the interlocutors involved, in spite of its talk of hypotheses that are "higher" or more stable. To this extent, then, it seems to be only a marginal advance upon the *elenchos*. What is needed is a way of recognizing the truth of these beliefs. Consequently, it is not clear how successful Plato thinks the application of the method in the *Meno* has been. The method of hypothesis may provide Plato with a method for proceeding in the quest for knowledge in the face of genuine, complete, and mutual ignorance, but it appears to leave untouched the difficulty of recognizing when it has been successful.[81] This appears to be the role of the theory of recollection and, perhaps, the unhypothetical first principle of the *Republic*. Perhaps this is what Plato means to be suggesting at the end of the dialogue when he writes:

> (T12) We will know clearly concerning this [that virtue comes to us by divine inspiration] when before we attempt to seek how virtue comes about in men, we attempt to seek what virtue is itself by itself. (τὸ δὲ σαφὲς περὶ αὐτοῦ εἰσόμεθα τότε, ὅταν πρὶν ᾧτινι τρόπῳ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις παραγίγνεται ἀρετή, πρότερον ἐπιχειρήσωμεν αὐτὸ καθ' αὑτὸ ζητεῖν τί ποτ' ἔστιν ἀρετή.) [100b4-6]

While the method of hypothesis provides a way of proceeding in the face of ignorance, its results can be no more than provisional as long as knowledge of what is epistemically prior has yet to be acquired. Nevertheless, in the *Meno* Plato appears to be recommending the method of hypothesis as a reasonable strategy for seeking such knowledge.[82]

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[81] See Scott (1995: 30-31) for the distinction between the paradox of inquiry (the paradox of the attempt to inquire) and the paradox of discovery (the paradox of successful inquiry). Scott thinks that the first paradox, which I see the method of hypothesis as a response to, is trivial and depends on an obviously false conception of knowledge, while the second paradox is interesting and difficult for Plato to resolve. See also Weiss (2001:54-58).

[82] I am grateful to the audience at Boston University where an earlier version of this paper was presented under the auspices of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy, as well as to numerous colleagues and friends, including David Wolfsdorf, Mark McPherran, Jeffrey Purinton, and Reinaldo Elugardo for their helpful comments. I would especially like to thank David Roochnik, his family and colleagues for their gracious hospitality during my visit to Boston.

COMMENTARY ON BENSON[1]

DAVID WOLFSDORF

Professor Benson reasonably believes that Socrates'[2] ultimate philosophical ambition is to acquire the knowledge of good and bad, i.e., ethical knowledge.[3] He distinguishes two methods that Socrates uses in the pursuit of this goal: the elenctic method and the hypothetical method. The elenctic method is employed when one is seeking knowledge from an allegedly knowledgeable person. In that case, it serves to test the allegedly knowledgeable person's knowledge claims.[4] The hypothetical method is employed when no knowledgeable person is available. This includes cases where an allegedly knowledgeable person is revealed, as a result of elenctic testing, not to possess knowledge; for example, Meno on the question of what virtue is. In that case, the elenctic method, according to Benson's conception of it, is of course useless, since there are no knowledge claims to be tested. Consequently, it is a question how one is to pursue ethical knowledge in the absence of anyone who possesses it. This, as Benson takes it, is the problem at the heart of Meno's paradox:

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[2] Here and throughout I am referring to Plato's Socrates in the early dialogues.

[3] Cp. Benson 2000, 186-7. The view itself is not uncontroversial. As an anonymous referee has stressed to me, "many scholars hold that Socrates/Plato advertises Socrates' primary goal to be the anti-hubristic one of fostering the realization in himself and others of the depth of human ignorance and that 'god alone is wise'." However, I regard Benson's view as the correct one and this other goal as complementary to the pursuit of ethical knowledge. It is, of course, another question whether Socrates believes ethical knowledge is, in fact, humanly attainable.

[4] Notably, Benson does not discuss in this paper nor—if I am not mistaken—in any of his writings, how one might proceed to acquire knowledge from another person if that person actually passed the elenctic test. An obvious reason for this may be that Socrates is never portrayed as finding anyone who actually survives his elenctic testing. On the other hand, perhaps the very process of elenctic testing in a case where the interlocutor in fact possessed knowledge would constitute the acquisition of the desired knowledge. If not, then, I emphasize, the elenctic method would merely constitute an initial stage in the process of the acquisition of knowledge under circumstances where one was seeking knowledge from another person, even if that person had knowledge.

... how is one to proceed when the project of learning from one who knows has been abandoned? ... [i]t is this question that motivates Plato's introduction of the method of hypothesis...[5]

Accordingly, in the pursuit of ethical knowledge the hypothetical method either supplants or supplements the elenctic method. The hypothetical method supplants the elenctic method, in case one seeks another who has ethical knowledge, but cannot find that person. The hypothetical method supplements the elenctic method, in case, once the elenctic method has revealed that the interlocutor does not have knowledge, the hypothetical method provides a means of jointly pursuing its acquisition. In short, for Benson, the functions of the elenctic and hypothetical methods are distinct and not overlapping.

