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Does Socrates Commit the Socratic Fallacy?

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Ever since P. T. Geach's famous assault[1] on a "style of mistaken thinking" underlying Socrates' What-is-*F?* question the specter of the Socratic Fallacy has haunted the literature. Unlike many less searching allegations, the charge of a specifically "Socratic" fallacy cuts deep and calls for radical reappraisal. It bespeaks not simply error but monumental error—a mistake in principle which fatally undercuts Socrates' whole theoretical enterprise and is "quite likely to be morally harmful"[2] as well.

How is it that the man who claimed never intentionally to have wronged anyone should have come under such severe censure? What, exactly, is the Socratic Fallacy?

According to Geach, it consists in making two assumptions:

(A) [I]f you know that you are correctly predicating a given term "T" you must "know what it is to be a T," in the sense *of* being able to give a general criterion for a thing's being T,

and

(B) [I]t is no use to try and arrive at the meaning of "T" by giving examples *of* things that are T.[3]

That Socrates makes both assumptions Geach has no doubt. I will argue that he makes neither and hence does not commit the Socratic Fallacy.[4]

I. THE CHARGE AND ITS HISTORY

The charge is based on a cluster of misconceptions about the methodology which Socrates tacitly employs in the early dialogues. First, it presupposes a mistaken *philosophical* interpretation, not an uncontroversial textual exegesis, of the epistemic relation between definitional knowledge of *F* and extensional knowledge of things that are *F*. Geach thinks that, for Socrates, the former is epistemically prior to, and a necessary condition for, the latter. Second, in imputing to Socrates a "contemptuous attitude toward the particular case,"[5] it misconstrues the epistemic status and elenctic

role of the numerous examples he employs. Third, it misunderstands the peculiarly Socratic conception of knowledge (not to be confounded with the Platonic) and how it differs from true belief.

Geach is not the first to have ascribed **(A)** to Socrates.6 **So** had many prominent commentators of the 50s and early 60s[7] who, on this point, were themselves following well-trodden logical and epistemological trails already blazed by some of the most respected names in early twentieth century Platonic scholarship.8 What distinguishes Geach from his like-minded predecessors is that he not only ascribes **(A)** to Socrates but proceeds to advance the polemical thesis that, in holding it, he commits a fallacy of grievous proportions. Whether he is right about this is a much-debated and still-unresolved question.9 In any event, since my contention that Socrates does not hold **(A)** goes far beyond a mere disagreement with Geach and challenges a long-standing interpretive tradition, I will not only deny the charge of the fallacy but also argue that the methodology at work in the early dialogues requires that we reject the entire traditional interpretation on which it is based.

So as to bring under (A)'s rubric the kindred views of many commentators, past and present, who concur with Robinson about the impression "vaguely given" by the early dialogues that no truth whatever about ***F*** can be known without a definition of *F*, I will embellish Geach's original formulation by distinguishing two forms that it may take:

(A1) If you do not know the definition of F, you cannot know that anything is an *F*,

and

(**A2**) If you do not know the definition of F, you cannot know anything about F (e.g. that ***F***, say Justice, is ***Y***, say beneficial).

I will also reformulate (B). Since the futility to which Geach refers in claiming that, for Socrates, it is "no use" searching for definitions by means of examples is not the futility of excessive difficulty but of sheer impossibility, I will hereafter render (B) as:

(B*) It is impossible to search for a definition of ***F*** by means of examples of things that are F.

I will begin by re-examining the Socratic theory of Definition and the doctrine of epistemic priority which, according to a great cloud of exegetical witnesses, lies at its very heart.

11. THE TEXTS

Geach's charge is based on a single passage from the ***Euthyphro.*** Although he claims that the early dialogues are the *''locus classicus''* of the Socratic Fallacy and that the same "fallacious" reasoning is "paralleled" in "many other" places, he does not document these somewhat sweeping generalizations with further textual support. We are left, then, with ***Eu.*** 6D9–E6 where Socrates, in quest of what Holiness ***(to hosion)*** is, says:

> [T]ell me what is the essential form (*auto* to ***eidos)*** of holiness which makes all holy actions holy . . . so that, with my eye on it, and using it as a standard (***paradeigma***), I can say that any action done by you or anyone else is holy if it resembles this ideal, or, if it does not, can deny that it is holy.

Geach thinks that here we catch Socrates in the very act of committing the Socratic Fallacy, that is, ***of*** affirming (A1). Hence since neither he nor Euthyphro **knows** the definition of Holiness, they cannot know that any action is holy. Geach then formulates this thesis in full generality: since throughout the early dialogues Socrates and his interlocutors ***never*** arrive at definitions of Courage, Temperance, Justice, and so on, it follows that they cannot know that any action is courageous, temperate, just, etc. Universal eidetic ignorance entails a correspondingly universal lack of extensional knowledge of which actions any moral term is correctly predicable. Add to **this** already disquieting situation the further methodological stricture that, given (B*), they cannot even minimally extricate themselves from their predicament by pondering examples, and the result is a hopeless epistemic impasse.

These "Socratic" theses strike Geach as scandalous. But does Socrates hold them?

First, (B*). If Socrates really thinks that it is impossible to search for a definition of F by means of examples of things that are F, he is guilty of repeated self-contradiction;[10] for that is exactly what he urges his interlocutors to do in every early dialogue in which the What-is-F? question is raised." The dialogues of search abound with passages in which he not only unproblematically accepts examples of the virtue under discussion from interlocutors who manifestly lack a definition of it but heartily endorses examples as the primary data from which the definition is to be extracted.

