

“MUSIC TO THE EARS OF WEAKLINGS”: MORAL HYDRAULICS AND THE UNSEATING OF DESIRE

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Abstract: Psychological eudaimonism (PE) is the view that we are constituted by a desire to avoid the harmful. This entails that coming to see a prospective or actual object of pursuit as harmful to us will unseat our positive evaluative belief about (and co-stantiated desire for) that object (§I). There is more than one way that such an 'unseating' of desire may be caused on an

intellectualist picture (§II). This paper arbitrates between two readings of Socrates' 'attack on laziness' in the *Meno*, with the aim of constructing a model of moral education based on PE's implied moral psychology. In particular, we argue against the view that when we come to see – through prudential reasoning – that our blatant evaluative beliefs and desires deserve eudaimonism, we will no longer perceive their intentional objects as choice-worthy. We suggest, instead, that it is by experiencing shame that we cease to see the intentional objects of our evaluative beliefs and desires as worthy of pursuit (§III). This form of 'hydraulic education' bypasses reason-responsiveness altogether. As such, it only allows for practical norms to be derived from the nature of agency indirectly, namely by enabling the use of discursive practical reasoning.

PROLOGUE

Moral education in the *Meno* consists in recovering the desires and evaluative beliefs that constitute us as psychological eudaimonists.¹ That is, it is a matter of empirically *recollecting* what our souls contain *a priori*. Recollection, on this unpacking, consists in recovering our standing desire for the good. The effect of this recovery reconstitutes our motivational economies so that they reflect our deep eudaimonist commitments.²

¹ The dialogue tells us that having true beliefs can serve us just as well as having knowledge (96e-97c). The *primary* aim of moral education will be to give the agent true beliefs about the good. This should not, however, be thought to exhaust Socratic moral education.

² “Since the soul both is immortal and has been born many times, and has seen both what is here and what is in Hades, and in fact all things, there is nothing it has not learned. And so it is no matter for wonder that it is possible for the soul to recollect both about virtue and about other things, given that it knew them previously. For since all nature is akin and the soul has learned

On this view, we cannot endorse any desires that, upon recognition, propel us towards misery and wretchedness. Our innate eudaimonism has the power of veto over any desire discovered to be errant. The grounds upon which a desire is deemed errant consist in it being found to disserve the soul's native eudaimonism. In being—as Meno is—readily taken in by the apparent good-condition of the soul that pleasure brings about, we just as readily assume that pain connotes harm. Consistent with our eudaimonism, and the constraint this places on our rational desires, the latter is thus avoided, as a negative corollary of acting for the sake of the good. Meno assumes just these connections. As such, Socrates in his “music to the ears of weaklings” (81d5-e2) speech commences Meno's moral education by *exploiting* the latter's first-order desire to avoid pain, perceived by Meno as an apparent harm, in order to drive him away from the temptations of the eristic argument. Indeed, on the eudaimonist picture, the pursuit of something so apt to harm is psychologically excluded. To “tie down” Meno's moral progress, Socrates uses the slave-boy demonstration to explicitly engender the benefits belying apparent harms. Altogether, this mints in Meno a new, or rather *recollected*, desire for inquiry, whereby the “background”³ for his questions is no longer an empirical disposition of intellectual torpor nor a “greed for answers”⁴ but his now-recovered standing desire to learn. The ultimate goal of moral education, then, is the

everything, there is no reason why someone who has recollected only one thing – which is what people call ‘learning’ – should not discover everything else, as long as one is brave and does not give up on the search. For seeking and learning turn out to be wholly recollection” (*Men.* 81c5-d4).

³ Klein (1965), p.188-189.

⁴ Giblin (1953), p.201.

satisfaction of the desire to live well, consisting in the pursuit and attainment of objects⁵ that are objectively good.⁶ This paper asks how this is achieved in the particular case of Meno, with the further aim of clarifying the limited role that practical norms can play in hydraulic education.

I. PSYCHOLOGICAL EUDAIMONISM AND SOCRATIC INTELLECTUALISM

It is a foundation of Socratic ethics that every human soul is equipped with a native striving for the good.⁷ If this good can become the non-accidental⁸ object of our positive

⁵ Santas (1964), p.152 n.15. According to Annas (1981) p.181, rational desire “is associated with what is objective [...] based on what can be judged to be the case after reflection”. According to Scott (1999), p.29 desires are rational if they are “founded upon beliefs about the good”.

⁶ According to PE all of our desires may be parsed as desires to live well. For this reason, they may be couched as rational desires, that is, desires we have in virtue of being practically rational, sc. ones regulated by our conception of living well (*eudaimonia*). The intended objects of this comprehensive desire to live well are the *de dicto* good, understood as the beneficial (*Men.* 87e2-3), where attaining the beneficial is the mark of the *eudaimon* (as a negative corollary of the claim, at *Men.* 78a1-5, that attaining the harmful is the mark of the *kakodaimon*). As such, nobody rationally desires (or Socratically “wants”) the bad. If one desires the bad *de re*, but under the description ‘good’ or ‘beneficial’, one’s desires are still parsable as rational just in case these desires are regulated by one’s conception (however mistaken) of the good, for whose sake all of those actions are taken.

⁷ Segvic, (2000), p.20.

⁸ As we see it, the “*de re* / *de dicto*” distinction, applicable to Socrates’ discussion of desire at *Men.* 77b-78b, does not disambiguate sufficiently. For everything one actually desires

evaluative beliefs and desires, that is, the object that has “the required evaluative properties and the agent *recognises*, and *responds to*, these properties”,⁹ then we will live well. All human actions, according to this model, must be parsed as aiming at the good *de dicto*. Indeed, according to Socratic ethics, human actions are structured teleologically: everything an agent does is for the sake of the good.¹⁰ Clearly, however, while the soul moves in this teleological direction, the objects picked out by the description ‘good’ could, and do, fall short of evaluative reality. That is, as Wolfsdorf puts it, “all people desire objects as a result of *fallibly* evaluating them as good”.¹¹ Before discussing the intended and actual objects of desire according to the *Meno*, we shall first briefly unpack how Socrates’ cognitivist approach to desire relates to evaluative belief.

could happen to be good, and this is compatible with both moral luck *and* recognition of a real evaluative property.

⁹ Segvic (2000), p.10 (our emphasis).

¹⁰ According to Socratic moral psychology, in apprehending a moral reason, we obtain sufficient motivation for its pursuit. Mackie (1977, p.24) expresses Socrates’ intellectualism very nicely: “Being acquainted with the [Form] of the Good [...] [one] will, by this knowledge alone, without any further motivation, be impelled to pursue and promote these ideals.” Nehamas (1998, p.28) also phrases the position well: “Socrates’ ethical intellectualism makes him believe that once people acquire knowledge of virtue, they will be able to tell what the good thing to do is in all circumstances, and will in fact do it.” When Plato uses the term “reason” in relation to action (e.g. *aition* at *Protagoras* 352d), he has a teleological conception of reason in mind. We might then distinguish between normative teleological reasons, *for the sake of which we ought to act*; and so-called ‘motivating’ teleological reasons, *for the sake of which we actually act*.