Benson also stresses that the hypothetical method is not a second-best method to be applied in cases where a preferred method is inapplicable. One way this can be understood is in view of the contrast, as defined, between the hypothetical and elenctic methods. Since the elenctic method cannot achieve constructive results, the hypothetical method would not be a second-best method to that. On the other hand, according to Benson's view, the hypothetical method surely is a second best method, just insofar as it would seem easier to acquire knowledge from one who knew than to acquire it on one's own or only with the help of another ignorant person. However, Benson's claim that the hypothetical method is not a second-best method is not oriented in this way. Rather, it is directed against the conception that in *Meno* the hypothetical method is applied to the pursuit of the answer to the question, "Is virtue teachable?" this, according to Socrates' commitment to the epistemological priority of definitional knowledge over pertinent non-definitional knowledge, should not be addressed and cannot be satisfactorily answered before the question, "What is virtue?" has been answered. In other words, Benson is responding to the view—false from his perspective—that because the hypothetical method is employed in answering the question, "Is virtue teachable?" and because, according to Socrates' epistemological commitments, the answer to this question must follow, not precede, the answer to the question, "What is virtue?" Socrates' pursuit of the answer to the question, "Is virtue teachable?" by means of the hypothetical method, is a concession to Meno and a second-best approach, where the optimal approach would be to answer the question, "What is virtue?" and to do so, apparently, by the elenctic method or just some other method.

In response to this, Benson distinguishes between epistemological and methodological priority. Granting that Socrates is committed to the epis-

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[5] Benson 2003, 96.

temological priority of definitional knowledge, hereafter (PD),[6] answers to τί questions, that is, questions about the identity of F,[7] are epistemologically prior to answers to related ποῖον questions, that is, questions about properties of F that are not constitutive of their identity.[8] But, while Socrates is committed to (PD), epistemological priority does not entail methodological priority. Consequently, one may pursue the answer to either a τί or a ποῖον question, and not necessarily in that order, by the hypothetical method or by some other method, say, in case one is in the presence of an alleged expert, the elenctic method, and the elenctic method perhaps supplemented by some other method. And yet, if one pursues the answer to a ποῖον question by whatever method and without having secured the answer to the pertinent τί question, the answer to the ποῖον question will necessarily be provisional. Accordingly, at the end of his paper, Benson writes:

> While the method of hypothesis provides a way of proceeding in the face of ignorance, its results can be no more than provisional as long as knowledge of what is epistemically prior has yet to be acquired.[9]

Precisely, in this case, he is referring to the fact that in *Meno* Socrates has pursued the answer to a ποῖον question, "Is virtue teachable?" by means of the hypothetical method. And, even if his investigation had not ended in contradiction, the answer would still be provisional, insofar as he had not determined, by the method of hypothesis or by some other method, the answer to the pertinent τί question, "What is virtue?" In short, the fact that Socrates pursues the answer to the question, "Is virtue teachable?" a ποῖον question, rather than "What is virtue?" a τί question, by means of the hypothetical method indicates nothing about his view of the methodological priority or lack thereof of this method.

Consider now the final line of Benson's paper:

> in the *Meno* Plato appears to be recommending the method of hypothesis as a reasonable strategy for seeking such knowledge [that is definitional knowledge, in this case the definition of virtue].[10]

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[6] (PD) represents the conjunction of two propositions: (P) if one does not know what F is, one cannot know, for any x, whether x is an instance of F; and (D) if one does not know what F is, one cannot know for any property P, whether F has P. Accordingly, (PD) states that if one does not know what F is, one cannot know anything about F. See Benson 2000, 112ff.

[7] Here and hereafter the variable F should be understood as ranging over the human ἀρεταί, σωφροσύνη, δικαιοσύνη, ἀνδρεία, φιλία, human ἀρετή as a whole, and τὸ καλόν.

[8] As Benson notes, the distinction between τί and ποῖον questions that Socrates employs is somewhat obscure. A useful point from which to explore this question would seem to be the distinction between πάθη and οὐσίαι in *Euthyphro*.

[9] Benson 2003, 120.

Benson here leaves us with an important claim. Again, since Socrates is committed to (PD), and since the *elenchos* is not a method for the acquisition of knowledge insofar as no one has ethical knowledge, the hypothetical method is the appropriate method or at least an appropriate method for the pursuit of definitional knowledge.

I now wish to show that Benson's distinction between the elenctic and hypothetical methods is ill-conceived. To begin, I regard Benson's view that Socrates is committed to (PD) as correct.[11] However, as Geach first argued, Socrates' commitment to (PD) appears to entail a methodological fallacy, the so-called Socratic fallacy: Socrates cannot pursue definitional knowledge of F on the basis of examples of F that he believes he knows.[12] To my mind, the most reasonable way to resolve this apparent problem is to register that Socrates does not believe that he knows examples of F or F's properties. Rather, he conducts his investigations of F on the basis of beliefs about instances of F and F's properties.[13]

Benson defends a different solution. As noted, he argues that Socrates does not use the *elenchos* to pursue definitional knowledge so much as to test his interlocutor's professed or alleged expertise. More precisely, in order to demonstrate knowledge or expertise, the interlocutor must maintain a consistent set of beliefs about the given subject matter, say, F. Thus, Socrates' elenctic method involves eliciting a set of propositions regarding F and evaluating whether they are consistent.[14]

This conception of Socrates' elenctic method in the early dialogues is misguided. First, several of Socrates' interlocutors are not self-professed or alleged experts; e.g., Lysis and Menexenus, Charmides and Polemarchus.[15] However, even those that are, e.g., Hippias and Euthyphro, Socrates does not test to determine whether their beliefs are consistent and so whether they have knowledge. Instead, he conceives of himself as

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[10] Benson 2003, 120.

