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The Meno, Recollection, and the Role of Hypothesis

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Although memory and recollection are topics discussed by some of the chief figures in Western Philosophy, there are few treatises devoted to a thorough examination of these two. Aristotle's treatise is one exception in that it captures these two topics in its very title: *De Memoria et Reminiscentia*. However, this is a relatively short work and other treatments and references to these two notions within the Aristotelian corpus are not that extensive. One should not infer from this that memory does not play an important role in Aristotle's philosophy nor that memory is considered an insignificant cognitive ability. In the very first chapter of *Metaphysics* Alpha Aristotle notes that memories (mnemai) are the basis of experience (empeiria) which, in turn, becomes the basis for art (technē) and scientific knowledge (episteme).\(^1\) Similarly, memory plays a very important role in the outline of the process of conceptualization that Aristotle presents in *Posterior Analytics*, II, where it is the base upon which sensations gather for higher modes of cognition.\(^2\) Locke's treatment of self-identity makes much use of the concept of memory and he does note the importance of its role in human knowledge.\(^3\) Yet, it is Augustine, perhaps, who stands out as one figure who is prominent in utilizing memory as an important philosophical concept.\(^4\) His broadly Platonic background is probably rightly suspected as the inspiration for this concept in his thinking. Plato gives memory and recollection an enduring role in his own philosophizing, a role easily recognizable as operative already in the dialogue *Meno*. Here the doctrine that learning is recollection gives prominence to a cognitive power in learning that seems to many to be totally overblown. Already Aristotle, in the opening of his treatise on epistemology and method, the *Posterior Analytics*, seems taken aback by Plato's teaching and, mentioning the *Meno*, tries to wrestle what truth he can out of it, before proceeding with his technical analysis of scientific reasoning and axiomatized systems.\(^5\) Some do not share Aristotle's deference

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\(^1\) *Metaphysics* 981a2-3: καὶ δοξεῖ σχεδόν ἐπιστήμη καὶ τέχνη ὑμοιὸν εἶναι καὶ ἐμπειρία, ἀποβαίνει δ᾽ ἐπιστήμη καὶ τέχνη διὰ τῆς ἐμπειρίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

\(^2\) PA, II, c. 19, 100a3: ἐκ μὲν οὖν ἀναθήσεως γίνεται μνήμη, ὡσπερ λέγομεν, ἐκ δὲ μνήμης πολλάκις τῶν αὐτῶν γνωμενίων ἐμπειρίαν· αἱ γὰρ πολλαὶ μνήμαι τῷ ἀριθμῷ ἐμπειρία μία ἔστην· ἐκ δὲ ἐμπειρίας...τέχνης ἀρχή καὶ ἐπιστήμης.

\(^3\) *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. II, c. 27 (Of Identity and Diversity); Bk. II, c. 10 (Of Retention) where he writes, "Memory... is of so great a moment that, where it is wanting, all of our other faculties are in great measure useless."

\(^4\) See *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. By A. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), "Memory", pp. 553-555. Augustine's reflections on memory include not only retention of images from the senses but also "ideas acquired through teaching (the definitions of disciplines; the kinds of questions; distinctions; relationships and the countless laws of numbers and measures." (p. 554) It is this second bundle of notions that intersects with what, in my opinion, is important in the understanding of Plato's theory. For Augustine memory also retains emotive states and experiences, and – in a sense – is the self.

\(^5\) *Posterior Analytics*, I, c. 1, 71a27ff.
and simply reject Plato's doctrine as showing a naïveté in its seeming rejection of the importance of novelty, empiricism, and contingency in items of knowledge. The supposition of pre-existing minds that re-incarnate – which seems to be a concomitant feature of this doctrine – also seems more than many philosophers wish to accept.

The aim of this paper is to present Plato's doctrine within a perspective that will both explain why Plato found himself prompted to formulate it, as well as explore some enduring insights exhibited in its applications. First, the paper will argue that Plato was prompted to adopt the doctrine given the difficulties that had arisen from the employment of the Socratic elenchus. Second, it will argue that hypothesis, already implicit in the elenchic method, will begin to be developed into a more complex and refined method that Plato's sees necessary for the whole learning process. The retention of a hypothesis within a learning situation is what allows that process to succeed. This retention is a major, albeit not the sole, aspect of what Plato means by anamnesis or recollection. This section of the paper will consider in some detail parts of the *Meno* displaying the use of recollection (e.g., the slave boy conversation) as well as the excursus on the geometrical use of the method of hypothesis with some reference to that method's use in the later part of the dialogue. Third, the paper will give some indication of other uses of recollection in Plato that will make more plausible the doctrine that "learning is recollection."