¹¹ Wolfsdorf (2006) p.51. Our emphasis.

On our reading of Socratic intellectualism, human desires are psychologically bound up with evaluative beliefs. Just in case one believes an object to be good, one desires it.¹² As such, a positive evaluative belief about some object necessitates one's desire for that object. *Pari passu*, a desire for some object always involves that one holds a positive evaluative belief about it: if you pursued some object it is *because* you thought it good. Owing to this, on the Socratic picture it is possible to read off from your actions which evaluative beliefs and desires you held.¹³ On this view, desires are not merely concomitants of our evaluative beliefs, but are co-instantiated with them. This co-instantiation entails that an object is desired under any description that renders it true that the agent believes the object in question to be good. Likewise, an agent believes an object to be good under any description whereby it is desired. Thus, a propositional attitude of the kind “I think cream buns are great” implies a *desiderative* pro-attitude towards cream buns (in Barney’s helpful phrase, an “appropriative attitude”).¹⁴ Any such appropriative attitude,

¹² As Segvic explains: “Socratic volition is a receptivity of the soul to certain evaluative properties of the object of volition, the properties Socrates designates by the term “good”. However, *wanting* (*boulesis*) is not sheer receptivity; it is mediated by a correct conception of the object of desire as the good or the right thing to do. [...] so Socratic volition latches onto a certain evaluative aspect of reality. Thus this kind of wanting can be correctly ascribed to the agent only if the object of his volition has the required evaluative properties and the agent recognises, and responds to, *just these properties*. [...] desire (*epithumia*) involves believing that the object of desire is good, wanting (*boulesis*) implies knowing that the object of desire is good.”

¹³ For a contemporary development of this view, see Nagel (1970) ch. 5.

¹⁴ Barney (2010, p.40).

originating in a belief about the object's goodness, will produce sufficient motivation to act upon the desire that is co-instantiated with the evaluative belief. This view is known as strong motivational internalism. It can be stated as follows:

Knowing or believing the good, given the actual or apparent perception of a moral property, necessarily exerts a motivational pull on the agent acquainted with that moral property.¹⁵

Altogether, the above implies that the evaluative beliefs one has delimits the desires one can act upon. Only this picture of the relation between desire and evaluative belief can make sense of the *Protagoras's* (351b) denial of *akrasia*. In that text, being “overcome by pleasure” (ὑπὸ τῶν ἡττᾶσθαι), in cases where you alleged to believe or know of a better course of action, is ruled out. If you have been overcome by pleasure or irrational desire for some object *other* than what you purportedly believed or knew to be best, it turns out that you did not in fact believe or know the original course of action was best. If you really did believe it to be best, then you could not have ended up doing otherwise. That you desired to X while believing that doing Y is better *reveals* that your positive evaluative beliefs and concomitant desires are in actual fact set over objects of kind X, rather than objects of kind Y.

Such cognitivism about desire asserts that we cannot desire objects under the description ‘bad’. Since cognitive attitudes are prior¹⁶ to (yet, from the perspective of agency,

¹⁵ This statement, closely echoing Mackie, follows Olson (2014), p.111.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.38.

inextricable from) desiderative attitudes, thinking an object *bad* prevents our being motivated to pursue that object. However, as Bobonich explains, since “the principle of psychological eudaimonism [...] does not immediately entail that the person have any particular conscious attitudes”,¹⁷ while the *intended* object of all our desires is the good, the *actual* objects of our desires could be bad.¹⁸ Nonetheless, we desire them *sub specie boni*, as apparent goods. As Barney explains on this point, “‘apparent goods’ aren’t some natural kind that we might prefer to real ones, but are just the class of things thought to be genuinely so”.¹⁹ As such, Socrates’ claim that “we all desire the good” is most naturally understood as a *de dicto* claim. But it could also be seen to amount to the *de re* claim, viz. that “we all want to do the thing that is *actually* right and good”, regardless of how we conceive of it. That is, as Barney puts it, ‘good’ is the “perspicuous” description of the object of our desires,²⁰ even if, as Carone notes, we do not have “opaque acquaintance with the objects of [our] desires”,²¹ viz. by not being “fully aware of the content of happiness”.²² In other words, one desires to do whatever actually *fits the description* ‘what is good in evaluative reality’. We can helpfully think of this along Biblical lines. Imagine someone imploring God: “Show me what is right! I want to do it, but I do not know what it is...Lord guide me!” In this ‘*de re* theological’ sense one desires the good insofar as one desires *whatever fits the bill of the good in actuality*, and this

¹⁷ Bobonich (2010), p.297 n.10.

¹⁸ Scott (2005), p.49.

¹⁹ Barney (2010), p.35.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.53.

²¹ Carone (2004), p.67.

²² *Ibid.*

is compatible with not knowing what it is. Put more succinctly: one desires whichever thing (*res*) merits the description (*de dicto*) ‘good’. Even if one has a false conception of the good, then, there are at least two senses in which one both desires the good *and* desires the bad (see n.38 for elaboration).

One can desire some bad thing *de re*, whereby one’s desires track or are in fact set over some evaluatively poor object, provided it is desired under the guise of the good, and provided this guise is not removed or altered. This strikes us as Socrates’ takeaway claim in the *Meno*’s central discussion on the objects of desires (77b2-78b6). Were an object to be revealed as fitting a description under which it is *not* desired (indeed, where it *could* not be desired as a negative corollary of the thesis of PE), the agent would give up the desire on account of now taking its object to be bad.²³ This is not only true as a psychological fact. It also *logically* precludes the ascription of such a desire to the agent for the object revealed to be harmful. For example, when the object desired under the description ‘good’ is revealed to the agent to instead fit the description ‘harmful’, since this reveals that the desired object is bad, and moreover given the equivalence of the bad, the harmful, and the wretched-conducting (since, according to PE, nobody desires to be wretched), it cannot be true that they desire the bad and harmful object. PE precludes the ascription of the (presumably second-order) desire to be wretched, and this falsifies the claim that the agent desires the

²³ As Kamtekar (2006) p.145 writes, “our beliefs (or their expression in particular circumstances) are typically governed by rules of consistency and logical entailment, and *we may be unaware of the bearing of these rules on our beliefs* – which ones conflict with one another, and which ones we will abandon when we find they conflict, and so on.”

(equivalently) bad/harmful object.²⁴ In other words, if an evaluatively bad property, coextensive with the object of one's desire, were to become perspicuous to one, one would no longer even desire (in the general sense of '*epithumein*') it, because one cannot desire (either *epithumein* or *boulesthai*) something *qua* bad.²⁵ In cases such as these, if we remove or alter the guise (that is, the *de dicto* description) under which it is true that the agent desires the desideratum, since this does not preserve the intensionality of the attitude 'desiring', neither does it preserve the truth of the claim—or, to use Davidson's expression, "the validity of the inference"—that the agent desires the object *de re*.²⁶

²⁴ PE's plausibility depends on understanding the desire to not be wretched as being second-order (Frankfurt: 1971, p.12), *de dicto* (Davidson 1985, p.297), thick (Raz 1999, pp.101-110), and 'super' (Frankish 2004, pp.xiiff). Whether Socrates' argument for PE loses any of its bite once we conceive the desire in question this way (as opposed to one that is first-order, *de re*, thin, and/or 'basic') is beyond the scope of this paper; but we are not optimistic.

