

The Problem of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis explores the integral role of aporia in Platonic philosophy by exploring its epistemological, philosophical, and ethical contexts. Aporia is the disruption of pre-philosophical opinion – some call it intuition – by pointing out its inherent inconsistency and partial constitution in falsity itself. Opinions, however, also always have something of truth in them, thus they can be called intuitions at all and can allow for the aporetically stirred soul to approach truth at all. This disruption, moreover, occurs philosophically in a realm of *value*, as it is always due to the need to determine what is good over what is bad that causes one to get mixed up in the first place. Because of this, philosophy is always concerned with coming to know what is good and, because the philosopher is never satisfied by opinions that are inevitably false, this good eventually becomes an ethical problem of ‘goodness’ against ‘badness’ in general. Philosophy is a maddening pursuit after knowledge of truth and goodness, because as soon as one grasps what one is after it becomes immediately apparent that they have again grasped mere opinion. To this extent the acquisition of knowledge comes not in the accumulation of true propositions – opinions – but rather in the honing of one’s skill in understanding them. Aporia non-intuitively begins and ends philosophy by generating the creative pursuit of truth.

1. the beginning of philosophy

That aporia¹ is the beginning and the end of philosophy is a confusing belief to hold, and perhaps a self-defeating thesis for a philosophical theory. It may not be, however, a very contentious view to hold; after all it’s not always clear that philosophy is anything other than much ado about nothing. These propositions are true propositions, but they are not true in the way most people who might be heard to utter them think they are. A proposition’s being true is of limited value; what must be looked into is the argument that supports the assertion. Truth is maintained and managed by attending to the process by which truth is uncovered, and this process unearths truth by continually perplexing a thinker to consider freshly and differently about something which was before a bald-faced truth. ‘Aporia is the beginning and the end of philosophy’ is a confusing and true proposition, and it is a richly appropriate thesis for a philosophical theory that attempts to understand philosophical perplexity itself.

¹ Aporia means ‘impasse’, ‘perplexity’, ‘without a way’, and even ‘without passage’. For this essay it will, on top of all these meanings, be used to denote the specific kind of perplexity that pertains to philosophy.

The point of this thesis is to establish the *positive* role of perplexity and confusion in the machinations of philosophy itself, and the strategy is to demonstrate its centricity in Plato's thought – for which it will be termed aporia. If Whitehead's praise for Plato is accurate, then discovering a critical role for perplexity in Platonic theory will resonate across the Western philosophical tradition, and indeed it is probably the case that aporia itself, as a phenomenon, is responsible for Plato's continuing importance. Before this can be launched, however, a certain intuitive skepticism regarding aporia ought to be aired.

One might wonder if it is not perplexity that in fact paralyses learning and is only characteristic of coming to know in that it must be overcome and minimized. Should not philosophy be concerned merely with avoiding perplexity, not with deliberately initiating it? This is the beginning of a powerful objection to an aporetic theory called the Learner's Paradox², which basically asks: "If philosophy begins in aporia, how can it hope to approach knowledge"? The intuition is that if one begins investigation at a complete loss for what to say, lacking any convenient method of approach, one could never know what to look for in learning, or be able to recognize knowledge should they reach it. One might think that anything conceived perpetually in perplexity is simply misbegotten.

The first section of this essay focuses on coming-to-know and the epistemological contexts of aporia. It responds to the Learner's Paradox by isolating opinion as the site of aporetic necessity, and asserting that one learns not by leaping from ignorance to knowledge, but rather by a process of *recollecting* opinions and furnishing them with dialogic mastery, constituting knowledge. Here aporia has the dual role of disturbing one's solidified opinions about a subject such that it becomes apparent that they are not knowledge, and then guiding the way to knowledgeable opinion by attending to the reconstruction of the way to knowledge –

² Alternatively the 'Debater's Argument', the 'Eristic Argument', and the 'Paradox of Inquiry', among other things. It will here be referred to either as 'the Learner's Paradox' or simply 'the Paradox'.

generously termed the argument. Thus knowledge is not the thesis itself, but the path forged by its articulation, beginning and ending with aporia.

The second section focuses on philosophy and established aporia as the erotic *love* of knowledge. Having established that aporia leads to knowledge, the Paradox's numbness implies that no one would desire to come to know, if it meant being in such a distastefully confused state. Plato responds to this charge by saying that it is only in aporia that desire is possible, because one must lack something to desire it. Furthermore, aporia motivates the philosophical pursuit of good and beautiful things, and is responsible for any act of creation, and most importantly philosophical creation. Thus, far from deadening people, erotic aporia energizes people to chase after truth, and only aporia enables people to want to come-to-know.

The third section responds to the Paradox by appeal to the need for value and ethics to motivate philosophy and knowing, which in turn articulates an ethical role for aporia in coming-to-be good. First it is determined that knowing and being have a symbiotic relationship in ethics, because one can only truly be good if one knows what the good is, while at the same time it is only through the need to *evaluate* what is good that knowledge is required in the first place. Second, the argument distinguishes between those who are good by being god-liked (without knowledge) and those who are good by being god-*like* (with knowledge) and the latter is given the ethical edge. This latter is the aporetic ethical person, and it is she who most closely actualizes goodness itself, rather than being a blurry imitation of it. Lastly, like knowledge being is never perfected, and aporia must be maintained in the ethical subject lest its good action become inflexible habit. Being good by habit is not the goal of philosophy, and is indeed only good derivatively. Thus the Paradox eliminates coming-to-be good, thereby allowing only for derivative 'being' of good people, which neither should be accepted ethically nor can it be accepted without ignoring human value and its origins.

As philosophical perplexity, aporia responds to the Learner's Paradox by showing the ethical and epistemological benefits of philosophy that are only possible in a deeply aporetic discourse. Epistemologically aporia orients and guides the search for knowledge, truth, and goodness, philosophically it is the erotic desire to obtain and interact with the most beautiful ontological entities, and ethically it is the continually frustrated attempt at being good in a pursuit labeled by and articulated in value. Aporia is the soul of philosophy, and philosophy concerns anyone who wants to know how to be good.

2. a philosopher never asks directions

How does one come to know? Alternatively, how does learning occur? In the *Meno*, this question gets raised when a self-promoted expert of virtue, Meno himself, can no longer “even say what it is” (*Meno* 80b) as a result of the aporia brought on by Socratic questioning. In this moment of frustration, Meno strikes out with the Learner’s Paradox, which, if true, effectively paralyses a human’s ability to come to know even something so important and ostensibly ubiquitous as virtue. If the ultimate goal of Plato’s philosophy is to provide a means by which a person can come to be good in step with coming to know what is good, then resolving the aporia of coming to know *at all* is the first task to be completed. Should learning become impossible, then Plato’s attempt to characterize and reproduce a theory of the good, which is at least in *some* way prescriptive, would be a *caput mortuum*.

