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***Lists in the *Meno* and the *Euthyphro****

Bachelor Thesis

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Tartu 2015

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## Introduction

This thesis explores Plato's dialogues the *Meno* and the *Euthyphro*. The *Meno* ponders on the question "What is virtue?", the *Euthyphro* "What is piety?" The dialogues *Laches* ("What is courage?"), *Hippias Major* ("What is the fine?") and *Charmides* ("What is temperance?") follow a similar pattern. This is commonly formalised as Socrates asking the "What is F?" question (see Fine 2004: 46-47) or alternatively the "What is F-ness?" question (Benson 1992: 123) or the "What is the F?" question (Benson 1992: 134). Which one to use is a matter of preference. I will use "What is the F?" because as we will see, Socrates asks for the one "form itself" (*Euth.* 6d)<sup>1</sup>, and to me, "What is F?" does not seem to capture this, while "What is F-ness?" perhaps too strongly hints at essence. In any case, all these dialogues end in *aporia*, that is, for one reason or another, no satisfactory answer is found. Socrates' interlocutors offer several answers, but each is refuted. Socrates often seems to be especially unhappy with the first answer given to his "What is the F?" question. Often scholars characterise the first answers (but not necessarily only the first answers) as giving *examples* (e.g., Geach 1966: 371). Although I do not object to this characterisation, I will often talk of *lists* instead. I prefer to talk of lists or sets rather than examples because Socrates' criticism seems to be aimed at there being (explicitly named, or implicitly thought) more than one candidate for the F, and because the word 'example' does not capture this multitude-ness as well as the word 'list'. I am, then, interested in why Socrates<sup>2</sup> finds unsatisfactory the answers where the interlocutors name just one or more F things, that is, where they give examples as part of a list (a set of candidates for the F). For instance, *Meno's* third answer to the question "What is virtue?" is: "I think courage is a virtue, and moderation, wisdom, and munificence, and very many others" (74a).

The reason for my focusing on the *Meno* and the *Euthyphro* is that in these dialogues we find the clearest cases of the interlocutor giving a list. In chapter I, then, I hope to show that the first answer in the *Euthyphro*, and the first and third answer in the *Meno* do

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<sup>1</sup> I will use the Stephanus pagination to refer to Plato's works. All quotes from the *Euthyphro* and the *Meno* are from G.M.A Grube's translation, unless noted otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> I do not make claims about the historical Socrates. I consider the positions of the character Socrates in the dialogues the *Meno* and the *Euthyphro*.

indeed provide a list. I refer to these answers as the Three Answers. In the case of the *Meno*, the fact that we are dealing with lists should not be too uncontroversial, but we will see that in the *Euthyphro*, it is already not immediately obvious.

I use some anachronistic terms, that is, terms which were not used by Plato or Socrates themselves. It was Aristotle who started to analyse Plato in terms of universals (*katholou*), but the word is not found in the dialogues themselves (Fine 2004: 46). In chapter II, I nevertheless consider an interpretation which claims that these answers are discarded by Socrates because they provide particulars instead of universals. Following Alexander Nehamas (1999: 159-175) and Hugh H. Benson (1992: 123-128), I show why this interpretation is not correct.

In chapter III, I look at the interpretation of P. T. Geach (1966: 369-382). Nehamas (1999: 160-161) lumps Geach's position together with the particulars vs. universals interpretation. For reasons that I will outline, I am not convinced that this is a fair characterisation, and in any case, Geach has a further point. He claims that Socrates commits a fallacy, and Geach calls this the Socratic fallacy (Geach 1966: 371). I will give an overview of what this supposed fallacy consists of, how it is supposed to explain why Socrates rejects examples, and attempt to show that no such fallacy is actually made by Socrates.

In chapter IV, I look at the position of Nehamas (1999: 159-175), which is that *Euthyphro*, specifically, is either forced to admit that his definition is too narrow, or that his definition of F fails to give a single explanation – contrary to his earlier admission that there should be just one explanation. I will also look at whether this is what is going on in the *Meno*. I will claim, *contra* Nehamas, that Socrates does not make a narrowness-criticism against any of the Three Answers. But I agree with the second part of Nehamas' position. In conclusion, I will claim that Socrates assumes that there is only one explanation (form) for why all F things are F, and that Socrates thinks the Three Answers provide more than one explanation, and that this is why he rejects the answers.