²⁵ Socratic wanting (*boulesthai*) is, we might say, evaluatively factive: it does not *count* as wanting (*boulesthai*) if the object the desire is set over is not really good. As Devereux (1995), p.402 puts it: "For Socrates, the distinction between wish and desire is parallel to the distinction between knowledge and opinion—just as we do not speak of someone knowing x unless x is true, so we should not speak of someone wishing for x unless x is truly good. [...] Wish (*boulesthai*) is veridical in relation to its objects whereas desire (*epithumein*) is not [necessarily]."

²⁶ Davidson (1985), pp.295ff.

II. FORMING AND UNSEATING DESIRE IN THE *MENO*

The above gives us clues as to how the unseating and formation of desires may occur within the *Meno*'s moral psychology, including how Meno's own desires may come and go. As we shall see in due course, this will prove to be of central importance.

Let us begin with unseating. Revealing an object to fit a description whereby it could not possibly, on reflection, be desired (for example, since it is constitutive of us to avoid such objects) can unseat the desire for that object. Does this mean that it is *consciousness* of an entailment that removes the desire (an empirical claim), or is it just the *very fact* that such an entailment is present (an *a priori*/conceptual claim) that makes the desire impossible? Clearly, desiring the bad *de re* is a real possibility.²⁷ What is *impossible* is to desire the bad *de re* once the only set of descriptors under which it *could* only have been desired (*viz. qua* good, beneficial, or happiness-conducting) have been substituted for their contrapositives (*viz. qua* bad, harmful, or wretchedness-conducting). Importantly, this substitution cannot go unnoticed by the desiring agent. Since desiring something under one of the latter descriptors implies desiring something that one believes will make them miserable (*athlios*), and nobody according to PE desires *that*, then it is impossible to continue to desire a bad object *de re* once the object of that desiderative attitude is revealed perspicuously to the agent to be an object of universal human avoidance (77e5–78b2). Thus, revealing the desideratum under the description whereby it is the object of avoidance (*viz. the harmful*), will remove the desire.

²⁷ At least when we understand this to mean, as Reshotko (2006), p.147 writes: “All people *either* desire good things *or* desire bad things *thinking* them good”.

The above also gives us a clue as to how the *formation* of desire may occur according to the *Meno's* moral psychology.²⁸ The text allows us to posit two ways in which desires can be formed. The first imports the prudentialism of the *Protagoras*. On this reading, if desiring something requires perceiving an object as beneficial, then if an object can be *calculated* to benefit—following, for example (and as we elaborate below), the *Protagoras's* recommendation of the “measuring art”—then this will cause a desire for that object.

The second, more ‘passive’ picture of desire formation—though still compatible with the intellectualist moral psychology of 77b-78b—is as follows. If some object’s beneficial properties can be made explicit to us, such that we take (sc. think, believe) the object’s pursuit and acquisition to be beneficial for us, we will form desires to pursue and appropriate the apparently beneficial object. The appearance of benefit can be achieved through the experience of pleasure, an apparent good. This is because experiencing pleasure is one way of *appearing* to be benefitted, since pleasure brings about the apparent good-condition (*enexia*) of the soul—a signal to us that our standing eudaimonist desires are being satisfied, though this is of course compatible with ethical hubris. On this model,

²⁸ What causes us to evaluate objects as good? The objects of one’s first-order desires are all, as we conceive of them at least, on this picture of PE, *means* to happiness. To the person who has not accurately specified what happiness consists in, e.g. Meno, these could even appear to be the *constituents* of happiness. We are apt to see the immediate “appropriative” objects of our first-order desires as valuable on account of the experiential benefits they afford. Chief amongst these are pleasure and satisfaction. Thus, these objects appear choice-worthy because, on account of their capacity to please and satisfy, they thereby appear to satisfy the standing desire for our own welfare. Cf. Taylor (2008), p.226 ff.

if some option can be presented to us as beneficial *by* giving us pleasure (even in the mere imagination of that option), we will want to pursue that option because we see it as giving us what we value: happiness. (The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of pain. Having some desiderative option presented painfully, then, will prevent or forestall the formation of a desire for the object being presented.) Unless the experience of pain can be cognitively mediated with the *evidence* of benefit (thus enabling the subject to forge a reflective, cognitive connexion between pain and benefit), the only connotation pain will have for a subject is that of producing wretchedness rather than happiness. We return to this latter point in our discussion of the slave-boy demonstration.

But how is this second mode of desire formation and unseating compatible with Socratic intellectualism, which reduces all motivation to the cognitive?²⁹ Our answer is that to the extent that experiencing pleasures entails that one thereby *believes* oneself is benefitted, pleasure is inextricably bound up with the cognitive (if one did not *believe* one was benefitted, there would be no experience of pleasure). Moreover, in experiencing pleasure one takes oneself to be acting in ways consistent with PE, even if one's experience of pleasure is not explicitly regulated by the norms generated by PE. As Carone notes, experiencing pleasure causes an agent "to *believe* that he is in a state of *euxidia*".²⁹ These pleasures are of a piece with rational desires. Since one pursues these pleasures and desires *just because* they are regulated by one's conception of the good, they may be called rational desires; desires an agent has *only in virtue of believing* that the pursued object contributes to their overall happiness.³⁰

²⁹ Carone (2004), p.65 n.26. Our emphasis.

³⁰ According to Le Bar and Goldberg (2012), p.312, a desire is rational when we can "embed that desire within a framework of

Despite its intellectualism, then, the *Meno* provides us with two surprisingly diverse models by which empirical desires can be formed and unseated. In summary, the first requires that we calculate whether the option in front of us is really beneficial. Ceasing to see something as beneficial after engaging in the art of measurement will *extirpate* the desire for that object, while discovering that an option is most beneficial will *cause* a desire for that object. On the second model, if one's desiderative options can in their very presentation to, or imagination by, the agent be experienced pleasantly or painfully, these can respectively form or unseat a desire for the desideratum. This is because the experience of pleasure is an apparent good connoting (albeit fallibly) the good-condition (*euexia*) of the soul. As such, the experience of such a pleasure subjectively feels like satisfying a rational desire for the (objective) good aimed at by one's standing eudaimonist commitments. Indeed, from the perspective of the subject this is just what she is doing. This is true, *mutatis mutandis*, with pain, the experience of which connotes (again, fallibly) the bad-condition of the soul, such that its experience feels like fulfilling a desire *contrary to* one's eudaimonist desire for the good. Both the experience of pleasure and pain on this second model are regulated by one's rational desire—that is, parasitic upon one's conception—of the good.