[11] Benson 1987, 67-85; Benson 1990a, 128-58; Benson 1990b, 19-65; Benson 1995, 45-122. Cf. also Benson 2000, 17-95. It must be noted, though, that this is not the prevailing view. Cf., Vlastos 1983, 27-58, 71-4; reprinted in 1994, 1-29, with appendix at 29-33, and postscript at 33-37; Kraut 1983, 59-70; Brickhouse and Smith 1984, 185-95; cf., also Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 3-29; Polansky 1985, 247-59; Nozick 1995, 143-55. Cf., also the recent collection of essays in Scott 2002. In particular, this collection includes a paper by Benson restating and defending his position at 101-13, and Brickhouse and Smith's criticism of Benson's position at 145-57, esp. 147-52.

[12] Geach 1966, 369-82.

[13] This approach is defended, rather weakly, by Irwin 1977, 40-1; but more substantively by Burnyeat 1977, 381-98. I have defended it in a paper currently under review entitled "Plato's Socrates on the Epistemological Priority of Definitional Knowledge".

[14] Benson 1990a, 44-65; Benson 2000, 17-56.

[15] Benson's response to this relatively minor point occurs at 2000, 26-8.

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learning from them.[16] Moreover, he does not undertake to learn from them as a naïve student who unquestioningly accepts anything his teacher says. Indeed, Socrates would not regard that as learning. Rather, when his interlocutor asserts a proposition that Socrates believes is inconsistent with his own beliefs, he seeks clarification. Typically, he elicits his interlocutor's assent to the contradictory proposition in order to determine whether his interlocutor also accepts that proposition. If so, then he indicates that this proposition conflicts with the view the interlocutor proposed and he rejects the initial position.

It is not possible here to defend this view completely adequately. But, it is possible and appropriate to adduce some evidence to support it. Consider the example of Socrates' investigations of definitional knowledge of F in the early definitional dialogues (*Charmides, Laches, Lysis, Euthyphro, Republic I, Hippias Major,* and *Meno*). There are twenty-seven definitions discussed in the early definitional dialogues.[17] Four in *Charmides*;[18] three in *Laches*;[19] two in *Lysis*;[20] four in *Euthyphro*;[21] seven in *Hippias Major*;[22] three in *Meno*;[23] and four in *Republic I*.[24] In twenty-six of these twenty-seven cases Socrates rejects the definition because it does

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[16] "Then the best thing for me, my admirable Euthyphro, is to become your pupil..." (5a ff.) "I was angry with myself and reproached myself and threatened that the first time I met one of you wise men, I would hear and learn and practice..." (287d ff.)

[17] There is certainly room for debate about exactly how many definitions are tested in the various dialogues. For instance, cf. Schmidt's appendix A (1998, 153-8), where he discusses several possible interpretations of the number of definitions in *Charmides*. One sticking point is that Socrates sometimes responds to definitions by reinterpreting them. Another question is whether to count as definitions Laches', Euthyphro's, and Meno's first responses to the What-is-F? question.

[18] Quietness, modesty, doing one's own thing (which is reinterpreted as doing good things); and self-knowledge (which is reinterpreted as knowledge of knowledge).

[19] Remaining in rank, defending against the enemy and not fleeing; toughness of the soul; and knowledge of what is to be feared and dared.

[20] The neither-good-nor-bad loves the good on account of the presence of the bad; the neither-good-nor-bad loves the ultimate good on account of desire.

[21] Prosecuting one who commits sacrilege regardless of the prosecutor's relation to the offender; that which is god-beloved; that which is loved by all the gods; attention to the gods (which is reinterpreted as service to the gods).

[22] A beautiful woman; gold; to be rich, healthy, honored by the Greeks, to live to old age, and to bury one's parents; decorousness; utility; benefit; aesthetic pleasure (reinterpreted as beneficial pleasure).

[23] Managing political affairs (for a man) and managing domestic affairs (for a woman); being able to govern people; desiring what is fine and being able to procure it.

[24] Telling the truth and returning what one takes; doing what is fitting (reinterpreted as aiding friends and harming enemies); aiding a friend who is good and harming an enemy who is bad; what is good for the stronger

not satisfy some identity condition of *F* to which *he* is committed.[25] For example, in evaluating Hippias' first definition Socrates suggests that the *definiens* must be purely καλόν (or not not-καλόν in any way) and rejects the claim that a beautiful young woman is τὸ καλόν, because a beautiful young woman is not καλόν relative to a goddess. Ample evidence supports the view that Socrates is committed to the identity conditions he employs in evaluating proposed definitions;[26] and that in considering pro-