**Part One: The Problem of Elenchus**

Many items can become the objects of recollection. One thinks, for instance, of a rule, an idea, a proposition, an event, an individual, an image, an emotion, or even another memory. The stereotypical picture that is given of the Platonic doctrine is that the objects of recollection are transcendent Forms, i.e., immaterial, eternal objects that correspond to abstract singular or general terms. However, in the early (Socratic) dialogues there is no development of the doctrine of Forms, nor of recollection, nor of the method of hypothesis, although there are the makings of these ideas already early on in Plato's career. A view of Socratic dialectic in action shows that Plato (Socrates) is concerned to arrive at clear definitions of basic moral ideas that will enable a just application of those to concrete human situations. However, although the scope of the method of elenchus (Socratic refutation) has a very lofty rational aim -- the clarification of fundamental moral concepts -- its actual application, while revealing the intellectual deficiencies of the Socratic interlocutors, fails to realize its positive aim. The early dialogues fail to produce a definition of the topic under their respective scrutiny. Consider, among others, the *Euthyphro* on piety, the *Laches* on courage, the *Lysis* on friendship, the *Charmides* on temperance, perhaps even *Republic* I on justice. This failure might well be expected if such critics as Peter Geach are correct in thinking that the method itself is mistaken and gives rise to what he calls the "Socratic fallacy."

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6 Foundational to this topic of recollection is the comprehensive work by C. Huber, *Anamnesis bei Platon* (Munich: Max Huber, 1964).


8 See P.T. Geach, "Plato's Euthyphro" in *Logic Matters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 33-34. Among more recent work on the Socratic Fallacy is the work of D. Wolfsdorf,
too, found himself, in my opinion, confronted with a very serious epistemological and methodological problem. If the interlocutor does not know already – in some way – what is the nature of the quality that is being investigated (e.g., piety, friendship, courage, etc.) then all discourse is in danger of becoming meaningless. As the application of a term to a given type becomes subject to scrutiny, the term will lose all significance if its meaning is not already somehow anchored (albeit the anchor chain, implicit in the metaphor, may be given an amount of play). Plato came to realize that the Socratic enterprise could not succeed on the supposition that dialogue can be linguistically cleansed of problematic conceptions and all interlocutors embark on their investigation with a blank slate, so to speak.\(^9\) He also came to realize that one could not simply trust socially determined uses of terms to be ontologically accurate. Hence, the theory of recollection is introduced to solve the first difficulty and the theory of Forms is introduced, very quickly thereafter, to solve the second. With these two doctrines, a person enters into the Middle theory of Plato's writings.\(^{10}\)

This context might explain the introduction of the theory of recollection, which otherwise seems hardly able to account for the empirical, historical, and contingent items that are part of our awareness. Nonetheless, the role of recollection is multifaceted for Plato and is operative throughout his writing, as will be mentioned later. However, there is one factor especially which is operative early on and has been overlooked. It is one that makes Plato's introduction of recollection much more comprehensible and even intriguing. This is a methodological factor, namely, the role of hypothesis in reasoning. Now, it is likely not a mere coincidence that Plato explicitly begins to talk of the method of hypothesis in the *Meno*, recommends its use for the resolution of the problem facing the discussants (i.e., "Can virtue be taught?")\(^{11}\), and provides an example of its use by mathematicians. Somewhat further in the dialogue he also invokes particular hypotheses to continue the investigation. Later in his middle writings the (a?) method of hypothesis is explained at length (such as the *Phaedo*) and reference is made in the *Republic* to its use as Plato presents his central images of the Sun, the Cave, and the Line.\(^{11}\) The argumentation of the *Theaetetus* is laid out within the

\(^9\) This metaphor of a blank slate, when applied to the mind of an inquirer or learner, becomes a problematic one for Plato. It seems more consistent with a transmission theory of learning than it does with a recollection theory. However, Plato will employ it in his discussion of falsity in the *Theaetetus* 191C.