Learning occurs only in the face of perplexity, and philosophy occurs only in the presence of aporia. Thus the first item on the agenda is to characterize what kind of perplexity aporia is, so as to isolate how it can orient one towards knowledge, and why it gives rise to the Paradox. Appropriately, the Paradox will next be articulated and resolved. This resolution will not be a refutation after the eristic style, but will rather seriously consider the two horns of the Paradox as the boundaries of the human pursuit of knowledge, and then will occupy the ground

directly between the killing horns. As his response, Plato writes that “when men are interrogated in the right manner, they always give the right answer of their own accord, and they could not do this if they did not possess the knowledge and the right explanation inside them” (*Phaedo* 73b). The true act of coming to know (the ‘Aha!’ moment) always feels as though it comes from within the learner, and Plato uses this intuition to situate the man in aporia as between the extremes of the Paradox. Aporia is the interrogative that demands the ‘right answer’, and it is only through aporia that the right answer can even be approached. Finally, aporia is required for the maintenance of knowledge because it is only by repeated aporetic questioning that truth is apprehended *as it is* rather than as one would like it to be. In other words, only if one can consistently respond to problematic questions can they be counted as having truthful and beneficent knowledge.

First aporia must be distinguished as a special kind of perplexity, and only then will its recurrently positive and negative features make sense. Aporetic perplexity toes the line between frustration and anticipation, and this can be seen in looking at Socrates’/aporia’s various interlocutors in the *Meno*. At one pole, the stately Anytus is hostile to philosophy, threatens Socrates, and is living proof of his statement “it is easier to injure people than to benefit them” (*Meno* 94e). Aporia has turned Anytus away from philosophy because he feels slandered and attacked. Even though Socrates notes that Anytus feels this way because of his ignorance of what slander is, it is still the case Socrates has perplexed Anytus in such a way that he neither apprehends a means of extricating himself nor cares to, but rather he turns from philosophy as only confusing things. At the opposite pole, Meno’s slave is very eager to learn in his perplexity, but his perplexity is at best an introductory one. The slave has a way to knowledge, and that way is through Socrates who knows exactly where the dialogue is going. The slave has that hope of coming to know absent for Anytus, but his hope is mostly supplied by Socrates’ mastery, since

he has no reason to suspect that knowledge will not be attained. Aporia must be ‘without a way’, such that one must be created in the interrogative dialogue. Should perplexity fail to satisfy these criteria, then philosophy will either never get started or it will fail to apprehend a truth beyond the master’s knowledge, meaning that truth will have been investigated in the master’s terms rather than in terms of non-subjective and perhaps transcendent truth.

Between the eagerly guided and the petulantly misdirected is Meno, submitted to aporia in the company of Socrates and yet willing to push on to knowledge. Meno’s aporia is unlike the slave’s, because Meno thought that he knew what virtue was but was made to realize that he did not know because of Socrates’ own aporia with regard to virtue. It is also unlike Anytus’ because though Meno is hostile to being in aporia (insulting Socrates, among other things) he has a question he wants answered – “can virtue be taught?” (*Meno* 70a) – and an argument for why, if aporia is necessary, coming to know is simply impossible – the Learner’s Paradox. This perplexity is such that it fruitfully progresses toward knowledge by its very interaction with and questioning of aporia. Essentially, aporia arises from the very attempt to understand what it is, and from this stylistically brilliant moment Meno and Socrates must rely on each other’s cunning through perplexity to move toward a truth that is outside either interlocutor’s familiar opinions.³

The first thing that aporia must answer to is its own paradoxical existence, interestingly articulated in Meno’s frustrated Paradox. Notably, Plato takes the most devastating articulation of the Paradox out of Meno’s mouth and presents it through Socrates as: “a man cannot search either for what he knows or for what he does not know... he cannot search for what he knows – since he knows it, there is no need to search – nor for what he does not know, for he does not know what to look for” (*Meno* 80e). If something is known, there is no possibility for learning,

³ Though we may suspect Meno’s motivations. He is here cast in a mostly favorable light, but others, such as Klein, give some reason to doubt Meno’s sincerity. Specifically, it seems as though Meno is eager to simply learn arguments and facts, and not interested in philosophical understanding (Klein 72, and more).

because one cannot come-to-know what one already knows. Alternatively, if one does not know something, then it would seem impossible to search for knowledge, because one does not even know where to start looking, nor would one be able to recognize knowledge if it were happened upon. The Paradox asserts that one cannot search for knowledge and thus cannot come to know, and it does so by implicating aporia as the state of ‘not knowing’ that cannot lead to knowing due to the inability to search. Thus the Learner’s Paradox challenges the very notion of aporia, stating that if utter confusion is truly the beginning of philosophical inquiry, then coming to know is impossible.

That Socrates is the one who re-formats the Paradox into a truly problematic twin-horned terror indicates how the Paradox will be wrangled. Rather than disprove it, Plato accepts the truth of the Paradox, but denies the assumption that a human can only either know something or not know it.⁴ Rather, as Socrates declares, “opinion is a different thing from knowledge” (*Meno* 98b) and this different thing is intermediary between pure ignorance on the one hand, and pure knowledge on the other, and accounts for movement (learning/forgetting) between the two. Thus, to respond to the Paradox, opinion must be distinct from both knowledge and ignorance, such that the opiner can both come to know and be able to search for it. Furthermore, aporia must not be a state of ignorance depriving someone of a way to knowing, and it must not be such that the means of attaining knowledge is already determined and simple to achieve. Plato accomplishes both of these goals by articulating a theory where knowledge is *recollected* from the learner’s soul by the rousing and guiding functions of aporia.

Socrates says, “searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection” (*Meno* 81d), meaning that when a person learns she does so by finding the knowledge within her own soul and it is brought out by being asked the right questions in aporetic dialogue (either internally or

⁴ These considerations helped by Matthews’ handling of the Paradox (Matthews 1999, 61-65).

interpersonally). The notion that one must ‘learn by doing’ is a similarly intuitive understanding of this idea, because it is not until one has done something themselves that they truly know how to do it. When she recollects, moreover, she is drawing from something that is “prior knowledge... but deficiently so” (*Phaedo* 74e) which is to say that it *was* knowledge, but in forgetting her knowledge became derivative in some fashion. Thus the object that is recollected always has some semblance of knowledge, but never quite gets there – it *is not*, in a very important way, true knowledge. Neither, however, is it complete ignorance, because when one forgets, they can subsequently remember, even if it takes some prodding. Recollection of true knowledge takes a lot of a very specific sort of prodding, and is always going to be articulated as one who is remembering (i.e. imperfect and at times made up) though in this theoretical sense the remembering is importantly metaphorical for what it is like to *learn/come to know*.

