

RECOLLECTION AND SELF-UNDERSTANDING IN THE *PHAEDO*¹

Socrates' account of recollection in the *Phaedo* has been the subject of much study, but little attention has been paid to the questions whether and how far his arguments address Simmias' claim that he needs to recollect and be reminded that learning is recollection (73b6–10).² I shall argue that Socrates reminds Simmias by appealing to Simmias' experience of question-and-answer discussion in order to show him how in these discussions they are regaining forgotten knowledge, but have not yet completed this process.

In reminding Simmias that he recollects, Socrates aims to impart to him an understanding of his own soul—its capacities and potential achievements—that will provide a ground for a morality centred on the aspirations of the soul and a motive for continuing in the life of philosophy. Learning that involves the use of perception, and the changed understanding of the soul that comes from awareness of oneself as recollecting are aspects of the separation of soul from body. An examination of them, therefore, throws light on how Plato understood this separation and how he thought it could in fact be practised. Socrates' response to Simmias is a significant part of his attempts throughout the *Phaedo* to bring about a changed self-understanding in his companions' souls. On his success or failure in these attempts depends to a large extent the fate of their souls after his death.

I. MENO AND SIMMIAS

Socrates' arguments for recollection in the *Phaedo* differ in several respects from the demonstration with the slave-boy in the *Meno*. Some differences lie in the relations of Meno and Simmias to the arguments. Meno listens to Socrates' argument and observes the experiment of recollection in another, his slave-boy. He appears to assent to Socrates' conclusion, but does not apply the thesis to himself. For in persisting with his original question, whether virtue can be taught (*Meno* 86c4–d2), he reveals that he does not see the implications of treating learning as recollection. For he accepts the argument that since there are no teachers of virtue, it cannot be taught. But the absence of teachers in the conventional sense is irrelevant to learning as recollection. Nor does he apply to himself Socrates' inference from the recollection-thesis—an inference that begins to answer the question what virtue is—that we shall be better, braver and less lazy if we persist in seeking and if we do not believe that we cannot find and ought not to seek what we do not know (*Meno* 86b1–c2).³ Simmias, by contrast, wishes to apply the thesis of recollection to himself.

¹ I am very grateful to David Sedley for his comments on an earlier draft of this article.

² Three scholars who give weight to Simmias' words are Monique Dixsaut, *Platon Phédon: traduction nouvelle, introduction et notes* (Paris, 1991), pp. 343–5, who contrasts Simmias, who is aware of the need to apply the recollection thesis to himself, with Kebes, who uses the thesis not to draw implications about his own learning but to argue to immortality; Carlo Huber, *Anamnesis bei Plato* (Munich, 1961), pp. 347–52, who argues that recollection is fully understood only through reflection on one's own learning; and C. J. Rowe, *Plato Phaedo* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 163–4, who takes the point of the repeated reference to Simmias' being reminded to be that in the *Phaedo*'s account of recollection something acts as a reminder.

³ These points are drawn from K. V. Wilkes, 'Conclusions in the *Meno*', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* LXI (1979), 143–53, at 146–7.

He asks first to be reminded of the arguments for recollection, but he is not completely satisfied (73b8–10) with Kebes' summary of the arguments from the *Meno* (73a7–b2). This summary treats the arguments as proceeding, from the observation of another giving correct answers, to the conclusion that the recollection-thesis is true of all people. Simmias wants more than this: he wants to be reminded that learning is recollection (73b4–7). In response, Socrates treats Simmias as seeking to apply the recollection-thesis to himself. He bases his argument on matters that he treats as already familiar to Simmias: everyday examples that illustrate and support his general description of recollection (73c4–74a8); the Equal itself and how they acquired knowledge of it (74a9–c9); the comparison they make between equal objects they perceive and the Equal itself (74d4–75a2, 75a11–b8, 76d7–e2); their practice of question-and-answer discussions (75c7–d5); their use of perception in (re)gaining knowledge of Ideas (75e1–76a4). Unlike *Meno*, Simmias, if he is persuaded by Socrates' arguments, is to see recollection as something that he has been and can continue to be engaged in. Unlike *Meno*'s slave-boy, he does not now recollect something for the first time, but turns out, if Socrates' arguments are valid, to have been recollecting for some time. If Simmias accepts all this, it will make a difference to his understanding of his own soul and of what he is doing in learning.

II. SOCRATES' DESCRIPTION OF RECOLLECTION, AND THE EVERYDAY EXAMPLES

The everyday examples of recollection are introduced as a clarification of Socrates' description at 73c6–d1. Thus they serve to remind Simmias of what ordinary recollection is. In so doing they add features not given in Socrates' description. When the lessons of the description and of the everyday cases are applied to acquiring knowledge of the Equal (74c9–d1), similarities as well as contrasts between the two kinds of case make clear which features of acquiring knowledge of Ideas constitute this as recollection.

The necessary condition for recollection is that one has prior knowledge of what one recollects (73c1–2). 'In the examples about Simmias and lyres', Ackrill writes,⁴ 'it is all too easy just to assume the condition of prior knowledge to be satisfied.' It is precisely because prior knowledge can be taken for granted in the everyday examples that I suggest that Plato intends the condition of prior knowledge to be taken together with the description Socrates gives of recollection at 73c6–d1. Consequently it is not this description on its own that gives sufficient conditions for recollection but this description together with the condition of prior knowledge. In the account of how we acquire knowledge of the Equal itself, by contrast, prior knowledge is not taken for granted or inferred from the occurrence of recollection, but is argued for.⁵ The description of recollection runs: 'If someone on seeing, hearing or in some other way perceiving one thing not only recognizes that thing but also thinks of another of which the knowledge is not the same but different, are we not right to say that s/he has recollected the object s/he thought of?' (I shall use *p* for the object perceived and *r* for the object recollected.) Ackrill (pp. 182–3, n. 4) drew attention to the importance of the often neglected condition that one recognize *p*. If perception of *p* is to remind one of *r*, then *p* must be recognized in such a way that it can be a reminder. That means

⁴ J. L. Ackrill, 'Anamnesis in the *Phaedo*: Remarks on 73c–75c', pp. 177–195 in E. N. Lee, A. P. D. Mourelatos, and R. Rorty (edd.), *Exegesis and Argument* (Assen, 1973), at p. 187.