\(^{10}\) T. Irwin in "Recollection and Plato's Moral Theory," *Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1974), pp. 752-772 has noted the tension between the craft analogy employed in the early dialogues and the method of recollection yet remarks, nonetheless, that the results of the elenchus itself make way for Plato's adoption of the theory of recollection. How one divides the periods of Plato's writing is obviously controversial. In *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) Julia Annas challenges the standard division of Platonic dialogues into early, middle, and late. Although her focus is the ethical side of Plato's philosophy, she indicates that her work may have "implications for developmentalism in other areas of Plato's thought" (p. 5).

\(^{11}\) Cf. 100A ff. in the *Phaedo* and 509-511E in the *Republic*. Note the extensive discussion in K. Sayre's *Plato's Analytic Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 28-56.
framework of hypotheses and the *Parmenides* is also strategically laid out in the same way.\(^\text{12}\)

Of course, as the above question mark indicates, one must be cautious when speaking of the method of hypothesis in Plato. If, as Robinson notes, it is difficult to say what the *method of dialectic* is,\(^\text{13}\) it is also difficult to get a clear picture of the *hypothetical method* in Plato.\(^\text{14}\) Yet, if one looks carefully at the early Socratic dialogues, the ground is already laid for the use of what are perhaps more highly diversified and developed forms of hypothesis employment. The significant philosophical dimension here, however, is that Plato is tying the learning process – if not all of it, at least a considerable part of it – to hypothesizing. Hypothesizing by nature implies that the one using the hypothesis holds it in mind during the reasoning process – as well as, of course, the steps of the argument that either follow from it or are added to it in the course of arriving at a conclusion. (One thinks here of the procedures in conditional or *reductio ad absurdum* reasoning as well as other forms of reasoning.) Of course, the sense of "hypothesis" must not be too restrictive; a hypothesis need not always be true, nor must a person be limited to using only a single one in an argument, as noted by one author.\(^\text{15}\) It is by deliberately holding in mind or recalling from memory certain propositions, rules, and ideas, that one comes to "acquire" new truth or purported truth, i.e., that one comes to learn.

*Part Two: Hypothesis and Recollection*

The use of hypothesis as already seminally present in the early dialogues might become clearer if we look at a few examples. At the start, it should be noted that the very language of hypothesis is fairly extensive, albeit translators have not always been sensitive to its presence. Consider the following instances drawn from the recent, and what is considered - justifiably - the most up-to-date, reliable, and significant translation in English, the Cooper-Hutchinson edition (multiple translators involved). First consider two Socratic-type dialogues which, although either spurious or dubious, do incorporate the style and structure of the early works. In the first, the *Rival Lovers*, the translator renders 134C as:

"I'm sure that I would be able to support the claim I made, even if my position were far weaker than it is."

\(^{12}\) Regarding the layout of the *Theaetetus* see again the extensive treatment given in Sayre, ibid. For the *Parmenides* use of hypothesis, see Sayre, *Parmenides' Lesson* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996). See also his more compact treatment in "Plato's Parmenides: Why the Eight Hypotheses are not Contradictory," *Phronesis* 23 (1978), pp. 133-150.


\(^{14}\) There are problems that arise in the *Phaedo* account vis-à-vis the notion of the agreement ("accord") of the hypothesis with its consequences as noted by both Robinson (ibid., pp. 129ff.) and Sayre (op. cit., pp. 28-40ff.) as well as an employment in the *Meno* presumably different from that in other dialogues (Robinson, ibid., pp. 114ff.).

But it more literally reads:

"I know well that I would be able to strengthen the hypothesis which I hypothesized, even if I hypothesized a hypothesis weaker than this..."\textsuperscript{16}

We find at \textit{Euthyphro} 9D:

"You look whether on your part this proposal will enable you to teach me...."