For recollection to work opinions need to have some access to truth such that knowledge can be recollected when opinions are stirred. Though this has been elaborated to some extent by appeal to the *Phaedo*, Book V of the *Republic* makes the relation between opinion and knowledge more apparent. Plato here describes human epistemological psychology as consisting of three different cognitive powers that are assigned to different objects of apprehension. Of these powers knowledge apprehends ‘what is’, ignorance apprehends ‘what is not’, and opinion apprehends what arises from the mixture of the two Paradoxical powers. For example, Socrates notes “that the many conventions of the majority of people about beauty and the others are rolling around as intermediates between what is not and what purely is” (*Republic* 479d). Thoughts about beauty and ugliness, such as ‘long hair is beautiful’, both are and are not because any opinion only obtains for as long as someone believes it to be so, and is true for some people and false for others. Moreover, to say of hair that it is beautiful is to say something about *what Beauty is*, but in a way that does not apprehend Beauty itself. Beautiful hair, in this sense,

reminds someone of Beauty, and this idea of beauty is the object of opinion. Being composed of both truth and falsity in this manner, opinions have something of knowledge in them – thus one can trust that intuition in some way gets at truth in recollection – and something of ignorance in them –such that the search can be enacted at all. In this way, opinion and its object situates humans as between the horns of the Paradox, but always interacting with them and tending toward them.

Opinion has been discussed such that it can enable coming to know. But doing so was mainly to establish how aporia is neither a state of ignorance, nor a step-by-step guide to knowledge. Knowledge comes from within the soul, but it is an ancient and forgotten knowledge, and aporia must help to draw someone's knowledge out of one's self, rather than preparing the soul for truth to be placed into it. When Socrates says: “during the time he exists and is not a human being he will have true opinions which, when stirred by questioning, become knowledge, will not his soul have learned during all time?” (*Meno* 86a) The right questions, the kind that Socrates asks, stir up the soul such that knowledge is possible. True opinions reside within the soul⁵ and, partaking of truth, they have the resemblance of knowledge to the unwary person. Thus, without aporetic questioning, opinions that appear true remain settled and knowledge cannot be approached. When they are stirred by the right kind of questioning in the right kind of soul, however, opinions yield knowledge.

Knowledge must be maintained in continual aporetic questioning lest, in forgetting, it degenerate into mere opinion, and aporia enables this maintenance by continually challenging the knower to being able to account for his knowledge. The true proposition is only what hints toward knowledge, but the event of knowledge is in the ability to account for the proposition's

⁵ How does one make sense of the idea of ‘true opinion’ when it has just been argued that all opinions are of objects that are both true and false, after a fashion? True opinions are those that attach mostly to the truth of ideas, and have a propositional content that reflects the ideas in a true fashion.

soundness. Without the argument, no one is credited with knowledge, because part of knowing is undeniably ‘giving reasons for why X’. Thus being able to defend and interrogate one’s knowledge ensures the philosopher’s orientation toward truth, rather than adapting that truth to his purposes. An illuminating example for how this maintenance works can be bullied out of Plato’s aviary metaphor for the soul that occurs in the *Theaetetus*’ famous false judgment aporia.⁶.

Socrates describes the soul as an aviary, which houses knowledge in a latent fashion, metaphorically as birds, which must be hunted down and grasped to become active, robust knowledge. To this effect, Socrates says, “to ‘possess’ knowledge is one thing and to ‘have’ it is another” (*Theaetetus* 199a), putting an informative twist on the old resolution of the Paradox. Opinions are, clearly, the latent knowledge within the soul, moving lazily about like possessed city pigeons, while knowledge is a different sort of phenomenon – the active ‘having’ or grasping of opinions (birds) which always attempt an escape, even if in the ambling fashion of the bloated rat of the sky. This model is remarkable in many ways, most of which stem from the idea that the birds must be hunted within the soul, and even though some may be easily caught, it always requires an activity of the soul to do so. This imagery of hunting explicitly brings out aporia in a vivid fashion, perhaps justifying the time it took to get here.

Aporia is supposed to involve the right kind of questions which lead inexorably to knowledge by stirring up a sedentary soul to realize that it was only dealing with opinions, and

⁶ This is not a typical reading of the aviary, and indeed it is here taken as a useful metaphor for aporia’s role in recollection, and this usage is neutral as to whether this is the role it takes in the *Theaetetus* itself. This would need to be argued for, as I think it can be, but unfortunately the place for such an argument is not in the current project. Such an argument would consider the obvious fallacy of equating knowledge with true opinion and the early contexts of this section which set it up to run constantly in the issues with the prongs of the Paradox. In this way the section is in a way a *reductio ad absurdum* of the Paradox, but if one follows and amends the movements that land the argument inextricably in the Paradox (first the need to have fallacy in an epistemic faculty which has been made indivisible and then by the need to have fallacy in an epistemic model which only allows for opinion and knowledge thereby ignoring the second prong of the Paradox) one can soundly come to this understanding of the aviary as not-outrageous and indeed quite natural.

really knew nothing at all. In the aviary model, the birds that will be easiest to grasp are the most domesticated ones; the ones that have been kept by one's side and fed from one's hand. These birds conform to the soul's demands of them, becoming subject-serving opinions that appear as if they were knowledge because they are so familiar and applicable to one's daily prehensions. Suddenly, these birds are scattered by a wilder one, which has more of truth in it because of both its distance from the soul and its natural beauty. Aporia is a state of the soul in which domestic opinions get scattered by the hint of a greater and more beautiful truth. When Socrates submits himself and others to aporia, it is because his questions are constantly driving at a truth that is just out of reach, but undeniably beautiful and *approachable* if not, perhaps, attainable. When the common birds are scattered, they are generally too stupid to return immediately, having lasted so long on the hand that feeds. Thus one has two options, try to chase after the more beautiful and dangerous truth, or walk around one's surroundings slowly gathering back up the fat birds of opinion. Anytus preferred the latter method, while one might say that the sort of learning underwent by the slave was such that he was gifted an already domesticated bird by Socrates; having already domesticated this geometric knowledge, Socrates was able to give it to the slave once the slave had been shown the proper way in which to care and feed the bird. Aporia is the pursuit of the trail of truth that disrupted one's opinions, and one chases it with the hunting skills learned from tackling like prey.