To foreground and pre-empt our discussion in §II, we want to briefly outline the role we think shame can play according to the second model, sketched above, of desire formation and unseating. Socratic attempts to unseat his interlocutors' desires, in order to rearrange their

ends which takes its structure from the aim of living well, requiring the dominant desire to live well as part of one's psychological economy". See also Bobonich (2010), p.313: "a person desires and pursues anything only insofar as it conduces to his own greatest happiness".

psychological economies—such that these interlocutors may lead better lives—foregrounds the role of shame. This motif is particularly prevalent in the *Gorgias*, but we want to suggest in this paper that it also operates in the *Meno*. Not only—as has been noted by previous scholars³¹—in the slave-boy demonstration, but earlier in Socrates’ “music to the ears of weaklings” tirade (81d5-e2), which attempts to persuade Meno out of his lazy desire (though not, on this picture, *irrational*) to abandon the inquiry into virtue. Being shamed on account of one’s evaluative beliefs has the power to unseat those evaluative beliefs and their co-instantiated desires, because shame is experienced as a pain. This is significant, as Moss notes, because “shame can separate a person’s judgements about what is pleasant from his judgements about what is good”.³² If one thinks some object is good because its acquisition brings one great pleasure, being shamed on account of that evaluative belief—a painful experience—will cause one to feel pain instead of pleasure with regard to the desideratum. This causes one to see the desideratum anew: as something that does *not* bring about the good-condition (apparent or otherwise) of the soul, but the reverse. As a result of this, one no longer sees the desideratum as an object of rational desire, because, in Scott’s words, “a person desires something *if and only if* they believe that it contributes to their overall happiness”.³³ If apparent pleasures were rationally desired *given* the belief that they contribute to one’s happiness, then the agent will register actual pains as signs that the desideratum is not ‘happiness-conducting’ (along with the other descriptors belonging to this triad)

³¹ See for example: Gordon (1999); Weiss (2001, p.82); Scott (2005, p.209); Brickhouse and Smith (2010), p.117.

³² Moss (2005, p.140).

³³ Scott (2005, p.51). Our emphases.

after all. The agent will simultaneously give up the evaluative belief that such an object is good, and, with that, the desire for the object as contributing to their good will also disappear.

The removal of errant desires, along these lines, removes obstacles to living well. On certain interpretations, in fact, this removal is all it takes to reconstitute the motivational topography of agents to that of the “true self”.³⁴ (Recall that, for example, in *Republic* X (611b9-612a3), Plato employs an image of the sea-god Glaucus as an analogy of an “unencrusted soul”, to use Raphael Woolf’s phrase,³⁵ whose true nature is philosophical but is hindered in reflecting this disposition given its association with the empirical “accretions”³⁶ it has acquired in its maritime situation.) The removal of such cognitive obstacles, such as errant beliefs about the good and their desiderative entailments, suffices for us to recover, or recollect, our standing desire for the good. We return to this discussion in our exegesis of 81d5-e2 (§III).

Let us return now to the equivalence within the respective and exclusionary evaluative triads good/beneficial/happiness-conducting and bad/harmful/wretchedness-conducting. If one’s desideratum is shown to an agent (and she notices it) to fit the description of any single descriptor in the respective triad, this will make it true that it is desired *qua* any of the other descriptors belonging to the same triad. However, since nothing is desired under the descriptors of the latter triad, if one’s desideratum is *revealed* under one of these descriptions, on pain of the truth of PE, the desire for the

³⁴ See especially Cornford (1933, p.306). See also Brickhouse and Smith (1996, ch. 3, esp. p.101).

³⁵ See Woolf (2012).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.158.

thing itself (the *re*) will be eliminated. If *de dicto* descriptions are interchangeable just insofar as there is an identity relation between those descriptions, falsifying one's desire for just one of these equivalent *de dicto* descriptions (e.g., if not beneficial, then not good), can serve to unseat the desire *de re*. This means that making transparent the equivalence/identity of these *de dicto* descriptions places descriptive constraints on the possible objects of our *de dicto* desires. Indeed, as a consequence of this, it will now be false that you want to appropriate the *thing* that has now been revealed to fit the description 'harmful'. For, as Wolfsdorf explains, "an intensional context is one in which substitution of coextensive expressions does not preserve truth-values".³⁷

To illustrate the above, and adapting one of Wolfsdorf's own examples, consider the following sentence describing a case of ignorant incest: "Jane desires to have sex with Joseph; Joseph is Jane's brother; therefore, Jane desires to have sex with her brother." Desire introduces an intensional context. Owing to this, we cannot replace co-referring terms (e.g., "brother" for "Joseph") and preserve the sentence's truth-value.³⁸ In these cases we speak of desire *de dicto*: Jane *de dicto* desires to sleep with Joseph, but she does not *de dicto* desire to sleep with her brother. However, since 'Joseph' picks out the same thing as 'Jane's brother', it is true *de re* that Jane desires to sleep with her brother.³⁹ To adapt a quotation from Broackes:

A [desire-ascription] is about a particular object (*de* that particular *re*) if one is free to

³⁷ Wolfsdorf (2006, p.34 n. 20).

³⁸ Broackes (1986, p.375).

³⁹ See, again, Davidson (1985), esp. pp.296-297.

substitute any name or description of that object.⁴⁰

Owing to this, we should heed Scott's recommendation that, "when it comes to deciding whether the people under discussion desire the good or not, we should focus on their intended objects".⁴¹

Recall that PE holds that desire for the good "belongs to our common nature" (*Men.* 78b6-7).⁴² This is equivalent to the claim that "no one does evil knowing that it is evil". If you have beliefs about the good, or better yet *knowledge*, you will never act against these beliefs, provided the belief is held at the time of acting.⁴³ As noted above, this places descriptive constraints on the possible objects of our *de dicto* desires as psychological eudaimonists. The above, however, also places a *normative* constraint on us as desiring agents. Indeed, PE can be found to generate the following prescriptive claim. Following Le Bar and Goldberg, we call this thesis, 'normative eudaimonism':

We have conclusive reason to act in ways that conduce to our own *eudaimonia*.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Broackes (1986), p.375.

⁴¹ Scott (2005), p.49.

⁴² PE appears widely across the Platonic corpus: *Euthy.* 278e3-5, *Prot.* 358c6-d4, *Grg.* 467e6-468c7, *Meno* 78a3, *Rep.* 505e1-2, *Sym.* 205a4-10, and *Phile.* 20d6-8.

⁴³ The amounts to the impossibility of both 'synchronic belief-akrasia' and 'diachronic knowledge-akrasia'. (On this, see Penner 1996, p.201).

⁴⁴ Le Bar and Goldberg (2012), p.288.

According to this claim, certain norms preside over all acts that are within our control. This, very importantly, includes cognitive acts such as those involved in the formation of our evaluative beliefs. Since we pursue objects *sub specie boni*, that is, those that *seem* best to one even when the acquisition of those objects is not really in our eudaimonist interests, we ought, as Brickhouse and Smith note, to subject these seemings to “sensible evaluation”.⁴⁵ If we can correct our errors—or, just as importantly, our errors can be corrected—at the level of evaluative belief, then we can end up with desires at the first-order that conduce to, and satisfy, our *standing* desire for happiness. If not, then we run the risk of “ethical hubris”:⁴⁶ whereby we think we are living well when we are not.⁴⁷

The problem here is one of motivation. This is because, on the Socratic-intellectualist picture, our beliefs about living well end up constituting, and thereby delimiting, the motives from which we can act. As such, we can follow Mackie and describe Socratic intellectualism as entailing “motivational internalism”,⁴⁸ or, following Stratton-Lake “belief internalism”.⁴⁹ As Rider rightly presses,

⁴⁵ Brickhouse and Smith (2010), p.46.

