

PLATONIC ANAMNESIS REVISITED

The belief in innate knowledge has a history almost as long as that of philosophy itself. In our own century it has been propounded in a linguistic context by Chomsky, who sees himself as the heir to a tradition including such philosophers as Descartes, the Cambridge Platonists and Leibniz. But the ancestor of all these is, of course, Plato's theory of recollection or anamnesis. This stands out as unique among all other innatist theses not simply because it was the first, but also because it is in some respects the strangest: Plato proposed not just a theory of *innate* knowledge, but of *forgotten* knowledge, and this, of course, goes hand in hand with his interest in the pre-existence of the soul. But my concern here is with another difference that makes Plato's theory unique, though it is not as clear as the previous one: in fact it has been for the most part over-looked by commentators and scholars. I wish to argue that while other theories of innate knowledge or ideas hold that much of what is innate in us is realized automatically and with ease, be it knowledge of moral principles, the idea of cause and effect or linguistic competence, anamnesis is concerned only with the attainment of hard philosophical knowledge, which most of us never reach.

Before I plunge into any interpretations of anamnesis, let me exhibit some of the creatures of the post-renaissance innatists to clarify my own interpretation. The first distinction to be made is between a theory about innate *ideas*, and one about innate knowledge of propositions. The claims that seem to have upset Locke most in his famous polemic against innatism¹ were that we know innately certain maxims, both speculative and practical. Under the first heading would be included the principle of non-contradiction, and under the second religious and moral principles, such as 'God exists', 'The soul is immortal' and 'God is to be worshipped'. This second class was a hot issue in the seventeenth century when many clerics and philosophers saw the foundations of morality and Christianity under threat, and so attempted to justify them by appealing to innate *a priori* principles, the idea being that we cannot doubt the principles that have been stamped upon everyone's minds, principles that would command universal assent, but for the dissension of a few wicked atheists.²

The innateness of ideas was also entrenched in the philosophical battlefield of the time. On this thesis, many if not all of the ideas and notions that are the *sine qua non* of conceptual thought, and so of all judgement and knowledge, are innate in the human mind. This was Descartes' position:

...in our ideas there is nothing that was not innate in the mind or faculty of thinking, except only these circumstances which point to experience – the fact, for instance, that we judge that this or that idea, which we now have present to our thought, is to be referred to a certain extraneous thing, not that these extraneous things transmitted the ideas themselves to our minds through the organs of sense, but because they transmitted something which gave the mind

¹ See *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. I.

² The evidence for belief in innate principles in the seventeenth century has been excellently documented by J. W. Yolton in *John Locke and the Way of Ideas* (Oxford, 1968), 30–48. The dramatis personae include clerics from Bishop Stillingfleet to the Cambridge Platonists More, Culverwel and Cudworth, who embraced more subtle theories of innatism. A good example of the association between innatism and religion is More's *Antidote Against Atheism*, reproduced in C. A. Patrides (ed.), *The Cambridge Platonists* (Edward Arnold, 1969). See especially pp. 218ff.

occasion to form these ideas by means of an innate faculty, at this time rather than another. For nothing reaches our mind from external objects through the organs of sense beyond certain corporeal movements... but even these movements and the figures which arise from them are not conceived by us in the shape they assume in the organs of sense, as I have explained at great lengths in my *Dioptrics*. Hence it follows that the ideas of the movements and figures are themselves innate in us.³

The innateness of ideas was also embraced by the Cambridge Platonists. Cudworth, for instance, claimed that in sensible ideas there has to be a contribution from the mind, and in the case of non-sensible ideas, such as relational ones, or 'cognitive' ideas, e.g. wisdom, folly, etc., there is no question of an empirical contribution.⁴ More also dismisses an empiricist explanation of the formation of relational ideas in his *Antidote* (p. 224). Here he is discussing the idea of dissimilarity:

But now that these *Relative Ideas*, whether *Logical* or *Mathematicall* be no *Physicall* affectations of the *Matter* is manifest from these two arguments. First they may be produced when there has been no *Physical Motion* nor alteration in the subject to which they belong... As for instance, suppose one side of a room whitened the other not touched or medled with, this other has become unlike, and hath the notion of *dissimile* necessarily belonging to it.

Thus if there is no physical impression from without, the ideas must proceed from within the mind.

The problem which the innateness of ideas is supposed to tackle is one about how certain elements in human understanding could possibly have arisen if all we had for their explanation was sense-experience. Thus one argument was that the mere passive reception of mechanical bombardments from outside could never give rise to ideas of colour, let alone extension, similarity and so on. This, of course, is a completely different problem from that of the justification of moral and religious beliefs in the wake of sceptical attack, the problem that lies behind the positing of innate practical maxims. Nevertheless, the Cambridge Platonists, at least, espoused both theories, and were concerned with both problems.⁵

What the solutions have in common, however, is that they are concerned with innate ideas or propositions many of which are aroused automatically, and without any conscious intellectual labour. This is obviously the case with innate ideas as these are meant to explain the fabric of all human thought, but it is also true of the propositions which were so fought over by the clerics and their empiricist opponents. This is made clear from the fact that the innatists of the seventeenth century at whom Locke's polemic was directed favoured arguments either from universal assent, or from the immediate assent of someone to whom the principle is first proposed.⁶

³ Descartes, *Notes Directed against a Certain Programme*, tr. E. S. Haldane & G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge, 1911), 442–3. Descartes also used the term 'innate' in a more specialized sense to describe ideas that were not adventitious or fictitious. In the broader sense, however, all ideas are innate, even those of primary qualities. For a discussion of this issue see R. M. Adams, in S. P. Stich (ed.), *Innate Ideas* (California, 1979), 77–8.

⁴ R. Cudworth, *A Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* (1731), 148–9.

⁵ Leibniz, in his attack on Locke's polemic, re-asserts the innateness of both ideas and principles (practical and speculative). He points out that although speculative maxims may not be explicitly known to everyone, they are innate in so far as they would be assented to as soon as heard. He adds that they are innate also because they are in us 'potentially', suppressed as in enthymemes (see P. Remnant and J. Bennett, *G. W. Leibniz: New Essays on Human Understanding* [Cambridge, 1982], 76). He talks on p. 84 of the mind relying on certain principles constantly, these serving as 'the inner core and mortar of our thoughts'. Some innate principles are in fact the necessary conditions of thought, and in using them we know them 'fundamentally'. He also espouses the innateness of ideas by making several intellectual ideas – being, unity, substance, duration, change, action – innate to us (see p. 51).

⁶ Locke, *Essay*, Bk. I.3.§2, and Yolton, op. cit. (n. 2), 39–41.

How, then, does Platonic anamnesis stand in relation to this? If we are talking about innate *knowledge*, then there is agreement between Plato and some of the post-renaissance innatists to the extent that they were all concerned with knowledge of fundamental moral truths. As far as Plato is concerned, this is clear from the *Meno*, where the theory grows out of a problem that threatens to undermine the possibility of attaining knowledge of what virtue is. But it is no less obvious, in that dialogue, that the attainment of such innate knowledge is anything but automatic, and requires immense philosophical effort.

When we come to the innateness of ideas, things become more controversial: on one line of interpretation, Plato is advancing a thesis which is intended to explain how conceptual thought is possible, and so recollection is used to provide the apparatus that is too rich for the senses to have provided on their own. The textual support for this interpretation seems at first sight formidable. The *Meno* does, after all, say that learning and research are *wholly* recollection.⁷ The *Phaedo*, according to this interpretation, claims not only that we all recognize universals in particular sense-perceptions by virtue of our pre-existent knowledge of the forms, but also that we notice that particulars fall short of the forms as copies do of an original. The argument for the immortality of the soul moves from an observation of what we all do towards a deduction of the necessary cognitive wherewithal. Then, from the pre-existence of such knowledge, it moves to the pre-existence of the soul.⁸

The strongest evidence is to be found in the *Phaedrus*. At 249b, during the mythical account of the soul, Socrates talks of the choice that the fallen souls must make every thousand years as to what type of creature they wish to become. Some may choose to turn into animals having been humans; others may turn back into human form after a spell as an animal. But a soul which has never seen the truth can never take on human form, since a man is required 'to understand the language of forms, passing from a plurality of perceptions to a unity gathered together by reason', and this is nothing other than the recollection of the vision which we had before incarnation. The present interpretation very plausibly asserts that the argument of this passage requires anamnesis to explain the cognitive activity of all humans. It is the hallmark of human intelligence to classify the data of sense-perception under universals, and Plato's claim is that this would not be possible if we had not already had knowledge of formal concepts.