Coming to know is like hunting, and when one stalks new prey one uses old tricks in a novel fashion. Notably, however, when one catches the bird one is after, it is still mere opinion; no matter how much it hints at truth it always disappoints. The difference between possessing opinion and knowledgeably having it does not alter opinion in a meaningful way, but rather it is the *act* of grasping that constitutes knowing. The opinion, always a statement, remains a hint towards knowledge, but knowing is the trace of skill left in hunting, and the exercise of holding

truth in sight. Noticeably, however, the ‘having’ of knowledge always attempts a domestication of the opinion grasped, meaning that it always becomes deficient in nature as it becomes more amenable to the knower’s soul. Additionally, the more one focuses on keeping opinions safely within the mind the worse that person gets at hunting again for those opinions. Hunting opinions which have truth in them is getting to know the truth as it appears, and domesticating the opinions – making them readily available to cognitive usage – is getting to know them as they *conform to the soul*. Thus, the most beautiful of knowledgeable opinions, if they fail to escape the soul’s clutches, become domestic and prehensile, slow and fattened by the soul’s attention. Knowledge, then, is not about acquiring facts in the soul like it were a dictionary, but rather about honing one’s abilities to track down those opinions which hint most at truth. Does not this fit the image of Socrates and aporia?

Socrates is always on the pursuit of knowledge because he is never satisfied with what little wisdom he has (*Apology* 21a- 24b). Even more excitingly, his aporetic stance provides the stimulus for his interlocutor’s coming to know by being likewise submitted repetitively to aporetic interrogation. Coming to know begins in aporia, because it is in aporia that opinions get stirred up and seen as inadequate but nevertheless hint toward truth in recollection because of their constitution in both ‘what is’ and ‘what is not’. Knowledge, however, must be found and maintained in continuing philosophical aporia because an opinion, even when grasped in philosophical coming to know, is always false and merely representational of truth, and so the chase must begin again. Coming to know occurs and it is not the acquisition of propositional knowledge, but rather the continuity of aporia depriving the soul of thinking it has grasped truth such that it can pursue and understand truth on truth’s own terms rather than in terms of the soul which hunts.

3. head over heals in perplexity

Why pursue wisdom at all, if it must partake in what is surely the madness of aporia?

This is a rejoinder that the Paradox might offer, noting that knowledge, in being concerned with truth and always ending in confusion, has no practical use and thus paralyzes human activity.

Such a conclusion, however, mischaracterizes humanity in general and more importantly deeply misses a fundamental point about the psychology of the philosopher. Philosophy literally means ‘lover of wisdom’⁷, and so it should not be, though it historically has been, forgotten that the philosopher shares in the cognitive state of the *lover*.⁸ To respond to the Paradox one need only look to the appellation of the pursuit of knowledge to see that the pursuit of knowledge is in fact a sort of madness, but it is the very human madness of love. The Paradox “would have been fine to say if madness were bad, pure and simple; but in fact the best things we have come from madness, when it is given as a gift of the god” (*Phaedrus* 244a), which is to say that if knowledge is achieved by glimpsing the best of truth, then the aporia of love is a gift of the most good. Thus philosophy is a sort of madness, and the philosopher pursues knowledge, prior to any ethical or pragmatic benefits, because of an erotic, frustrated, and maddening *desire* to do so. Rather than paralyzing human activity, philosophy is a paradigm of ceaseless movement toward a great good.

Aporia in the process of philosophy is necessary for the genuine desire to know; enabling someone to be “keen on the search” for knowledge, and only in philosophical aporia can a man “realize he did not know and longed to know” (*Meno* 81de, 84c). This section first describes the psychology of a lover’s desire for the beautiful, and then investigates how *philosophical* love

⁷ φιλοσοφία (philosophia) – Liddell pg. 1940.

⁸ We have an intuitive grasp of what it is like to be in love, and this always comes with a certain concession to madness and irrationality. One can rarely answer as to why they love someone, and if they can we might even be suspicious of its validity. Plato spends a lot of time fleshing out the irrationality/madness of Love in the *Symposium* (of specific interest to this argument would be Pausanius’ speech at 180c-185c), but it is by no means uncommon in his dialogues (*Phaedrus* in particular has much to say on the pros and cons of the madness of love).

presents itself as fundamentally aporetic and erotic. This will be accomplished by comparing aporia with the spirit Eros, developing their congruency, and then noting that aporia only exists in co-arising with one's erotic desire. Being erotic, therefore, it becomes clear that the goal of the love of wisdom is to create and reproduce with truth, taking on a metaphor of pregnancy that intuitively represents the drive to form and articulate *ideas*, as the so called offspring of this coupling. Thus philosophy is differentiated from love in general by the beauty it pursues because the philosopher is never satisfied with the *kind* of beauty apprehended, whereas lovers in general desire always after objects *within* a kind (lovers of women desire beauty in women, whereas lovers of knowledge desire beauty in beauty itself and thus continually re-define what beauty is). Finally, humans are understood as always being in a state of renewal, and this is doubly so with knowledge and forgetting such that the philosopher is always frustrated in aporia because she must always be re-creating the way to truth. Thus, the *love* of wisdom is launched in aporia, perpetuated by the eroticism of aporia, and then terminating in aporetic self-renewal.

Plato's *Symposium* is his "proper hymn to Love" (*Symposium* 199b), and in it he differentiates the philosophical lover from other erotically inclined individuals. Indeed, before he begins his speech, Socrates notes that there will be a difference between his and the other orations. While the other orators' style was to "stir up every word and apply it to Love", Socrates' speech will first and foremost ground itself in truth and from here "select the most beautiful truths and arrange them most suitably" (*Symposium* 199a, 198d). Socrates' speech is thus flagged as a different sort of endeavor; where the others pursued only the most beautiful things to apply to Love, Socrates' speech will, like philosophical recollection, be stirred up only by truth, and the account provided will be one which gets at that truth found only in aporia, rather than one which gets at the beauty of easily stirred and readily available opinions. The

philosopher has a certain psychological structure in similarity with the ‘lover’ generally defined, but his concern with truth notably alters how the pursuit will take place.

It is now time to cash out these bold claims that have been made about the beauty and greatness of philosophy’s mad aporetic and erotic desire, and the first step is to understand what desire is and how it is aporetically frustrated. In the *Meno* the interlocutors yearn after knowledge, but only after the aporetic realization that they do not possess it. In this manner, a man who desires wants “what is not at hand and not present, what he does not have, and what he is not, and that of which he is in need; for such are the objects of desire and love” (*Symposium* 200e). This characterization of desire is meticulously worded so as not to conflict with the idea of recollection in that one can desire what one may possess, but not what is presently at hand. Desiring, then, is wanting what one lacks and for which one has a need that, once fulfilled, disappears along with the desire. If someone desires to be strong, and becomes strong, then they can no longer be said to desire the same object but, if anything, to desire to have it in the future (*Symposium* 200cd). Finally, the specific desire of Love is “a desire for beauty, and never for ugliness” (*Symposium* 201a). When one falls in love it is with something one thinks of as beautiful, though such beauty can vary in type. Being between beauty and ugliness, frustrated philosophical desire mirrors the epistemological situation between the Paradox’s horns on a psychological level, and it is interestingly aporetic because it must always be frustrated, lest it die out and become Paradoxically inert.