## I. An Overview of the Three Answers

In this chapter, I will give a brief overview of the first and third answers in the *Meno*, and the first answer in the *Euthyphro*. I try to show that in each case, Socrates finds fault with answers which explicitly or implicitly give a list (a list, if you will, consisting of examples), and that each time, Socrates makes the same complaint. In the remainder of this thesis, I will try to find out what this complaint means and why Socrates rejects these answers.

In the *Meno*, Meno asks from Socrates whether virtue (ἀρετή) can be taught. Socrates, however, not only claims not to know whether virtue can be taught or not, but also not to know what other qualities virtue might have or not have, and that this is so because he does not know what virtue itself is. He asks Meno to explain it to him: “But Meno, by the gods, what do you yourself say that virtue is?” (71d).

In reply, Meno evidently provides an incomplete set of virtues:

M: First, if you want the virtue of a man, it is easy to say that a man’s virtue consists of being able to manage public affairs and in so doing to benefit his friends and harm his enemies and to be careful that no harm comes to himself; if you want the virtue of a woman, it is not difficult to describe: she must manage the home well, preserve its possessions, and be submissive to her husband; the virtue of a child, whether male or female, is different again, and so is that of an elderly man, if you want that, or if you want that of a free man or a slave. And there are very many other virtues, so that one is not at a loss to say what virtue is. There is virtue for every action and every age, for every task of ours and every one of us – and Socrates, the same is true for wickedness. (71d-72a)

So, there are different virtues for different kinds of persons, actions, etc. But Socrates sarcastically objects: “I seem to be in great luck, Meno; while I am looking for one virtue, I have found you to have a whole swarm of them“ (72a). Meno’s answer seems to literally name too many things (that is, it provides a list, or a set), while what was asked for was just one thing<sup>3</sup>. I will simply call this the “Too Many Criticism”.

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<sup>3</sup> I will follow David Sedley (1998: 115) in using the word ‘thing’ extremely liberally. It is a placeholder to refer to particulars, universals, etc., that is, to whatever is presented as a candidate for the F. See also my footnote [13].

Meno's second attempt at an answer, which we will not consider by itself, but which we will shortly see to lead to the third answer, is that *virtue is to be able to rule over men*. Socrates asks whether they should add to *to be able to rule over men* that it should be done *justly* (73d). Meno thinks so, for (so he says), "justice is virtue" (73d). Socrates wonders whether justice is virtue or *a* virtue, and when Meno does not understand what he means, Socrates explains by analogy, saying that, for example, roundness is only a shape, not shape, because there are shapes other than roundness (73e). Meno then corrects himself: "So I too say that not only justice is a virtue but there are many other virtues...[] I think courage is a virtue, and moderation, wisdom, and munificence, and very many others" (73e-74a). (To those unaware like myself, the unexpected virtue of munificence (μεγαλοπρέπεια) is the same as being generous). I will consider this to be Meno's third answer. Socrates says that they are "...having the same trouble again, Meno, though in another way; we have found many virtues while looking for one, but we cannot find the one which covers all the others" (74a).

Again we explicitly have an incomplete set, or a list, and Socrates offers the Too Many Criticism ("...we have found many virtues while looking for one...").

Something similar happens in the *Euthyphro*, though in a less obvious way. In this dialogue, Socrates runs into Euthyphro in front of the court. Socrates is heading to a court hearing, eventually leading to his fatal trial which is depicted in the *Apology*. Euthyphro, in contrast, is not going to court in order to defend himself from prosecution, but will rather be the one doing the prosecuting – infamously, he is accusing his own father for the murder of a hired worker. Euthyphro finds this to be the pious thing to do, since (or so he believes) it does not matter whether a killer is unknown to you or your closest relative indeed: an injustice must be brought to court (2a-4e).

This leads Socrates to examine where this confidence of Euthyphro stems from; he must surely be an exceptionally knowledgeable man (and Euthyphro happily agrees to this) in matters of piety and impiety to dare undertake such a controversial thing as prosecuting one's own father (4e-5a).

With that in mind, Socrates insists that Euthyphro let him, too, know what is piety (τὸ ὅσιον)<sup>4</sup>.

S: So tell me now, by Zeus, what you just now maintained you clearly knew: what kind of thing do you say that godliness and ungodliness are, both as regards murder and other things; or is the pious not the same and alike in every action, and the impious the opposite of all that is pious and like itself, and everything that is to be impious presents us with one form or appearance in so far as it is impious?