Now, according to this interpretation of anamnesis, human understanding is the product of an interaction between the information that our senses give us, that is particular ideas of physical objects, and universal notions, under which we classify our sense-data. This enables us to see both the similarities and the differences between this reading of anamnesis and the Cartesian model of innateness. On both theories there is an innate stock of ideas, or an innate disposition to form ideas that are essential to human conceptual thought. This difference should also be noted: for Plato particular objects in the physical world do have the qualities that we attribute to them in sense-perception, and so we can talk of these particular ideas being organized under universal concepts, whereas on the Cartesian theory the senses merely act as stimulants to the innate ideas, not providing anything of their own as material of the thought.

Platonic anamnesis is now rather Kantian in tone, for just as Kant made intuitions and concepts the two essential sources of our empirical knowledge, Plato (according to this interpretation) uses *aistheta* and our innate knowledge of the forms. Of course,

⁷ *Meno* 81d4–5.

⁸ *Phaedo* 74e ff.

the recollection that we all engage in must be extended into knowledge by the philosopher, but that is the next stage on, and does not upset the 'Kantian' nature of the first one.

I wish to argue, as against this thesis which I shall call 'K' (for 'Kant'),⁹ that Plato was not worried that the senses might be unable to account for human conceptual thought when he proposed his theory of recollection; rather, he was concerned with the movement from beliefs (which presuppose conceptual thought) to knowledge.

My claims need both explication and support from the Platonic texts. I shall start by elaborating them with a fascinating (and, I think, more or less correct) interpretation of anamnesis that is suggested by a fragment attributed to Plutarch:¹⁰ *ὅτι ἔνεισιν μὲν αἱ ἐπιστῆμαι, κρύπτονται δ' ὑπὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἐπεισοδίων ὁμοίως τῇ ὑπὸ Δημαράτου πεμφθείσῃ δέλτῳ*. Herodotus tells us that Demaratus was a Spartan spy working in Persia for the Greeks. To inform the Greeks of imminent invasion, he sent a message written on a wax tablet, but put a 'decoy' message on the wax surface for the Persians, and carved the real message for the Greeks on the wood underneath.¹¹

This analogy is historically interesting: by the time the commentator was writing, empiricist theories about blank tablets had been circulated¹² and so perhaps the Platonist replies as follows: 'Of course you can have your empiricism with its blank tablets etc., since it is true that we derive all sorts of notions and opinions from sense-experience; the point is that these are all deceptive and should be scraped off to reveal what lies underneath.'

Philosophically, it is even more interesting. It presents us with empiricism and rationalism in one theory, the former for opinion, the latter for knowledge. The sensible world, on this story, presents us with a huge number of unreliable opinions that we leave unquestioned (like the Persian readers of the wax tablet). Deep in our soul, however, lies the real message – our innate knowledge of the forms – which can only be recovered if we remove the surface layer. This requires us first to be suspicious of the surface message, to be puzzled by the world of sense-perception (like an astute Persian spy-catcher might have been), and then to reject its claim to be reliable in favour of what lies beneath.

Perhaps the most striking thing about this reading of anamnesis, which I shall call 'D' (for 'Demaratus'), is the rigid separation it makes between the empirical and the rational. Unlike K, it allows us to form any number of opinions, true or false, *before* we even begin to recollect. It emphasizes the element of deception in true Platonic spirit, and it goes hand in hand with the sort of pessimism which says that most of us do not attain knowledge at all. Like the Persians, we are content with the deceptions of the world of experience. Most people, in fact, do not begin to recollect at all.

⁹ It is fascinating to note, however, that one person who dissociates himself from this 'Kantian' view of anamnesis is Kant himself. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* A 313/B 370 he talks of the laborious process of recollection and identifies it with philosophy. Elsewhere, (*Reflexionen zur Metaphysik*, Nr. 6050, in *Kant's gesammelte Schriften* [Berlin and Leipzig, 1928], xviii (5), 434–5), he says that we recollect the ideas *only* with difficulty. It is thus a very recondite affair and Kant's reason for thinking this was that he saw the ideas not as categories or concepts of pure reason, which combine with sensible intuitions to make experience possible, but as far surpassing these and constituting intellectual intuitions of things as they are in themselves, which is a very different matter. In fact, Kant interpreted anamnesis as amounting to no less than a participation in the Divine Intellect.

¹⁰ For the origin of this fragment, see Plutarch's *Moralia* (Loeb), ed. F. H. Sandbach, xv. 388–9; L. G. Westerink, *The Greek Commentators on Plato's Phaedo* (Amsterdam, 1976), ii. 166.

¹¹ VII, 239, 4.

¹² See SVF II 83.

But if recollection is not operative during the process of concept formation, and in human cognitive development in general, how does Plato explain the growth of human reason from bare sense-perception to the ability to form judgements, however unreliable and faulty? Answer: he doesn't, or rather, he rests content with an empiricist theory to account for our formation of opinions,¹³ but is not concerned with the explication of such a theory.¹⁴ His interest is merely in accounting for the development of *knowledge*. There are two sources for our ideas, one from without, the other from within, and it is only the second which is Plato's concern. If Plato is accused at this point of being too narrow, we can point out in his defence that, because of the double-origin theory, questions about how we form empirical judgements can be treated as entirely distinct from the issue of *a priori* knowledge.

Whereas K insists on the co-operation between the innate and the empirical, D forces their separation. We can make 'Kantian' sense of our experience without invoking any innate knowledge of forms: the two cognitive storehouses are thus separate from each other. Both the interpretations agree that there are two sources, but D allows each of the two storehouses to be stocked independently of the other, and so it is in effect superimposing empiricism on rationalism, the former to explain judgements, the latter to account for knowledge. What should now be obvious is the extraordinary boldness of D in its pessimism about the degree to which most people actually recollect – zero. It is a necessary condition of recollection, and so of attaining knowledge, that we rid ourselves of the empirically given, but the problem is that most of us are too impressed by the world of particulars to do this, and so we can never begin to recollect.

K, on the other hand, holds that recollection is not the prerogative of the philosophically earnest, but an essential ingredient of all human thought, be the thinker tyrant, sophist or philosopher. According to this more generous approach, Plato is advancing a thesis that explains our intellectual activity from infancy through to maturity in terms of a continuous path of recollection. One theory, in fact, is made to embrace the earliest glimmers of intelligence and the vertiginous heights of philosophical achievement at once: *all* learning is recollection. Learning includes concept formation, the classification of our earliest sense-experience, and so the formation of judgements. We have to learn something not only to get things right, but also to get them wrong, to make mistakes. All human beings go through such a process of learning, and, according to Plato, all human beings thereby recollect. Not that this is all there is to recollection: this is only the first part. For if the philosopher questions, refines and revises the opinions of common sense, and arrives at the truth, he is in fact completing the process of recollection.

We have seen that at first glance this interpretation enjoys considerable textual support, though most of the evidence that has been appealed to has come from the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus* rather than from the *Meno*. This reflects the fact that the theory of recollection undergoes some important changes between the *Meno* and the *Phaedo* because of the introduction of the theory of forms. The result is that the theory of recollection is clearer, at least in relation to the role of sense-perception, in the later

¹³ There was available an empiricist account of the emergence of knowledge from sensation that is mentioned in the *Phaedo* at 96b, and it has been attributed to Alcmaeon (24 A 11 DK). Its stage-by-stage account – sensation, memory, opinion, knowledge – was echoed by Aristotle (*An. Po.* B19, 100a3 ff. and *Met.* A1, 980a27 ff.) and the Stoics (SVF II 83). On my story, Plato's quarrel with Alcmaeon would have been with the final transition from opinion to knowledge, not that from sensation through to opinion.

¹⁴ Notice Plato's lack of interest in Alcmaeon's theory in the *Phaedo* passage.

dialogue, and so more determinate positions can be gleaned from it. Thus, just as K finds its habitat in the two later dialogues so does D, and it is around the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus* that the battle will be fought. Nevertheless, I shall begin with a brief look at the *Meno*, to show that an embryonic version of D can be found there and that, by contrast, there was never any possibility for K to seep in at the beginning in any form.

(1) The *Meno* 80ff.

In the famous examination of the slave boy in the *Meno*, Socrates provides us with a demonstration of anamnesis in action, and, as he presents it here, there are three stages:

(i) The slave boy comes to realize that what he previously believed to be right was in fact wrong. Thus, after he has elicited a false answer from the boy, Socrates says to Meno at 82e12–13:

Now watch him recollecting sequentially, as one should recollect.

It is between this point and 84a2 that the first stage happens, and at the end of it the slave boy is in *aporia*, but is at least aware that he does not know.

(ii) The slave boy now moves from the *aporia* towards the acquisition of true opinions. Yet when he has these opinions, he does not yet have knowledge (85c6 ff.):

So that he who does not know about any matters, whatever they may be, may have true opinions on such matters, about which he knows nothing?...and at this moment those opinions have been stirred up in him just like in a dream.