Asked what Courage **is,** Laches responds with an example: the courageous man "remains at his post and fights against the enemy." ***(La.*** 190E5–6) Now if Socrates holds (B*), he should immediately rebuke Laches for appealing to an example of a courageous action with no definition of Courage. But he does not. He ignores Laches' apparent transgression of (B*), ***accepts*** his example, and then flagrantly violates (B*) himself by producing additional examples: courage amid perils at sea, in disease, poverty, pain ***(La.*** 191D1–E2). Thereupon he exhorts Laches to attend to this inventory of particular cases and search for the common character which is the same in each. That he is not merely describing general action-types but identifying particular action-tokens, that is, predicating "F" of specific actions and persons without a definition of *F*, is clear from his reference to the courage of the Scythian cavalry and from his concluding summation, "Now all these are courageous" ***(Oukoun andreioi menpantes houtoi eisin, La.*** 191E4). Similarly, at ***Charm.*** 159C3–160B5 Socrates easily disposes of Charmides' definition of Temperance as Quietness by producing examples of temperate actions which do not require quietness but quickness and agility, and then urges him to resume his search for a definition by investigating a wider range of cases. Euthyphro, too, is directed to "the numerous actions that are holy" ***(tōn pollōn hosidn)*** and asked to state the *idea* "by which" they are holy ***(Eu.*** 6D9–E1). Far from eschewing examples until he has discovered the definition of the relevant moral or evaluational term, Socrates habitually operates on the opposite methodological principle that it is by means of a scrutiny of examples that the definition is to be achieved. For only by examining diverse instantiations of ***F*** can the inquirer be in a position to discern the ***eidos*** which is "the same in all cases," "includes all the various uses of the term," and constitutes "the universal nature that pervades them all" ***(La.*** 191E10–192B4). How could it be otherwise? **If** it is the F-ness common to things that are F that he wishes to discover, how could he systematically disallow a scrutiny of the very ***Fs to which*** it is common? What sense could anyone make of a request for that which all Fs have in common which

in the face of its procedural stipulations that, in complying with it, one must not take into account any *F*s?[12]

Now why does Socrates fail to rebuke his interlocutors for unlawful trafficking in counterexamples as they search for definitions, he makes copious use of examples himself in refuting the definitions they proffer. Refutation by counterexample, typically a single counterexample, is one of his most characteristic elenctic strategies. Since in any adequate Socratic definition the members of the classes denoted by the ***dejiniens*** and the ***dejiniendum*** must be coextensive, counterexamples can be employed in a variety of ways. At ***La.*** 191D1–E2 Socrates rejects a definition by producing examples of the ***dejiniendum*** which are not covered by the ***dejiniens:*** there are cases of Courage other than remaining at one's post: at ***La.*** 191E1–3 by citing an example which is covered by the ***dejiniens*** but is clearly not a case of the ***definiendurn:*** if Courage is wise endurance, then whoever endures in spending money wisely is courageous: at ***Charm.*** 159C3–160B5 by uncovering cases of the ***definiendum*** which have the opposite property of that expressed by the ***dejiniens:*** some temperate actions require not quietness but quickness; and at ***Rep.*** 331C5–9 by demonstrating that the ***dejiniens*** entails a moral judgment that is patently false: in response to Cephalus' definition of Justice as rendering to everyone his due, Socrates produces the celebrated counterexample of returning weapons to their mad, though rightful, owner—an action which must be pronounced just if the definition is to stand.

If Socrates holds (B*), how are these passages to be understood? How in ***Rep.*** I can Socrates' maneuver count as a refutation of Cephalus' definition if his philosophical methodology categorically prohibits him from employing the very counterexamples by which the refutation is accomplished? All these passages bear witness to the fact that Socrates does not hold (B*). He not only encourages his interlocutors to search for definitions by means of examples, he also proceeds in a manner which implies that any adequate definition must be compatible with those examples. Deny this compatibility requirement and Socrates' elenctic use of examples and counterexamples loses not only all cogency but all intelligibility. Socrates, then, has no ***general*** methodological objection to employing examples.

To say this is not to deny that there is a sense in which Socrates does invariably reject examples. But he does so only in one exceptional and methodologically isolated context, namely, whenever his interlocutor offers an example ***as an answer*** to the What-is-F? question. This move he never tolerates. Yet even as he rejects the example as an answer to his question, he is usually perfectly willing to accept it ***as an example.***[13] Hence whatever "contemptuous" attitude Socrates may harbor toward the particular case, it is not a contempt ***uberhaubt*** but rather a context-dependent and context-provoked protest against confusing definition with enumeration of instances—a protest which would be wholly superfluous if he really holds that without a definition it is impossible to enumerate instances. Why forbid the doing of what cannot be done? Hence those (perhaps too familiar) passages in which Socrates does reject examples as answers to the What-is-F? question entitle us to infer neither that the elenctic method makes no use of examples nor that he prohibits his interlocutors from searching for definitions by means of them. Once his interlocutor has assimilated the distinction between definition and enumeration of instances, Socrates is only too happy to work with examples. In fact, the elenchus could not get along without them.

I turn next to (A1). Since Geach rests his entire case on ***Eu.*** 6D9–E6, that passage

warrants close scrutiny. Does Socrates here assert that knowing the definition of Holiness is a necessary condition for knowing that any action is holy? He does not. He does, however, make two other assertions: first, that knowing the definition of Holiness would be a sufficient condition for knowing what actions are holy; second, that such definitional knowledge alone can provide him with the "standard" he needs in the situation at hand. Clearly, then, he thinks that knowing the definition of Holiness is a necessary condition for doing ***something.*** But what? The answer is provided by the perplexity which precipitated the whole discussion: Socrates needs to know the definition of Holiness in order to adjudicate the controversial and borderline case of Euthyphro's pending suit against his father, i.e. in order to know whether Euthyphro's action is holy. That it is the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the Euthyphro case, rather than some general epistemic inability, which prompts the need for a "standard" is evident from the overall context of the dialogue as well as from the further textual consideration that of all the early, elenctic dialogues it is in the ***Euthyphro*** alone that this appeal to the eidetic standard as a necessary condition for advancing a knowledge-claim about a particular case occurs.[14] Little wonder, then, that Geach cites only this passage in support of ascribing (A1) to Socrates. His claim that its "fallacious" content is "paralleled" in "many other" places is not only undocumented but undocumentable.

My contention that, for Socrates, definitional knowledge of *F* is not a necessary condition for knowing that anything is an *F* should not be confused with a very different claim recently put forth by Santas:

> Socrates does not say **or** imply that without having a definition of holiness it would be impossible for him to say, in the sense of forming a judgment or belief, that a given action is holy. He says only that by using such a definition he would be able to tell whether a given action is holy. In short, the use of such a definition would be sufficient for determining whether a given action is of the defined kind; it is not necessary. . . . This is a fundamental point. If Socrates had held the view that the use of the definition of a given kind is **necessary** to determining whether **a** given thing is of that kind, he would have committed himself to consequences that are indeed very bad for anyone who makes the discovery and use of definitions an essential part **of** the search for knowledge.[15]

This latter view is precisely the view of the "Socrates" of *H.Ma.*, *Ly.*, and ***Rep.*** 354A12ff. And unlike his counterpart of the early, elenctic dialogues, who remains cheerful in the face **of** his failure to discover the correct answer to the What-is-F? question, this "Socrates" is acutely aware of the "very bad" consequences of which Santas *speaks:* anyone in such a state "might as well be dead" (*H.Ma.* 304E2–3). It is not, however, the view of the Socrates of the early dialogues.