Which more literally is:

"You look whether on your part, if hypothesizing this...."\textsuperscript{17}

One reads at \textit{Euthyphro} 11C:

"And they do not want to stay where one puts them. Are these propositions yours?"

but this is more literally translated:

"Are these hypotheses yours?"\textsuperscript{18}

Of course, some translators do hit it just right, as does the one for \textit{Hippias Major} 299B:

"I think we'll repeat our hypothesis: 'This is what we say is fine, the part of the pleasant that comes by sight and hearing.'"\textsuperscript{19}

But again the nuance seems missed in the \textit{Protagoras} 339D, which is especially glaring given its connection with forgetting (i.e., failure to recollect):

"First he asserts himself that it is hard for a man truly to become good, and then, a little further on in his poem he forgets (epelatheto) and (criticizes Pittacus):"

which could be better rendered:

"First he hypothesized that it is hard for a man truly to become good, and then, a little further on in his poem he forgets and (criticizes Pittacus):"\textsuperscript{20}

Hypothesis does, however, play a role even if the term 'hypothesis' or one of its cognate forms does not. A striking case is the \textit{Laches} where Socrates secures from Laches the assertion that courage is a part of virtue (190C-E): "...an investigation of the whole of virtue – that would perhaps be too great a task – but let us first see if we have a sufficient knowledge of a part."\textsuperscript{21} After many twists and turns of dialectic Socrates reminds the other interlocutor Nicias at 198A that they were investigating courage at the

\textsuperscript{16} καὶ εὖ ἀδ' ὅτι ἰκανὸς ἂν γενοίμην βοηθήσαι τῇ ὑποθέσει ἢν ὑπεθέμην, καὶ εἰ ταύτης ἐπὶ φαινόλεται ὑπεθέμην

\textsuperscript{17} ἀλλὰ σὺ δὴ τὸ σὸν σκόπει, εἰ τούτο ὑποθέμενος οὕτω ράστα μὲ διδάξεις ὁ ὑπέσχοι.

\textsuperscript{18} νῦν δὲ σαλ γὰρ ἂν ὑποθέσεις εἰσίν.

\textsuperscript{19} ἔρομαιν δὴ ὅμαι ὅπερ ὑπεθέμεθα.

\textsuperscript{20} ὅσ γε τὸ μὲν πρῶτον αὐτὸς ὑπέθετο χαλέπιον εἶναι ἀνδρα ἁγαθῶν γενέσθαι ἀλαθεία, ὄλγον δὲ τοῦ ποιήματος εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν προελθὼν ἐπελάθετο. Of course this does not mean that Simonides himself actually thought of hypothesizing. That Plato uses the verb seems to indicate he is importing his method even into the analysis of the poem.

\textsuperscript{21} Μή τοι γὰρ, ὁ ἄριστε, περὶ δῆλοις ἀρετῆς εὐθέως οἰκοπώμεθα πλέον γὰρ Ἰσως ἔργον ἀλλὰ μέρους τινὸς πέρι πρῶτον ἑσμεν εἰ ἰκανὸς ἑχομεν πρὸς τὸ εἰδέναι.
beginning (κατ’ ἄρχας') as a part of virtue and at 199E that an agreement had been made with regard to courage being merely one of the virtues. Now using this hypothesis, as an explicit/indirect one, Socrates is able to reject the proposal of Nicias. The dialogue ends without resolution.

In shifting focus from the early to the transitional and middle dialogues, the attention to method becomes explicit. In looking at the Meno, one finds the role played by methodological aspects of dialectic closely tied to recollection. First, as the question is raised whether virtue can be taught, Socrates warns Meno that the prior question of the nature of virtue must be resolved in order to resolve the one about its character as teachable. In other words, the "what is x?" question must be resolved before the "Is x y?" question can be resolved. One suspects that in the background is the geometrical practice of first providing a definition of a figure before any properties could be demonstrated about it. In anticipation of the upcoming treatment of recollection, Socrates then cleverly makes puns in response to Meno's query about whether Gorgias' definition of virtue was correct by saying:

"I do not altogether remember (mnemon), Meno (Menon) ... so you remind (anamneson) me of what he said." (71C-D).

After several unsuccessful attempts at definition Socrates reinforces the methodological point he made at the beginning, i.e., the distinction between, "what is x?" and "is x y?" questions, by reference to the mathematical definition of shape. That mathematics is playing a prominent role in this dialogue is not surprising, given that the word manthano means "to learn" (mathema = a thing learned) and the dialogue's supposition is that learning is recollection. With respect to the earlier discussion on shape, Socrates notes:

"If you remember, when I was answering you about shape, we rejected the kind of answer that tried to answer in terms still being the subject of inquiry and not yet agreed upon." (79D)

The recollection of this regulative principle prompts Meno's protest about Socrates' numbing tactics and he then articulates the famous paradox.