⁵ This is my reason for rejecting Ackrill's account of Plato's strategy: to set up sufficient conditions for recollection that do not include the necessary condition of prior knowledge; to

that recognition of p must be adequate to put one in mind of the link between p and r . For it is clear from the examples, although not stated in the conditions, that there is some link between each p and r and that awareness of this link is a part of the explanation why someone who perceives p recollects r and indeed recollects the particular r that is linked to this p . The lyre, horse or cloak that the lovers see, or of which they see pictures, are variously described as things that the beloved boy uses or that belong to the boy (73d5–8). The picture is a picture of Simmias (73e9–10). Although no connection between Simmias and Kebes is spelt out, a close friendship is implied. In some of the examples awareness of the link between p and r probably does not form part of the recognition of p . Kebes is recognized as Kebes and not as Simmias' friend Kebes; the picture is recognized as a picture of a cloak, a lyre or a horse, and not as a picture of this boy's cloak, lyre or horse. In other examples Socrates' language leaves it unclear whether awareness of the link enters into the recognition of p . The lovers might recognize the lyre as a lyre or as this boy's lyre. But for the example that comes closest to recollection of Ideas, recollecting Simmias on seeing a picture of Simmias, to recognize this as a picture of Simmias is to be aware of the relevant link between the picture and Simmias, namely that this is a picture of Simmias. The Greek expression for the picture of Simmias, *Σιμμίας γεγραμμένος*, makes it even clearer that in recognizing Simmias drawn, one has some thought of Simmias. So, in recognizing the picture one necessarily has some thought of Simmias. Ackrill (pp. 182–86, n. 4), argues that in this example the condition that knowledge of r is different from knowledge of p is violated. For one who recognizes this as a picture of Simmias necessarily has Simmias in mind. So recognizing this as Simmias' picture cannot prompt a further bringing of Simmias to mind. Then, if the example of recollecting Simmias on seeing his picture is analogous to the putative case of recollecting equality on seeing equal objects, one who sees and recognizes some objects to be equal has some thought of equality. Therefore seeing and recognizing equal objects cannot prompt a further bringing of equality to mind. If Ackrill is right, then Plato's argument that perception of equal objects prompts recollection of equality is fatally flawed.

Akrill, however, is not right. He identifies recollection with bringing to mind. But this identification is not necessary in the everyday cases, nor is it appropriate for the recollection of Ideas. The general point, applying to everyday examples and to Ideas, is that we need to distinguish between being put in mind of or thinking *of* r and thinking *about* r . Recollection of r is not limited to being put in mind of r ; it includes recovering knowledge of facts about r . This knowledge covers more than whatever thought of r may be involved in the recognition of p . So the occurrence of a thought of r in the recognition of p does not violate the condition that the knowledge of r is different from the knowledge of p . I shall argue later, following Scott,⁶ that recollection of Ideas is a lengthy process of reacquiring knowledge, so that even to think *of* an Idea is not all there is to recollecting it, nor is to think *about* an Idea to complete the process of recollecting it. I turn first to the everyday examples in order to argue that recollection is weighted towards recovering knowledge of facts about r .

Someone who recognizes this as a picture of Simmias must have some antecedent knowledge of Simmias, sufficient to pick this picture out as of Simmias rather than

argue that the sufficient conditions obtain when one comes to knowledge of the Equal itself; to conclude that one thereby recollects the Equal itself; and thence to infer that the necessary condition, prior knowledge of the Equal itself, obtains.

⁶ Dominic Scott, *Recollection and Experience: Plato's Theory of Learning and its Successors* (Cambridge, 1995).

someone else. This using of antecedent knowledge involves having some thought of Simmias, but it does not necessarily involve thinking *about* Simmias. The latter is more important in recollection as Socrates is delineating it. This becomes plain if we consider the other examples of recollection prompted by seeing a picture. Someone sees a picture of Simmias and recollects Kebes. In this example, one recognizes this as Simmias' picture, but Socrates does not say that one has recollected Simmias. Nor does he say that when one recollects a person on seeing a picture of a cloak, lyre or horse, one has recollected the cloak, lyre or horse. Socrates is distinguishing between such cases, with whatever thought of the pictured object is involved in recognizing the picture, and recollection of the object/person pictured. The kind of distinction he is using is also brought out in the example of the lovers who see the lyre and recollect the boy. Even if they recognize this as this boy's lyre and therefore are thinking of the boy, to recollect is to think of the shape or form of the boy (73d7–8). This looks like some aspect of thinking about the boy. Similarly, recollection of Simmias will go beyond the thought of Simmias involved in using one's antecedent knowledge of him in recognizing the picture. My interpretation is also borne out by Socrates' claim (73e1–3) that thinking of *r* is most especially recollection when *r* is something that through time and non-attention we have forgotten. In the everyday examples, where those who recollect have not forgotten, salient facts come readily to mind. If we rethink the everyday examples on the assumption that those who recollect have long forgotten what they recollect, it becomes clear that the content of what they recollect need not be included in whatever thought of *r* may be involved in the recognition of *p*. Socrates' very introduction of the proviso about forgetting into the everyday cases to which it does not apply serves to highlight the fact that it does apply to the Ideas (76a–c). If recollection of Ideas is a matter of a lengthy process of relearning, then it is more likely that the content of what is recollected differs from any possible thought of Ideas involved in the perception and recognition of particulars. The distinction that I claim Plato is making is doubtless a rough one, although clear enough in the everyday cases. We might cavil at his weighting recollection to the thinking-about side of the distinction. But Plato is not recording or clarifying ordinary usage so much as adapting it to the kind of recollection he wishes to argue for in the case of the Equal and other Ideas.⁷