But neither does he hold the view imputed to him by Santas—that definitional knowledge of *F* is a necessary and sufficient condition for ***knowing*** that anything is an *F* but not a necessary condition for having a ***true belief*** that something is an *F*. I am advancing a much stronger claim, namely, that although Socrates asserts that definitional knowledge of *F* is a sufficient condition for knowing what actions are F in general, he does not assert that it is a necessary condition for ***knowing*** that any action whatever is an F. Hence a person could, in principle, know that something is an ***F*** without knowing the definition of *F*.

Nor can (A1) be coaxed from the other passages often cited. At *Charm.* 176A6–B1,

for example, Charmides does not say that without a definition of Temperance he cannot know that any actions are temperate but only that he cannot know whether ***he*** is temperate—a remark which is nothing but a more emphatic reaffirmation of the philosophically and psychologically intimidated state of mind to which he had already given vent at 159D1-6. We would be on textually thin ice indeed were we to elevate this embarrassed, boyish utterance to the status of a methodological axiom involving the full generality of (A1)—especially in view of the disconcerting fact that from 159C3–160B5 Socrates and Charmides had both proved remarkably adept at predicating "is temperate" of a host of actions.[16] Provided that Charmides is willing to assent to the general principle—itself a glaring violation of (A2)[17]—that Temperance is noble (*kalon*), which he is, Socrates can effortlessly demonstrate that "in all bodily activities" such as writing, reading, and playing the lyre (159C3–D6) as well as in the "searchings and deliberations of the soul" such as learning, remembering, and understanding (159E1–160B1) quickness and agility are "clearly better than," ***and hence more temperate than,*** slowness and quietness. Similarly, at ***La.*** 190B7–C2 Socrates does not put forth the completely general assertion that if you do not know the definition of ***F,*** you cannot know anything whatever about ***F*** or that anything whatever is an ***F.*** His claim is very specific and heavily qualified: if you do not know the nature of virtue, you cannot usefully advise anyone about how best to achieve it. Again, at ***Eu.*** 15C11–E2 when he mockingly declares that it is Euthyphro's uncommonly firm grasp of what the Holy is ***(ti esti to hosion)*** which enables him to know "precisely what is holy and unholy," he is again asserting only that definitional knowledge of ***F*** is a sufficient condition for knowing what things are *F*, not that it is a necessary condition. I conclude that there are no compelling textual reasons for ascribing (A1) to Socrates.

III. TWO POST-GEACH PROPOSALS AND BEYOND

But it is not enough to ransack the early dialogues for passages in which Socrates encourages his interlocutors to search for definitions by means of examples or employs them himself. Granted, Socrates makes copious and diverse use of examples; but what is their epistemic status?

Two mutually exclusive accounts have recently appeared, both based on the view that Socrates disavows all moral knowledge. According to one—the True Belief Theory (hereafter TB)—Socrates' appeals to examples and counterexamples should not be taken as knowledge-claims but as embodying true moral beliefs. According to the other—the Correct Use Theory (hereafter CU)—these same Socratic appeals should be taken neither as knowledge-claims nor as belief-claims.

First, CU. Recently championed by R. M. Hare, this strategy invests Socrates' philosophical method with a Wittgensteinian twist designed to place him on "safer ground."[18] In employing his examples and counterexamples, Socrates is not advancing truth-claims but appealing to the "linguistic fact" that such utterances, ***whether true or false,*** constitute "what we would say." In support of this interpretation Hare offers the following gloss on ***Rep.*** 331C5–9:

> All of us would call the act of giving back weapons to a madman "not right"; this universal opinion, whether or not it is correct, is certainly not self-contradictory; so the definition which makes it self-contradictory, must be wrong. [H]ence a linguistic hypothesis about the meaning of a word . . . is refuted by showing that the linguistic facts do not square with it.[19]

But this account is at variance with the texts on every point. First, in casting Socrates in the role of an examiner of linguistic ***hypotheses,*** it misreports what he explicitly claims to be doing whenever he engages in elenctic argument and overlooks one of its announced conditions. "Contentiously eager to know what is true and false" ***(Gorg.*** 505E3–7), Socrates will enter into disputation only if his interlocutor is willing to lay himself on the line by saying what he really believes:

> Callicles, do not fancy that you should play games with me, and give me no haphazard answer contrary to your real opinion. (Gorg. 500B5–C1)[20]

His interlocutor may neither advance theses which he does not hold nor concur with those propounded by Socrates unless he sincerely assents to them. Having secured such a thesis, Socrates relentlessly applies the elenchus in an effort to determine whether it can withstand scrutiny and is therefore certifiable as an elenctically justified truth-claim. He does not appear noticeably interested in ascertaining what his interlocutor finds it necessary to say in light of certain alleged "linguistic facts."

Second, although Socrates periodically assures his interlocutor that he is simply "following the argument wherever it leads," this universally acclaimed profession of philosophical malleability should not be taken in any naively literal sense. Socrates does not passively follow the argument wherever ***it*** leads. The direction the argument takes is not vouchsafed to the elenctic practitioner by a presiding Cosmic Logos in relation to which he is merely the linguistically attuned and morally neutral medium. It is wholly dependent on the systematically operative, sometimes unargued, and often even unstated methodological assumptions and substantive assertions of the practitioner himself, e.g. his views about the nature and role of definition in philosophical analysis, his implicit ontology and epistemology, his theory of human nature, his first-order moral judgments, and his analogies between morality and the crafts. These factors determine the "direction" in which the argument leads. They are not only constitutive of the conceptual framework within which the discussion takes place, they also specify the preliminary substantive propositions about which the practitioner will attempt to elicit agreement from his interlocutor as well as the subsequent propositions required as premises entailing the negation of the theses targeted for refutation.

Ostensibly concerned with Socrates, **CU** in fact presents us with a philosophical method which is radically different from that of the early dialogues and which presupposes an equally radically different conception of philosophy itself and the reasons for engaging in it. In transforming the truth-seeking and unabashedly revisionist elenctic method into a use-clarifying and purely descriptive form of conceptual analysis, it leaves us with a Socrates who is all but unrecognizable—who, in effect, argues as follows: "Look here, Cephalus, you don't really want to say that it is just to return weapons to a madman, do you? Such a claim flouts ordinary language."