(iii) It is in the final stage that knowledge is acquired, as Socrates goes on to say in the passage immediately following the quotation. This stage is mentioned later in the dialogue, at 98a4, when Socrates describes the difference between knowledge and true opinion. When we have tied down an opinion with a ‘causal reckoning’ we convert it into knowledge, and this is nothing but anamnesis.

The theory aims to show that we can attain knowledge and how we can do so, but it shows anamnesis starting only after contact with a certain type of stimulus or catalyst, in this case Socrates. Had the slave boy never met Socrates he might never have started to recollect at all. Anamnesis is thus only invoked to explain the movement from opinion towards knowledge of *a priori* truths. It is *not* used to explain how the slave boy acquired the beliefs and concepts necessary to make sense of what Socrates was talking about when the examination began. Yet this is precisely what K would have anamnesis do: beginning from an analysis of propositional thought into its conceptual components it makes Plato answer a problem about the formation of concepts that make language and thought possible. Yet throughout the whole of our passage Plato shows himself only interested in propositions, and that is because he is proposing anamnesis as the solution to a problem about how we can transcend our opinions and achieve knowledge, rather than how raw sensation can yield any thoughts whatsoever.

Now for a couple of objections to my interpretation. In the first place, it seems to be ruled out by the statement ‘learning and research are wholly recollection’ (81d4–5). But this objection is only damaging as long as we take the sentence at 81d4–5 literally, making *μανθάνειν* co-extensive with our word ‘learn’. And we should be wary of making such a move, as it raises some acute problems for any interpretation. If we take the statement at face value, then should we include *all* learning, ‘learning how’ as well as ‘learning that’? Does Plato include learning how to play the lyre, for

instance? Do we also, under the label of 'learning that', have to include empirical learning and discovery of individual facts? These sorts of question have, of course, already been raised by scholars and commentators, who have argued for various qualifications to be appended to the sentence.¹⁵ But I know of no one who has insisted that 'all learning' is to be taken absolutely literally. What we have to do is to examine what Socrates says about recollection after 81e in order to determine the scope of the theory. It should also be remembered that the theory emerges from a myth, so its initial statement cannot be interpreted as if it formed part of the demonstration that begins with the interview of the slave boy. The answer to the question of what qualifications we should put on the statement of 81d4–5 comes at 85e2: the slave boy can recollect not just about geometry, but also about all the other *μαθήματα* – i.e. scientific disciplines. This provides an important clue to the limitations that we should impose upon *μανθάνειν*: Plato is surely interested in the acquisition of knowledge about *μαθήματα*, of which geometry is a paradigm example.

A second objection to my view is suggested by the sentence at 82b5–6, where Socrates, before the slave boy has even opened his mouth, says to Meno, 'Now see whether he seems to you to be recollecting or learning from me.' Should we not infer that anything that the slave boy says after this is the result of recollection, including the mistakes and false starts that lead him into his *aporia*?

But the comment at 82b5–6 applies to the demonstration as a whole in which there will indeed be some recollection. It need not apply to the immediately following section (to 82d12). In fact, the consequences of its so doing would be disastrous to Socrates' whole strategy in the *Meno*. This interpretation would turn anamnesis into something very much like the midwife story in the *Theaetetus*, where Socrates extracts from his interlocutor a number of *false* definitions which are 'within' him.

Now try saying that when Socrates extracts the false answer from the slave boy he is making him recollect; try saying this while at the same time remembering that Socrates is using the examination to prove to Meno that learning is recollection, as part of his programme to show that inquiry is both possible and worthwhile. Socrates' strategy in examining the slave boy is to take some subject-matter about which both he and Meno know so that they can arbitrate. In the search after virtue, however, there was no one who knew, and so no one to arbitrate. If Socrates can convince Meno that he is not teaching the boy but merely questioning him, and if Meno himself knows the answers, then he may be persuaded that when the slave boy gets it right, he is deriving knowledge from within. But if Meno sees the boy 'recollecting' *false* judgements, Socrates' programme is completely ruined. If we can derive from within ourselves false judgements as well as true ones, we shall need to decide which are which, but how are we to know if we do not already know – or is there to be another process of recollection to help us find out, in which case we have an infinite regress on our hands. Meno's counter-attack would in fact be chillingly similar to the scorn of the 'elenctikos' who sets up the aviary regress in *Theaetetus* (200b). If we can spare anamnesis from falling into these problems, so much the better; and we can – so long as we reject any interpretation that is not content to limit Plato's interests to the

¹⁵ R. S. Bluck, *Plato's Meno* (Cambridge, 1961), 9–10, for instance, argues against including experiences of a previous life into the matter of recollection. G. Vlastos, 'Anamnesis in the *Meno*', *Dialogue* 4 (1965), 143ff., excludes empirical knowledge from Plato's programme. For an extremely severe restriction on the meaning of *μανθάνειν*, see A. Nehamas, 'Meno's Paradox and Socrates as a Teacher', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 3 (1985), 1–30: on his view, the slave boy does not recollect at all, and would only do so if he attained knowledge, not just true opinion.

problem of how the slave boy got the right answers, but wants to make anamnesis explain how he could converse with Socrates in the first place.

(2) The *Phaedo* 72e3–76e7

As far as the *Meno* is concerned, I am only claiming that anamnesis there could not be used to explain the emergence of our pre-philosophical judgements. When we come to the *Phaedo*, however, the introduction of the forms and the two-world ontology allows us to go beyond this negative claim and attribute a more determinate theory to Plato. I wish to claim that the dual ontology is mirrored by the Demaratus analogy of a wax tablet ready to accept the impressions of sense, and underneath it a stock of innate knowledge, knowledge of the forms. So I shall be arguing that the story that I was outlining at the beginning of this essay, though too determinate for the *Meno*, fits the text of the *Phaedo* beautifully.

The first task is to show that the textual basis for the alternative interpretation, K, is not nearly as strong as it may have seemed. The passage in question is 72e3–76e7, where Plato's interest in the theory of recollection is firmly subjugated to his attempt to prove the immortality of the soul, his precise intention being to demonstrate that the soul must have existed before it was embodied. At the beginning of the passage Plato sets out four conditions for recollection: if we are reminded of α by β ,

- (i) we must have known α beforehand (73c2);
- (ii) we must not only recognize β but also think of α (73c7–8);
- (iii) α must not be the object of the same knowledge as β but of another (73c8);
- (iv) when α resembles β , we must consider whether β is lacking at all in relation to α (74a5–7).

Socrates goes on to claim that we compare sensible equal objects with the form, and that this counts as a *bona fide* case of recollection, but we must have got knowledge of the form before we started to use our senses, and the only time could have been before birth; therefore the soul must have existed before birth.

A number of commentators have interpreted this passage as saying that recollection of the forms accounts for concept formation as well as the ability to compare forms and particulars.¹⁶ In attempting to replace this interpretation with D, I shall

¹⁶ It is now time to unmask some of the adherents of K. The most articulate versions come from N. Gulley, 'Plato's Theory of Recollection', *CQ* 4 (1954), 197ff., and *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London, 1962), 31ff; J. L. Ackrill, 'Anamnesis in the *Phaedo*: Remarks on 73c–75c', *Exegesis and Argument, Phronesis*, suppl., vol. I (1973), 177–97, especially p. 192; and David Bostock, *Plato's Phaedo* (Oxford, 1986), 66ff. See also F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London, 1935), 108.

I have said that K interprets anamnesis as explaining concept formation, but just what is meant by 'concept formation' varies depending on how much of our conceptual apparatus different versions of K think is to be explained by anamnesis. The most careful claims are made by Bostock, who argues that recollection accounts for our ordinary and everyday grasp of meanings of those words, such as 'equal', of which there are no paradigm examples provided by sense-perception; it should also be pointed out that Bostock gives a more linguistic slant to the issue than other commentators by talking about 'meanings of terms' rather than 'concepts'. At the other extreme, Gulley (*CQ* 4 [1954], 198 n. 2) thinks that the form of the argument of the *Phaedo* 'almost' implies an unlimited range of forms. This approach is more typical of commentators on the *Phaedrus* where Plato is thought to be talking of the use of universals in language without implying any restriction whatever (see below, n. 44).

Despite the differences between versions of K, I shall mount my attack on them as one body, because I am refuting interpretations which require anamnesis to explain any of our ordinary conceptual apparatus, however limited the range of concepts concerned.

Another point that should be clarified is that it is essentially concept *formation* rather than

distinguish two assumptions that these commentators make, and argue against each in turn. The first, (A), is that the theory of recollection is meant to explain concept formation, the second, (B), that we all recollect to some degree.