It is clear that the example of recollecting Simmias on seeing a picture of Simmias comes closest to the recollection of the Equal and other Ideas. Just as each Idea shares a name with the corresponding perceived objects, so Simmias and his picture are both called *Simmias*. One is Simmias and the other is Simmias drawn/pictured (73d8–e10). Ordinary language makes a distinction, the analogue of which Socrates and his companions draw by distinguishing between objects called equal, large, good or whatever, and the entities to which they attach the seal, 'the very thing that is' equal, large, good or whatever (75c7–d3). By this device Socrates and his companions are pointing to the primacy of Ideas over perceived things that corresponds to the position of Simmias as the source of the name of his picture. Now, in the everyday example, the link between object perceived and object recollected is a subject to be reflected upon. 'When one recollects something from similars, is it not necessary also to think whether this [*p*] does or does not fall short in respect of similarity of that which one has recollected [*r*]?' (74a5–7) The analogue to this thought in the case of Ideas is, as I shall argue, the judgement that perceived objects wish and strive to be

⁷ Ackrill explicitly cites the distinction between being put in mind of *r* and thinking about *r* (n. 4, pp. 185–6) but refuses to count thinking about *r* as recollecting.

such as the Idea, but fail and fall short. This judgement, as I shall also argue, is a part of the activity of using perception in recovering knowledge of the Ideas. It is a notoriously vexed question what Socrates means by 'thinking whether this [*p*] does or does not fall short in respect of similarity of that which one has recollected [*r*]'. It is best approached by comparing this example with the case when someone sees a picture of Simmias and recollects Kebes.

Socrates does not hint that there is anything problematic or giving rise to doubt in seeing and recognizing Simmias pictured. One is in no doubt that it is Simmias rather than someone else and that it is a picture. Someone who sees and recognizes the picture must be using some antecedent knowledge of Simmias. Just as when they recollect Kebes on seeing Simmias, so in the present case when they see not Simmias but his picture, their knowledge of Simmias must be sufficient to make them aware of the link between him and Kebes. But because they recollect Kebes and not Simmias, they are not attending to the fact that Simmias is distinct from the picture nor are they recalling any facts about Simmias. The emphasis is on their seeing and recognizing *Simmias* pictured, and because it is *Simmias* pictured they recognize, they go on to think about Kebes. When, in contrast, on seeing Simmias' picture they recollect not Kebes but Simmias, they are not merely having that thought of him that is involved in their recognizing *Simmias* pictured, they are thinking about Simmias. Their doing this implies that they are distinguishing Simmias from the picture before them. There is a shift of emphasis. They now see and recognize Simmias *pictured*. Some interpreters take Socrates to be referring only to the distinguishing between Simmias and his picture. To think whether the picture falls short of Simmias or not in similarity is to think that Simmias and the picture are distinct.⁸ On this interpretation what one must think in the everyday example corresponds to accepting the conclusion of Socrates' argument (74b6–c6) that the perceived equal objects are different from the Equal itself. This interpretation has the advantage of being something that one has to think under the circumstances. It also brings out a further correspondence between the final example and recollection of Ideas. For the final example is the only one of the everyday examples in which the question arises of distinguishing between the perceived *p* and the recollected *r*. This corresponds to becoming aware that the Equal itself is distinct from any perceived equal objects. But Socrates' expression that one must think whether *p* 'falls short or not in similarity' suggests that something more is involved. His words suggest, in Ackrill's phrasing, that one must consider how good a likeness the picture is. Plato, I think, wants the example of Simmias and his picture to cover both the awareness that the picture is a likeness and the weighing up of how good a likeness it is. His reason for wanting this is that he treats recollection of Ideas as containing both awareness that Ideas are distinct from perceived objects and a comparison between Ideas and perceived objects in the course of recovery of knowledge of Ideas.

Plato wants the everyday case to illuminate the recovery of knowledge of Ideas, but this original knowledge has been long since forgotten (75e–76c). Imagine, then, the case in which someone has neither seen nor thought of Simmias for many years; the kind of case that Socrates says is especially recollection (73e1–3). They recognize the picture as being of Simmias and go on to think about Simmias. While they do not need to compare the picture to their memory of Simmias in order to think of him as distinct from the picture, they may need to make this comparison in order to recover

⁸ J. C. B. Gosling, 'Similarity in *Phaedo* 73 seq.', *Phronesis* 10 (1965), 151–61, is the best-known argument for this interpretation.

any clear idea of Simmias. If they are trying to recover knowledge of, for example, how Simmias looks, one resource is to use the features of the picture to summon up memories. The features of the picture can be judged against the memories, and by this process the memories can be improved and be brought closer to how Simmias in fact looks, while the adequacy or otherwise of the picture as a likeness can be better assessed. (That the comparison in my story is between picture and memories has an important analogue in the comparison of perceived objects to Ideas. I come to this towards the end of the article.) This is a plausible interpretation of Socrates' words at 74a5–8, when they are set in the context of recollection of someone long-forgotten; it is plausible also if Plato is already anticipating features of the reacquiring of knowledge of Ideas. On this interpretation of Socrates' comments, the reflection on picture and original is the analogue to the comparison between perceived objects and the Equal of which he talks at 74d4–e45, as well as at 75a1–3, a11–b2, and 75b7–8. For this comparison is, as I shall argue, at least a principal part, and perhaps all of the use of perception in regaining knowledge of Ideas, to which he refers at 75 e2–5.