⁴⁶ Reeve (1989), p.35.

⁴⁷ As Segvic (2000), p.16 notes, “the Greek verb translated as ‘to err’, ‘ἐξαμαρτάνειν’ or ‘ἀμαρτάνειν’ (*Prot.* 345d6-e4), ranges over a wide territory. It covers both simply going wrong, in the sense of making an error [and] *doing* wrong, in a moral sense.”

⁴⁸ Mackie (1977), pp.23-4.

⁴⁹ According to Stratton-Lake (1999), p.313: “if A believes that she ought to Φ in circumstances C, then either she is motivated to Φ in C, or she is irrational.” As Evans (2010), p.17 n.44 puts it (as it applies distinctively in the *Meno*): “if an agent desires x, then she believes that x is good for her”.

If Socrates is right about the structure of human motivation, nothing is more important in a person's life than that he have the right views about what is valuable.⁵⁰

Owing to Socratic eudaimonism, then, we are, as Le Bar and Goldberg put it, under “reflective pressures to shape our empirical desires according to the end of living well”.⁵¹ If we inevitably desire and pursue what we *think* good, then by either calculating what is good, or being *persuaded* that something is good so that we end up *taking* it to be good, will motivate the pursuit and acquisition of that thing. This is why, as Wolfsdorf explains, “Socrates is concerned with evaluations of objects that motivate the acquisition of those objects”.⁵² Thus, when we reflect on and discover what living well consists in, we will desire whatever we find to be instrumental to the fulfilment of that desire.⁵³ *Pari passu*, as Irwin identifies, if an agent “ceases to believe that x contributes to the final good, he will cease to want x”.⁵⁴ Indeed, Socrates' mention of *kakodaimonia* at the end of his argument (*Meno* 78a2) itself has the effect of reminding us of what we really want: *eudaimonia*. In light of prompting this recollection, Klein writes, for us and for Meno:

Everything would have to be considered anew [...] We would have to decide about the “rightness”, or right order, of [our] goals

⁵⁰ Rider (2007), p.43.

⁵¹ Le Bar and Goldberg, (2012), p.307.

⁵² Wolfsdorf (2006), p.91.

⁵³ Le Bar and Goldberg (2012), p.293.

⁵⁴ Irwin (1977), p.78.

[when] most of the time we shy away from this all-important task.⁵⁵

If our tendency to form beliefs *ignores* the norms available to govern this activity,⁵⁶ as per normative eudaimonism, such as when we “guess at pleasure without the best” (*Grg.* 465a), our evaluative beliefs—which motivate us to pursue what we *take* to be the good—will also fail to represent evaluative reality correctly, and so we will fail to do what we want as eudaimonists. Thus, if we can control (or, indeed, if *Socrates* can control) what happens during our evaluation of our desiderative options, so that we evaluate aright, then we can be motivated to pursue and thereby attain the right objects. In so doing we would fulfil the desires constitutive of us as psychological eudaimonists. In short, we would live well. In the next section we begin discussing the first model that might be at work in the *Meno* regarding how Meno himself can evaluate his options aright.

III. CHANGING MENO'S MIND

One way of controlling how we evaluate our desiderative options is by using prudential reasoning. One form of prudential reasoning that can “show us the truth” (δηλώσασα δὲ τὸ ἀληθές) (*Prt.* 356d8-e2) is the “art of

⁵⁵ Klein (1965), p.77. But is the giving up of a desire always this reflective? While in certain Socratic dialogues the formation of desire is presented as result from calculative reflective (such as in the *Protagoras*), we claim that it is not always as explicitly reflective as this. Those who are out of practice with such reflective skills (as we think Meno is) may give up their desires following a more passive methodology, as suggested in §II.

⁵⁶ On this topic, see Vogt (2012), esp. pp.19-20.

measurement” (ἡ μετροητικὴ τέχνη) (356d), which is touted in the *Protagoras* to be our “salvation” (σωτηρία) (356e2–4). Are these the kinds of tools Meno takes recourse to when Socrates suggests that he should reconsider and re-evaluate the merits of the eristic argument? Given Meno’s acceptance of PE in the key passage on desire at 78a5-6, the only way to understand Meno’s choices are as *expressions* of his practical rationality, viz. as concerted, rational attempts to satisfy the desire to live well. However, while Meno may have exhibited tendencies to “guess at pleasure without the best” (*Grg.* 465a), this is, from the perspective of PE, prudentially irrational (though not *in fact* irrational, given that Meno’s desire for pleasure is still desired *qua* contributing toward the good, such that Meno’s own behaviour can be read *subjectively* as prudentially rational). In this section, we explore this possibility by reading into the key passage (*Men.* 81d5-e2) the psychology of the *Protagoras*.

Socrates’ denouncement of the eristic argument—whose immediate, and presumably intended, result is to stall the pair’s inquiry into virtue—goes as follows:

We ought not then to be led astray by the contentious argument you quoted. It would make us lazy and is music to the ears of weaklings. The other doctrine produces energetic seekers after knowledge; and being convinced of its truth, I am ready, with your help, to inquire into the nature of virtue. (81d5-e2)⁵⁷

In order to determine whether Meno’s choices, and therefore his progress, are directed by the norms governing prudential rationality in his eventual abandonment of the

⁵⁷ Translation by Guthrie (1956), slightly adapted.

eristic argument, we should first consider what we know about Meno's character thus far in the text.

Meno has demonstrated a proclivity, up until this point in the dialogue, to prefer the lazy way out. For this is the path of least resistance, and that way immediate pleasures lie. Meno, we have learned thus far, is highly sensitized to the pleasures of confirmation. Consider, first, how Meno relays his experience of *aporia*, intellectual numbness, as like being stung by the torpedo fish (79e7–80b7). That *numbness*, nay *analgesia*, can have the effect of such a pain on Meno proves just how sensitive he is to the pleasures of confirmation (and the pains of being confounded).⁵⁸ Consider also that the definition Meno gives of colour is one he is “used to” and thereby “pleases [him] more” (ἀρέσκει σοι μᾶλλον) than the previously-given definition of shape. When Meno *can* indulge his tendency for being philosophically work-shy, he does—he even, at one point, demands it (76a8–c3). Indeed, Meno says explicitly that he will stay (περιμένοιμ’) in the conversation if Socrates continues to gratify him with answers of a certain kind (77a1-2). Meno essentially *banks* on the pleasure of being reassured that Gorgias's gobbets—the tutor from whom Meno memorises speeches and answers⁵⁹—hold up under scrutiny, and is upset when this expectation is subverted. All of this points to, as Scott notes, a tyrannical soul:⁶⁰ one who takes pleasure to be the good, and who behaves so as to sustain that psychic status quo.

While Meno's intellectual laziness promises short-term pleasures, heeding the norms of evaluative belief-formation is the route to *guaranteeing* that one's life is well lived. The

⁵⁸ Warren (2014), p.28.

⁵⁹ As Weiss (2001), p.19 notes, “Meno's very name is, in fact, a pun on memory and memorization.”