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22 Ότι τὴν ἀνδρείαν κατ’ ἄρχας τοῦ λόγου ἐσκοποῦμεν ὡς μέρος ἀρετῆς σκοποῦμεν;
23 καὶ μὴν ἔφαμεν γε τὴν ἀνδρείαν μόριον εἶναι ἐν τῶν τῆς ἀρετῆς.
24 Οὐ πάνω εἰμὶ μνήμην, οὐ Μένων, ὅστε οὐκ ἔχω εἰπεῖν ἐν τῷ παρόντι πῶς μοι τότε ἔδοξεν, ἀλλὰ λοιπὸν ἐκεῖνος τε ὑδέ, καὶ οὐ δὲ ἐκεῖνος ἔλεγεν ἀνάμνησον οὖν με πῶς ἔλεγεν.
26 Εἰ γὰρ καὶ μέμνησαι, ὅτε ἔγω σου ἄρτι ἀπεκρινάμην περὶ τοῦ σχῆματος, ἀπεβάλλομεν ποὺ τὴν τοιαύτην ἀπόκρισιν τὴν διὰ τῶν ἐτὶ ζητουμένων καὶ μῆπω ὀμολογήματι καὶ ἐπιχειροῦμεν ἐπικρίνεσθαι.
27 If you seek to inquire about something you know.... If you seek to inquire about something you don't know.... The paradox is adumbrated in the dialogue the Euthydemus where it is playfully put forward by the two sophists 275D ff. Later in that same work Plato also seems to raise the notion that knowledge of one thing implies knowledge of all things (294A).
paradox comes about by Plato slipping through the horns of the dilemma (the dichotomous exclusion of states of knowing and not knowing) by use of the state of recollecting. Here an initial read of the text leads one to think only of a vision of things formerly seen – an interpretation not at all unjustified given that Plato has just presented the Pindar quotation bearing on reincarnation as well as his own assertion that in its eternal existence the soul has learned all things during its cycles of rebirth. Plato makes two statements that are then of import (81D): a) "since all nature is akin and the soul has learned all things, nothing prevents a person who has recollected one thing (i.e., what men call learning) from discovering all other things"28 and b) "for searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection."29 From the second one knows the scope of recollection; from the first one gets an indication that items of knowledge are not totally atomic and that in the act of knowing as well, more than a single item of knowledge is involved.30 This first point provides a general principle that will further support the role of hypothesis in the recollection doctrine.

Plato indeed gives us examples of the use of hypothesis – explicitly at 86E and 87D – but also, I believe, implicitly in the slave boy discourse. As Plato will mention in the course of the demonstration (82E): "Watch him now recollecting things in order as one must recollect." The process is not an empirical one – Vlastos has argued well to show that it is not.31 Nor is the process a haphazard series of "aha" experiences. Although a good case might be made that there are certain intuitive grasps which serve as starting points or "evident assumptions" in the course of the proof, there seem to be some very clear steps at which Plato is employing an articulated hypothesis to achieve the final solution to the problem32 of doubling the area. For instance, the slave boy's ready acknowledgement of what a square is, that its sides are equal, that it can vary in size is due either to these being somehow innate within the lad or immediately obvious. However, he also assents to a more complex proposition, i.e., "Double the sides of a
figure and you will double its area" and repeatedly endorses it at 82E and 83A. Yet, as he employs this, he runs into the undesirable result of a figure four times as large as expected (83B). By employing but not quite articulating the propositions: "The length of a side will determine the area of a square;" "The greater the length of the side, the greater the area;" "The less the length of a side, the smaller the area;" and "A side of intermediate length will produce an area of intermediate size", the slave boy proposes a side with a length of three units. Of course, this also fails and the boy is in perplexity. He is in perplexity because he has the failed options before his mind, i.e., he is deliberating and holding them from the past reasoning processes – he is recollecting them. This is an indication that the doctrine "learning is recollection" does not mean, then, that what someone recollects is something necessarily true. A person, by employing some mistaken notion in the dialectic process and by retaining that notion and its implications, can come, eventually, to a grasp of the truth of another, perhaps more significant, point through the realization that the current approach is erroneous and that another way is needed.  

Thus, when Socrates remarks at 84A: "You realize, Meno, what point he has reached in his recollection," the reader should not think that Plato is merely attempting to persuade his readers by repeating his thesis; Plato has tried to show what assumptions are held in memory and how they are constitutive of the learning process.