III. RECOLLECTION OF THE EQUAL AND OTHER IDEAS

Socrates addresses his arguments for recollection of the Equal and other Ideas to one who holds the thesis that there is such a thing as the Equal itself, the Beautiful itself and so on, and who has made some progress in dialectical discussions towards gaining knowledge. He bases his argument on what Simmias accepts about Ideas (74a9–b1, 75c10–d3, 76d7–9), and he argues from the practice of discussion with which Simmias is familiar (74b2–6, d4–7, e6–75a3, 75a10–b8, c10–e7). While others might examine the relations between the existence of Ideas, Socrates' account of learning and the recollection-thesis, only those who, like Simmias, accept that there are Ideas and have made some progress towards gaining knowledge of them, are in a position to conclude that they themselves have been recollecting.⁹

At 74a9–c10 Socrates advances all but one of the claims he needs in order to assimilate the learning of the Equal to everyday examples of recollection. The one missing claim is the requirement of prior knowledge, for which he argues at 74d4 ff.:

1. They agree that there is such a thing as the Equal itself (74a9–b1).
2. They know what it is (74b2–3).
3. They acquired knowledge of it from perceiving equal objects (74b4–6).
4. The Equal itself is different from the equal objects from perception of which they get knowledge of the Equal (74b6–c10).

He then concludes that to gain knowledge of the Equal itself under those circumstances, whether the Equal itself be similar or dissimilar to perceived equal objects,¹⁰ is to recollect the Equal (74c11–d3).

⁹ Scott (n. 6), has shown how throughout the argument from 74a9–76e7 every occurrence of the first-person plural, even in its context the statement at 74b10–11 that we began to perceive at birth, refers to those who believe in Ideas and engage in dialectical discussions. The conclusions about pre-existence of 'our' souls may then be generalized to cover all human souls, on the grounds that while only a few engage in recollection, all are capable of it, even though the distractions of this life normally prevent them from doing what they are capable of.

¹⁰ The reason why Socrates leaves it open whether the Equal is similar or dissimilar to perceived equal objects is probably that he thereby takes account of its being analogous to the everyday case of perception from similars in that a particular kind of comparative judgement about what is perceived and what is recollected accompanies the recollection, but the distinctive

Just as elsewhere in the *Phaedo* the existence of Ideas is accepted without argument (65d4–7, 78c10–d8, 100b4–c2), so here too Simmias accepts that there is such a thing as the Equal itself. Of the other claims, only claim (4) is argued for within this passage, at 74b6–c6. Claim (2) may represent a rash agreement on Simmias' part, confusing the possession of some notion of equality adequate for some mathematical purposes¹¹ with full knowledge of Equality. If so, he is to be corrected by his later realization that no one, except perhaps Socrates, has knowledge of any Idea (76b10–12). Alternatively, his agreement may be justified in the case of mathematical Ideas. At any rate, as Scott argues (pp. 67–8, n. 6), all that is necessary for Socrates' argument as it applies to Ideas in general is that Simmias should have some notion of them adequate for taking part in dialectical discussions. For since Socrates treats the regaining of knowledge of equality and other Ideas as a lengthy process, all he needs is to be able to show that some advance has been made in this process through the use of perception. From 74d4 onwards he does argue for (3) and for just such a modified version of (2). His argument for them is that in their question-and-answer discussions they are seeking to acquire knowledge that they once had but have forgotten. This argument depends on the thesis that they have prior knowledge of the Equal and other Ideas. This thesis, which is of course the necessary condition for recollection, is the first thing he establishes at 74d4ff. Thus, the passage from 74a9 to d3 is not complete in itself as a defence of the thesis that we recollect Ideas. Some crucial parts of that defence are argued for subsequently and in these arguments the nature of the recollection and the role of perception in recollection are further explicated.

Socrates' argument for claim (4) has generated a vast amount of scholarly literature. It would unbalance this article to enter into this debate. Fortunately I need not do so. A major part of the debate turns on the interpretation of the claim that equal objects sometimes $\tau\hat{\omega} \mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu \textit{\text{ἴσα φαίνεται, } \tau\hat{\omega} \delta' \omicron\upsilon\text{ῖ}}$ (74b8–9). It will become evident from my interpretation of the arguments about recollection at 74d4ff. that this property of equal objects, however it ought to be understood, is not the way in which perception is used in recollection of the Equal itself. This use of perception is closely related to the comparative judgement that equal objects wish to be such as the Equal itself but fall short. On the interpretation of recollection for which I shall argue, the judgement that equal objects appear equal and unequal is not the same judgement as the comparative judgement that objects perceived equal wish to be such as the Equal itself but fall short. If my interpretation can be sustained, the analysis of the much vexed passage 74b7–c6 is not relevant to the analysis of recollection as relearning or to Socrates' way of reminding Simmias that he recollects. I shall therefore simply take claim (4) as established.