⁶⁰ Scott (2005), p.63.

Meno recommends that we heed the norms of evaluative belief-formation to prevent us from succumbing to the ready comforts of intellectual laziness, for that way *kakodaimonia* lies. Contenting oneself with mere appearances whilst eschewing the norms of belief-formation thereby constitutes a kind of flattery that the *Gorgias* denounces as “[guessing] at what’s pleasant with no consideration for what’s best” (*Grg.* 465a1-2).

With such an interest in pleasure, then, *Meno* would do well to engage in the kind of prudential reasoning that aims at maximising his hedonic benefits. Does *Meno* plausibly engage in such an attempt at pleasure’s maximisation at the crossroads between the eristic argument and the doctrine of recollection? Let us see.

According to the first reading, the moral wrong that constitutes succumbing to the eristic argument is a matter of errant prudential reasoning. As James Warren explains:

The principal aim of the art of measurement is to produce an accurate account of something’s size or value which is not distorted by factors that are irrelevant [such as] the physical proximity of the object.⁶¹

According to the picture of the *Protagoras*, our lives go best overall when we engage in cognition by which we maximise the pleasures accruing to us. We can call this view “prudentialism”.⁶² Would this make *Meno*’s longstanding tendency to “guess at what’s pleasant with no consideration for what’s best” (*Grg.* 465a1-2) *merely* a matter of faulty prudential reasoning? Yes. We know that *Meno* has systematically avoided engaging in the art of measurement,

⁶¹ Warren (2014), p.104.

⁶² Brickhouse and Smith (2010), pp.44-49.

failing, thereby, to calculate what is really in his interest rather than what *appears* to be given the proximity, and so illusory size, of pleasures accruing to him. The pursuit of pleasure *qua* good, then, is susceptible to calculation, for forcible reflection on the benefits or harms accrued by these pleasures can diminish or remove their good-appearance and hence their desirability.⁶³ Thus, by forcing Meno to adjudicate his options in terms of a cost-benefit analysis, employing the art of measurement (should he assent to the eristic argument, or assent to the doctrine of recollection?), cancels (ἄνωγον) (*Prt.* 356d7-8) the effect of appearances on Meno's soul. This enables him to see what is overall in his interest, and would be the saviour of his life.

Given the strong motivational internalism entailed by Socratic intellectualism, once Meno *knows* what will benefit him overall he will inevitably pursue it.⁶⁴ As things seem to Meno on first appearances, submitting to the eristic argument looks to promise the comforts of instant acquiescence. There is, in this case, an example of “bias towards the near”, whereby pleasures closer at hand always

⁶³ As Moss (2006), p.508, “on this characterization [...] desires for pleasure are sensitive to, and often even arise out of, calculations about the relative sizes of pleasures and pains.”

⁶⁴ Bobonich (2010), p.313: “Since the art of measurement directs us to maximize our pleasure because that is best for us, we get the Principle of Rational Eudaimonism (*Prt.* 356a-357e). Indeed, since Socrates thinks that all desire is for the good, and understands this in a maximizing way, he is committed to a stronger form of PE— that is, to the claim that a person desires and pursues anything only insofar as it conduces to his own greatest happiness. Since this is what reason prescribes, Socrates is thus also committed to a stronger form of rational eudaimonism such that one's (greatest happiness) is one's only rational consideration in action.”

appear larger than those further away.⁶⁵ Owing to this bias, the eristic argument appears to provide a greater good (or pleasure) to Meno than the alternative of a protracted inquiry, whose pleasures—if that inquiry were ever to result in discovery—would not be so close-by. However, with the use of the skill of measuring, Meno will no longer see the ready-comforts of the eristic argument as inflated, to-be-pursued pleasures. If Meno was for one moment tempted⁶⁶ by the apparent pleasures on offer with the eristic argument, the effect of the measuring art on this appearance will be counteracted or canceled once the eristic argument’s proximal pleasures have been revealed as actual harms (not to mention, of course, being vastly outweighed by concrete benefits of putting his faith—as Socrates has (81e2)—in the doctrine of recollection).

According to this reading, once Socrates spells out the consequences of submitting to the eristic argument, viz. its harmful effect on our character, it is purely a matter of prudential reasoning that leads Meno to reject it in favour of the doctrine of recollection, which promises, by contrast, myriad benefits. (These benefits include, we are told at 86b-c3, making us “more manly” (ἀνδρικώτεροι). This will seem a particularly impressive benefit to Meno. As Ionescu observes, “Meno generally subscribes to common traditional views [...] and the superiority of manly over cooperative virtues is one of the common opinions that he endorses”.)⁶⁷ Thus, once Meno can see his desire to submit

⁶⁵ Warren (2014), p.112.

⁶⁶ In this passage, Meno is tempted to acquiesce to the eristic argument. This does not imply that Meno at any point risks acting akratically, or that any mental conflict is at work. That is, there is not, simultaneously, one part of Meno’s soul that wants to heed the eristic argument, and another that wants to resist. Meno either goes one way or the other.

⁶⁷ Ionescu (2007), p.5.

to the eristic argument as harmful, as a consequence of his latent commitment to PE (whereby desiring the harmful entails, *per impossibile*, the desire to be wretched) he will no longer find the eristic argument desirable, for, *ex hypothesi*, he cannot desire a comparatively smaller pleasure over a greater one. By revealing the eristic argument to be harmful and the recollection doctrine to be beneficial, Socrates gives Meno all the information he needs to conduct a cost-benefit analysis that will give him overall pleasure. The knowledge resulting from this cost-benefit analysis enables Meno to make a choice that could prove the saviour of his life.

Unfortunately, we find this ‘Protagoras reading’ of Meno’s change of heart (or, to avoid any irrational contamination, *mind*) deeply implausible. As we know, Meno cannot but choose the gratification of oratory over the discomforts of reflective, norm-governed thought. Owing to this, Warren’s comments on the hedonic (and perhaps affective) disadvantages of the art of measurement seem particularly salient when we apply them to Meno:

The calculation [...] is itself likely to be of some hedonic cost in so far as it requires time and effort and, even if it is not itself a painful activity, precludes the performance of some other potentially more pleasant activity.⁶⁸

Furthermore, how could a character who has shown systematic obliviousness—if not *disdain* (76a8–c3)—regarding the need to think for himself suddenly end up autonomously engaged in the art of measurement? This implausibility is made particularly conspicuous against the following remarks of Klein’s. As Klein notes, just as Meno’s answers are not “*his* answers”, neither are his

⁶⁸ Warren (2014), p.116 n.21.

judgments *his* judgments, since “they merely reproduce the opinions of others”.⁶⁹ Likewise, “his questions are not really *questions* since they do not stem from the desire to know”.⁷⁰ If Meno’s questions have “any background at all”, Klein continues, “it is provided either by Meno’s desire to avoid such exploration and search, or by his habit of bringing his memories into play”.⁷¹ While, then, engaging in the art of measurement is of course what Meno *should* do, not least because his patterns of forming beliefs aim at the pleasant without any reflective concern for the good (even though his pursuit of pleasure aims teleologically at the good), it is highly doubtful that Meno deploys the skill of measuring. Meno would of course be *more* prudentially rational if he did bother to conduct a truth-productive (*Prt.* 356d8-e2) prudential calculus on his choices, *particularly* if he aims at pleasure *as* the apparent good. But Meno has eschewed the norms of belief-formation for far too long for this to be at all persuasive. *Counterfactually*, yes, the art of measurement would be the saviour of Meno’s life, *were he to bother to engage in it*. But he is so out of practice with utilising any such skill that it is implausible that he should be doing so on this occasion.