To investigate philosophical love, Socrates turns to a conversation with the sophistical seer Diotima about wisdom and Eros, whose very existence belies the Learner’s Paradox. According to Diotima, Eros is a spirit who exists “between mortal and immortal” (*Symposium* 202d). The job of such spirits is to act as messengers between these two realms, since the “Gods do not mix with men” (*Symposium* 203a). Thus, it is in virtue of spirits, specifically Eros, that

men interact with immortality, which is the realm of unchanging truth. In other words, it is through love that humans approach and interact with knowledge, because love and erotic desire are the spiritual drives for mankind, pushing humans to improve their accounts of truth. It means, furthermore, that aporia and Eros are one in the same or, like Aristophanes' myth, mutually inseparable.

The nature of erotic desire, as it will come to be understood philosophically, is reflected in Eros' lineage. As Diotima tells it, Eros was conceived of Poros (way/resource – son of cunning) and Penia (poverty) on the night of Aphrodite's birth. Being the son of both impoverishment and resource, Eros is, "having his mother's nature, always living with Need. But on his father's side he is a schemer after the beautiful and the good... a lover of wisdom through all his life" (*Symposium* 203 d). At the same time he is both impoverished and cunning, always living with desire for beauty (since he necessarily follows Aphrodite) but having no means to attain it except through his wiles: his intellect. Furthermore, Diotima elaborates that "now he springs to life when he gets his way; now he dies – all in the same day... anything he finds his way to always slips away, and for this reason Love is never completely without resources, nor is he ever rich" (*Symposium* 203e). Eros comes to life in the presence of beauty, desiring to possess it even as he is confounded in his poverty. If he grasps beauty, even for a moment, he then dies having achieved his goal. This is because he is only cunning in his poverty, and should he happen upon wealth he has not the cunning to retain it. Desire is birthed in the impoverishment of the soul, but without Eros' cunning it remains just as helpless in ignorance as the gods remain almighty in knowledge.

All of this is true of aporia, even the lineage. Aporia is rooted in the word poros (father of Eros) which means 'passage through' or 'a way out', etc.⁹ The 'a-' prefix is familiar enough in

⁹ πόρος (poros) – Liddell pg. 1450-1.

that it means a negation or privation (ahistorical, etc.) in a similar fashion as Penia is poverty and lack. Aporia then means, etymologically, ‘not having a way’ or ‘lack of passage’, and it only exists when one is confounded in coming-to-know; when one realizes that there is something other than conventions under investigation. Like Eros, it can only exist as long as the knowable object is not known – for once it is there is no aporia – and thus works between the disjuncts of the Paradox by moving one towards knowing but never reaching it. In this manner, the psychology of the philosopher is such that Eros and aporia are wedded and co-arising; meaning that philosophy is embraced because one cannot help but respond to aporia with the erotic desire to know.

Aporia is the paralysis of disrupted opinions where there is no easy answer, and one must either fight through with cunning alone or retreat into the safety of convention. Only in such tension can fruitful philosophy take place, for only in such dire straits is one forced to *create* something new and to construct a new means of extraction from perplexity. In addressing this idea, Diotima articulates philosophy as the desire for ever more beautiful things, beginning with the beauty of particulars and progressing toward the greatest beauty of all – that of truth and goodness. This progression is motivated by the familiar aporetic process of realizing that the truth of beauty is always something different from what one thought it was, and the philosopher is compelled to pursue. This is an old yarn, by now, and what is really interesting is how this progression of philosophy toward truth, obviously aporetic, is psychologically motivated by persistently frustrating aporia.

The goal of philosophy is creating beautiful and true ideas, and the philosopher approaches this by being continually dissatisfied with the validity of the ideas she produces in comparison to the truth she feels laboring to be expressed. The philosopher is metaphorically pregnant in soul, for as Diotima says, “when he makes contact with someone beautiful and keeps

company with him, he conceives and gives birth to what he has been carrying inside him for ages” (*Symposium* 209c). Latent within the philosopher are ideas of “wisdom and the rest of virtue” (*Symposium* 209a), and these are brought forth by intercourse with beautiful things in the world, the most fruitful of which is another beautiful soul. Thus Plato puts an erotic twist on the epistemic understanding of recollection by showing that the latent knowledge of the good within one’s soul is what promotes and fuels the erotic need to experience aporia.

Philosophers partake in the “great excitement about beauty that comes to anyone who is pregnant and teeming with life: beauty releases them from their great pain” (*Symposium* 206e). It is painful to feel that one is simply inadequate to express the truth one feels pressing against the confines of the soul, and this inadequacy (of the self in relation to the discursive truth the self inhabits) forces one to consider ever deeper and more articulate notions of truth in the hopes that one will finally be able to breath real life into the idea that has lain incubating for so long. Aporia is the frustration of desire, and the philosopher is the person who is psychologically resolute in pursuing beauty even in his impoverishment. This determination to uncover the truth is motivated by the fact that every idea birthed in the pursuit of truth is lacking in some frustratingly aporetic fashion. Thus the philosopher seeks to be released from the ideas that goad her on, and this is what forces her to put up with the interminable frustration of her desire.

Psychologically, philosophy remains in aporia even at its terminus, and this is why the Paradox’s charge of madness is true though off base because it assumes madness is necessarily bad. By engaging in erotic philosophical study, Diotima says, “everything mortal is preserved, not, like the divine, by always being the same in every way, but because what is departing and aging leaves behind something new, something such as it had been” (*Symposium* 208ab). Philosophical creation, which is the delivery of ideas latent within the soul, is how humans stay in touch with immortality in the midst of their mortal degeneration and forgetting. Humans are

always in a state of decay and renewal both biologically and mentally, and study exists to recall and recreate forgotten knowledge. With every act of renewal, the subsequent forgetting leaves behind a trace and an offspring of the goodness that was achieved. Whether this offspring is a written work, in the mind of a pupil, or simply as an enhanced ability to create in the future, the frustration of philosophy – its continual aporia – is in fact the moment where creation occurs.