It is, of course, true that the unleashing of the madman counterexample by which Socrates executes the speediest refutation in the entire Platonic corpus is prefaced by an expression of his complete confidence that it will be endorsed by everyone ***(Rep.*** 331C5). But this is neither an empirical appeal to ***consensus gentium*** nor a logical appeal to Correct Use.[21] His confidence **derives not from his expectation that the counter-**

example will accord with everyone's linguistic intuitions but from his philosophical conviction that it can itself withstand elenctic scrutiny and that he therefore has elenctic justification for asserting what everyone else would presumably be prepared to assert without such justification, namely, that the moral judgment "It is just to return weapons to a madman" is false. Far from trying to convict Cephalus of linguistic aberration, he is forcing him to choose between competing truth-claims. Cephalus must either affirm that it ***is*** just to return the weapons because the true definition of Justice is exactly what he said it is, or he must concede that it would be unjust to do so and withdraw his definition as *false*. He is refuted only if he opts for the latter. Which, of course, he does. But what if Cephalus had refused to budge, clung to his definition, and retorted, "Yes, it ***is*** just to return the weapons because, mad or not, they are his weapons"? Would this force us to conclude that in the very act of advancing a morally bizarre assertion Cephalus successfully undercuts Socrates' intended refutation? Apparently so. For, according to CU, in dealing Cephalus this ***reductio,*** Socrates has played his last logical trump and is left with an empty hand.

Something is very wrong here. Although the application of the elenchus begins with an attempt to secure agreement about some premise or premise-set, it is not shortcircuited if agreement is withheld; it is only delayed. If his interlocutor will not accept *q* as a counterexample to p, Socrates will either secure agreement about some more fundamental premise, ***r,*** or premise-set, ***r*** and s, which entails *q*, resume the argument, and demonstrate that *q*, to which his interlocutor has just assented, entails ***not-p*** (as he does at ***La.*** 196E1–199E12); or he will ignore *q*, secure agreement about some new premise, *s*, or premise-set, *s* and *t*, resume the argument, and demonstrate that it, too, entails *not-p* (as he does at ***Gorg.*** 482C4–516D5). Socratic counterexamples have no inherently "nonnative" status. He employs them not because they enshrine the logical bedrock of Correct Use, nor because they constitute the categorial framework of our language by appeal to which justification comes to an end and our practices take over, nor because it was by attending to such paradigmatic cases that his interlocutors originally learned the meanings of the terms in question. He employs them because these examples and counterexamples, together with the moral predications he makes about them, embody the best by way of truth-claims that he has been able to achieve by the practice of the elenctic method and which therefore serve as the touchstone against which all other alleged truth-claims are tested. By relying on theory-laden terms like "paradigm" and "linguistic facts," CU obscures all this and inadvertently foists upon Socrates a view of philosophy and philosophical discovery that is alien to him.

TB offers the very solution declined by CU. Convinced that Socrates holds (A1) and (A2), and thereby commits the Socratic Fallacy, its proponents try to mitigate the disastrous epistemic consequences by arguing that although he and his interlocutors have no definitions and hence cannot ***know*** what actions are courageous, temperate, or just, they can still have ***true*** moral ***beliefs***. And that is precisely the epistemic status of the examples which Socrates accepts from his interlocutors and of the counterexamples which he employs against them.[22]

When confronted with the texts, however, TB fares no better than CU. Its apparent cogency derives from the fact that the concepts of knowledge and true belief occur in both the early and middle dialogues. Its central flaw lies in the contention that despite innovative metaphysical and epistemological developments in the middle dialogues concerning the respective objects of knowledge and true belief, the concepts of knowledge and true belief themselves are elucidated in fundamentally the same way and play identical epistemic roles. This is not so.

Proponents of TB *speak* rather loosely about ***the*** distinction between knowledge and true belief—as if this were a single distinction in the early and middle dialogues which, given Plato's increasingly frequent excursions into metaphysics and epistemology, is gradually elaborated: implicit but detectable at ***Cr.*** 44C6–47D5 and ***Gorg.*** 454B3–E9, somewhat more explicit at ***M.*** 97A6–98C3, and fully explicit at ***Rep.*** 476B3–478E7. This overlooks the fact that while the terms ***epistēmē*** and ***orthē doxa*** (or ***pistis***) occur in the pre-*Meno* dialogues, they are not employed in the technical epistemic senses which they acquire in the *Meno* and post-Meno dialogues and which are presupposed by TB, that is, as connoting a greater or lesser cognitive achievement on the part of someone and hence a correspondingly greater or lesser degree of epistemic reliability on the part of the propositions he affirms. In the ***Crito*** Socrates draws a sharp contrast between those who know and those who believe, but only to remind Crito that of the diverse and fluctuating opinions of "the multitude" (***tēs tōn pollōn doxēs melei***, 44C6–7) he should respect the "useful" views (***tas chrēstas***) of the wise (***tōn phronimōn***), that is, those who know (***tō epistatē***) and understand (***epaionti***), and disregard the "useless" views (***tas ponēras***) of the foolish (***tōn aphronōn***, 47A7–B 11). He is not propounding an important epistemic distinction but simply trying to dispel Crito's worries about how his reputation will suffer among Athenian rumormongers chattering about his failure to arrange Socrates' escape from prison. Similarly, at ***Gorg.*** 454B3–E9 the terms *epistēmē* and ***pistis*** are employed to draw an equally non-technical distinction between two kinds of persuasion: that which produces knowledge of the kind possessed by experts (masters of a ***technē***) and that which produces belief without knowledge of the kind possessed by non-experts (sophists) who rely on rhetoric.

Socrates does not, of course, ***deny*** that some of his interlocutors have true moral beliefs, beliefs which, ***if submitted for elenctic resting,*** could survive; but he attaches no epistemic importance to them. It is not enough to believe propositions which happen to be true. Until the person holding such beliefs submits them for elenctic interrogation and discovers that they can survive, he necessarily lacks all epistemic warrant for believing them. Unless they are "buckled fast and clamped together . . . with arguments of steel and adamant" (***sidērois kai adamantinois logois, Gorg.*** 508E6–509A2), and thus "become" knowledge, they remain unstable and are not an acceptable stopgap for the knowledge which, by liberating its possessor from the powerful solicitations of desire and appetite, is virtue. Hence while acknowledging the empirical fact of true moral beliefs, Socrates denies their theoretical importance and practical efficacy. Given his exclusively practical philosophical interests, urgent sense of discharging a divinely appointed mission, and views about the decisive role of knowledge in living the moral life, he opted for a different distinction—not between those who have knowledge and those who have true beliefs, but between those who have knowledge and those who do not.