But perhaps this is too quick. Perhaps, we could instead adopt a reading presented by Penner, which would not require us to make any implausible assumptions about Meno’s (dormant or otherwise) calculative skills.⁷² Penner proposes to explain why we act as we do according our perception of “different gestalts” of an action’s value.⁷³

⁶⁹ Klein (1965), p.188.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp.188-189.

⁷² Penner (1996), pp.199-229.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

These gestalts of value appear and then disappear depending on perspective, such as when a pleasant object is closer or farther at hand.⁷⁴ Perceiving the differences between these different gestalts of value enables, as Warren notes, “correct estimation and comparison” by contrast with “with the simple acceptance of appearances”.⁷⁵ It would be *Socrates* who made these various gestalts apparent to Meno, and to that extent Socrates lends Meno a hand in measuring the various benefits of his choices at the juncture between submitting to the eristic argument and trusting instead in the recollection myth. This would render Meno’s choice to turn his back on the eristic argument a choice *resulting* from measurement, albeit one helped along by Socrates’ own calculated presentation of their respective benefits. Meno’s choice is, on this reading, mediated by *Socrates’* appraisal of Meno’s options.⁷⁶

We think any *decisive* reading of Meno’s change of mind, however, ought to pay greater attention to the language Socrates uses in his attack on laziness (81d5-e2). Or, indeed, the fact that it *is* an attack of sorts. Let us return, then, to the “music to the ears of weaklings” passage:

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Warren (2014), p.106.

⁷⁶ In this respect, Socrates acts as a kind of sophist, ensuring that things appear to Meno in the way Socrates intends. However, unlike the sophists’ deceptive words, Socrates’ *logoi* are soul-bettering. Socrates may be a producer of appearances (*Soph.* 236a-c), insofar as he attempts to present Meno’s options in a certain way (and to that extent, put Meno in mind of the truth). Quite unlike the sophist’s art, Socrates’ noble art is guided by the motive of unseating false beliefs, or very minimally beliefs that get in the way of doing philosophy.

We ought not then to be led astray by the contentious argument you quoted. *It would make us lazy and is music to the ears of weaklings.* The other doctrine produces energetic seekers after knowledge; and being convinced of its truth, I am ready, with your help, to inquire into the nature of virtue. (81d5-e2)

This speech constitutes a forcible, though verbal,⁷⁷ indictment on the source of Meno's intellectual laziness. It is apt to make Meno feel acutely pained, and deeply ashamed—not least on account of being likened, albeit counterfactually, to somebody 'soft-of-soul', which is likely to disgust the champion of manly virtues that is Meno.⁷⁸ These pains range over something Meno *thought* worthy of pursuit, or rather, intellectual capitulation: the eristic argument (80d5-e5). This speech, we argue, is Socrates' attempt to forge a connexion between an apparent good (the eristic argument, which appears good because it offers a lazy mind relief from the strains of inquiry), and the experience of pain, which Meno is likely to experience as a harm. Our claim is that in this speech Socrates exploits Meno's assumption that being pained (or, as Meno thinks

⁷⁷ That words (*logoi*) can have the effect of physical force is strongly suggested by the pharmaceutical properties that certain *logoi* and *muthoi* possess (e.g. *Meno* 80a3-4—recall in the *Meno* that Meno experiences elenctic *aporia* physically; Meno says Socrates bewitches him with “magic and spells” (γοητεύεις με καὶ φαρμάκτους καὶ ἄτεχνῶς κατεπῆδεις). As Murray (1996), p.229 notes, this recalls the analogy between persuasion and cookery in the *Gorgias* 463-5. Moreover, as Moline (1978), p.17 observes, the goal of curing the soul of its vice “is attainable by verbal means—by the use of words so remarkable in their effect that he terms them or “charms” and likens them to φάρμακα or drugs”.

⁷⁸ Ionescu (2007), p.5, p.12.

of it, *harmed*) brings about, or connotes, the poor condition of the soul *and so wretchedness*—an assumption embedded, as we saw in within a psychological eudaimonist framework (§I). Socrates exploits this assumed equivalence on Meno’s part, and, by making Meno feel pain with regard to something he *thought* was worthy of pursuit, Socrates causes Meno to think that the thing he *thought* worthy of pursuit cannot in fact be worthy of pursuit because, on account of bringing about a painful state of soul, it seems to Meno that it cannot thereby conduce to his happiness (*ex hypothesi*, PE). The positive evaluative belief that drew Meno towards the eristic argument, then, is given up because this is seen as dis-serving his PE: that which structures and regulates all of Meno’s desires.⁷⁹ And, given the co-instantiation of evaluative belief and desire, this all serves to eliminate Meno’s desire for the eristic argument.

It is even, on a *hydraulic* reading of this passage, capable of forming a desire in an opposite direction of the eristic argument. Such hydraulic models are found in both Socratic and Platonic moral psychology. Take this instance from the *Gorgias*:

⁷⁹ Socrates’ “music to the ears of weaklings” speech is intended to register in Meno as *ad hominem*. As such, it constitutes an attempt to curb Meno’s enthusiasm for the eristic argument. In so curbing, however, the attack on laziness effects its second purpose. By effectively ‘punishing’ the errant evaluative belief and desire that gave rise to the eristic argument—which bespeak Meno’s laziness—Socrates achieves what he describes as the moral psychological effect of rejecting the eristic argument in favour of the doctrine of recollection, viz. of making one energetic and manly (of which we are reminded at 86b-c3). This passage (81d5-e2), therefore, not only *describes* a hydraulic effect of a certain kind of logos (one that should be resisted on similar grounds to tragic poetry, see *Rep.* 603c ff.); it *achieves* the hydraulic effect in its very utterance, since it is an attack on laziness that Meno will register as an attack on *his* laziness.

But when it is a matter of leading men's desires into a different direction, not indulging them, [but] persuading and constraining them, *that* will make the citizens better. (*Grg.* 517b5-7. Our translation.)

While, in *Republic* VI:

Now, we surely know that, when someone's desires incline strongly for one thing, they are thereby weakened for others, just like a stream that has been partly diverted into another channel. (*Rep.* VI 485d6-8)

Thus, as Nicholas White nicely summarises:

A 'hydraulic' conception of motivation [indicates that] the forces of all desires are roughly commensurable. Each part's desires exert pressure in some direction. The action that these desires produce depends on the direction in which the total pressure is greatest. One desire's gain in pressure is also another desire's loss. No further factor plays a role.⁸⁰

Given this characterisation of Socratic/Platonic psychology in the foregoing quotations, we can begin to offer an account of how such a hydraulic account of moral education can be read into the *Meno's* "music to the ears of weaklings" speech. As we see it, since this speech channels

⁸⁰ Nicholas White, "Plato and the Ethics of Virtue" in *The Routledge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, edited by Lorraine Besser and Michael Slote (London: Routledge, 2015): p.10.