E: Most certainly, Socrates.

S: Tell me then, what is the pious, and what the impious, do you say? (5c-d)

This is Euthyphro's answer:

E: I say that the pious is to do what I am doing now, to prosecute the wrongdoer, be it about murder or temple robbery or anything else, whether the wrongdoer is your father or your mother or anyone else; not to prosecute is impious. (5d-e)

At first sight, Euthyphro does not seem to be giving a list as an answer. He is saying that the pious is “to do what I am doing now, to prosecute the wrongdoer”, and that this (prosecuting the wrongdoer) *applies* to various different offences, and this irrespective of who committed the offence. But consider Socrates' answer:

S: ...try to tell me more clearly what I was asking just now, for, my friend, you did not teach me adequately when I asked you what the pious was, but you told me that what you are doing now, prosecuting your father for murder, is pious.

E: And I told the truth, Socrates.

S: Perhaps. You agree, however, that there are many other pious actions.

E: There are.

S: Bear in mind then that I did not bid you tell me one or two of the many pious actions but that form [εἶδος] itself that makes all pious actions pious, for you agreed that all impious actions are impious and all pious actions pious through one form [ἰδέα], or don't you remember?

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<sup>4</sup> G.M.A Grube, whose text I cite, translates τὸ ὅσιον as “the pious”, while John Burnet, whom we will discuss in chapter II, translates it as “holy”.

E: I do.

S: Tell me then what this form [ἰδέα]<sup>5</sup> itself is, so that I may look upon it, and using it as a model, say that any action of yours or another's that is of that kind is pious, and if it is not that it is not. (6c-e)

We will later return to the claim that pious actions are pious through one form. For now, note that Socrates has to ask for confirmation that Euthyphro thinks there are *other* (yet unnamed) pious actions (or types of pious actions)<sup>6</sup>, and that Euthyphro confirms there are. The point is that theoretically, he could have denied this, and then his answer would not have provided (part of) a list and instead the one (kind of) thing which was actually named would have been a candidate for just what piety is. But with the confirmation, Socrates is in a position to complain that he did not want to know “one or two of the many pious actions” (compare with the unwanted onslaught of the “swarm” of virtues in Meno's first answer, and the “many” virtues in Meno's third answer), but only one thing (the form itself). Clearly Socrates again provides the Too Many Criticism. With this in mind, I suggest that we characterise Euthyphro's answer as implicitly giving a list, despite this not being clear from his answer alone. His confirmed intent is to partially enumerate members (examples) of a list of pious actions (or types of pious actions), with the “many” other members simply being unnamed. Alternatively, we could say that Euthyphro lacks commitment to the exclusivity of his answer. By an exclusive answer I mean an answer which is intended as the *only* correct answer (see also Benson 1992: 130-131). Instead, Euthyphro is willing to permit his candidate for the F to be positioned into a list with other (again, unnamed) pious actions (or types of pious actions).

With this, I hope to have shown that the first answers of both Meno and Euthyphro, and Meno's third answer, provide an incomplete list, and that all encounter the Too Many Criticism.

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<sup>5</sup> Grube translates both εἶδος and ἰδέα as ‘form’. Burnet (1979 :111, 116), too, argues that the two words are used interchangeably.

<sup>6</sup> There is a controversy over whether Euthyphro is referring to his particular action (his prosecuting his father), or to the kind of his action, a universal (prosecuting the religious wrongdoer). The “other” pious things would then either be other pious actions or other kinds of pious actions (alternatively, other explanations (Nehamas 1999: 163)). This controversy is the topic of chapter II.

## II. Confusion over Particulars and Universals

Nehamas speaks of a “universally accepted interpretation imposing an unnatural reading on a particular text” (Nehamas 1999: 163). This common approach focuses on the metaphysical status of the candidate(s) for the F. The idea is that Socrates rejects Meno’s and Euthyphro’s answers because they confuse particulars with universals. On this reading, the interlocutors provide a particular, or particulars, whereas Socrates is looking for a universal which would be common to all these particulars. I will, in a very general way, refer to this as the U-P Confusion Interpretation.