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[25] These identity conditions are as follows. From the investigation in *Charmides*: σωφροσύνη is (necessarily or in all cases) καλόν; σωφροσύνη is (necessarily or in all cases) ἀγαθόν; σωφροσύνη entails knowledge (for a σώφρων man knows what he is doing); σωφροσύνη is beneficial. From *Laches*: ἀνδρεία is the same in all cases and the common possession of ἀνδρεῖοι men; ἀνδρεία is a δύναμις; ἀνδρεία is (necessarily) καλόν; ἀνδρεία is a part of ἀρετή. From *Lysis*: φιλία must have an ultimate object; the presence of badness is not the cause of φιλία. From *Euthyphro*: τὸ ὅσιον is an εἶδος, is the same in all instances, and is that because of which all ὅσια entities are ὅσια; τὸ ὅσιον is not in any way ἀνόσιον (or, it is purely ὅσιον); the *definiens* must describe the οὐσία (and not πάθος) of τὸ ὅσιον. From *Hippias Major*: τὸ καλόν is not in any way not-καλόν (or, it is purely καλόν); τὸ καλόν makes καλά entities καλά; τὸ καλόν is ἀγαθόν. From *Meno*: ἀρετή is the same in all instances of ἀρετή and that because of which instances of ἀρετή are such instances; ἀρετή is a property that most people do not possess. From *Republic I*: all instances of δικαιοσύνη must be δίκαιον; it is not a function of δικαιοσύνη to do harm; δικαιοσύνη is beneficial to others.

[26] During the investigation in *Charmides* Socrates says, "I divine that σωφροσύνη is something beneficial and ἀγαθόν" (169b4-5). And at the end of the investigation, he says, "I think σωφροσύνη is a great good" (175e6-7). Outside the response in which he introduces the condition that σωφροσύνη entails knowledge, Socrates does not suggest that this is so. However, Socrates' identification of ἀρετή and some form of σοφία is generally accepted on the basis of a wide variety of evidence. Among the early definitional dialogues, for instance, in *Laches* Nicias attributes to Socrates the view (and Socrates accepts the attribution) that a man is ἀγαθός insofar as he is σοφός (194d1-3). Later in the dialogue he suggests that a person who possessed the knowledge of good and bad would lack nothing so far as ἀρετή is concerned (199d4-e1). Of course, Plato need not characterize Socrates as committed to the same propositions in all of the early definitional dialogues. However, in this case, there is no good reason to assume that he is not committed to these views in *Charmides*. (Consider that early on in their discussion Socrates suggests to Charmides that σωφροσύνη is a psychic entity, i.e., an entity of the ψυχή. He describes his alleged Thracian charm with these words: "He said, my friend, that the ψυχή is treated by means of certain charms, and that these charms are beautiful words. From such words σωφροσύνη is engendered; and when σωφροσύνη is engendered and present, then health comes more easily to both the head and the rest of the body" [157a3-b1]. Shortly after, he says: "Now it is clear that if σωφροσύνη is present in you, you are able to form some opinion about it. For it is necessary, I suppose, that if it is in you, it provides a sense of its presence, from which you would be able to form an opinion both of what it is and of what sort of thing σωφροσύνη is... So, then, in order to guess whether or not it is in you tell me what in your opinion σωφροσύνη is" [158e7-159a3]. In *Laches* Socrates says that ἀνδρεία is the same in all cases and the common possession of ἀνδρεῖοι men (191c7-e7). In *Laches* Socrates says that ἀνδρεία is a δύναμις (192a10-b3). In *Laches*, outside of the argument where he introduces the condition, Socrates does not explicitly state his belief that ἀνδρεία is καλόν. However, from a wide

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posed definitions his aim is to determine their truth-value, rather than merely to determine whether his interlocutor can maintain a consistent set of beliefs about *F* and therefore has knowledge of *F*.[27]

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body of evidence in and out of this dialogue, it seems beyond dispute that he does. For instance, early in the discussion, he says that he and the others are "consulting about making the ψυχαί of Lysimachus' and Melesias' sons as good as possible (ὅτι ἀρίστας)" (186e3-6). Given his belief that ἀνδρεία is a part of ἀρετή, it is reasonable to infer that he believes ἀνδρεία is καλόν. (For evidence of Socrates' identification of what is καλόν with what is ἀγαθόν, cf., his claim in *Charmides*: "Well, now, I asked, did you not admit a moment ago that σωφροσύνη is καλόν? Certainly I did, he said, And σώφρονες men are also ἀγαθοί" [160e6-10]; and his claim in *Protagoras*: "Is going to war a καλόν thing, I asked, or an αἰσχρόν thing? Καλόν, he replied. Then, if it is καλόν, we have admitted, by our former argument, that it is also ἀγαθόν; for we agreed that all καλά actions are ἀγαθά. True and I abide by that decision. You are right to do so, I said" [359e4-8]. In *Lysis* Socrates suggests that φιλία must have an ultimate object. (217d6-220b5) In this dialogue he also suggests that the presence of badness is not the cause of φιλία (220b6-221b6). In *Euthyphro* Socrates suggests that τὸ ὅσιον is an εἶδος, the same in all instances and that because of which all ὅσια entities are ὅσια (6d9-e1; cf. 5c8-d5). He also says that it is not in any way ἀνόσιον (8a10-b6; cf. 5c8-d5); and that the *definiens* must describe the οὐσία (rather than the πάθος) of τὸ ὅσιον (11a6-b1). In *Hippias Major* Socrates (or his alter ego) insists that τὸ καλόν is not in any way καλόν and that it makes entities καλόν (e.g., 292c9-d6). In *Meno* Socrates says that ἀρετή is the same in all instances and that because of which all instances of ἀρετή are such instances (72a6 ff.). In *Meno* Socrates says he does not know what ἀρετή is and that he has never met anyone who does. Given his view, expressed in *Laches*, that a man is ἀγαθός insofar as he is σοφός and that ἀρετή is a kind of knowledge, and given his view expressed in *Charmides* that if one possesses σωφροσύνη one should be able to say what it is, Socrates' expressed failure to encounter anyone who knows what ἀρετή is suggests that he believes not many (if any) people possess ἀρετή. Finally, I take it that in *Republic I* the arguments Socrates develops for the views that it is not the function of δικαιοσύνη to do harm and that δικαιοσύνη is beneficial obviously reflect his own views. Though, if supporting evidence is desired, one might consider his shock at Thrasymachus' suggestion that δικαιοσύνη is not an ἀρετή and therefore not καλόν or ἀγαθόν, and his expressed intent to try to persuade Thrasymachus otherwise (347e2 ff.).