The Paradox asks why anyone would desire to pursue philosophy, and Plato responds by noting that it is the Paradox that makes men “idle, and fainthearted” (*Meno* 81d), effectively stunting desire *in general* in its rejection of philosophical desire. This response is to say that being human means embracing a sort of madness, as it is the lover’s obsession that brings some of the greatest and most beautiful things into existence. Without this desire, aporia is merely frustration, and for this reason Plato ties together the phenomena of aporia and desire in comparing their like etymology and genealogy. Thus, just as Aristophanes joined the first humans together in a love that challenged the gods, Plato gives something of divinity to the philosopher whose soul unifies erotic inclination with aporetic frustration. But this desire and frustration does not make sense on its own, and to round out the description of the eroticism of the philosopher it must be seen that she has within her soul the greatness of truth, developing like a child in the womb, and that this truth welling up inside of her can only come to light when she intercourses with the right kinds of beautiful things that enable its expression. The philosopher is never satisfied with the truth he bears, however, because despite the beauty of the offspring of philosophy, it never quite captures the divinely inspired truth that his soul has caught sight of. For this reason, the philosopher lives in constant aporetic frustration, and he must remain this way lest the labor pangs of the unborn idea tear at his soul without relief, turning him most likely to the depths of depravity and misology to benumb himself of his frustration.

4. good to know

What is the point of philosophy? The point of philosophy is to *have a philosophy* by which to live ones life. Even those who detest philosophy will be found, from time to time, to utter the words “My philosophy is...” and this is not a chance slip of the tongue. This last section is concerned with a final justification of philosophy that rounds off the last concern the Paradox might raise, which is that philosophy is occasion only for the disturbed lover, and that there is nothing good in it except in the eyes of the blinded aporetic. The truth, however, is that philosophy is the means by which one comes to be good by knowing what the good is.

Conversely, it is the case that one comes to know what the good is only in virtue of encountering aporia in value.¹⁰ Aporia is no fetish of the philosopher, for is the ethical moment that defines the goodness of a person and gives meaning to philosophy and aporia. One’s reaction to moral uncertainty is the locus of the phrase “actions speak louder than words” and it is from this ethical aporia that one becomes aware of the need to be, and the impossibility of being, good.

Philosophy is primarily and ultimately concerned with and generated in the aporia of value, and Plato’s high esteem for reason is due to the understanding that it alone can approach the highest ethical good through active being.

This section will first discuss the problem of ensuring one’s offspring’s goodness by appeal to the *Meno* to understand biological children and the *Republic* to consider the metaphysical ones. From here, aporia will be investigated as the means for ensuring one’s goodness by looking to the symbiotic relationship between coming to know what is good and coming to be good terminating in the attempt to be *like god*. Thus what it means to be *like god* will be cashed out in terms of the intersection of being and knowing the good, and it will be held

¹⁰ This section is formatted to be mostly neutral with regard to *what* ethical system one embraces (utilitarian teleology, Kantian deontology, pragmatism, etc.) but is rather concerned with the drive to ethics in general, and the aporetic contexts in which one comes to be a good person.

in contrast with both what it is like to actually be god and as what it is like to be merely god inspired. For humans, being like a god requires the activity of the deepest of aporetic souls, and thus aporia will begin the pursuit of being good, motivate its intersection with knowledge, and inhabit its terminus in terms of the impossibility of actually ‘being’ good. This justifies aporia and philosophy, demonstrating that it is constructed out of the deepest concern for what is good and how to be such, responding to even the most general implications of the Paradox by noting that only in such a desirous and maddening venture is it possible to *be good*.

The fundamental question throughout the *Meno* is “can virtue be taught” (*Meno* 70a), and this turns eventually to considering whether the sons of virtuous people are themselves virtuous. As it turns out by the end of the *Meno*, it is very commonly the case that virtuous fathers birth non-virtuous sons, not by lack of trying but “because it cannot be taught” and for this reason “virtue no longer seems to be knowledge” (*Meno* 99a). Since goodness cannot be approached through knowing, it seems as though it is up to true opinion alone, as the other guide for behavior, to account for virtuousness. Thus the people who possess virtue “possess it as a gift from the gods” (*Meno* 100b) and one is only good from divine providence rather than from *becoming* like the gods. Is this how it really is? Looking to another offspring of goodness enables a comeback for knowing virtue.

In the *Republic* Socrates proffers what he calls the “child and offspring of the good” with the caveat that the interlocutor “be careful that I don’t somehow deceive you unintentionally by giving you an illegitimate account of the child” (*Republic* 507a). Thus, for the child of the good to be legitimate, it must pass the test of philosophical accounting. If Socrates’ account falls flat and provides a windegg of an offspring, it is not the fault of the child but rather of the philosophical ability of the discussants to furnish a dynamically beautiful and true account of

what it is and could be. Philosophy provides the goodness of the child in metaphysical offspring, and this notion can be imported back to the *Meno*.

It could be the case that the child of the virtuous man is just a lemon. More likely, however, would be that the child, though rigorously taught, has nevertheless been given a poor education. Socrates' assertion that virtue is only possible for the divinely inspired opiner is only true if "we were right in the way in which we spoke and investigated in this whole discussion" (*Meno* 99e), and indeed one would be vindicated in speculating that they were *not* right in the investigation. This is because they searched for a teacher of virtue in sophists, poets, seers, fathers, politicians and orators but never considered the philosopher. Furthermore, they neglected the familiar philosophical fact that "searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection" (*Meno* 81d) that was established earlier in the dialogue. To ensure goodness in the offspring of the good, one must give the child the proper account – meaning that the proper questions must be asked of her such that she can come to know the good (furnish an account) as she simultaneously becomes good herself (makes the account her own) in continual aporia (to ensure her knowledge of goodness is not ignorantly domestic). Having shown that the good child requires philosophy to *become* good, it is now investigated how aporia causes and instigates human coming to be good.

Fair enough, says the skeptic, but it still has to be shown how this happens. Ethical aporia is the origin of reason and objectivity, and by this light it is in concern with relative value that the imperative to reason and coming to know becomes a *need* at all in the sense of visceral human spiritedness. For Plato, humans want what they believe to be good¹¹, but it is only a matter of luck whether their beliefs conform to what is *actually* good. During the investigation into

¹¹ First of all, Platonic theory rests on the innocent looking assumption that "no one wants what is bad... unless he wants to be such" (*Meno*, 78a). This section accepts this as unproblematic. I suspect this assumption could fall under heavy attack in the (post-)modern philosophical scene, and for this reason I include it upfront so as to not sneak around the premise. One thing I might posit as a preliminary defense is that it would seem hard to posit another human drive away from being good since ignorance and aporia have already been accounted for.