It is not until ***M.*** 97A6 that we discover signs of a different philosophical mentality at work. Here we encounter the wholly unprecedented and decidedly un-Socratic claim that "for the purpose of acting rightly" true moral beliefs are "as good a guide (***hēgemōn***) as" knowledge (*M.* 97B5–7). This Socratic heresy is a clear forecast of the "Socrates" of the ***Republic*** who no longer thinks that those who lack knowledge should undergo elenctic cross-examination until, with their ignorance exposed, they take up the

philosophic quest. By this time the state of mind called true belief is no longer the morally precarious plight of those whose assertions lack theoretical justification. It has become a ***laudable*** state of mind to be inculcated in all but the select few capable of attaining knowledge. Such views are utterly foreign to the pre-*Meno* Socrates who would have repudiated the central moral thesis on which the entire ***Republic*** is based—that virtue is achievable without knowledge by holding true moral beliefs on the authority of the philosopher-king and by performing one's function in the ideal state. For him, there can be no virtue without knowledge.[23] By importing these later views into the pre-*Meno* dialogues, TB misconstrues the purpose of the elenctic method—which is not to turn ignorance into belief or dubious belief into true belief but to turn true belief into knowledge and thereby escape from the unstable realm of true belief altogether.

Nor do the pre-*Meno* dialogues distinguish knowledge from true belief on the ground that each has a distinct object. That is also a later innovation of which the Socrates of the early dialogues knows nothing. In the pre-*Meno* dialogues the distinction between knowledge and true belief is a distinction between states of mind: if you have knowledge, the propositions you affirm will not run away like the statues of Daedalus but "stand fast" (*Eu.* 11B9–E5, 15B7–C3). In the post-Menu dialogues, on the other hand, the object of knowledge is the separately existing Form while the object of true belief is the sensible particular inextricably embedded in the world of flux. To know is no longer simply to affirm propositions bound by arguments of steel and adamant; it is to contemplate an eternal and transcendent ***eidos***. The epistemic distinction between knowledge and true belief is grounded in the metaphysical distinction between the two worlds, and the "infallibility" of knowledge is parasitic on the immutability of its object—"the real" *(to* **on) (*Rep.*** 476E4–479E6, ***Phdr.*** 247C3–E6, ***Sym.*** 210E2–211D1). It is the character of the intentional object of knowledge, the Form, not the dialectical ability of the possessor of knowledge, which defines knowledge and invests knowledge-claims with their authoritative status. Just as changing sensible particulars "fall short" of unchanging intelligible Forms, so true belief, whose object is those very particulars, "falls short" of knowledge.

Socratic knowledge, that is, knowledge in the pre-*Meno* dialogues, neither has nor requires this transcendent metaphysical grounding. It is irreducibly propositional in character, and the same proposition serves as the object of both knowledge and true belief. That Socratic ***epistēmē*** and ***orthē doxa*** not only do, but must, have the same object—for different persons at the same time and, more importantly, for the same person at different times—is strictly entailed by Socrates' conception of knowledge and how it is acquired. Only if the proposition which serves as the object of ***epistēmē*** (for the person who knows that a is ***F***) is identical with that which serves as the object of ***orthē doxa*** (for the person who truly believes that a is *F*) can the belief-claim "become" a knowledge-claim if and when its possessor justifies it with "arguments of steel and adamant." This claim is echoed—for the last time before giving way to the middle-period view that knowledge and true belief have distinct objects—at ***M.*** 98A3-4, a passsage which, though surrounded by doctrines absent from the pre-*Meno* dialogues—the theory of Recollection and belief in the immortality and pre-existence of the soul—retains the earlier Socratic view that knowledge and true belief have the same object and that true beliefs remain unstable until they are "tethered by working out the reason"[24] (***heōs an tis autas dēsē aitias logismō***) after which they acquire stability and "become" knowledge (***epeidan de dethdsin, prdton men epistēmai*** *gignontai,* ***epeita monimoi).***

Like knowledge in the middle dialogues, Socratic knowledge is ideally knowledge of the **eidos;** but our only hope **of** attaining it is by submitting theses for elenctic interrogation. Socratic ***eidē,*** however, are not separately existing Forms but common characters "present in" those particulars that "have" ***(echon)*** them ***(Eu.*** 5D3). Although Socrates has neither an explicit metaphysical theory of Forms nor an explicit epistemological theory as to how they can be known, he conducts the search for definitions in a way which suggests that our only access to the ***eidos*** is ***via*** its propositional counterpart—a Socratic definition whose ***definiendum*** is the relevant moral term and whose ***definiens*** purports to be an elenctically certifiable explication of the form "The ***F*** is such and such." Were they ever forthcoming, such definitions would constitute the highest kind of knowledge recognized by Socrates. At the same time, it cannot be emphasized too strongly that this is not the only kind of knowledge that he recognizes. Socratic knowledge is not coextensive with definitional knowledge. Nor do all knowledge-claims presuppose it. Lacking Socratic definitions, one need not therefore despair of all moral knowledge and settle for true moral beliefs. A second (and lower) kind of knowledge is available to anyone whose non-definitional assertions can withstand elenctic scrutiny: propositions either of the form "a is ***F***" (which predicate some **moral** term of **an** action or person) or "The *F* is Y" (which predicate some moral quality of a virtue, for example, "Temperance is noble," or—to avoid tangential skirmishes involving Pauline predication—of an action or person exhibiting that virtue, for example, "Whatever or whoever is temperate is noble.")

Furthermore, contrary to TB (as well as to CU and the traditional interpretation), Socrates explicitly avows some moral knowledge of this second kind:

i. ***Apol.*** 29B6–7: "But I know ***(oida)*** that to do wrong and to disobey my superior . . . is wicked and dishonorable."
ii. ***Gorg.*** 486E5–6: ''I know well ***(euoid')*** that if you agree with the opinions held by my **soul,** then at last we have attained the actual truth."
iii. ***Gorg.*** 512B1–2: ''[H]e knows ***(oiden)*** that it is not better for an evil man to live, for he must needs live ill."
iv. *Prot.* 357D7–E1: ''[Y]ou know yourselves (***iste pou)*** that a wrong action which is done without knowledge is done in ignorance."
v. ***Rep.*** 351A3-6: ''[I]f justice is wisdom and virtue, it will easily . . . be shown to be also a stronger thing than injustice, since injustice is ignorance—no one could now fail to know that" (***oudeis an eti touto agnoēseien***).