As far as (B) is concerned, it is the reference of 'we' that is crucial, but for (A), we should ask, whatever the range of the 'we', whether Plato's interest lies in the fact that we have all formed general concepts which are essential for our ordinary and everyday judgements. There is nothing in the text to say that it does.¹⁷ He never discusses how we originally classified the sticks and stones as equal, nor how it is that we understand the term 'equal' in ordinary empirical judgements about particulars; he takes all this for granted and goes on to concentrate on knowledge of the form 'equal' and the fact that we compare its equality with that of the particulars. These cognitive achievements, which provoke Simmias' exclamation *θαυμαστῶς γε* at 74b1, are quite distinct from and go beyond the ordinary classification under universals.

(A), however, is not merely absent from the text, but is also the source of acute difficulties – difficulties that have been brought out by both Ackrill and Gulley.¹⁸ The problem that Ackrill¹⁹ puts his finger upon concerns (ii) and (iii) out of the four conditions for recollection listed above: Plato is right to point out that if we are to be reminded of α by β , then we must have a recognition of β that does not involve knowledge of α , otherwise the absurdity results that in recognizing β we are already thinking of α , and so recollection of α is impossible. But if we insist that Plato is using recollection to explain concept formation, if, that is, we need to have recollected the form equal in order to recognize this stick's equality, then we invite just that absurdity: in order to recognize the equal stick we already need to be thinking of the form, and so we cannot then go on to recollect it; if, on the other hand, we have not already recollected the form, then, according to (A), we cannot recognize the equal stick as

concept *use* that anamnesis is meant to explain on any version of K. As a theory of learning, it attempts to show how we came to form the concepts that we use, or how we came to understand the meaning of certain terms; inasmuch as the formation of concepts is a necessary condition for their use it contributes to an account of concept use. But I take it that adherents of K are not concerned with the issue of concept use in the sense of how we apply the concepts which we have already formed correctly to objects in the world.

¹⁷ One might think that at 74a9–b3 Socrates is drawing attention to the fact that we all have a humdrum knowledge of equality, i.e. we know what 'equal' means. But the contrast made in 74a9–12 jars with this: 'We say that there is something equal, I don't mean a stone to a stone, or a stick to a stick...' The contrast is between our acknowledging the equality of the form and the equality of the sticks and stones; in 74a10 there is an ellipsis, and that part of the sentence, if filled out, would run: '...I don't mean that we say that a stick is equal to a stick...'. Now it is precisely in such statements as, 'this stick is equal to that one' that our humdrum grasp of the concepts and meanings is manifested, yet Socrates dismisses these as irrelevant to his argument. So these lines cannot be used to show that recollection is to be invoked to solve mysteries surrounding our ordinary grasp of 'equal'.

¹⁸ Gulley (*CQ* 4 [1954] 197–8) paints himself into a corner by saying 'What appears to be envisaged is an immediate transition from the sensible to the intelligible world, the argument relying on a contrast between sensation and a conceptual level of apprehension. Plato is apparently saying that the fact that we attain this conceptual level in describing what is given in sense-experience constitutes recollection of forms.' Gulley goes on to consider the claim at 74c that in being reminded of the form we are gaining *knowledge* of it, which he takes to imply that the immediate transition referred to above is one from mere sensation to philosophical knowledge of the forms, but, as he goes on to say: 'Plato never assumes elsewhere that the fact that we employ concepts to describe what we see is either a mark of knowledge of the forms, or in itself any reliable pointer.'

¹⁹ Ackrill, *op. cit.* (n. 16), 183: 'There may be a lurking problem for Plato's programme. For if recollection is to explain concept-formation, can a pre-condition for reminding be recognition or something akin to it?'

an equal stick, and so, in the absence of any associative bond, it cannot serve as a stimulus for recollection. Either way, recollection of forms from sensible particulars will be impossible. In fact, we find ourselves impaled on a dilemma very much like the paradox in *Meno* 80e, which is a cruel irony, because that was originally the very problem that anamnesis was meant to solve.

If, however, we do not say that reminding is meant to explain concept formation all these problems disappear. Of course, anamnesis does explain concept formation of a very special kind, viz. our knowledge of Platonic forms, but not the formation of those concepts that we use all the time. According to D the concepts that we need to say, 'these sticks are equal' are formed empirically, and recollection has not as yet come into the picture.

One feature of the whole argument that might have tempted us towards (A) is this: why is Plato so interested here in empirical judgements? Normally, in his discussions of the forms and knowledge, he is highly disparaging of the senses, yet here he is not only interested in judgements that combine empirical and conceptual components, but he even says that we get our knowledge of the forms from the senses. In view of what he says elsewhere in the dialogue,²⁰ we seem to have an outright contradiction on our hands. One way out is to say that Plato is not talking about the attainment of philosophical knowledge, but the way in which we classify sensibles under general terms in ordinary use of concepts. D has denied us this escape – what do we do instead?²¹

The first task is to remove the contradiction itself. If we assume that Plato is claiming that use of the senses is a sufficient condition for gaining philosophical knowledge, then he is indeed contradicting himself. But there is no reason why the sentence should be saying more than that use of the senses is a necessary condition for gaining knowledge, i.e. that to start the process off, we must have our memories jogged by sensible stimuli.²²

In fact, Plato has very good reasons for being interested for once in the role that the senses play in the attainment of philosophical knowledge. The argument is seeking to show that learning is recollection. Whereas the *Meno* puts stress on the *innateness* of our knowledge, and then quickly goes on to deduce that learning is recollection,²³ the *Phaedo* makes much more noise about *recollection*, not merely *innateness*. We have already seen how Plato carefully lays down the conditions for recollection at the beginning of his argument. He makes no attempt at all to differentiate between ordinary recollection and the philosophical variety, and we can see why: the closer the two are, the easier it is to see why the soul must have existed before embodiment.

The more specific Plato can be about the nature of the relation between forms and particulars, the better his chances of assimilating recollection of forms to ordinary recollection. Thus when he says that this relation is one of similarity, he can appeal to normal assumptions about recollection to interpret a special case of being caused to think of one thing by something similar. Plato is interested in sense-perception here because it clarifies the notion of the stimulus for recollection, and so enhances his thesis that learning is recollection and that the soul existed before birth.

Once we reject (A) as an unwarranted intrusion on the text, we are already half-way to D: there are two cognitive storehouses, one of which is *a priori* and can be opened

²⁰ 65d11 ff. and 82d9 ff. It is particularly at 75e3 ff. that Plato seems to contradict these other passages.

²¹ For a statement of this problem, see D. Gallop, *Plato's Phaedo* (Oxford, 1975), 121.

²² Socrates is perhaps referring to the necessary role of sense-perception at 83a6–7.

²³ This has been discussed by T. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory* (Oxford, 1977), 315 n. 13.

up by recollection; the other is stocked quite independently of the first. But D goes further than this: it holds that it is all too easy to be taken in by the surface layer, and difficult to uncover the real message, so that most people do not in fact recollect. To say that this is the story that the *Phaedo* is telling involves limiting the reference of the 'we' that appears throughout the passage to the philosophically earnest; this leads us to consider (B), the claim that everyone recollects to some degree.

Let us start by assuming that 'we' applies to everyone and then ask what this process is that K has us all engaging in. Now that we have ruled out understanding by universals, the alternative looks very unappetizing. Any adherent of K would have to admit that Socrates is neither saying merely that we use the terms 'equal', 'good', etc., nor restricting himself to the claim that we recognize that equal objects are, in certain contexts, not equal. He is taking all this for granted and saying that we refer these equals to another which is never unequal, which, of course, involves having the form before our mind. Now to make this claim for all human beings is patent nonsense: it is not merely false, but trivially false at that. Platonists may go around saying that sticks and stones fall short of being like the form of equal, but who else does? If we can avoid trivializing Plato's argument by attributing to him such assumptions, so much the better; and D allows us to do this.²⁴ Furthermore, if Plato did believe that everyone refers sensibles to forms, he certainly went back on it in the *Republic*: when he attacks the *φιλοθεάμονες* he chides them for not believing in the form of beauty itself and for being unable to recognize it (*Rep.* 476b–c).