[27] In response to Euthyphro's second definition, Socrates says: "Excellent, Euthyphro, you have now answered as I asked you to answer. However, whether it is true, I am not yet sure; but of course you will show me that it is true" (7a3-4). In *Lysis* Socrates responds in dismay to his first definition: "...a most unaccountable suspicion came over me that the conclusion to which we had agreed was not true" (218c5-7). In *Charmides*, Charmides introduces a definition that Socrates suspects Charmides heard from Critias. Charmides asks whether it should matter from whom he heard it; and Socrates replies: "It makes no different at all... One ought not to consider who said it, but whether or not it is true" (161c5-6). Later in the same dialogue when Critias accuses Socrates of deliberately trying to refute him without paying attention to the content of the investigation Socrates says: "If I am thoroughly refuting you, how can you think I am doing so for any other reason than that on account of which I would scrutinize what I myself say—from a fear of carelessly supposing at any moment that I knew something when I did not know it. And so I assert that here and now this is what I am doing, I am examining the argument mostly for my own sake, but also perhaps for that of my fellows. Or do you not think it is basically a common good for all

This evidence contradicts Benson's view of Socrates' so-called doxastic constraint in his elenctic arguments. According to the doxastic constraint, "[b]eing believed by the interlocutor is a necessary and sufficient condition for being a premise of a Socratic *elenchos*."[28] I cannot here undertake a detailed criticism of Benson's conception of the doxastic constraint.[29] But, I will consider the larger problem to which Benson conceives the doxastic constraint as a response, namely, the so-called problem of the *elenchos*.

According to the problem of the *elenchos*, as first emphasized by Vlastos, it is unclear how Socrates can employ the *elenchos* to achieve constructive results. Socratic *elenchoi* can reveal that a set of premises, including, say, a proposed definition of *F*, is inconsistent and thus that at least one premise in the set is false, but not that a particular premise is false. Thus, Vlastos wondered how Socrates could conclude elenctic arguments by claiming that the proposition investigated was false or true.[30] Benson's position dissolves the problem of the *elenchos*, precisely in its claim that Socrates' elenctic arguments are not in individual instances intended to be constructive, but, again, merely to test an interlocutor's ability to maintain consistent beliefs about a given topic. In support of this view, Benson argues that Socrates does not conclude his elenctic arguments with categorical assertions or refutations of propositions investigated.

Rather, Benson draws attention to the so-called hypothetical or conditional character of Socrates' conclusions.[31] For example, the arguments in response to Charmides' first two definitions basically have the following form:

[definition] σωφροσύνη is ἡσυχιότης or αἰδώς

σωφροσύνη is καλόν or ἀγαθόν

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people that the nature of every entity be made clear?" (166c7-d4). Cp., Socrates' remarks in *Gorgias*: "I think we should be contentiously eager to come to know what is true and what is false about the things we discuss; for it is a common good for all that the truth should be made evident" (505e4-6). Cf., also Socrates' remark in *Protagoras*: "It is the truth and our own minds that we should be testing" (348a5-6).

[28] Benson 2000, 38 ff.

[29] One should also consult Brickhouse and Smith's recent and able (if brief) discussion of why Benson's conception of the doxastic constraint is untenable in Scott 2002, 145-57, esp. 147-9. This discussion also advances the position that in the early dialogues Socrates uses a variety of arguments which he puts to a variety of purposes, and that the very idea of a Socratic elenctic method in the early dialogues is problematic.

[30] Vlastos 1983, 27-58.

[31] This useful terminology is introduced by Adams 1998, 287-307.

ἡσυχιότης is not necessarily or in every instance καλόν or ἀγαθόν

Instead of concluding categorically that ἡσυχιότης and αἰδώς are not satisfactory definitions of σωφροσύνη, Socrates concludes the arguments hypothetically, that is, conditionally or by relativizing them to the particular arguments themselves:

> So, σωφροσύνη cannot be a sort of ἡσυχιότης, nor can the σώφρων life be ἡσύχιος, *at least according to this argument*, since being σώφρονα, it must be καλόν ... So σωφροσύνη cannot be αἰδώς, *if* in fact it is ἀγαθόν, while αἰδώς is no more ἀγαθόν than καλόν.[32]

Benson argues that all of Socrates' elenctic arguments are concluded hypothetically and that this reflects Socrates' motive of testing his interlocutor's beliefs for consistency, rather than employing arguments to determine the truth-value of given propositions, say, proposed definitions of *F*.