After Socrates has explained the benefits of the "numbing" process or what some would refer to as the purificatory side of the elenchic method, he then proceeds to lead the boy to the grasp of the right answer. One by one he lays out squares (each of area 4 in size) as tiles and receives from the boy the recognition that this constitutes a composite figure of size 16, one that is four times the required size. At this point Socrates says:

"But we should have had one that was twice as large, or do you not remember?" (84E)

Here is a definite allusion to the need to recollect prior steps or, above all, the starting point in a proof. Socrates then proceeds to cut the figure so that diagonals divide the four squares as to create an inner square. The boy comes to recognize this as the area he sought. At this point Socrates says to Meno:

"So these opinions (doxai) were in him, were they not? ... So the man who does not know has within himself true opinions about the things that he does not know? ... These opinions have now just been stirred up like a dream, but if he were repeatedly asked these same questions in various ways, you know that in the end his knowledge about these things would be as accurate as anyone's."
Socrates then goes on to relate the presence of these opinions to pre-existence. However, it is important not to take this as an indication of a desire to reduce the doctrine of recollection to a simple doctrine of pre-embodiment apprehensive intuitions. The whole demonstration has shown learning to be a process of constantly interrelating items of awareness that themselves, in many cases, are resultant from previous reasoning processes.

Plato has operative in the dialectic presented thus far the elements of hypothesizing that he will now expressly propose as an important method. As the dialogue proceeds Socrates now says that to continue the original investigation about the teachability of virtue, without knowing the essence of virtue, one must engage in using a hypothetical method similar to that of the geometers:

"agree to investigate whether it is teachable or not by means of a hypothesis. I mean the way geometers often carry on their investigation." 37

That Plato really is intending a serious comparison is shown by his use of it as a technical expression as a more accurate translation shows:

"agree to investigate whether it is teachable or not by means of a hypothesis. And I mean 'from hypothesis' in just the way geometers often carry on their investigation ..." (86E)

The exact interpretation of the mathematical example is open to various construals.38 Also open to interpretation is the form or forms of the hypothesis or hypotheses that are at work in the later part of this dialogue. Yvon Lafrance has proposed three alternatives; L. Rose has offered at least three.39 So, in the way that only the artistry of Plato can connect levels of discourse, the dialogue continues now to employ hypothesis in the learning process of determining whether virtue can be learned; the following lines evidence multiple instances of the term 'hypothesis'.40 At the end of the dialogue Plato notes that opinions which one has, need to be tied down in order to become knowledge:

"True opinions are not worth much until one ties them down by (giving) an account [logismos] of the reason why. And that, Meno my friend, is recollection, as we previously agreed." (98A).

Plato could have added, "as you must remember" since the reference is to those things about which "we previously agreed."41 The translator's – in my opinion, fine rendering of "logismos" notes the active and complex side of this process. Hypothesizing is a

37 "For example, if they are asked whether a specific area can be inscribed in the form of a triangle within a given circle, one of them might say: 'I do not yet know whether that area has that property, but I think I have, as it were, a hypothesis that is of use for the problem, namely this: If the area is such that when one has applied it as a rectangle to the given straight line in the circle it is deficient by a figure similar to the very figure which is applied, then I think one alternative results, whereas another results if it is impossible for this to happen. So, by using this hypothesis, I am willing to tell you what results with regard to inscribing it in the circle, that is, whether it is impossible or not." (86E ff.)
40 Meno 87A2, A7, B4, D3, and 89C3.
41 ὥς ἐν τοῖς πρόσθεν ἡμῖν ὑμιλογίται.
means of tying things down even if it does not do so definitively. For as Plato will go on
to develop his remarks on hypothesizing in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, it becomes clear
that the activity of hypothesizing can move on different levels, one replacing another.

**Part Three: Additional Aspects of Recollection**

Memory and Recollection will continue to play a role in Plato later, even long
after the *Meno*. In the *Phaedo* one finds the doctrine of recollection repeated and utilized
in one of the key proofs for the immortality of the soul. Recollection can often occur in
Plato giving accounts of certain doctrines, for instance, the myth of Er (*Republic*), the
story of Atlantis (*Critias*), and the story of Creation (*Timaeus*). However, the
logical/methodological side also remains while undergoing a metamorphosis as Plato
refines his technique. Another facet of recollection is found in its role as the summation
before the final articulation of a position. Already in the *Lysis* we find a use that will
move into prominence later. At the end of that dialogue (222D ff.) Socrates notes that the
last option proposed for the definition will not work:

"But we thought we had refuted (exelengxai) ourselves on this point. Or don't you
remember (memnesthe)?" "We remember (memnemetha)."