There is no getting around these passages.[25] Far from being "quite exceptional''[26]—mere textual curiosities to be marvelled at and then dismissed—they are the rock on which **TB** founders, a disproof of the thesis that Socrates claims no moral knowledge whatever.

But the case for ascribing some moral knowledge to Socrates does not depend on this handful of texts containing a tiny range of strong epistemic verbs such as ***oida, epaiō,*** *epistamai,* or ***gignōskō***. In addition to these passages in which Socrates advances explicit knowledge-claims there are numerous others which contain implicit knowledge-claim indicators, that is, semantically different but epistemically equivalent modes of expression: for example, when Socrates asserts that his thesis has been "proved true" (*apodedeiktai* ***hoti alēthē elegeto, Gorg.*** 479E8); that "the just man has revealed himself to us (***hēmin anapephantai)*** as good and wise and the unjust man as ignorant and bad"

(*Rep.* 350C10–11); that the previous argument "has rightly compelled them to agree (*orthōs anankasthēnai homologein en tois emprosthen logois)* that no one does evil voluntarily" (*Gorg.* 509E4); that "the sound-minded and temperate man, being, as we have just demonstrated (*hōsper diēlthomen*), just and brave and pious, must be completely good" (*Gorg.* 507C1–5); and that "we can now tell who are our friends, for the argument shows us (*ho gar logos hemin sēmainei*) that it must be those who are good" (*Ly.* 214D8–E1). Similarly, when in response to Polus' admission that it will be difficult to refute the Socratic thesis that, of all evildoers, those who escape punishment are the unhappiest, Socrates replies, "Not difficult . . . but impossible, for the truth is never refuted" (*Gorg.* 476B10–11), this strong epistemic claim need not be confined to the particular thesis under discussion but is applicable to any thesis which, bound by arguments of steel and adamant, is supported by the full weight of the elenchus. And the Socratic corollary—"unless you or one still more enterprising than yourself can undo [these arguments], it is impossible to *speak* aright other than I am now speaking" (*ouch hoion te allōs legonta ē hōs egd nun legō kalōs legein, Gorg.* 509A3–4)—can be generalized so as to cover a wide range of elenctically justified propositions. Such passages disclose the Socratic criterion of non-definitional moral knowledge which is operative throughout the early dialogues. That criterion is elenctic justification. Hence we may legitimately ascribe moral knowledge to Socrates in any passage in which that criterion is satisfied. It follows that in the absence of explicit contextual disclaimers we are justified in concluding that Socrates advances all such propositions as ***known truths.***

In restricting all knowledge-claims to the null class of Socratic definitions and propositions derivable from them and relegating all other assertions, including elenctically justified assertions, to the epistemic sub-class of true moral beliefs which remain "tentative" and always "up for discussion,"[27] TB overlooks something else. The irreducibly propositional character of Socratic knowledge entails that even definitions of the kind envisaged by Socrates, were they ever forthcoming, would remain equally tentative. Even if Socrates and his interlocutors were well supplied with Socratic definitions which had *so far* survived elenctic scrutiny, they would still not enjoy the infallible, non-tentative knowledge of the middle dialogues. For the object of their knowledge would not be a separately existing ***eidos*** of which they have a "direct vision" but a propositional explication of that ***eidos*** which, however it may have fared in the past, is always open to future refutation.

In addition to this textual evidence there is a philosophical reason for ascribing some moral knowledge to Socrates.[28] If, with TB, we deny this, then while he may have some true moral beliefs, we cannot on his own grounds *assert* that he does. That this is so may be seen by asking how, within the context of Socratic thought, we are to determine whose moral beliefs are true. What is Socrates' criterion of a true moral belief? Not elenctic justification, for that is his criterion of non-definitional moral knowledge. But while not itself the criterion, it yields one: to have a true moral belief is to affirm a moral judgment identical with that affirmed by the person who has moral knowledge. In short, the criterion is ***agreement with*** the "expert in right and wrong" (*epaiōn peri dikaiōn kai adikōn*), the "one authority who represents the actual truth" (*ho heis kai autē hi alētheia, Cr.* 48A6–7). But if TB is correct in claiming that neither Socrates nor his interlocutors has any moral knowledge, then there are no moral experts and hence no

non-vacuous criterion by which to determine whose moral beliefs are true—a situation which, far from constituting an improvement upon ignorance, is a form of it. That is why Socrates thinks that we must move beyond belief—even true belief—to knowledge. It remains true that the propositions which Socrates affirms today may prove elenctically unjustifiable tomorrow, but that is not sufficient to call them into question. Having renounced the quest for the absolute certainty that comes with infallibility, he is prepared to live with that risk.

This, then, is Socratic *epistēmē*—the knowledge which, by providing theoretical understanding and the resultant education of desire, brings with it those affectional readjustments which enable its possessor to achieve the only human happiness worth having and of which no one is voluntarily ignorant. In the ***Republic*** Plato was later to pursue with almost unparalleled moral earnestness the question of how the "philosophical element" in the soul can be preserved against the corrupting influence of evil and mediocrity, and recommended a rigorous program of study culminating in a synoptic vision of reality—the world of "true Being" which every soul pursues "with an intuition of its nature, yet . . . unable to apprehend it adequately" (*Rep.* 505D11–E2). In Socrates' hands the claims are more modest and metaphysically chaste. But while the language is not his, he shares the concern. A corresponding exhortation resounds through the early dialogues enjoining men to rise above the opinions of "the Many." In the end the gentle irony and unsparing criticism converge on the same goal—not simply to call men to virtue but to hover about them like a gadfly, never allowing them to rest content with what they believe and with what they are, even if what they believe is not wholly false and what they are is not wholly ignoble. Yet in the attempt to improve one's soul, one must start where one is—with the fallible and piecemeal insights of examples and particular cases. The road to knowledge begins with what is before one's very eyes, and one embarks upon it not, as the later Plato would have it, by a vertical flight of the soul in which one by degrees takes leave of the sensible world in search of a more exalted metaphysical object but by a horizontal expansion of the understanding—by discoursing with Socrates about matters as commonplace as who is taking whom to court. As the elenchus brings greater understanding, the propositions one affirms will grow less confused, less prone to inconsistency, less vulnerable to counterexamples. In this way true belief is gradually turned into knowledge.