First, I will look at how authors who discuss universals and particulars in Plato’s works use the words ‘particular’ and ‘universal’ (II.1). In II.2, I will give an overview of the position of John Burnet, a prominent proponent of the U-P Confusion Interpretation, and then show why his position, the way he puts it, is inconsistent. In II.3, I offer a general refutation of the U-P Confusion Interpretation.

I do not claim that Socrates is *not* looking for a universal. I claim that his interlocutors (with one doubtful exception) do not provide particulars, and that Socrates’ criticism is not focused on whether the answer provides a universal or a particular.

### II.1 What Are Universals and Particulars?

Burnet (1979: 111-116) is a proponent of the U-P Confusion Interpretation, as I call it. Unfortunately he does not define what he means by ‘particular’ and ‘universal’. Nehamas (1999: 159-175), who offers a classic critique of this approach, also does not define ‘particular’ and ‘universal’. Benson (1992: 123-125) gives an overview of Nehamas’ argument, and notes, “Nehamas’ argument presupposes a clear distinction between universals and concrete particulars. Unfortunately drawing such a distinction is not as easy as one might suppose” (Benson 1992: 123).

Benson himself gives a helpful definition:

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. (Benson 1992: 123)<sup>7</sup>

According to Benson's definition, "blue" would be a universal because it applies to various different things, while "this blue thing here" would be a particular because it only applies to the one object. There can also be particular actions or events, e.g., *my writing of this thesis*. The more generally applicable *writing a thesis*, on the other hand, would be a universal. Let us see whether Burnet, too, might have had this in mind.

First, consider the paragraph in the *Euthyphro* where Socrates formulated his question:

S: So tell me now, by Zeus, what you just now maintained you clearly knew: what kind of thing do you say that godliness and ungodliness are, both as regards murder and other things; or is the pious not the same and alike in every action, and the impious the opposite of all that is pious and like itself, and everything that is to be impious presents us with one form [ἰδέα] or appearance in so far as it is impious? ... [E. agrees]  
... S: Tell me then, what is the pious, and what the impious, do you say? (5c-d)

Regarding this, Burnet says: "ἐν πάσῃ πράξει. These words are of vital importance for the argument which follows. It is a universal for which we are looking" (Burnet 1979: 111)<sup>8</sup>. ἐν πάσῃ πράξει means "in every action". The way I understand it, Burnet takes the fact that Socrates claims that the pious is the same in every action to mean that Socrates, when looking for the pious, is looking for a universal. *The-same-in-many* then seems to be a central feature of a universal, for Burnet.

Burnet, just like Benson, also refers to predication: "In several of Plato's dialogues Socrates is made to criticize the confusion of the universal (εἶδος, ἰδέα) with some particular of which it is predicated" (Burnet 1979: 112). In reference to Socrates' criticism that Euthyphro named one or two of the many pious actions (6d), Burnet says: "ἐν τῇ ἡ

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<sup>7</sup> Benson (1992: 123, 134) says that this is an "Aristotelian account of this distinction" while pointing out that this is not necessarily Aristotle's exact position.

<sup>8</sup> Burnet's book is commentary-style in the classic sense, that is, he works through the *Euthyphro* line-by-line, sometimes offering page-long commentary on single words or phrases. This is why the paragraphs I quote begin in Greek. Burnet quotes the Greek text, and then comments on it.

δύο . . . τῶν πολλῶν ὁσίων, i.e., one or two particulars of which τὸ ὅσιον may be predicated” (Burnet 1979: 116).<sup>9</sup>

But Burnet does not explicitly *define* a universal as that which is predicable of many things, which was Benson’s definition. In any case, Burnet seems to attribute two features to universals: *same-in-many* and *predicable-of-many*. Particulars would then be such things which are not same-in-many and predicable-of-many.

Benson’s definition of universals, viz. that they are predicable of many, does not make a metaphysical claim about whether that which is predicated is somehow actually present (the same, etc.), in the subject. In contrast, Burnet’s attribution of the feature *same-in-many* to universals already adds a metaphysical aspect. But he does not elaborate, and let us leave aside the relation of *predicability-of-many* to *sameness-in-many*. We should simply note that Burnet might have a stronger definition for universals in mind than Benson, i.e., maybe some things which are universals by Benson’s definition would not be universals by Burnet’s definition.