The attention Benson draws to the character of Socrates' conclusions is valuable. But his interpretation of the character of the conclusions is misguided. First, a number of Socrates' conclusions are not hypothetical.[33] This, at least, has to be explained.[34] Second, the hypothetical conclusions need not be interpreted as Benson suggests. Rather, I believe that they reflect Socrates' awareness of the limitations of the arguments as satisfac-

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[32] *Char.* 160b-c; 161a-b.

[33] In response to Laches' and Meno's first definitions, as well as Meno's second definition, Socrates more or less simply tells his interlocutor that the response is inadequate because it does not satisfy some identity condition (*Lach.* 190e7-9; *Euthr.* 6d6-11; *Meno* 74a7-10). Moreover, Socrates' conclusions to the arguments in response to the third definition in *Laches*, the first definition in *Lysis*, the first and third definitions in *Euthyphro*, the first, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth definitions in *Hippias Major*, the third definition in *Meno*, and the first, third, and fourth definitions in *Republic I* are all unqualified (*Lach.* 199e3-11; *Lys.* 218c4-7; *Euthr.* 6d9-e6, 10e9-11a4; *H. Maj.* 289d2-5, 293b10-c7, cf., also 293d6-8, 294e7-9, 296d2-3, 297d3-6; *Meno* 79d6-e2; *Rep.* I 331d2-3, 335e1-5, 347d8-e1, cf., also 342e6-11). Socrates' exchange with Protagoras in the eponymous dialogue at 333a1-b8 is especially revealing: "Then which statement are we to give up? The dictum 'one thing one contrary' or the statement that wisdom is a distinct thing from temperance, both being parts of virtue, and that in addition to each being distinct they are dissimilar both in themselves and in their functions, like the parts of a face? Which shall we renounce? The two statements are not very harmonious. They don't chime well together or fit in with each other. How could they, if one thing can have only one opposite, and yet though folly is only one thing, temperance as well as wisdom appears to be contrary to it? Isn't that the way of it, Protagoras?' He agreed, though most reluctantly. 'Then must not temperance and wisdom be the same, just as earlier justice and holiness turned out to be much the same? Come now, Protagoras, we must not falter but complete our inquiry...'"

[34] An obvious explanation for the mix of hypothetical and categorical conclusions is that Socrates has different attitudes toward the different arguments. Some he finds more compelling than others. But, reasonable as this would seem, in fact, there isn't a compelling correlation between the character of Socrates' conclusions and the character of his commitments to the identity conditions he employs in the arguments.

tory demonstrations of the conclusions, on the grounds that the premises are insecure. Thus, in the case of the arguments from *Charmides*, the conclusions indicate that Socrates believes ἡσυχιότης and αἰδώς are not satisfactory definitions of σωφροσύνη, because, as he believes, σωφροσύνη is necessarily καλόν and ἀγαθόν. However, Socrates recognizes that the proposition that σωφροσύνη is necessarily καλόν and ἀγαθόν has not been proven, and so that it could be proven false.[35] Accordingly, I resolve the problem of the *elenchos* by allowing that the premises in Socrates' arguments do not all have the same doxastic status. Precisely, Socrates is more firmly committed to some premises than to others. This encourages him to draw conclusions from his arguments, yet to remain mindful of the insecurity of his conclusions.[36]

Although incompletely defended, the preceding remarks suggest that Benson's conception of the *elenchos* as a method of testing whether individuals have the knowledge or expertise they profess or are purported to have is untenable. Consequently, Benson's notion that Meno's paradox arises precisely in response to a condition where neither Socrates nor his interlocutor professes knowledge cannot be sustained. The question why Meno's paradox arises remains open. Furthermore, Benson's conception that the hypothetical method supplants or supplements the elenctic method is undermined. While it may in fact be the case that the hypothetical method supplants or supplements the elenctic method, we have no acceptable grounds for thinking so. In fact, the hypothetical method, as introduced in *Meno*, may well be an explanation of Socrates' method in the early dialogues.

I will not here proceed to defend this position. Instead, I will turn to another fundamental question that Benson's account of the hypothetical method needs to address. How can the hypothetical method, as Benson conceives it, advance the acquisition of definitional knowledge? And, more generally, how can the hypothetical method advance the acquisition of knowledge? In order to explain why Benson's paper yields this concern, it is necessary to return to the argument of the paper, specifically to Benson's description of the hypothetical method.

Benson describes the hypothetical method as proceeding in two stages, first by establishing a limiting condition, such that, if a hypothesis is to be

[35] Consider the fact that in *Republic* I Thrasymachus claims that δικαιοσύνη is not an ἀρετή, which implies that δικαιοσύνη is not καλόν or ἀγαθόν. Socrates is surely surprised by this radical position. But, he does not think Thrasymachus is denying a self-evident proposition or that his denial is, ostensibly, logically contradictory. Rather, Socrates develops an argument to defend his own view.