Socrates argues to prior knowledge of the Equal from their making a comparative judgement about objects perceived equal and the Equal itself, that the objects they perceive strive/desire to be such as the Equal itself, but are unable to and fall short (74d4–75a2). They make this judgement about particular sets of equal objects and they generalize it to cover all objects perceived equal (75a1–3, a10–b3, b7–8). Whether made about particular objects or all equal objects, this judgement compares objects perceived equal and another entity, the Equal itself. That they make this judgement implies that they had knowledge of the Equal before they made it. I aim to explain the

relation between Ideas and perceived objects is neither straightforwardly similarity nor dissimilarity.

¹¹ I take this possibility up below when I make use of Brown's argument that Plato is alluding to disputes among mathematicians about the definition of equality. See Malcolm S. Brown, 'The Idea of Equality in the *Phaedo*', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 54 (1972), 24–36.

content of this judgement, in what sense and under what conditions objects perceived equal strive to be such as the Equal but fall short; I aim also to show what role making this judgement has in recollection. Their making this judgement is described as referring what they perceive to Ideas (75b6–7, 76d9–e1). I shall show what the relation is between this description of their activity and the particular form that the comparative judgement takes. In order to achieve all this I have to examine the context of discussion within which they refer what they perceive to Ideas, and to argue that this referring to Ideas is in fact the use of perception in recovery of knowledge, to which Socrates refers at 75e3–5.

Plato certainly does not imply that all people make the comparative judgement or refer what they perceive to Ideas; for most are too distracted by their physical concerns to entertain any notion of the Equal, let alone the Pious or the Just, as things distinct from what they perceive around them. His words at 74d5–6 are therefore to be taken strictly: in saying that objects perceived equal strive to be like the Equal but fall short, Socrates is talking of the way in which he and his circle see these objects. Most people simply do not see equal objects in that way. Socrates and his circle, then, make this comparative judgement¹² about equal objects and the Equal. In what contexts do they do this? As soon as he has argued that their making this judgement implies that they had knowledge of the Equal before birth, Socrates asserts that they had knowledge before birth not only of the Equal, the Large and the Small, but also of the Beautiful, the Good, the Just, the Pious and all things that in their question-and-answer discussions they mark with the seal 'the very thing that is' (75c7–d5). If the argument applies to all these entities, Socrates must be implying that they make the comparative judgement about and refer perceived objects to these Ideas. This reveals why Simmias accepts that they make the comparative judgement: it is familiar to him from the practice of question-and-answer discussions in which he engages. Now, the reference to question-and-answer discussions, when set in the context of Socrates' earlier descriptions of the philosophic life as one that investigates the nature of these entities (65d4–66a8), implies that through these discussions Socrates and his circle are attempting to give accounts of the nature of these entities. (I set aside questions about just what it is to give an account.) The next stage of the argument (75d7ff.) shows that in attempting to give accounts of the Equal and other Ideas they are regaining knowledge they have forgotten. Socrates presents Simmias with the alternative that either we have never forgotten the knowledge of the Ideas that we acquired before birth, or we have forgotten it and later regain it (75d7–e7).¹³

Making the comparative judgement and in consequence possession of ante natal knowledge are compatible with both alternatives presented to Simmias. For if they have never forgotten the knowledge, they can still make comparative judgements and compare two kinds of entity, provided that they perceive one of the two types of entity and have prior knowledge of the other. They would be in a position analogous to that of the lovers who recollect the boy on seeing his lyre. The lovers have not forgotten the boy when they are not thinking of him. Nor do they need to recover knowledge of him. Similarly, the one thing Socrates and his circle would not need to do if they had

¹² Scott (n. 6, pp. 59–60) correctly argues that Socrates' description of the comparative judgement makes it unlikely that he is talking about our everyday application of such concepts as equality. But he then passes without sufficient supporting reasons, so far as I can see, to the conclusion that Socrates is therefore talking about learning.

¹³ Simmias' hesitation over which alternative to accept may be intended by Plato to emphasize the importance of the alternative he is brought by Socrates' arguments to accept, as it may also emphasize the difference between this and the everyday cases.

never forgotten the Ideas is regain their knowledge of them. They would simply be calling to mind things that were temporarily not before their attention. In this calling to mind they would be comparing the equal objects they perceive to the Equal they recall to their minds.

The reason for which Simmias accepts that they have long forgotten the knowledge they once had is that no one, except perhaps Socrates, can give an account of any Idea (76b4–c3). This reason, which decides the case in favour of their regaining and, for the reasons already examined, recollecting their lost knowledge, also determines that none of them, except perhaps Socrates, has succeeded in completely recollecting any Idea. Thus, the use of perception as a reminder is not limited to some one occasion. For then perception would only put one in mind of the Idea; it would not be used in the regaining of knowledge. In this respect recollection of Ideas differs from the everyday examples of recollection, except the final example, where on one interpretation examination of the picture helps in the recovery of memories about a long-forgotten Simmias.

If in their discussions they are regaining prior knowledge that they have long since forgotten, the reason why this regaining of knowledge is recollection is that they have already established that it is recollection when from the perception of one thing they are reminded of another to which the perceived thing, whether similar or dissimilar to it, approximates/approaches (*ἐπλησίαζειν*¹⁴). This description of recollection refers to the comparative judgement that perceived objects strive to be such as the Idea. This implies that the comparative judgement has a role in that regaining of knowledge. But he has just described the regaining: 'using perceptions we regain the knowledge we formerly had' (75e3–5). Consequently the comparative judgement is involved in the use of perceptions in the regaining of former knowledge.