My second objection to (B) is that although there are certain points at which the reference of 'we' seems unclear, there are others where it must apply only to Socrates' circle, notably at 75d1–5 when he refers to dialectical question-and-answer sessions, and at 76d8 when he says that we are always talking about the good, the just etc. If we try to do justice to this and hold on to (B) we have to make the referents of 'we' veer without any warning between everyone and Platonists. D allows no such unsignalled shifts in reference. True, at 76a5 'we' *does* apply to all men, but this is quite acceptable on D's terms. The insertion of the *πάντες* is very emphatic and is contrasted with 'those who learn' in the next line. These latter people are those who know, i.e. the 'we' of the previous passage (74b9 ff.). Plato has generalized the results of his argument,²⁵ to say that if some people recollect and have known before, there

²⁴ The absurdity of the claim that all men compare equal particulars unfavourably with the equal itself undermines Bostock's (op. cit. n. 16) first argument against an interpretation which limits those who recollect to philosophers. On p. 67 he says that if 'we' is limited to Platonists, then one of the leading premises of the whole argument would be unacceptable to most people, whereas on his view, the argument is supported by a sensible and uncontroversial point that we understand the meaning of the word 'equal' (pp. 70, 72). But when he discusses our humdrum cognitive achievements that Plato is allegedly interested in, he confines himself to 74a–b, and treats 74d4 ff. in a separate section, dealing with it primarily as a metaphysical thesis about the contrast between forms and particulars; he does not explain what humdrum cognitive achievement is being referred to there.

²⁵ Gallop (op. cit. (n. 21), 120) assumes that if the 'we' who actually recollect is limited to a few, then the entire theory is likewise thus limited, as if Plato could not generalize the results of his argument: 'Recollection is not a philosopher's privilege, but, as in the *Meno*, is possible for human beings generally.' But how does Plato in the *Meno* argue that recollection is possible for everyone? He takes one slave boy, shows him actually recollecting, and then assumes that if he can recollect, so can everyone. He has no qualms about generalizing from one case, and hardly expects us to respond 'What a clever and interesting slave, I wonder if anyone else can do this.' Exactly the same strategy is followed in the *Phaedo*: in the *Meno* Socrates' argument depended upon the true opinions that the slave boy acquired during the interview and the certainty that these had not already been learnt in this lifetime; the *Phaedo* parallels this with the Platonists' knowledge of the equal and the certainty that this was not derived purely from

is no reason why everyone cannot have the knowledge implicitly, though there are several good reasons why not everyone recollects,²⁶ and this distinction is preserved in the emphatic contrast of subjects in 76a5–7.

As well as requiring an unsignalled shift in the reference of ‘we’, (B) has to make the verb ‘know’ undergo an alarming change of meaning between 74b2 and 76b8. At 74b2–3, it is affirmed with some enthusiasm that we know the equal, but at 76b8–c3 Simmias agrees that it is far from true that everyone has knowledge of the forms. This apparent contradiction has exercised the commentators considerably. On (B), one would say that at 74b2 ‘know’ means the ordinary knowledge of a concept, but at 76c1–2 it means proper philosophic knowledge of the definition; on D one could agree with the interpretation of 76c1–2, but hold that at 74b2 it only means sufficient familiarity with the form to be able to participate in the question-and-answer sessions referred to at 75d3.

Now, Bostock (op. cit. (n. 16), 67) claims that if we accept (B) we can resolve this contradiction much more easily. In fact, the boot would appear to be on the other foot. Having argued that in the later passage ‘knowledge’ has changed sense to mean the precise knowledge to give an account, whereas before it just meant the humdrum knowledge involved in the grasp of certain meanings, Bostock says that if we restrict those who recollect to Platonists, ‘there must actually be three levels of knowledge in play’: proper philosophic knowledge, humdrum grasp of meanings, and a third intermediate kind which is the prerogative of philosophers, but falls short of precise grasp of the definition (p. 68). His interpretation is preferable, he claims, because it is more economical.

It is, however, false to say that on D there will be three kinds of knowledge *in play*; there will ‘actually’ be three, but only two of them will be ‘in play’, i.e. feature in the passage, as, according to D, the argument makes no use of our humdrum knowledge whatsoever. So the argument from economy bows out, while another one, this time favouring D, takes the stage in its place: the shift of meaning that is made on D is much smaller than the one Bostock proposes, and since there is no signal in the text that ‘know’ has changed sense, this is a mark in D’s favour, because on this interpretation we shift from knowledge needed to conduct a dialectical question-and-answer session to knowledge needed to conduct one with total success. So in this case, unlike (B), where the shift is from the knowledge we all have in usage of concepts to the ability to give a *logos*, we do not move from one sphere of intellectual activity to another that is very different.

On D, however, we can do away with a shift in meaning of the word ‘know’ altogether, and so dissolve the problem completely:²⁷ when Simmias admits that he knows the equal, he means that he, like other Platonists, can give an account of a

perception. In both dialogues these premises are used jointly to prove recollection for one or a small number of cases, from which Socrates then makes a tacit generalization. (Of course, if, in the *Meno*, Socrates made use of an argument to the effect that since someone of such humble origins can recollect so can everyone, then there would be a considerable difference in strategy between the two dialogues. But nowhere in the *Meno* does he appeal to such considerations. What he does make use of is the fact that because the slave boy has always been in *Meno*’s household, they know that he cannot have already learnt geometry (83e3–5). It is not so much that he is a slave boy but that he is *Meno*’s slave boy that matters, as it is this that ensures that the experiment is a controlled one.)

²⁶ See, for example, 83d4 ff.

²⁷ I am following Hackforth here (R. Hackforth, *Plato’s Phaedo* [Cambridge, 1955], 76). Gallop (op. cit. (n. 21), 133) objects to this view because ‘moral and mathematical forms are expressly said to be on a par’ (75c10–d2), but the only way in which all the forms are put on a par at 75c10 is by being objects of dialectical argument, not of knowledge.

mathematical form, but does not concede any more than that. Then, at 75c7 ff., the argument is broadened to include all the forms, but it is not thereby implied that Simmias has knowledge of all of these, but simply that he engages in dialectical question-and-answer sessions about them (see 75d2–3). That, in fact, is all that is needed to argue for recollection, just as in the *Meno* Socrates needs only to show that the slave boy has true beliefs (as opposed to knowledge),²⁸ but the argument for recollection is best introduced by citing the most successful case of this dialectical activity.

But if we are by now in favour of D, we are in for a shock at 76c:

‘You don’t think then that everyone knows those objects?’

‘By no means.’

‘Are they then being reminded of what they once learnt?’²⁹

‘They must be.’

Does this not clear away any speculation that only a limited number of men actually recollect?

A closer look at the logic of the argument, however, will show that these lines cannot be used as evidence against D. It has already been decided that all men have knowledge of the forms before they are born, and the argument is concerned with the choice between (i) ‘We do not forget at birth’ and (ii) ‘We do forget’, i.e. a pair of contradictories, P and $\neg P$. At 75d7–11 Socrates says that a necessary consequence of $\neg P$ is that we know the forms throughout our lives (R). At 75e2–7 we seem to have the same done on P , i.e. a necessary consequence of P is that what we call learning is recollection (S). Socrates goes on to ask Simmias to choose between R and S , and uses an application of the law of the excluded middle. Thus:

$\neg P \rightarrow R$

$P \rightarrow S$

but $\neg R$

therefore S .

On closer inspection, 75e2–7 turns out not to parallel the previous paragraph, because whereas R is the implication of $\neg P$ alone, S is the implication of P and another premise, viz. that we later regain the knowledge that we once had. Now, in the next paragraph, this is preserved exactly, but the second premise is incorporated into the consequent. Thus P and $\neg P$ are as before (as is R), but S is ‘those who learn recollect’, and ‘those’ is contrasted with the πάντες of R . Now there seems little room for doubt that the argument is an application of the excluded middle, as the ἄρα of 76c4 testifies, but if this is so the conclusion is not that all people recollect, but that those who learn recollect. If the argument is to be valid, therefore, the sentence at 76c4 must be consistent with the D thesis, and cannot be used as evidence for K. Plato has simply been careless in his language (as he is at 76a9–b2), and if this conclusion is the price we have to pay to vindicate Plato’s logic, it is a small one.³⁰

²⁸ *Meno* 85c6–7.

²⁹ I am translating ἀναμνησκονται here as ‘being reminded’ rather than ‘are reminded’ as the latter would create a needless contradiction with an earlier passage. If Socrates and Simmias are now concluding that all men recollect, they are contradicting what they have just decided, viz. that not all men know the forms: at 75e5–6 it has been stated that to recollect is to regain knowledge, so if all men recollect, all men know, and this is just what has been denied.

³⁰ Interestingly enough, Hackforth (op. cit. (n. 27), 72) translates 76c4 as ‘Can they then recollect what they once learnt?’.

Two more objections have yet to be answered. First, we should consider one of the more general consequences of accepting D. On K, we might have seen the argument of 74a ff. as attempting to convince the common man of the existence of forms, whereas on my interpretation it assumes them right from the beginning. If Socrates is thus preaching to the converted, is not much of the argument redundant? Not at all. That Socrates is to some extent preaching to the converted is obvious from 65d4 ff. – his interlocutors have already accepted the existence of forms, that is entities each of which exist αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό. They have also agreed that these forms are not to be grasped by sense-perception, but must only be approached by the soul αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτήν. What the argument of 74a ff. goes on to do is to explore some of the epistemological ramifications of what Simmias and Cebes have already accepted. In particular it gives them an explanation as to why these forms are not accessible to the senses, why, that is, we could never have derived our knowledge of the form equal purely from seeing equal sticks and stones.