[36] I discuss my explanation in greater depth in "Socrates' Pursuit of Definitions" (under review).

confirmed, it must hold or obtain, and then by determining whether that condition does in fact hold or obtain. For instance, in the case of the question, "Is virtue teachable?" it is established that if virtue is knowledge, then it is in fact teachable. Thus, the limiting condition is that virtue is knowledge. The question then arises: How is one to tell whether a limiting condition holds? Here Benson finds the nature of the kinds of arguments about the limiting condition that are actually developed in *Meno* elucidated by remarks Socrates makes in *Phaedo* 101-2. Specifically, he suggests that in *Phaedo* Socrates describes two means of confirming that limiting conditions hold; and he suggests that in *Meno* Socrates in fact presents these two methods in determining whether the limiting condition holds, that is, in determining whether virtue is knowledge.

The first method is to treat the limiting condition as a hypothesis in itself and thus to attempt to establish a limiting condition relative to it and on the basis of which it, the original limiting condition *qua* hypothesis, can be confirmed. In other words, there is a process of deriving one hypothesis from another so-called higher hypothesis.[37] The difficulty with this method is clearly seen to be that it leads to an infinite regress of deriving successive hypotheses from successively higher ones. However, apparently, as the *Phaedo* passage suggests, this regress can be brought to a halt if one alights on a proposition, used to confirm a hypothesis, which is itself found to be adequate, firm, or stable. This means that the proposition does not demand consideration of a further higher hypothesis for its confirmation. As Benson acknowledges:

> [i]t is not completely clear what the force of "standing firm for us" is supposed to be (that is, how Socrates describes a proposition that is adequate or stands firm) ... The idea seems to be that a proposition that stands firm, remains, or does not run away from us is one that in some sense is better confirmed, more evident, or more stable than one that does not. Perhaps it is not likely to be abandoned in the face of contrary beliefs or recalcitrant evidence.[38]

This notion of stability, of a stable or adequate proposition seems crucial to the idea that the hypothetical method is a method by which knowledge may be pursued— I will return to it momentarily.

First, I want to recount the second method for determining whether a limiting condition holds. (I stress that the point here is not simply to summarize Benson's account. Rather, by recognizing the limitations of this second method, we can be clearer about the limitations of the first method.) This second method is to examine the consequences of the limit-

[37] Benson 2003, 110-111.
[38] Benson 2003, 112.

ing condition for consistency. In this case, as it is said, certain conse-
quences follow from the limiting condition. Benson writes:

> the "consequences" [of, in this case, the limiting condition that virtue is
> knowledge] are all those beliefs, assumptions, or common opinions (endoxa)
> appropriately associated with virtue and knowledge, the two component con-
> cepts of the hypothesis [that is, the limiting condition conceived as a hy-
> pothesis].[39]

For instance, it is a common opinion about knowledge that it can be
taught, that, given a specific body or kind of knowledge, there are teachers
and learners of it. Thus, one consequence of the limiting condition qua
hypothesis is that if virtue is knowledge, it is teachable. Another is that if
virtue is knowledge, there are teachers and learners of it. The problem here
is that there are no teachers of virtue. Thus, the consequences of the hy-
pothesis are contradicted, and so, the limiting condition qua hypothesis
that virtue is knowledge is shown not to hold. There clearly seem to be
problems with this argument, as Benson and others have noted. Perhaps
what one must consider here is that there are not teachers and learners of
virtue, just in the sense that one conventionally understands these roles—
but perhaps there are teachers and learners according to the conception of
teaching and learning that is introduced in the dialogue itself. I will not
dwell on this point here. Rather, I want to emphasize Benson's own point
regarding this second method of determining whether limiting conditions
hold. He writes:

> this procedure for examining the hypothesis is at best provisional. For Plato
> has given us no reason to think that we should take the premises of the argu-
> ment in this portion of the dialogue as in any way more secure or stable than
> the hypothesis itself.[40]

In other words, for instance, the premise that if virtue is knowledge there
should be teachers and learners of it is in no way more secure or stable
than the hypothesis that virtue is knowledge itself.

Insofar as this is the case, then, of the two methods available for
determining whether the limiting condition of a hypothesis holds, only the
first method, as Benson understands it, namely, that of deriving the
limiting condition qua hypothesis from a higher hypothesis, seems to hold
out the possibility of securing that the limiting condition in fact holds.
Precisely, as we have seen, the success of this method depends upon the
possibility of finding adequate, firm, or stable propositions that put a halt
to potential infinite regresses involving the leap from one hypothesis to
another. Thus, the success of the hypothetical method in enabling ignorant
investigators to acquire knowledge, specifically definitional knowledge,

[39] Benson 2003, 115.
[40] Benson 2003, 115-116.

to acquire knowledge, specifically definitional knowledge, appears to rest
on the very possibility of finding adequate or stable propositions. Other-
wise, the results of the hypothetical method will remain provisional and
fundamentally unstable; and, accordingly, it is unclear how Socrates can
regard such results as advances toward knowledge. It is, then, unsettling to
find that, with regard to such propositions, Benson says just the follow-
ing—I am now repeating the passage I have already cited from the paper:

> The idea seems to be that a proposition that stands firm, remains, or does not
> run away from us is one that in some sense is better confirmed, more evident,
> or more stable than one that does not. It is not likely to be abandoned in the
> face of contrary beliefs or recalcitrant evidence.[41]

The question that needs to be addressed is this: What makes such proposi-
tions better confirmed, more evident, more stable, less likely to be aban-
doned in the face of contrary evidence? And, perhaps more specifically,
on what grounds does Socrates maintain (or even by what method does
Socrates arrive at) such conclusions about such propositions?