Theaetetus' first theory that "knowledge is simply perception" (*Theaetetus* 151e) Socrates examines Protagoras' theory that "man is the measure of all things... as each thing appears to me, so it is for me..." (*Theaetetus* 152a). Socrates notes that such an account of truth fails to make sense of one's expertise in a subject, and thus falls short of grasping any objective truth, obsessed as it is with the truth of how things seem to a subject¹². To salvage it, he argues that "if the theory is going to admit that there is any sphere in which one man is superior to another, it might perhaps be prepared to grant it in questions of what is good or bad for one's health" (*Theaetetus* 171e). Socrates is willing to admit that some things are as they appear to a person, and among these he includes perception, but the ethical aporia where one feels the pressure of evaluating things in terms of good or bad brings out wisdom as the means by which a man is superior or inferior at getting at truth. Put a different way, Socrates says "when it is a question of what things are good, we no longer find anyone so heroic that he will venture to contend that whatever a community thinks useful... really is useful" (*Theaetetus* 177d). There are harmless things like the specifics of religion that can be true for a community, but it is when it comes to evaluating the good at this most basic perplexing level that coming to know ever has motivation to get going. Thus aporia is given an even more robust role, which is to instigate the desire to know not from mere erotic fantasy, but from a very real craving and need to determine how to be good.

¹² Protagoras' theory is, according to Socrates, internally incoherent since it contradicts its authority and externally inaccurate because it misrepresents certain obvious human phenomena and situations. Internally, Protagoras' *Truth* undermines its own authority because "in conceding the truth of the opinion of those who think him wrong, he is really admitting the falsity of his own opinion" (*Theaetetus* 171b). Basically, since this doctrine states that what someone sees or believes is truth for that person, it contends that anyone who thinks Protagoras wrong to be speaking the truth. Not wanting to accept this, Protagoras would be forced to admit that the *Truth* is not true for anyone, since it is disputed by all (*Theaetetus* 171c). Thus if he admits that the doctrine is correct, Protagoras must accept the opinion of a dolt as equally true to his, but if he disputes this saying that someone's theory can be more expert and true than another's, then it must be the case that nobody believes the *Truth*, not even Protagoras.

This is a deeply personal point, as the nature of philosophy would suggest, and to draw this out a little further one should look not at the staged discussion between Socrates and Protagoras, but at the real and personal one found in the *Protagoras*. In contrast to discussing expertise, Socrates in the *Protagoras* is concerned with describing an art of measurement by which deeply worrisome ethical problems are weighed and decided. This argument concerns the ‘common sense’ understanding of ethics that what is good is what is pleasurable, and to this Socrates says “while the power of appearance often makes us wander all over the place in confusion... regretting our actions and choices with respect to things large and small, the art of measurement in contrast... would give us peace of mind firmly rooted in the truth and would save our life” (*Protagoras* 356e). In this argument, Plato is very careful to attempt a description of what anyone would say on the issue, which is something akin to the Protagorean idea that what seems true to the subject is in fact the truth for that subject. Even so, it is still the case that determining what is good *purely* for the self requires the ‘art of measurement’ to resolve common ethical aporia. Subjectively speaking, one’s life would be lost if one had no *art* of measurement, and so it is not simply about developing expert knowledge (in the fashion of *technē*) that guides ethical behavior. Rather, one must internalize an *ability* to measure the ethical choices before one in order to be a good person. In this way, though coming to know arises out of a consideration of an ethical aporia, one’s knowledge must constitute one’s *capacity* to encounter and resolve aporia. Thus coming to know requires one to be coming to be (the philosopher’s birth in aporia arises out of ethical confusion about how to be), yet at the same time to come to be requires one be philosophically coming to know (becoming good requires that one be able to apply knowledge of the good at the deepest personal level).

The role of philosophy, for Plato, is to enable humans to become as like god as possible, which is to say to become as close as possible to actualizing goodness rather than only

possessing it by luck. Thus the final step is to differentiate the god inspired from the godlike, and to discuss how aporia inhabits the ethical goal of philosophy. First the *Theaetetus* and *Protagoras* are both set in the contexts of becoming godly, and both remark on the impossibility of such a pursuit. To make sense of this the *Symposium* will be revisited to discuss how the ‘human way’ to immortality is different from the gods’ and constructed in aporia, and then the *Meno* will end the discussion as it began it by elaborating on what it would mean to be godlike in a context which perplexingly seems to preclude human coming to be virtuous.

The *Theaetetus* is home to a very famous digression in which Plato has occasion to describe in part the life of the philosopher. Within this digression, Socrates says “evil... must inevitably haunt human life, and prowl about this earth. That is why a man should make haste to escape from earth to heaven; and escape means becoming as like God as possible” (*Theaetetus* 176a). Philosophy is oriented toward godliness epistemologically because it is truth and ethically because it is good. Ignorance, however, haunts human life and so the philosopher attempts always to become “just and pure, with understanding” (*Theaetetus* 176b), and thus godliness is approached at the intersection of being just and understanding it.

The *Protagoras* presents a similar thought in an auspiciously digressive moment – the discussion of Simonides’ poem. The central thought of this poem and Platonic philosophy is the expression: “to become good is hard, though possible, but to be good is impossible” (*Protagoras* 344e). Being good is impossible, moreover, because “God alone can have this privilege” (*Protagoras* 341e). Only gods can be truly good, because humans are always haunted by ignorance and evil. On this note, becoming good is hard, but not *impossible*. If someone could become good but not be good, it means that as soon as one becomes good, one is already slipping away from it. In other words, becoming good is only possible if aporia inhabits the destination because it is only in this manner that someone would be pushed to *continue* to become.

The *Symposium* provides more insight into the specifically human manner of being divine in goodness. A human can only be divine insofar as he continually recreates the path to goodness because only in such a way is “everything mortal... preserved” (*Symposium* 208b) because “only then will he give birth not to images of virtue... but to true virtue... and if any human being could become immortal, it would be he” (*Symposium* 212ab). At this point the philosophical pursuit has become more than solely epistemological, as it no longer concerns itself with images of virtue, such as theories and ideas, but concerns itself with the active existence and reproduction of virtue itself, which leads into an ethical realm of producing *actions* and *dispositions* that are themselves virtuous. This is what Plato has in mind, and the point is to say that philosophy is set with the goal of truth in mind, and this goal is only ever truly approached in its consistent repetition in the soul of the philosopher such that she becomes (but does not ‘be’) herself a persistent articulation of the truth she pursues. The philosopher comes to be good, therefore, by continuing to submit herself to aporia because aporia is the means by which she adapts her soul and her pursuit to truth itself, rather than adapting truth to her humanity. Fittingly the only means of fulfilling the epistemic project is to attune oneself to truth, which is a moment cast recurrently in ethical aporia.

