

Review of the Bachelor thesis „Meno’s paradox and Anamnesis” by Vladislav Odínokov

Vladislav Odínokov (hereafter VO) discusses Plato’s dialogue *Meno* with special focus on two particular topics: the so called Meno’s paradox, one of the most important and interesting epistemological problems discussed in Plato’s Academy, and the theory of recollection that is commonly believed to be Socrates’ solution to the paradox in the dialogue. VO challenges this belief with a reference to contemporary attempts to cast doubts on the possibility that the theory of recollection (as presented in the dialogue) provides a serious philosophical reply to the paradox, and suggests scrutinizing in detail the purpose of the theory in the dialogue. With the help of two prominent contemporary interpretations of the topic, namely Scott (2005) and Fine (2014), VO goes through all relevant passages, meticulously analyses their contents and discusses the suggested interpretations. He finally concludes (p. 26) that the purpose of the theory of recollection in the dialogue is multilayered and that there are three distinct reasons for its application: (a) “to motivate Meno and make him eager to inquire”, (b) to solve “the epistemological problem raised by foreknowledge principle and principle of priority of definition”, and (c) to answer “the second version of the third Meno’s question”.

The thesis is short and compact, written for the most part in comprehensible English. The author shows a good command of analytical methods and other academic skills.¹ Nevertheless, there are also possible objections to the thesis and its methodology:

(1) Despite the fact that there is an abundant secondary literature on Plato’s *Meno* in general, and on the Meno’s paradox in particular, VO draws in his thesis almost exclusively on no more than two secondary sources. Moreover, it often seems that he is concerned with these two authors and their arguments more than with the original text. What is the justification for restricting the discussion to these two interpretations?

(2) I have doubts whether one can find satisfactory answer to the main question (especially if one aims at a “logical and complete answer”, p. 2) without taking into consideration the general framework of Academic epistemology. An introduction into Plato’s philosophy is missing in the thesis and there are no references to other works of Plato, despite the fact that Plato’s concept of recollection is discussed in a number of other dialogues, some of which, such as *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*, are essential for understanding

¹ Yet, the entry “Plato - Meno” in bibliography (p. 27) is not a valid reference to a source text.

the moral as well as epistemological framework of the conception. Recollection presupposes reincarnation, a remarkable topic on its own that Plato discusses in a number of dialogues (e.g. *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, *Timaeus*).

(3) I would strongly recommend including in the discussion also Aristotle's reflection of Meno's paradox and his criticism of the theory of recollection in *An. Post.* I,1. It would be highly relevant and illustrative to see how Aristotle understands Meno's paradox, especially because his solution rests in making distinction between (a) a preliminary knowledge from which one starts in his/her inquiry ("All teaching and learning that involves the use of reason proceeds from pre-existent knowledge"), and (b) the absolute knowledge acquired by means of demonstration, i.e. a syllogism which produces scientific knowledge. An inclusion of Aristotle's position (discussed in detail both by Scott and Fine) would help the reader (as well as the author himself, I believe) in better understanding the difference between pre-existent knowledge in the sense that it exists before the act of inquiry (e.g. the slave boy has learned Greek as well as plenty of false believes before meeting Socrates), and knowledge which is pre-existent in the sense that it is acquired from prenatal experiences, as Plato's theory of recollection presupposes and Aristotle refutes.

Despite these objections, I regard the thesis very good and suggest grade B.

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