The second objection is this: even if we grant that in the *Phaedo*, at least, K does not have much textual backing and in fact leads us into appalling difficulties, have we not, in replacing it with D, chosen a highly implausible theory? It seems to claim that all the concepts by which we classify our sense-experience are empirically gained while our grasp of the forms, the *a priori* concepts, is recollected well after we have accumulated sense experience. What is so puzzling, if not outright absurd, is this: if we have these two *distinct* sources, how is it that *both* our empirical concepts *and* our recollected ones are of 'equal'? There must be *some* connection.

There is, but it is not between the two cognitive storehouses. The link which saves D from degenerating into an absurd chain of coincidences is provided by Plato's middle-period ontology. For Plato, there are real properties 'out there' in the particular objects of sense-perception, and there are real separate forms. But it is no coincidence that there is a form of equal and equal objects in the sensible world: the latter participate in the former. Thus the resemblance of particulars and forms is mirrored by the resemblance between our *a priori* knowledge and our empirical judgements. D, in fact, goes hand in hand with the dual ontology of the *Phaedo*.

(3) The *Phaedrus* 248ff.³¹

The passage that concerns us most comes at 249b6–c4:

δεῖ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον συνιέναι κατ' εἶδος λεγόμενον, ἐκ πολλῶν ἰὸν αἰσθήσεων εἰς ἓν λογισμῷ συναιρούμενον· τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶν ἀνάμνησις ἐκείνων ἃ ποτ' εἶδεν ἡμῶν ἡ ψυχὴ συμπορευθεῖσα θεῶ καὶ ὑπεριδούσα ἃ νῦν εἶναί φαμεν, καὶ ἀνακύψασα εἰς τὸ ὄν ὄντως.

Though there are a number of difficulties about the language used, difficulties that have provoked attempts to alter the text, most commentators seem happy to espouse K. Hackforth,³² for instance, interprets the line of argument as follows:

³¹ In what follows I shall be using the *Phaedrus* as a testing ground for D and K in much the same way as I used the other two dialogues. The whole passage is, of course, a myth and so it may be objected that the text requires different treatment and cannot be used 'straight-forwardly' as evidence for a particular interpretation of anamnesis. I emphasize, however, that my specific purpose is to reject K, which means arguing against those who have used the *Phaedrus* myth as evidence. I shall therefore be giving K the benefit of the doubt on this issue, and shall be claiming in effect that *if* one were to use the myth in this way, then it would be D, not K, that emerged as the most convincing interpretation of anamnesis.

³² R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge, 1952).

Plato is careful to insist that the soul of an animal can pass into the body of a man only if the reverse transmigration has preceded (249b4). This has of course already been said, or implied, at 248d1, but the reason for it is now given, namely that only souls which have seen true being in the supra-celestial procession can possess that power of conceptual thought which distinguishes man. If it were possible to imagine a soul starting its existence in an animal, its capacity of thinking when it passed into a man's body could not be accounted for. (p. 91)

Hackforth is joined in this interpretation by Thompson and Vries,³³ and at first glance it seems churlish to disagree. K makes the argument of 249b–c a smooth one, and so we should be reluctant to interfere in such a way as to upset this. If we were to end the story here we would have to say that the *Phaedrus* marks a radical turning point in Platonic anamnesis, since it is now being used to apply to all human conceptual thought. This would, of course, be extremely interesting, but before we rush headlong into accepting it we ought to check that D does not fit the text better than K.

My interpretation, however, appears to make a much less satisfying argument out of 249b–c than K. The crucial sentence now claims that a man must understand (i.e. have knowledge) by recollecting. It does not say that men *do* understand, but that they need to recollect if they are to understand. So far so good; but the argument now proves much less than it did on K's interpretation: it only says that a man who is actually going to become a successful philosopher needs to have seen the forms, and so, surely, souls which have never seen the vision could become human as long as they do not join the Academy. But can there be any doubt that the argument of the passage is supposed to apply to all men?

If D fails because it cannot make the argument work, let us stay with K until 250c6. The next stage in the account comes at 249c4: 'Therefore it is right that only the soul of the philosopher should grow its wings for it is always dwelling upon those things as best it can...' This needs some clarification. According to K, all human souls recollect, i.e. they find unities in the plurality of sense-perceptions, but the philosopher does this to a much more intense degree than everyone else. He is *always* using his knowledge of the forms *to the best of his ability* and so is taking a process that we all engage in to its fulfilment. Strictly speaking, when the text says at 249c1–2 'This is anamnesis...', we should read 'This is the first stage of anamnesis...'. When the philosopher goes on to complete the process that we all begin he becomes an outcast, and is considered out of his mind. So far there seems nothing awkward about following K; we simply have to fill out the text.

But problems arise when we come to 249e4 ff.: 'For as we have said, every human soul has by nature seen the things that are, otherwise it would not have entered that animal. But it is not easy for every soul to be reminded of [the things that are] by those [sc. likenesses].' Socrates is obviously recapitulating 249b5–8, and qualifying it. Some people, he points out, only had a very brief glimpse of the vision, others have consorted with the wrong types since their fall and have forgotten the vision. Few are left with adequate memory.

This passage is uncomfortable for K. When Socrates talks of those who have

³³ W. D. Thompson, *The Phaedrus of Plato* (London, 1868), 55, for instance, says 'It is a law of human understanding that it can only act by way of generic notions...sensibles are *per se* unintelligible'. One scholar who does not follow this line, remarkably enough, is Gulley, who, despite his reading of the *Phaedo*, takes the *Phaedrus* passage to refer only to the philosopher: 'Thus whereas the *Phaedo* argued that the presence of [the possibility of reasoning from sensation to conceptual apprehension] was explicable as recollection of forms, the *Phaedrus* can be consistently interpreted only as a description of a process of inductive reasoning from a number of instances of sense-perception.' (CQ 4 [1954], 201). See also T. Irwin, op. cit. (n. 23), 173.

forgotten by falling into the wrong company, there is no suggestion that they can remember anything at all. But even Plato's pet tyrant can go around classifying as well as the next man. The knowledge that he has forgotten has nothing to do with the wherewithal for human intelligence in general to function. The point of this passage is surely that some people have forgotten everything.

This line of thinking pervades Plato's use of the form-model hypothesis in the *Phaedrus*. The claim is that when some people view a beautiful object, they do not see it as a likeness of the original at all, and so treat it with no respect: the real lover, however, uses the *ὑπομνήματα* correctly,³⁴ i.e. he treats the sensibles as reminders of the vision, not as objects of desire in themselves. We can find further support for this interpretation at 250e ff.: when the real lover recollects, he feels an emotional tug,³⁵ provoked by the divine associations of the form, and his whole attitude is conditioned by this, resulting in his appearing to everyone else a complete lunatic. The non-lover, however, experiences none of this, but acts like an animal³⁶ – i.e. *as if he had never seen the form*. Now there is nothing to say that he cannot classify an object as beautiful; what he does not do is recognize it as a copy of something *else*, which would inevitably conjure up the associations of his previous existence and so bring on the ecstatic pain of the real lover. Recollection involves the conscious awareness of the form, and thus it necessarily carries with it an emotional dimension that is lacking in the case of the non-lover. According to K, however, one stage of recollection is concerned not with the emotional overtones of the lover's experience, but with the mundane process of classification.

The upshot of all this is, I think, that the *Phaedrus* in fact supplies us with some of the best evidence for D³⁷ – were it not for the sentence at 249b. K's account of this, initially attractive though it is, presents us with an anomaly, an excrescence in the context of the whole passage. If we can find an alternative reading, one which accords with D, so much the better. Let us try a more detailed analysis.

This sentence is in fact teeming with problems of translation – unusual phrases and ambiguity in the syntax. As a preliminary I shall do some parsing. The difficulties are such that the editors have felt compelled to emend the text in three places, despite the consensus of MSS.

(1) *λεγόμενον* on its own has been deemed impossible without either *τό* before, or *τι* after.³⁸

(2) *ἴον* has been objected to because it is surely the man, not the form, which goes to the one. Hence the change to *ἴοντ*.³⁹ Accepting both these emendations, Hackforth translates:⁴⁰

...seeing that man must needs understand the language of Forms, passing from a plurality of perceptions to a unity gathered together by reasoning.

Verdenius,⁴¹ however, argues that we can make sense of the text as it stands without either emendation: *λεγόμενον* = *λόγος*, and, in this usage, no article is needed and it is quite admissible to talk of the *λόγος* (= the man) going to the form.