Socrates then runs through a the list of failed possibilities and then remarks, with some
irony since his list captures the main dialectic moves:

"I certainly don't remember (memnemai) them all anymore.

Later in his writing, Plato introduces the Method of Collection and Division. Mentioned
in the *Phaedrus* (266A ff), this method will be refined and applied in the later dialogues
where various "trees" of division will furnish the elements for a final statement of
definition. These elements, first articulated in the division process, are then gathered
together as definitia constitutive of the complete definition. Dialogues such as the
*Statesman* and *Sophist* illustrate this technique in detail. At the end of the *Sophist* (268C
ff.) Plato pulls together the elements into a statement that resolves the question raised at
the start: "what is the sophist?":

"Shall we weave his name together from start to finish and tie it up the way we
did before?" "Of course." \(^42\)

Although Plato's choice of the term 'weaving' depends on the weaving analogy so
important to this dialogue, the collective and reminiscent -- one might say 're-collective'
- aspect is unmistakable. In the *Statesman* (267A) Plato has the Visitor say:

"...let's go back to the beginning and gather together (suneiromen) from there to
the end our account of the name of the expertise of the statesman." \(^43\)

\(^42\) 268C: Ούκουν συνδήσομεν αὐτοῦ, καθάπερ ἔμπροσθεν, τοῦναμα συμπλέξαντες ἀπὸ
teleutēs ἐπ' ἀρχῆν; Πάνυ μὲν οὖν. Italics mine.
At the end of the dialogue (311C) the final enumeration and summation of characteristics is given in a way similar to that of the Sophist, again using the late analogy of weaving. However, within the dialogue itself, the Visitor speaks (278A ff.) of the need when trying to lead on (epagein) those to learn things not yet known (mepo gignoskomena) to go back (anagein) to cases that have a similarity (homoioieta) so that they get things right. There are distinct echoes here of the idea of recollection (especially as sketched in the Meno where there notion of all being akin is raised), even if there is no explicit alluded to it.

In conclusion, this study has attempted to show that the theory "learning is recollection" is more complex than just seeing all learning as resulting in a reminiscence of a pre-embodiment encounter with a transcendental Form. Even if Plato allows such Forms to be among the objects of recollection, he does not reduce the significance of the process by assimilating it to its outcome, the object known. To insist that Forms are not the object of any recollective process would go against the obvious meaning of some of the Platonic texts. However, the analysis and examples given above should show that Plato uses recollection in a much more varied and complex way both with regard to the objects considered as well as with regard to the activity itself of the mind. With regard to the former, the things recollected need not be Forms alone, since assumptions, propositions (true or false) and earlier steps in an argument all can be recollected.43 With regard to the latter, the activity of recollecting is not simply an instantaneous "aha" experience, but an extended rehearsal of mental options. If this view can be established as operative early in Plato's writing, the continuing use of recollection under the different guises in the later writings can be seen as a natural outgrowth of his earlier method(s). If the argument above proves cogent, the doctrine of recollection should be seen as far more complex than a cognitive intuition of objects in another world or of experiences in a previous existence. Although Plato introduces the doctrine in a context of myth and reincarnation, his motivation for it and the many varied occurrences of it indicate its serious philosophical function as well as his belief that it plays the decisive role in the learning process.

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43 φέρε δὴ καὶ συνελρωμεν ἐπανελθόντες ἐπὶ τὴν ἀρχήν μέχρι τῆς τελευτής τῶν λόγων τοῦ ὄνοματος τῆς τοῦ πολιτικοῦ τέχνης.

44 J.T. Bedu-Addo notes "in the Phaedo we are meant to understand that the λόγοι referred to in Socrates' description of the hypothetical method are opinions in the form of general explanations or definitions and that they become ὑποθέσεις when they are provisionally assumed to be true," "Recollection in Plato's Meno," Journal of Hellenistic Studies, 104(1984), p. 3.