollection. By making this comparison the value and reason of theory of recollection will be warranted and rediscovered in the new era.

*Keywords:* Recollection, Method of Hypothesis, Testimony, Knowledge, Understanding.