(3) *συναιρούμενον* has been changed to *συναιρουμένων* by those who argue that it is not the form that is collected together, but the sense-perceptions. We can avoid this change either if we take the word as middle, agreeing with the *λόγος*, or as passive, meaning not collected together literally, but 'comprehended', and to say that the

³⁴ 249c7.

³⁵ 251a ff.

³⁶ 250e4.

³⁷ Though see n. 14 above.

³⁸ Heindorf inserts *τό*.

³⁹ Badham, followed by Thompson, op. cit. (n. 33), 55.

⁴⁰ *Plato's Phaedrus* 86 n. 1.

⁴¹ W. J. Verdenius, 'Notes on Plato's *Phaedrus*', *Mnemosyne* (Series IV), 8 (1955), 280.

form is grasped by reasoning is quite familiar to readers of middle-period Plato.⁴² We can now translate the sentence as follows:

For a man must understand an account according to a form, which passes from many perceptions to a one comprehended by reasoning.

So far little of this seems to affect our issue. But what is implied by ‘understand’ (*συνιέναι*)? This can either mean ‘understand something said’ in a casual sense (hence the point about generic terms which are indeed essential to language and rational thought), or we can take it as understanding (i.e. gaining knowledge of) an account according to a Platonic form, not just an innocent generic term. So far there seems to be nothing to push us either way – the language leaves it open.

Things begin to tilt in favour of D in the second half of the sentence. To begin with, *λογισμῶ* is a word that means ‘calculation’ (often in a mathematical sense), implying a deliberate, perhaps laborious, activity, whereas the generalizing processes that K has the text refer to are surely automatic. Second, we are told that the *λεγόμενον* (or the man) goes (*ἰόν*) to the one from many sense-perceptions, which K takes as moving from raw sense-data to the generic terms by which we understand them. According to D, we move away from sensible appearances in this world, leaving them behind, and go on to contemplate the form on its own. From what has emerged from our analysis of the overall context, this is clearly the message of 250ff. What K is sponsoring, however, is not a departure from one to the other, but a synthesis of the two, necessary to generate empirical understanding.

Interestingly enough, Hackforth refers us to *Republic* 476a for a parallel usage of this language of ‘going to the form’. Yet if we look at that passage we do indeed find a parallel, but not one which helps the orthodox interpretation. At 476b10–11, Socrates says that those who would be able to go (*ἰέναι*) to the beautiful itself would be few, and he says this to contrast the philosophers with the lovers of sights and sounds who do not acknowledge the form at all. At 476a4–7 he has just stated in no uncertain terms the one/many distinction, where the many are also called appearances. This seems an excellent parallel for the *Phaedrus* passage, according to D at least: in both cases the philosopher moves away from the many objects of sense-perception to the one form, apprehended by reasoning.

So far I have attempted to show that what is said after the sentence is inconsistent with K, and that the sentence itself internally reads better on D’s terms. We have yet to show how this fits with the preceding argument (249b) – and it was this passage that originally ruled out D. The order of argument that seemed so attractive was this: the possible transmigrations include only the movement from man to animal, or animal back to man. A soul which has never seen the truth will not enter a man because he must understand in generic terms etc. K reads the ‘must’ as meaning ‘It is a fact of human nature that we have rational thought’. All men do in fact understand; all men do not in fact become philosophers, so we dismiss D. The *δεῖ* thus has a declarative force. But this is not the only possible meaning – a more natural translation would be that man *ought* to understand etc., whether he actually does or not: it is his epistemological (and hence moral) duty.⁴³ Man, that is, unlike animals has the

⁴² I am resisting the temptation to read ‘collection’ into this passage (*contra* Gulley, *op. cit.* (n. 33), 200–1). This new turn in Plato’s dialectic has yet to be announced (265d). Furthermore, *συναιρέω* is not part of Plato’s terminology for this procedure – it is not in fact used anywhere else in his works.

⁴³ *δεῖ* is used of our epistemological duty to inquire after what we do not know at *Meno* 86b7.

obligation to become a philosopher, and only a soul which has seen the forms can do this.

The point here is that the sense that K gives to $\delta\epsilon\iota$, and the type of argument that it reads in 249b, although possible, is not the only interpretation that the text allows – the language is quite open to D, and an argument can still be extracted on this reading. Thus the grounds for making a decision must lie elsewhere in the text, and it is at this point that I want to claim that my argument from the context of 250ff. is decisively in favour of D. The *Phaedrus*, in fact, seems to treat the theory of recollection much as the *Phaedo* does, tying it down firmly to the separation of copy and model that is one strand in the middle-period theory of forms.

(4) Plato on the inadequacy of the senses

I wish to round off my examination of anamnesis in the *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus* by pointing out that, as was the case with the *Meno*, Plato is not advancing the theory of anamnesis to overcome the difficulties with which K is concerned. In crediting Plato with a thesis about cognitive development, K is attributing to him a set of problems about the relation between sense-perception and thought, that is not even broached until the *Theaetetus*. According to K Plato points out that to think or say ‘Those objects are equal’ or perhaps even ‘Those objects are horses’,⁴⁴ we need, among other things, the notions of equality and horse, but he apparently thinks that sense-perception cannot give us these common notions, so we must derive them from elsewhere. But where does he state that *this* is the inadequacy of sense-perception, let alone explain why it should be?

When we considered some later innatist theories that are concerned with the *sine qua non* of thought,⁴⁵ we saw that behind them lay certain specific anxieties about sense-perception. In Descartes’ case it was the purely mechanical nature of perception that led him to innate ideas; there were also worries about relational ideas (e.g. the notion of similarity involves a mental process of comparison, and so cannot be derived purely empirically). Now two things are involved in these philosophical positions: first, an analysis of discursive thought (about empirical objects) into a conceptual component and a sensible one, and then reasons why the former could not be derived from the operations of the mind upon our sense-perceptions, without the mind itself contributing some, if not all, of the content.

⁴⁴ A further problem that some versions of K would have to tackle is that of the range of forms. If the *Phaedrus* is meant to explain the use of universals in language, then we do not need only forms produced by an argument from opposites, but also forms corresponding to all universal terms – hair, mud and dirt included. One advantage of embracing D is that we avoid tying anamnesis down to this particular crux. We should note that the only parallel text that K could appeal to for its range of forms in the *Phaedrus* is the notorious, but ambiguous, sentence at *Republic* 596a6–8: $\beta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\epsilon\iota\ \omicron\upsilon\upsilon\upsilon\epsilon\ \epsilon\upsilon\theta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\epsilon\delta\epsilon\ \alpha\rho\chi\acute{\omega}\mu\epsilon\theta\alpha\ \epsilon\pi\iota\sigma\kappa\omicron\pi\omicron\upsilon\iota\upsilon\tau\epsilon\varsigma,\ \epsilon\kappa\ \tau\eta\varsigma\ \epsilon\iota\omega\theta\upsilon\iota\alpha\varsigma\ \mu\epsilon\theta\acute{\omicron}\delta\omicron\upsilon;\ \epsilon\iota\delta\omicron\varsigma\ \gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho\ \rho\omicron\upsilon\ \tau\iota\ \epsilon\upsilon\ \epsilon\kappa\alpha\sigma\tau\omicron\nu\ \epsilon\iota\acute{\omega}\theta\alpha\mu\epsilon\upsilon\ \tau\acute{\iota}\theta\epsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota\ \pi\epsilon\pi\epsilon\iota\ \epsilon\kappa\alpha\sigma\tau\alpha\ \tau\grave{\alpha}\ \pi\omicron\lambda\lambda\acute{\alpha},\ \omicron\iota\varsigma\ \tau\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\nu\ \delta\omicron\nu\omicron\mu\alpha\ \epsilon\pi\iota\phi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\omicron\mu\epsilon\upsilon.$ $\eta\ \omicron\upsilon\ \mu\alpha\upsilon\theta\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\iota\varsigma$; J. A. Smith (‘General Relative Clauses in Greek’, *CR* 31 [1917], 69–71) points out two linguistic difficulties involved in taking this sentence as advocating forms of all universal terms. In the first place, the relative clause that ends the sentence is very unlikely to be a general relative clause: this would have a subjunctive or an optative, or, if an indicative, $\delta\omicron\sigma\iota\varsigma$ for $\omicron\iota\varsigma$ (see W. W. Goodwin, *Syntax of Greek Moods and Tenses* [London, 1889], §§ 532, 534). Second, the $\tau\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\nu$ is ambiguous, meaning particulars having the same name as each other or having the same name as the form. Smith suggests that $\kappa\omicron\iota\nu\omicron\nu\ \delta\omicron\nu\omicron\mu\alpha$ would be a much more natural expression for the former possibility. More work needs to be done on these problems, but as they stand they are sufficient to cast considerable doubt upon the usual claims made for this sentence.