The discussion so far has shown that the comparative judgement, describable as referring perceptions to Ideas, has a role, presumably an important one, in the use of perception within recollection of Ideas. This recollection occurs as a lengthy process within the discussions that Socrates and his circle hold about the nature of the Ideas. My next task is to propose an account of the ways in which perception was used within these discussions and consequently to show how these uses are related to the referring of what is perceived to Ideas, and to the comparative judgement that what is perceived wishes to be such as the corresponding Idea but falls short.

The practice of question-and-answer discussions is treated by Plato as sufficiently familiar to Simmias that he will accept that they use perception in regaining knowledge. Perhaps this practice was also sufficiently familiar to some of his intended readers. For other readers and for us it is necessary to try and reconstruct just what it is about their practice that involves the use of perception. I set the discussion within the broader context of the repeated warnings given by Socrates earlier and later in the *Phaedo* against the capacity of perception to mislead the mind enquiring after the truth.

If recollection of the Equal were only a matter of coming to think of the Equal or coming to think that there is such a thing, then for perception to function as a reminder, one need only become aware of some difference between perceived equal objects and the Equal itself. In that case the judgements that equal objects appear equal and unequal, while the Equal itself never appears unequal, would capture all

¹⁴ The imperfect is problematic; it implies at least the uncompleted approximation of perceived objects to ideas. The past tense may perhaps be used because Socrates is referring to what was clear, *ἐφάνη* (76a1) at an earlier stage of the argument.

that would be involved in the use of perception in recollecting the Equal itself. But for perception to make a contribution to the process of reacquiring such knowledge of the Equal that one can give an account of it, more seems to be required than the judgement that equal objects also appear unequal and consequently are different from the Equal. So, the comparative judgement cannot be the judgement that perceived equal objects appear unequal, not even when that judgement is made in the course of the attempt to regain knowledge of the Equal.

One important feature of recollection of Ideas is that it proceeds from perception of objects that correspond to particular Ideas. From perception of equal sticks one recollects the Equal, not some other Idea. It is to the Equal and not to some other Idea that they refer perceived equal objects (74c13–d2, 74e6–7, 75b4–8). The equal objects seem to strive to be such, but fall short of, not any or all Ideas, but the Equal (74d4–8). It is reasonable to generalize this correlation between perceived objects and the corresponding Idea to all the Ideas mentioned by Socrates in his account of recollection. From perception of beautiful objects one may recollect Beauty, rather than some other Idea, and so forth. The fundamental correlation between Ideas and the corresponding particulars that Socrates posits later in the *Phaedo* is that the appropriate Idea is the cause of particulars having such properties as being beautiful, being equal, being large. This suggests an ideal according to which one who fully understood each Idea would be able to recognize in the particulars the quality imparted by each Idea and would give the name of the Idea only to those entities in which they saw this quality. This ideal has not been attained by any member of Socrates' circle. Those who are far from understanding each Idea could seek a better grasp of its nature by trying to pick out in particulars features that are the effects of the Idea. But how could they identify the effects of the Idea rather than plausible seeming features that have nothing to do with the Idea? The answer is that they would select and judge perceived features against their best conception of the Idea. In doing this, they would seek an improved conception of the Idea, one that comes closer to the Idea as it is. On the basis of this improved conception they would then make a different discrimination of the features that are the effects of the Idea. I shall try now to illustrate and justify this answer.

I start with the use of perception in recollecting the Equal. The way in which Socrates introduces the Equal, by contrast to stick equal to stick, stone equal to stone, etc. (74a9–11), suggests that he is treating perception as of relations. Some might identify equality with particular pairs or specific sizes. In their case, perception and its associated beliefs are frustrating the enquiry when it is barely started. To treat equality as a relation is more sophisticated. We can begin to see what might be involved if we set the relation in a mathematical context. Malcolm Brown (n. 11) produced good reasons for holding that Plato was by the time of the *Phaedo* aware of such a definition of equality as the probably fifth-century one preserved in Euclid, *Elements*, VII, def. 20, that two quantities are equal if and only if they can be measured the same number of times by the unit. In discussion with Simmias, who knows something about mathematics (92d2–5), it is reasonable to think that Socrates is alluding to mathematical accounts of equality. Knowledge of this definition might justify to Simmias his claim that they in fact know what the Equal is. If we now introduce diagrams—the use of which in recollection Kebes has reminded us of (73a10–b2)—we see that diagrams of mathematical figures can suggest such a definition, but the definition would not be derived from the diagrams. Indeed the definition can be applied to the diagrams in order to show just what it is about them that makes the two

lines, for example, equal. Sticks and stones, which when they are first mentioned at 74a–b are just sticks and stones, can in a Pythagorean context be used as mathematical diagrams. In this simple way perceptible features can be improved and brought closer to an Idea. Now, the perceived diagrams can be contrasted in two different ways with the Equal. First, the diagram of some figure might be contrasted with the figure as such. The diagram is hardly a perfect instantiation of the definition of equality, but the mathematical figure is so. This approach takes us soon to the contrast between diagrams and mathematical figures of which Plato writes at *Rep.* 510d–e. Second, the particular instantiation of equality, whether in diagram or in mathematical figure, does not exhaust the nature of equality. This latter point becomes more pressing if we follow Brown in holding that Plato was probably also aware of the problems posed by the discovery of incommensurability for equality and other mathematical relations, such as being larger and smaller, with which the Equal is associated at 75c9. The problem is to find an account of these mathematical relations for quantities that cannot be measured by the same unit. In the course of mathematical investigations, diagrams representing some kinds of figure suggest definitions of equality and related notions in terms of measurability, which further discoveries show to be inadequate. Other diagrams, such as those of polygons enclosing and being enclosed by the circumference of a circle, suggest an account of equality between incommensurables in terms of approximation.