Consider the one proposition cited in Benson's paper and used in Meno
as an allegedly adequate, stable, or firm proposition: virtue is good.[42] In an
appendix in Socratic Studies entitled "Presumptive Moral Knowledge,"
Vlastos asks the question, "What would Socrates do with the moral com-
monplaces of his age—general propositions like 'virtue is good'...?"[43] He
answers:

> in Socratic elenchos there is no appeal to "reputable truths" (ἔνδοξα) as
> "starting-points" (ἀρχαί) of moral knowledge. Both Socrates and Aristotle
> proceed on the basis of commonly granted, uncontroversial, truths. The dif-
> ference is that Socrates does not give them the cognitively privileged status
> they get in Aristotle. For Socrates every proposition is open to elenctic chal-
> lenge.[44]

Of course, we are not talking about the elenctic method, but the hypotheti-
cal method. Nonetheless, the point is applicable. At the time Plato wrote
Meno, did he hold a view that he did not hold when he wrote the earlier
so-called elenctic dialogues, namely, that certain propositions are secure? I
am inclined to think Benson will deny this. Or, if not, then I wonder why
he does not make more of the introduction of this notion of stable proposi-
tions in Meno and Phaedo.

Whatever the case, it is worth considering that, as far as ethical proposi-
tions in the early dialogues go, the proposition, virtue is good (hereafter v),

[41] Benson 2003, 112.
[42] "ἄλλο τι ἢ ἀγαθόν φαμεν εἶναι τὴν ἀρετήν, καὶ αὕτη ἡ ὑπόθεσις μένει ἡμῖν,
ἀγαθὸν αὐτὸ εἶναι..." (87d2-3)
[43] Vlastos 1994, 138-9, at 138.
[44] Vlastos 1994, 139.

is remarkable. Vlastos is correct that v is *endoxic* and that Socrates does not regard *endoxic* propositions *per se* as solid grounds for knowledge.[45] But Socrates' confidence in v may have other grounds than its *endoxic* status.

Consider again Socrates' commitment to (PD). As noted, (PD) represents the conjunction of two propositions, (P) and (D).[46] (D) states that if one does not know what F is, one cannot know, for any property P, whether F has P. Thus, in *Republic* I, Socrates claims that if one does not know what δικαιοσύνη is, one cannot know whether it is an ἀρετή or whether its possessor is εὐδαίμων.[47] But, can Socrates really be committed to (D) so unqualifiedly? Consider the following proposition: If one does not know what εὐδαιμονία is, one cannot know whether its possessor is εὐδαίμων. This seems absurd. Similarly, if one does not know what ἀρετή is, one cannot know whether its possessor is ἄριστος? Again, this seems absurd. In other words, it seems that (D) must be qualified in the following way: (D') If one does not know what F is, one cannot know, for any property P, whether F has P—*unless this entails the contradiction of a logically true analytic proposition.*

Consideration of (D') at least suggests the possibility that Socrates may accept v on the grounds that it is logically self-evident[48]—although of course his commitment would be pre-theoretical and not conceived as such. If this is correct, it would explain why Socrates regards v as secure, and so it would provide at least the beginnings of an explanation of Socrates' conception of stable or secure propositions. It remains to develop such an explanation—or, if my suggestion is rejected, to provide an alternative.

Subsequently, it is necessary to explain how the process of inference operates from secure propositions and precisely how knowledge is to be achieved on the basis of secure propositions. Benson may be correct that Socrates' conception of knowledge entails a consistent set of beliefs.[49] But Socrates surely requires those beliefs to be true, not merely consistent. Since logically true analytic propositions are by definition true, inferences from them and consistent with them should be true. But, if logically true

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[45] I am not convinced by Polansky's argument (1985). However, there is one case where Socrates employs conventional beliefs in the context of asserting knowledge of an ethical proposition. In *Laches* Socrates assumes he and Laches know what ἀρετή is (190c-d). This passage has been neglected; perhaps precisely because of the way it complicates our interpretation of Socrates.

[46] See n.6.

[47] *Rep.* I 354c1-3.

[48] Accordingly, there is an important different between claims such as δικαιοσύνη is an ἀρετή or ἀγαθόν or καλόν and ἀρετή is an ἀρετή or ἀγαθόν or καλόν. It is logically self-evident that ἀρετή is not *an* ἀρετή, but that it is ἀγαθόν.

[49] Benson 2000, *passim*, but especially 189-221.

analytic propositions are not the only secure propositions, then it should be emphasized that consistency is insufficient for knowledge. Another possibility to consider is propositions derived from the divine. As Socrates says in *Apology*: the divine does not lie, for that is not lawful.[50] Thus, for instance, the Oracle's claim that Socrates is wise (or the wisest of men) might count as secure.

In closing, I wish to make explicit that in my response to Benson's paper I have not undertaken to examine whether Benson's characterization of the hypothetical method in fact squares with the evidence from *Meno* and *Phaedo*. My approach has been to grant that it does, and, under that assumption, to consider whether the hypothetical method differs from the elenctic method and whether and how the hypothetical method could be used to pursue definitional knowledge.

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[50] *Ap.* 21b5-7.