⁴⁵ See above, pp. 346f.

Plato does tackle the first of these issues, not, however, as part of his theory of recollection but much later on, in his analysis of judgement at *Theaetetus* 184b ff. There he makes a distinction between what the mind perceives on its own, and what it perceives by means of the senses, and he argues that certain properties such as hardness are the prerogative of certain individual senses, whereas being, similarity, beauty and some other forms are perceived by the mind on its own. What is involved here is an analysis of thoughts such as 'This *X* is beautiful or useful', or simply, 'This *X* is', from which Plato concludes that at least one component must be contributed by the activity of the mind on its own, and has nothing to do with any of the senses. It is not that the senses are unreliable, but that they are incapable of being used to grasp certain properties. Other philosophers⁴⁶ have gone on to argue about the origin of our ideas of qualities, and have concluded that they cannot be empirically derived, but this is not a part of Plato's programme in the *Theaetetus*.

This passage in the *Theaetetus* is critically important for Plato's development, as it represents a rejection of a view of the senses that runs throughout the middle period,⁴⁷ a view that is an essential part of D. In the *Republic* and the *Phaedo*, the senses are given a more extensive role in conceptual thought such that they are seen as deceivers, i.e. not as dumb witnesses lacking the ability to grasp being etc. This is especially clear in two passages of the *Republic*: 523–4 and 602–3. In the first passage, the senses are said to be reliable when it comes to telling us that this is a finger, because they do not indicate the contrary, whereas with other properties that is just what they do. So, in the case of the judgement 'This is a finger', Plato allows sense-perception a richness that he was to withdraw in the *Theaetetus*; and when he goes on to talk of the inadequacy of perception he does not say that it cannot tell us that the finger is large, but that it tells us that it is both large and small: it can only confuse us because it does have at its disposal, as it were, all the concepts banned by the *Theaetetus*. Thus in allowing the senses to make confused judgements Plato is in fact being very generous to them. Their inadequacy consists in their being cognitively unsound rather than cognitively sterile. In the passage in Book 10, Plato reinforces this view by allocating the confused judgements of sense-perception to one part of the soul, and the cognitively hygienic calculations to another, a division strikingly similar to that of D.

In the *Phaedo*, no less than in the *Republic*, the senses are seen as bewitching and deceiving the mind, so they must have the necessary conceptual richness for this.⁴⁸ Now one place in the *Phaedo* where Plato makes this point is at 83a4–b2, where he differentiates between the mind investigating with the senses and doing so on its own. The terminology, however, is the same as in the *Theaetetus* – and so this might seem to undermine my attempt to align the *Phaedo* with the *Republic* against the *Theaetetus* on this issue. Some clarification is needed.

Despite the similarities of language, there are crucial differences which underline the point I am making. When the *Theaetetus* makes the distinction it does so for cases of ordinary empirical judgements so that in the same sentence there could be a sensible and mental component. In the *Phaedo*, however, the distinction parallels the division between the physical world and the forms, so that when the mind investigates on its own it has left the world of changing objects behind: the parallel is strengthened by

⁴⁶ The Cambridge Platonist Cudworth (op. cit. (n. 2), 100), in the course of arguing for innate ideas, praises *Theaet.* 184ff. as an accurate assessment of the limitations of sense-perception.

⁴⁷ Plato's *volte-face* on this issue has been discussed by M. F. Burnyeat in 'Plato on the Grammar of Perceiving', *CQ* 26 (1976), 29–52.

⁴⁸ *Phaedo* 65a9–66a10, 79a, 83a–b.

⁴⁹ 83b1–2: ... ὅτι ἂν νοήσῃ αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτὴν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ τῶν ὄντων.

the fact that *καθ' αὐτό* is applied both to the soul and to the objects of its study.⁴⁹ In the *Theaetetus* such a departure is not necessary to the distinction. Thus whereas in the *Phaedo* Plato is pejorative about the use of the senses, in the *Theaetetus* there are no such overtones. This helps to align the *Phaedo* with the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*, and any remaining doubts about the autonomy of the senses should be dispelled by this sentence at 83d4–6: 'Because each pleasure and pain fastens the soul to the body with a sort of rivet, pins it there and makes it bodily, so that it judges to be true whatever the body says.'

In recanting his generosity towards sense-perception, and removing from it even the ability to provide unreliable information Plato moved towards a new set of considerations similar to those that K is importing back into anamnesis. This is an anachronism, however, because anamnesis is firmly tied to the middle-period ontology and epistemology. Moreover, this anachronism explains why D, in positing a surface *tabula* that is informed quite independently of the *a priori* knowledge underneath, is bringing out something that is only implicit in the Platonic texts. It was only after the *Theaetetus* that the use of everyday concepts in our thought needed explanation, and as long as it had not been considered problematic no attention would have been given to it. D, on the other hand, was formulated after Hellenistic philosophy had made an issue out of concept formation, and it explicates Plato's theory for the benefit of those considering it from that perspective. So to demand that Plato himself be as explicit as D is unreasonable, and indeed constitutes yet another anachronism.

Plato's theory of recollection emerged from a myth in the *Meno* and disappeared into one in the *Phaedrus*. After Plato, a number of different empiricist positions were developed, one of them by Epicurus, who introduced the technical term *prolēpsis*, to refer to a general notion which could serve as the conceptual component in judgements, and as a criterion of truth to which we can appeal in matters of inquiry;⁵⁰ this was taken over by the Stoics, who preserved its empirical basis.⁵¹ Later on we find moral *prolēpseis* turned innate by Epictetus, and even Platonists used Stoic terminology to describe anamnesis.⁵² Thus the irony is that when interest in innatist theories was renewed, it was influenced by an invention whose creator, Epicurus, was one of the hardest empiricists philosophy has known. The use of Stoicizing terminology spread even beyond antiquity: in the post-renaissance era we find the Cambridge Platonists talking of *prolēpseis*, anticipations and common notions.⁵³

But this Hellenistic influence ran to much more than a matter of terminology: three strands in the theory of *prolēpsis* penetrated deep into the substance of later innatist theories. First, there was the important feature of a *prolēpsis*, whether Stoic or Epicurean, namely that it develops automatically in humans without any care or intellectual labour, and as far as the Stoics were concerned it was out of a stock of *prolēpseis* that reason itself develops. Second, as we have seen, *prolēpseis* acted as the *sine qua non* of conceptual thought. A third, they were criteria of truth – they provided the bases of inquiry, axioms upon which we can all confidently agree, so that knowledge can develop from them as if from seeds.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Diogenes Laertius 10.33; Cic. *De Natura Deorum* 1.45.

⁵¹ For the Stoics on *prolēpsis*, see SVF II 83. There is a dispute as to whether the Stoics believed in innate moral *prolēpseis*, and whether Epictetus is really departing from the earlier Stoa on this point, but I shall not attempt to tackle that issue here.

⁵² The Anonymous Commentator on the *Theaetetus* describes recollection as a process of articulating 'common notions' (47.1–48.11, 53).

⁵³ See Patrides, op. cit. (n. 2), 132 n. 21, and Yolton, op. cit. (n. 2), 36, who points out that Leibniz included the Stoics in the innatist tradition. ⁵⁴ Plutarch, *Comm. Not.* 1060a.

Now make these *prolēpseis* innate and you have the components common to so many of the post-renaissance innatist theories: concepts which are essential to rational thought and automatically formed without any effort by all of us, and (ethical) maxims which form the basis of morality and religion, and which are also easily grasped by everyone. You will also have a theory that is very different from Platonic anamnesis as I have been interpreting it.

The intriguing historical tale that emerges is that the first and perhaps most famous of all innatist theories has remained unique precisely because its successors became infected by the considerations which first emerged from the opposite end of the philosophical world. The final twist in this tale is that the interest in concept formation, of which Hellenistic *prolēpsis* was one of the first and most articulate expressions, is what lurks behind the efforts of so many commentators to remove the theory of recollection from its splendid isolation: in all the Platonic texts considered we have seen that horrendous problems are caused by trying to make anamnesis an explanation of concept formation, yet commentators have been all too happy to embark on such a programme. This remarkable fact bears witness to an almost irresistible expectation that any theory of learning should explain the earliest stages of cognitive development, and it is this expectation that has made it so difficult to appreciate the real motivation and scope of Platonic anamnesis.⁵⁵

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⁵⁵ I have profited greatly from discussions with Gail Fine and Geoffrey Lloyd, and from the comments of the editors, as well as from the reserved agreement of Robert Wardy and the unreserved disagreement of M. M. Mackenzie. My greatest debt, however, is to the maieutic powers of Myles Burnyeat.