I have been sketching a possible progress that discussion about the Equal might follow. At each stage the perceived features can prompt the account of equality against which they are judged. But they can also mislead the enquirer into accepting as final the account of equality they suggest. Enquirers inspired by the ideal of a unitary equality free of internal contradictions will not be content with particular sizes or specific relations, or with diagrams that suggest accounts of equality applicable only to the commensurable or the incommensurable. The strong condemnations of perception as misleading are true of perception that stops enquiry. But the very features that can stop enquiry can also suggest to those who are willing to go further the need for a better account of equality.

I shall now suggest, more tentatively, how this approach could be extended to some other Ideas prominent in the *Phaedo*: the Beautiful, the Good, the Just, and virtues in general.

In the account of the human condition that Socrates presents in the *Phaedo* the judgements of most people are all based directly or at a short remove on the desires and aversions, pleasures and pains associated with physical needs and satisfactions. This he holds to be true of all people, except those who have turned to philosophy. Whether they have pursued their own pleasure or lived a tyrannical life of self-aggrandisement (81c5–82a5), or have devoted themselves to the pursuit of money or of honour (68c1–3, 82e), or even if they have lived according to the rules of conventional virtue without any attempt to seek knowledge (82a10–b3, to be compared with 68c5–69a5), the ultimate source of the motives and principles that guide their lives is the body and the needs, desires, pains, and pleasures associated with a bodily life. Therefore in the first story of reincarnations, all of these kinds of life are reincarnated in some animal form. Only those who have lived according to conventional virtue will, after a period as bees or wasps, return to human form (81e5–82b8). We might well wonder how perception within such a world of false values could pick out any features that have anything to do with Beauty, the Good, or the virtues.

Socrates' treatment of the conventional virtues (68c–69c), while exposing the false conception of the human good on which conventional attributions of virtue are based, sets in sharp contrast a conception of the possession of *φρόνησις* as the sole good worth pursuing. Only one who pursues this good will possess the virtues. If we transfer this to the attempt to learn of the Good and the virtues, we see that those who truly aim for *φρόνησις* will exhibit in their behaviour qualities in fact caused by the Ideas of the virtues, and only they will be able to recognize these qualities in their own and in others' behaviour. It is for this reason that Socrates, whose life has been such a pursuit, is evidently to Phaedo and others the best, wisest and most just of men (118a15–17). Plato closes the dialogue with this recognition of the working of the Ideas in Socrates; his courage has been manifest throughout. A complete transformation of values is required in those who seek and in those who live if the effects of the Ideas of the good and of the virtues are to be manifest. Although what is seen in the characters and behaviour of such people goes beyond what can reasonably be described as perceptible, the general principle applies, that things have to be so organized that the effects of the Idea are manifest in them, and those who seek have to change their values if they are to see these effects. Such a change is not a completed transformation but part of a long process.

In the *Republic* Plato argues that something similar to what I have been proposing holds for beautiful objects. It is one of the central conclusions of the discussion of imitative literature in Book III that whatever is beautiful should exhibit *εὐλογία καὶ εὐαρμοστία καὶ εὐσχημοσύνη καὶ εὐρυθμία* (400d11ff.). Drawing, and similar craftsmanship, weaving, decoration, house building and the making of all other tools are full of these qualities and of their opposites (401a–b). One who sees perceptible objects as structured on these principles will be aware of perceptible features counting for beauty that are quite different from the colours and shapes that are conventionally cited as reasons why things are beautiful (*Phaedo* 100d1–2, *Rep.* V 476b4–8). One who tried to give an account of Beauty by citing the features of things structured in the ways that Plato advocates would begin to grasp something of the nature of Beauty. Within the metaphysics of the *Republic* such an enquirer would have to pass from order, harmony, etc., as exhibited in the physical objects of the world to the same qualities in human souls and then to these qualities as seen in the ratios of mathematical figures. At the perceptual stage of this ascent, the enquirer would be using perceptible objects to grasp something of beauty, although the objects would fail to represent fully the qualities of order and harmony, let alone that of beauty.

Socrates' treatment in the *Phaedo* of the conventional virtues suggests that in the case of Beauty, the Good and the virtues, perception can only be used in the regaining of knowledge when values have been transformed. But this transformation involves a grasp of beautiful good, just, and in general of virtuous actions and people utterly at variance with the notions that most people have of the world around them.

Those who enquire in the way I have sketched for the Good, the Beautiful, virtues, the Equal, the Large, the Small, are comparing what they perceive with what at each stage they take the Idea to be.¹⁵ But they are also comparing them with the Idea they have not yet discovered. At each stage in their enquiries perceived objects seem to capture some better notion of the Idea, but this notion is still inadequate. The

¹⁵ Prauss, *Platon und der logische Eleatismus* (Berlin, 1966), pp. 111–12, shows that what Plato takes the perceptible features to be referred or compared to at 76e1–2 is 'nicht die Idee als solche, sondern die Idee als vorgewußte; oder genauer das Wissen von jener Idee'. If my arguments are accepted, then Wissen has to be qualified as the state of recovered knowledge, which may well be belief and the holding to some firm hypothesis, at any stage in the process of relearning.