Having gone the long way around, the discussion returns to the *Meno* to answer the question left hanging about whether one can come to be virtuous by knowledge rather than the divine gift of true opinion. The answer is that coming to know is a process launched initially by a concern with goodness, and that there is, perhaps, “someone among our statesmen who can make another into a statesman” (*Meno* 100a) if that someone is the philosopher concerned with reproducing true virtue. Being “as far as virtue is concerned... the only true reality compared, as it were, with shadows” (*Meno* 100a) requires that one be able to bring true virtue out of another person, as well as oneself. If philosophy occurs within the aporetic contexts of the dialogue, then

creation of virtue itself occurs within it as well, and the one who is in touch with the true reality of goodness is the one who can initiate coming to be within the dialogic circumstances, meaning that he or she instigates the state of aporia which promotes the adaptation of the soul to truth, rather than the other way around. The true philosopher perhaps does not need to be forced to ‘return to the cave’ (*Republic* ~520) but rather realizes that he can get closest to truth itself when “Going in tandem, one perceives before the other” (*Protagoras* 348d, *Iliad* x.224)

Thus the concerns of the *Meno* get answered, as it is possible to come to be virtuous, but it cannot be taught and rather must be recollected and the Paradox cannot call philosophy unjustified based on its erotic nature. Philosophy’s pursuit of knowledge is validated and instigated by ethical aporia, and thus the philosopher is or should always be concerned with coming to be what she comes to know. This should not be surprising since it has been held all along that the maintenance of a persistent state of aporia is necessary for philosophy, but it was perhaps incoherent without an ethical qualification. The strongest form of knowledge is in being able to sure-handedly retrace the steps to truth, and this is done by internalizing this truth not as the domestication of opinion, but as one internalizes a skill. But this skill must nevertheless be philosophically maintained such as to actively rather than passively express truth. Being like god becomes a goal for philosophy because it is only in such a metaphor of the divine that an image is comprehensible of how something could fully *know* a truth and simultaneously actualize it. Thus aporia saturates coming to be good, and it must if one is to actively engage with the creation of truth.

5. the end of philosophy

Aporia is the soul of philosophy, animating it from the paralysis of the Paradox in at least three very remarkable manners. Epistemically it orients and guides the search for knowledge, philosophically it is the erotic desire to obtain and interact with the most beautiful ontological entities, and ethically it is the continually frustrated attempt at being good in a pursuit labeled by and articulated in value. Socrates is the soul of these Platonic dialogues, and thus the final unveiling of aporia coincides with the revelation of Socrates' secret.

Unbeknownst to most people, Socrates practices the art of midwifery, a talent he inherited to some extent from his mother. By this light Plato assigns to Socrates the symbolic role of aporetic refinement of the philosophical pursuit, and in doing so both praises Socrates' distinct philosophical style and distinguishes Plato's own take on philosophy, which is the inherited discourse of Western thought. Like the midwife's infertility, and Eros' frustration, Socrates is "barren of wisdom" (*Theaetetus* 150c) and has no more ideas left to offer. It is for this reason that he quests always for wisdom, and submits people to aporetic questions so as to construct a fruitful way to knowledge. Socrates' assigned role, therefore, is not to teach people but to help deliver from "within themselves a multitude of beautiful things" (*Theaetetus* 150d), much like the goal of erotic aporia. One recollects knowledge, rather than being taught it, by aporetic discourse and interaction with what is. Thus Socrates' art is "able to bring on, and also allay" (*Theaetetus* 151a) the pains of labor, much like aporia refines an idea and also reduces it to confusion. Finally, Socrates states that "the most important thing about my art is the ability to apply all possible tests to the offspring, to determine whether the young mind is being delivered of a phantom, that is, an error, or a fertile truth" (*Theaetetus* 150c). The role performed here is to determine whether an idea has within it the beauty of truth and, if it does not, to capably draw what is good from it and throw the rest away. This is also the function of aporia, and the painful,

maddening paradox of philosophy. One is always refining one's knowledge, erotically reproducing with good things and, realizing that they were not the whole of truth, attempting again to come to the truth and the good.

Finally, as the closing lines of the dialogue make clear, the point of this aporetic midwifery was to develop the goodness within Theaetetus himself by learning how to hunt for truth. After this long and rich discussion, Socrates notes that they have come up only with wind-eggs, and no true children of truth. But, he remarks, “if ever in the future you should attempt to conceive or should succeed in conceiving other theories, they will be better ones as a result of this inquiry” (*Theaetetus* 210 c). The dialogue, conducted in aporetic and erotic philosophy, has made progress in advancing the philosophical ability of Theaetetus. He has refined his powers of cognition so that he can construct clearer ideas and form more knowledgeable opinions. More importantly, as an indictment both to Theaetetus and the reader, Socrates states that now “your companions will find you gentler and less tiresome; you will be modest and not think you know what you don’t know” (*Theaetetus* 210c). The dialogue of philosophy has been an exercise in moderation, tempering one’s drive to form hasty opinions with appealing coherence by demonstrating the aporetic nature of being and knowing. Thus the image of Socrates is that of Diotima’s paradigmatic philosopher who, by embracing and mastering aporia, draws great and beautiful ideas into the world by creating a moment of true virtue in the soul of the dialogue.

Aporia is the disruption of doctrine, necessary if progress is to be made toward truths. Without aporia, discourse is deathlike and still, locked squeamishly into the Learner’s Paradox. Aporia enables coming-to-know, and this coming-to-know is inevitably encountered in a human that is coming-to-be the very same thing. Philosophy is about actively *being* the knowledge one pursues. Lacking this ethical investment, philosophy becomes what Thrasymachus implies in saying “what difference does it make to you, whether *I* believe it or not? Its *my account* you’re

supposed to be refuting” (*Republic* 349a). If it is just his account that is refuted, then it is not knowledge that is being challenged or engaged, but merely opinion. If refutation of one’s account were all that was worth pursuing, then there would truly be no coming to know and thus no point to pursuing the good. If one does not actively engage with the truths one pursues, then those truths swiftly become inert opinions, only accidentally true and meaningless either way.

This eristic method of inquiry is like asking someone to judge a wine without ever tasting it.

Philosophy is distinctly and uniquely aporetic. Moreover, the end of philosophy in Socratic aporia matches to a certain extent its beginning – the slaves’ aporia. Aporia rounds off the philosophical pursuit, and also drives it from the inside. This is not to say, however, that philosophy is a fool’s gold, and valuable only to children. Rather, it is to say that philosophy is the moment of creation and artistry in the most serious of pursuits. Without this creativity, and this seriousness, the search for knowledge falls flat on old structures and worn out ideas.

Philosophy is not mere play, nor is it stern conservatism. It is rather a deep concern with the best things in life, and an attempt to vivify them by bringing them into being by coming-to-know through aporia. Speaking of philosophy as poetry, as Plato would (*Symposium* 205c), he writes “if anyone comes to the gates of poetry and expects to become an adequate poet by acquiring expert knowledge [techne] of the subject without the Muses’ madness, he will fail, and his self-controlled verses will be eclipsed by the poetry of men who have been driven out of their minds” (*Phaedrus* 245a). The goal of philosophy is the maddening state of perplexity, but for all this it is a beautiful and meaningful pursuit.

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