## II.2 Burnet’s Position

This is what Burnet takes Euthyphro’s first answer to be: “*First definition of τὸ ὅσιον* (5d8-6e9). τὸ ὅσιον is to prosecute offenders against religion”<sup>10</sup> (Burnet 1979: 112). Burnet offers this explanation for Socrates’ rejecting the answer:

In several of Plato’s dialogues Socrates is made to criticize the confusion of the universal (εἶδος, ἰδέα) with some particular of which it is predicated. Cf. *Lach.* 191a1 sqq., *Meno* 71e1 sqq., *Theaet.* 146c7 sqq. In the present instance a particular act which

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<sup>9</sup> Literally, this would translate as “some one or two ... of the many piouses” (Grube’s translation reads “...of the many pious actions”, likely for readability in English). τῶν πολλῶν ὁσίων is in plural genitive and the overall construction is a partitive genitive, that is, it denotes that something – the one or two (piouses) – is selected from something (the many piouses). In chapter IV.2, I will claim that these ambiguous “piouses” are quite abstract, referring to explanations, or causes. See Smyth’s Greek Grammar 1312 for the genitive of the divided whole (=partitive genitive) used with substantive adjectives. The number refers to the chapter/topic number and these are the same throughout all editions since 1956 (except in the unfortunate Benediction Classics edition).

<sup>10</sup> I will interchangeably use “to prosecute offenders against religion” and “prosecuting offenders against religion”. I cannot think of a relevant difference between the two.

may be called ὅσιον is adduced, but no account is given of what it is that makes that and all other religious acts religious. (Burnet 1979: 112)

According to this interpretation, then, Euthyphro replies to the question “What is piety?” by saying that his particular action is (indeed) pious. If this reading is correct, then Socrates’ interlocutors’ replies somehow seem strange, perhaps missing the point of the question entirely, and answering another question instead (see also Nehamas 1999: 159, 165). In the case of Euthyphro, the question could possibly be “Could you give me an example of a pious action?”.

Unfortunately Burnet does not offer a fuller explanation of why we should follow this interpretation and seems to take it as obvious that we are dealing with a particular.

Burnet’s own characterisation “τὸ ὅσιον is to prosecute offenders against religion”, does not pick out a particular if we follow Benson’s definition because *to prosecute offenders against religion* is predicable of more than one case. Otherwise we would have to claim that Euthyphro is the only one who ever prosecuted offenders against religion and that no one else *could* do this, which I think is an implausible claim.

How could *prosecuting offenders against religion* be seen as a particular? Perhaps Burnet means that *prosecuting offenders against religion* (I will call this the M) is not present in all *pious* (F) things and, we could agree with Burnet on this, it thus does not give an account of why they are pious. The M would therefore not be the F. Socrates does not explicitly make this argument and let us leave open for now whether he may have this in mind when he makes the Too Many Criticism.

For a universal the M, *predicable-of-many* and *same-in-many* can be true without the M being predicable specifically of many (all) F things and without the M being present and the same in many (all) F things and without the M “giving an account” of what makes F things F. *Prosecuting offenders against religion* may not be predicable of all pious things, and it may not be in many pious things, but that does not entail that it is not predicable of *many other* things, and that it is not the same in many other things. Presumably, it is truly predicable whenever someone is prosecuting offenders against religion, and is the same in all these cases. In any case, since Burnet’s claim is that *prosecuting offenders*

*against religion* cannot be the same in many, the burden is on him to show that this is so. But again, Socrates himself makes no such complaint.

Note that I rejected Burnet's position on the grounds of his own characterisation of Euthyphro's answer, namely that piety was *to prosecute offenders against religion*. We still need a more general refutation. We cannot assume that all U-P Confusionists would follow Burnet's characterisation of Euthyphro's answer. And Burnet did not here speak of the *Meno* at all. But I will first look at what the appeal of this line of thinking might be in the first place.

It is difficult to tell how Burnet came to see *to prosecute offenders against religion* as a particular. I am not the first to have difficulty in seeing the motivation for the interpretation. Benson, regarding the tradition in general, decries that "the point [that the interlocutors are providing universals] seems so obvious that it is difficult to imagine how the tradition arose in the first place" (Benson 1992: 125). Nehamas tries to motivate the position by pointing out that perhaps authors focus on the first part of the sentence (5d) "I say that the pious is to do what I am doing now, to prosecute the wrongdoer" (Nehamas 1999: 161) in the *Euthyphro*. This may be true for other authors, but Burnet's characterisation highlighted the second part of the sentence and took *that* as the definition. Nehamas also thinks the proponents of this interpretation might read too much into an analogy with bees in the *Meno* (72b-c), where Socrates explains that bees are the same in being bees, and that virtues are the same in being virtuous (Nehamas 1999: 165-166). Nehamas counters that the analogy focuses on the bees being "many and of every sort" and on the fact that the same holds for virtues, and that the analogy is not used to try to establish that virtues are particulars like bees (Nehamas 1999: 166).