It is, of course, open to anyone to disagree with Socrates about any or all of this. But no critique can carry conviction unless it manages to convey the power of his moral vision and respond to it at the same level of experience, forgoing the easier project of detecting alleged "fallacies" in his alleged "thought." I have no doubt that (A1), (A2), and (B*) are fallacious. For all I know, they may be morally harmful as well. But whatever they are, they are not Socratic.

NOTES

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1. "Plato's ***Euthyphro:*** An Analysis and Commentary," ***The Monist,*** 50 (1966), pp. 369–82.
2. Ibid., p. 372. I.e. in the sense that it is morally injurious to persuade someone that he "must suspend judgment as to whether swindling is unjust until he has water-tight definitions of 'swindling' and 'unjust."' P. T. Geach, ***Reason and Argument*** (Berkeley, 1970), p. 40.
3. Ibid.
4. By "Socrates" I mean the Socrates of Plato's early dialogues including ***Apol., Charm., Cr., Eu., Gorg., H.Mi., I., La., Prot.,*** and ***Rep.*** I through 354A11 but excluding ***Eud., H.Ma., Ly.***, and the remainder of ***Rep.*** I. Concerning this distinction within the traditionally recognized early dialogues I accept Vlastos' classification of the latter as post-elenctic, "transitional" dialogues between Plato's early and middle periods. (See "The Socratic Elenchus," ***Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy,*** 1 (1983), pp. 25–28, 57–58.) Given this schema, the *Meno*, long regarded as ***the*** transitional dialogue, must be viewed as containing further explorations of the logical, methodological, and epistemological innovations already present in them. Chief among these innovations is the unambiguous (and decidedly un-Socratic) assertion of (A): at ***H.Ma.*** 304D8–E3: "How can you know whose speech is beautiful or the reverse—and the same applies to any action whatever (***allēn praxin hēntinoun***)—when you have no knowledge of beauty?" (Cf. 286C5–D2); at ***Ly.*** 223B4–8: "[W]e have made ourselves rather ridiculous today . . . for our hearers will carry away the report that though we conceive ourselves to be friends . . . we have not yet been able to discover what we mean by a friend" (***oupō de hoti estin ho philos hoioi te egenometha exeurein***); and at ***Rep.*** 354C1–3: "[I]f I don't know what the just is, I shall hardly know whether it is a virtue . . . and whether its possessor is or is not happy." This so-called "priority of definition" thesis is also explicitly asserted in full generality at M. 71B3 where "Socrates" declares: "I have no knowledge about virtue at all" (***ouk eidōs peri aretēs to parapan),*** for "how can I know a property of something when I don't even know what it is?" Accordingly, a distinction must be made between the "Socrates" of these dialogues (a thinker whose views are often radically at odds with those of his counterpart in the early dialogues and who does indeed commit the Socratic Fallacy) and the Socrates of the early dialogues (who, as I will argue, does not).
5. The phrase is Wittgenstein's. See ***The Blue and Brown Books*** (Oxford, 1958), p. 19.
6. Nor is he the last. See R. E. Allen, ***Pluto's 'Euthyphro' and the Earlier Theory of Forms*** (London, 1970), pp. 71–72, 78, 115–17, and *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. I, tr. with analysis by R. E. Allen (New Haven, Conn., 1984), pp. 33–34, 142; M. F. Burnyeat, "Examples in Epistemology: Socrates, Theaetetus and G. E. Moore," ***Philosophy,*** 52 (1977), pp. 381–98; H. F. Cherniss, "The Philosophical Economy of the Theory of Ideas," in ***Studies in Pluto's Metaphysics,*** ed. by R. E. Allen (London, 1970), pp. 1–12; N. Gulley, ***The Philosophy of Socrates*** (London, 1968), p. 9; W. K. C. Guthrie, ***A History of Greek Philosophy*** (Cambridge, 19691, vol. III, p. 352; T. Irwin, ***Plato's Moral Theory*** (Oxford, 1977), pp. 40–41, and ***Plato Gorgias*** (Oxford, 1979), pp. 113, 221, 224; G. Santas, "The Socratic Fallacy," ***Journal of the History of Philosophy,*** 10 (1972), pp. 127–41, and ***Socrates*** (Boston, 1979), pp. 116–17, 311–12; C. C. W. Taylor, ***Plato Protagoras*** (Oxford, 1976), pp. 212–13; and P. Woodruff, ***Plato Hippias Major*** (Indianapolis, 1982), pp. 139–41.
7. See I. M. Crombie, An ***Examination of Plato's Doctrines*** (London, 1962), vol. I, p. 57; P. Friedlander, ***Plato*** (Princeton, N.J., 1964), vol. II, p. 85; R. Robinson, ***Plato's Earlier Dialectic*** (Oxford, 1951), p. 51; and W. D. Ross, ***Pluto's Theory of Ideas*** (Oxford, 1951), p. 16. Robinson speaks for many in declaring that "the impression vaguely given by the early dialogues as a whole is that there is no truth whatever about [*F*] that can be known before we know what [F] is."
8. See J. Burnet, ***Pluto's Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates and Crito*** (Oxford, 1924), p. 37; P. Shorey, What ***Plato Said*** (Chicago, 1933), p. 157; and A. E. Taylor, ***Plato: The Man and His Work*** (London, 1937), p. 47. G. Grote is one of the rare exceptions. He endorses neither (A) nor (B) and goes to great textual lengths to show that Socrates "never altogether lost his hold on particulars." ***Pluto and the Other Companions of Socrates,*** vol. 1, 2nd ed., (London, 1867), p. 326. Cf. pp. 307, 327, 477–80, 491, 498.
9. Dissenters include R. E. Allen, ***Plato's 'Euthyphro,'*** pp. 89, 115–16; R. M. Hare, ***Plato*** (Oxford, 1982), pp. 38–42; A. Nehamas, "Confusing Universals and Particulars in Plato's Early Dialogues," ***Review of Metaphysics,*** 29 (1975), pp. 287–306; H. Teloh, ***The Development of Pluto's Metaphysics*** (University Park, Penn., 1981), pp. 20–21; G. Vlastos, "Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge," ***Philosophical Quarterly,*** 35 (1985), pp. 23–26; and Woodruff, ***Plato Hippias Major,*** pp. 139–41. See also Burnyeat, Irwin, and Santas (cited in note 6).
10. That Socrates' appeal to examples leads straight to self-contradiction is limpidly, albeit inadvertently, exhibited by Guthrie who, after claiming that, for Socrates, "until [the meaning of F] has been fixed, so that we have a standard . . . to which the individual actions and objects can be referred, we shall not know what we are talking about" ***(History,*** p. 352), adds that in searching for a definition of F "the first [stage] is to collect instances to which both parties agree that the name ["F"] may be applied." ***Socrates*** (Cambridge, 1971), p. 112. That is, in searching for a definition we are to consult the very examples that we cannot identify until we have one.
11. As a corrective to the "priority of definition" thesis, it is worth observing that of the thirteen traditionally recognized early dialogues only six even raise the What-is-F? question. The elenchus is conducted more often without it than with it.
12. I am not at this point claiming that these "identifications" of courageous, temperate, and holy actions count as knowledge-claims. I will consider this interpretation of their epistemic status (together with its denial) in Section III.
13. Eu. 4E13–17 is an exception.
14. At ***Gorg.*** 474D3–9 Socrates asks Polus whether he "looks to nothing" (***eis ouden apoblepōn***) in calling fine things "fine," but he is not invoking the ***eidos*** as standard. Rather, one looks to see whether they are called "fine" because of their usefulness or because of some pleasure they afford (***kata tēn chreian . . . ē kata hēdonēn tina).*** Similarly, when Socrates asks what Nicias "has in view" as he defines Courage, he is not alluding to the ***eidos*** as standard but querying him about whether he thinks that Courage, Justice, and Temperance are all "parts" of virtue. (***La.*** 198A4–5) Nor does he allude to it at ***Charm.*** 175D6–E2 or ***Prot.*** 360E6–361D6.
15. ***Socrates,*** p. 116. Cf. p. 69.
16. Seen. 13.
17. Three further violations of **(A2)** occur at ***Charm.*** 160E9, E11, and E13 as well as at ***La.*** 192C5–7, 8–9, and 192D7–8. Other violations of both (A1) and (A2) are found at ***Cr.*** 54D4–6, ***Gorg.*** 474B2–4, ***Prot.*** 329E6–333B4, and ***Gorg.*** 470D9–11.
18. ***Plato,*** p. 42. Cf. Woodruff (*Plato Hippias Major*): "The 'Socratic' Fallacy is supposing that a person cannot use a word correctly unless he can define it. That is a fallacy but Socrates does not commit it." (p. 139) However, Woodruff's apparent espousal of CU is rendered problematic by his simultaneous appeal to Socrates' "body of tested opinion." (p. 140)
19. Ibid.
20. Cf. ***Cr.*** 49D1–3, ***Prot.*** 331B6–D1, ***Gorg.*** 491A7–9, and ***Rep.*** 346A2–5.
21. Although Socrates' counterexamples are carefully calculated so as to elicit the immediate assent of his interlocutors, this is not an appeal to "what we would say." At ***Gorg.*** 471E2–472A1 he declares: "[Y]ou are trying to refute me . . . like those . . . in the law courts. For there one group imagines it is refuting the other when it produces many reputable witnesses to support its statements. . . . But this method of proof is worthless toward discovering the truth." When the elenchus requires it, Socrates thinks nothing of flouting the