Meno's rational desires away from the now-impugned object of his desire/evaluative belief, Meno's rational desire will take a new intentional object of an evaluatively opposed kind. Thus, the hydraulic effect at work here replaces Meno's rational desire for the eristic argument (whereby inquiry is abandoned) with a rational desire for the recollection doctrine (whereby inquiry is rebooted).

This reading of Meno's change of mind is eminently more plausible than the '*Protagoras* reading'. This is because the psychological assumptions this reading requires us to make are entirely fitting with what we have seen from Meno's character. As we know, Meno is a student of Gorgias, a sophist. Sophists succeed in the same ways that pastry-chefs do: persuading on account of pleasure (*Grg.* 521a2-5, 521e2-4). They do this by flattering and confirming the evaluative beliefs of their customers, unable to contradict them (*Grg.* 481d6-e3), thereby bringing about the apparent good-condition of their customers' souls (*euxia*). As Devereux notes:

The rhetorician does not bring the many over to his view; rather, he 'flatters' them by telling them what they want to hear; what [the rhetorician] says is changeable and inconsistent, reflecting the shifting whims and desires of the many.⁸¹

By chastising Meno's intellectual laziness, and the evaluative beliefs that are the cognitive source of an impoverished way of life, Socrates forces Meno to give up these beliefs. On the best possible reading, these now-impugned evaluative beliefs and their co-instantiated rational desires will be substituted for those that conduce to

⁸¹ Devereux (1995), p.395, n.26.

Meno's wellbeing, viz. those constitutive of Meno *qua* psychological eudaimonist.

At this point it would be an oversight to pay no heed to the moral educational tool that is Socrates' putative 'demonstration' of the doctrine of recollection with Meno's slave. While we see the demonstration's import, we believe it serves as a mere *ex post facto* restatement of the "music to the ears of weaklings" passage. However, and more positively, in recapitulating the conclusion about the possible objects of desire from 77b-78b, the slave-boy demonstration serves to "tie down" (97d6-98a8) the results of the foregoing elenchus and protreptic. To this extent, the slave-boy demonstration does important moral educational work, even if it is essentially reiterative.

The slave-boy demonstration helps Meno to actively and explicitly connect the apparent *harm* of *aporia* (84b7-8) with *benefit* (84c9). Moreover, the slave boy demonstration enables Meno to see the ensuing "longing" (ἐπόθησε 84b6-7) for intellectual labour (sc. inquiry) that results from having forged this cognitive connexion (in the slave-boy himself). That is to say, the lesson Socrates makes explicit for Meno from the slave-boy's chipper attitude to *aporia*, and his resulting success, is intended to ensure that Meno 'joins the dots' between experiences of pain and their benefits. Meno should have learned this from the "music to the ears of weaklings" attack—perhaps this is of a piece with the *Meno's* claim that learning comes about by repetition (85c10-d1). As Socrates notes of the slave-boy's newly-recovered, but unstable opinions,

If someone asks him these *same things many times and in many ways*, you can be sure that in the end he will come to have exact knowledge of these things as well as anyone else does.

Quite literally, then, the slave-boy demonstration is intended to supplement what has already been shown to benefit Meno during the “music to the ears of weaklings” speech. As such, the slave-boy demonstration is just another one of “many ways” (85c11) to fasten down Meno’s moral psychological improvement.

All of this should remind us of the discussion at 77b-78b, and its central thesis of PE. Just as if something thought to be good can be shown to harm, this—from the perspective of the subject—invalidates the apparent equivalence of these states, and as a result eliminates the rational desire caused by thinking something to be good. Likewise, if a pain can be shown to benefit, this also—from the perspective of the subject—repudiates the subjective assumption that pains are wretchedness-conducting, and indeed produces—as is no less than *exemplified* in the slave boy—a desire for the thing now cognised as beneficial, as a corollary of PE.

We have called the slave boy demonstration an ‘*ex post facto* restatement’ because it really does no *new* work than the “music to the ears of weaklings” speech. It rather does the same work in another way. That attack caused Meno to passively connect the object with putative positive valence (sc. Meno’s attraction to the eristic argument) to the experience of pain, thereby replacing positive valence with negative. Likewise with the slave boy demonstration, this “object lesson”,⁸² as Scott calls it, intends to show an apparent harm (viz. a painful experience) to in fact be a benefit, and because of this, the formerly-assumed harm *now recognised as a benefit* will appear to Meno to serve his standing eudaimonist interests, owing to the equivalence between the beneficial and the happiness-conducting. He will, owing to the thesis of PE, rationally desire the object he now perceives as beneficial to him. This suffices for

⁸² Scott (2005), p.170.

Meno to recollect a desire to know: a desire constitutive of him, and all of us, as psychological eudaimonists.

EPILOGUE

So what does this hydraulic account of Meno's moral education mean for his capacity for practical reasoning going forward? On our account, to the extent that the "true self"⁸³ in Plato *is* practical reason (in the strong, Kantian sense), the hydraulic unseating of errant desires makes the descriptive 'norms' of the true self's practical rationality hegemonic (that is, able to rule) once again. In Meno's case this is perhaps the *first* time that reason has been made practical. Thus, the norms of practical rationality are realised and accessed without error once bad desires have been hydraulically unseated. On our reading of this dialogue, then, PE can only function as a descriptive norm of agency once errant desires have been unseated. And the *hydraulic* mechanism of their unseating is especially propitious for candidates with tyrannical souls, in whom pleasures of various kakodaimonic kinds connote the good.

Thus, according to our reading of the *Meno*, moral education consists in recovering by recognising the desires and evaluative beliefs that constitute us as psychological eudaimonists. We cannot endorse any desires that, upon sufficient reflection, propel us towards misery and wretchedness (78a-b). Since we are—as Meno is—readily taken in by the apparent good-condition of the soul brought about by pleasure, we just as readily assume that pain connotes harm, which we avoid – consistently with our eudaimonism and rational desire – as a negative corollary of acting for the sake of the good. As such, Socrates in his "music to the ears of weaklings" speech

⁸³ On this notion, see especially Cornford (1933, p.306).

begins Meno's progress by *exploiting* Meno's first-order desire to avoid pain, perceived by Meno as an apparent harm, in order to drive him away from the temptations of the eristic argument. Indeed, to pursue something so apt to harm is psychologically excluded on the eudaimonist picture. Then, to "tie down" Meno's progress and to ensure it does not run away like the statues of Daedalus (97d6-10), through the slave boy demonstration Socrates engenders explicitly, not least to Meno's acceptance (84b9, 84c10), the benefits that belie apparent harms. Altogether, this mints in Meno a new, or rather *recollected*, desire for inquiry, whereby the "background"⁸⁴ for his questions is no longer an empirical disposition of intellectual torpor, but his recovered standing desire to learn.⁸⁵

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⁸⁴ Klein (1965, p.188-189).

⁸⁵ Many thanks to our cat, Meno, for inspirational behaviour. Additional thanks to an anonymous referee for helpful feedback.

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