language of striving and falling short represents, I suggest, this use of perceived features to suggest a better notion of the Idea, and the constant realization that it is not good enough. It is fairly clear that within this context of learning about Ideas it is only enquirers into Ideas who can think that perceived objects strive to be like but fall short of the Idea. They think this about the objects they compare to Ideas because the way they use the comparisons suggests such approximation and failure. In an illuminating paper Lee¹⁶ argued for a dynamic metaphysics in the *Phaedo*, according to which the Ideas are the objects against which perceived objects are judged and in relation to which they have their natures. Modifying his approach, I have suggested that those who are learning about Ideas take not one group but a whole series of perceived objects, chosen to take account of better conceptions of the Idea, and place them in relation to the Idea they are seeking to understand. It is this linking of a series of objects to improving conceptions of the Idea that gives the particularity of the link between perceptual reminder and object of thought that is a feature of being reminded. Each object and the succession of different objects and features that they propose and discard in their quest for Ideas are seen as approximating to and falling short of the Idea. The striving seen in the objects is this approximation and also, perhaps, the effort of the learners to understand the Ideas.¹⁷

IV. THE CONSEQUENCES FOR SIMMIAS OF RECOLLECTING THAT HE RECOLLECTS

Before and after the arguments about recollection Socrates portrays philosophy as addressing the souls of philosophers (65b–67b, 82e–84b). Philosophy speaks of all the bodily forces that can prevent the life of philosophic enquiry and that can distort enquiry once it has started. It speaks also of the methods and goals of the philosophic life. These addresses are not only a protreptic to encourage some to turn to philosophy; they are also an encouragement to persist in this life. They convey an understanding of the soul and its capacities. To those who have embarked on the philosophic life and accept what philosophy says in these speeches, these words express what they ought to believe about their own souls. If the message of philosophy is internalized, it comes to constitute a self-understanding that is an encouragement to continue to live this life.

What Socrates has tried to do with Simmias is to bring him to some of that self-understanding. Simmias is to come to see himself as having recollected and as still being engaged in that process. For learning to be recollection, however, it is not enough that those enquiring into the virtues, equality, or whatever should take from Socrates the notions to which they compare the features they observe in the world around them. They must find within their own minds notions better than what they can observe around them. This urgency is even greater tomorrow, after Socrates has drunk the hemlock. Then they will need the confidence and courage that comes from belief in their capacity to recollect and the commitment to the values that their enquiries reveal to them, if they are to persist in the life of philosophy. The exhortations to turn away from all the influences of the body which Socrates puts into the mouth of philosophy will have to be a part of their own souls. From this dialogue, much

¹⁶ Edward N. Lee, 'The Second "Third Man": an Interpretation', in J. M. E. Moravcsik (ed.), *Patterns in Plato's Thought* (Dordrecht/Boston, 1973), pp. 101–22.

¹⁷ As Dixsaut (n. 2, p. 345), expresses it, 'En parlant de manque, d'aspiration, d'amour et d'images, il indique . . . le mouvement de l'âme qui, dans ce qui est là, voit ce qui précisément n'est pas là et qui ne manque qu'à celui qui le désire' (my emphasis).

concerned with remembering, we may safely conclude that to remember Socrates and his arguments, as Phaedo delights in doing (58d5–6), may help them and others who hear to enter or persist in the life of philosophy. But it will not be enough. They cannot for ever relive Socrates' last day. They have to draw from it his lessons and persist in enquiry. Perhaps Plato, whose absence¹⁸ was caused by one of those hindrances that the body places in the way of the soul (59b10), is better placed than some who were there to escape from perpetual remembering of the last day.

If recollection is not a single event but a long process, then without continuing enquiry there can be no recollection. The soul has to persist in order to become the kind of soul that can recollect better. It is therefore appropriate that the recollection argument is followed by the argument from affinity. For this argument shows the soul between two poles: of believing only what the body believes and of being such as the Ideas. The life of philosophy is the struggle to attain this affinity.

In a famous article Guérout¹⁹ argued that in the *Phaedo* Plato advocates and portrays 'la méditation de l'âme sur l'âme'. Guérout saw the soul's understanding of itself as proceeding within the dialogue through the epistemological levels of the Divided Line, from a sensory conception in the cyclical argument, through true beliefs to knowledge of its own essence in the final argument. Although I am sceptical whether this scheme can be found in the *Phaedo*, I think that the theme identified by Guérout is central to the dialogue; but it has been little noticed.²⁰ Through understanding itself as a being that can recover its former state only if it detaches itself from the body, the soul is given a motive for doing this. This double detachment, from what is familiar in perceptual thought and from the values based on the body, is a major part of the detachment of soul from body. To practise this detachment is to engage in the philosophic life. But this detachment is a slow and arduous business. One part of it is the constant effort to attain better conceptions of Ideas through a refining of one's perceptions of the world so as to bring perceived features closer to ever-improving conceptions of Ideas. In this process what one perceives becomes ever less like the world as most people perceive it. Understanding of oneself as engaged in this process and thereby as recollecting gives a conception of the soul that is a ground for hope that one can steadily achieve more of this detachment. It also shows how a certain kind of discussion is in fact recollection and a restoration of the soul's former and best state. If Simmias comes to believe this about his soul, then Simmias' soul will be able to survive the death of Socrates.

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¹⁸ Plato has Phaedo qualify his statement that Plato was ill by the word *οἴμαι*. Why does Plato have him express this qualification? Perhaps he is implying that Phaedo was mistaken and that Plato had another reason for not being there. It would not be too fanciful to suggest that he was already preparing to live as a philosopher without Socrates.

¹⁹ M. Guérout, 'La méditation de l'âme sur l'âme dans le *Phédon*', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* (1926), 469–91.

²⁰ An exception is Dixsaut (n. 2, p. 18), 'L'enjeu du *Phédon* n'est pas de nous enseigner comment mourir, ou même comment vivre: il est de nous faire concevoir notre âme d'une certaine façon.'