"linguistic facts" by affirming propositions that are universally denied or by denying propositions that are universally affirmed: e.g. that it is worse to do than to suffer wrong, that no one does evil voluntarily, and that one ought never to return evil for evil.

22. See Burnyeat, Irwin, Santas (cited in n. 6), and, more recently, G. Klosko, ***The Development of Pluto's Political Theory*** (New York, 1986), pp. 30–34.
23. Hence I cannot accept Santas' contention that, for Socrates, true moral belief is sufficient for virtue. ***Socrates,*** pp. 192–93.
24. In "working out the reason" one discovers the cause ***(aitia),*** i.e. the F—the ***mia idea—"by*** which" all ***Fs*** are F. ***(Eu.*** 6D11)
25. Although Socrates frequently disavows all moral knowledge, he also occasionally avows some. If recent contributions to the literature prove anything, it is that on the vexing question of whether Socrates claims any moral knowledge purely textual considerations are inconclusive: not because there is insufficient evidence for either view but because there appears to be sufficient evidence for both. If, as the growing consensus among contemporary commentators suggests, Socrates' disavowals are sincere (as opposed to "feigned," "ironic," "deliberately provocative," etc.), then in avowing what he simultaneously disavows he is either contradicting himself or asserting these apparent contradictories in different senses. See G. Vlastos, "Socrates Disavowal," and R. Kraut, ***Socrates and the Stare*** (Princeton, N.J., 1984), pp. 267–79.
26. Irwin's assessment of ***Ap.*** 29B6–7. ***Pluto's Moral Theory,*** p. ***58.***
27. See Bumyeat, pp. 386–87.
28. And, strange as it may seem, to some of his interlocutors as well. See ***Prot.*** 357D7–E1 and ***Rep.*** 351A3–6.

FURTHER READING

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8

Misunderstanding the "What-is-F-ness?" Question

HUGH H. BENSON

Over a decade ago Alexander Nehamas successfully called into question a long-standing tradition in Socratic scholarship.[1] According to this tradition, the initial answers to Socrates' ''What is F-ness?" question (the WF-question) frequently reflected a confusion between universals and particulars.[2] The interlocutors frequently provided concrete particulars, when what was asked for was a universal.[3] Nehamas persuasively argued that such a view misreads the interlocutors' initial attempts to answer the WF-question. They do not provide concrete particulars. They provide universals, albeit universals that are not sufficiently broad to answer the question correctly. In carefully examining these initial attempts and showing that the answers are universals, not concrete particulars, Nehamas has provided a real service.[4] Unfortunately, he has also raised a real problem—a problem which has not been sufficiently noted or sufficiently resolved. After briefly reviewing Nehamas' argument, I will describe the problem and offer a solution.[5]

A REVIEW OF NEHAMAS' ARGUMENT

Nehamas' argument presupposes a clear distinction between universals and concrete particulars. Unfortunately, drawing such a distinction is not as easy as one might suppose.[6] We can, however, adopt the following intuitive, if not completely accurate, Aristotelian account.

> Something is a universal just in case it is predicable of a plurality of things, and something is a concrete particular just in case it is not.[7]

Thus, for example, Socrates, Laches, and Socrates' standing his ground at Delium are concrete particulars (the first two are concrete particular objects, the third is a concrete particular action), while human, standing one's ground at Delium, and courage are all universals (the first is predicable of at least Socrates and Laches, the second of at least Socrates' standing his ground at Delium and Laches' standing his ground at Delium, and the third is paronymically[8] predicable of at least all four). Notice that on this account of the distinction universals and concrete particulars are mutually exclusive. While a