Finally, Nehamas (1999: 164-165) points out an ambiguity with the word 'example', namely that universals can be given as examples just as well as particulars. He illustrates by saying that we could reply to the question "What is beauty?" by giving as an example Charmides or Charmides' beauty or physical beauty. I could well be giving an example in all these cases, but only with the first (or at most the first two, see Nehamas' footnote 13) would I be providing a particular (Nehamas 1999: 164-165).

The fact that an answer provides an example or a list of examples need not be tied to any specific metaphysical status of these examples. I could even say that I am giving “particular examples” without meaning that I am giving examples of particulars. Perhaps the proponents of the U-P Confusion Interpretation have not thought through the distinction.

A short summary of chapter II so far: My rejection of Burnet’s stance depended on his characterisation of Euthyphro’s answer. Because he does not define ‘particular’ and ‘universal’, I had to deduce from the way he uses the terms what he might mean by ‘universal’ and ‘particular’. I concluded that he attributed two features to universals: predicable-of-many and same-in-many. I then took his distinction of particulars and universals to be such that according to his own characterisation of Euthyphro’s answer, it should be clear that the answer picks out a universal.

I now turn to a more general and hopefully more reliable rejection of the U-P Confusion Interpretation. I will take Benson’s distinction between universals and particulars as a basis and show that Socrates’ interlocutors do not provide particulars (things which are maximally predicable of one thing).

### **II.3 Criticism of the U-P Confusion Interpretation**

Nehamas (1999: 159-175), as already noted, offers a classic criticism of this approach. He provides a detailed analysis of the first answers in the *Meno*, the *Euthyphro*, the *Laches* and the *Hippias Major*, all of which have been characterised as providing particulars.

Regarding the *Euthyphro*, Nehamas’ (1999: 161-163) main point is to show that the “main burden” of Euthyphro’s answer “I say then that the pious is what I am now doing: prosecuting anyone who is in the wrong in questions of murder...” (5d, the translation is Nehamas’) falls on the latter half of the sentence. Nehamas offers a linguistic analysis of the Greek text of the *Euthyphro*. He tries to show that Euthyphro refers to the *kind of* his action (*avenging/prosecuting a religious wrong*), not to his particular action (*Euthyphro’s prosecuting his father*), and that this is how Socrates understands

Euthyphro. The first part simply specifies that Euthyphro's own action is of this kind (Nehamas 1999: 161-163).<sup>11</sup>

As for the *Meno*, armed with the distinction that we can construe an answer as giving an example without construing it as providing a particular, Nehamas suggests that Meno, when he distinguishes between different virtues for a man, for a woman, etc., is "citing different *kinds* of virtue, different *ways* of being virtuous, not particular virtuous things" (Nehamas 1999:165). Benson (1992: 123-125) agrees and adds regarding Meno's first answer that Meno's candidate for men's virtue, "managing the affairs of the city, treating one's friends well, and obeying one's man...are presumably truly predicable of a number of successful fifth-century Athenian politicians", and that his candidate for women's virtue, "managing the household well, preserving its possessions, and obeying one's man...are universals, unfortunately probably truly predicable of a number of fifth-century Athenian women" (Benson 1992: 125).

Regarding Meno's third answer to the question "What is virtue?", *courage is a virtue, and moderation, wisdom, and munificence and very many others*, Nehamas simply adds that these are "not likely to be considered as particulars by anyone" (Nehamas 1999: 166) – apparently, for better or for worse, appealing to our intuition on the matter.

But we can rely on a more relevant intuition – Socrates'. Socrates is very unlikely to consider *courage, moderation, etc.* as particulars. First note that Socrates does not object to Meno's third answer on the grounds that Meno is not providing virtues. Instead, by saying that they have found many virtues while he wants to find the one "which covers all the others" (74a), he seems to agree that these *are* virtues. Second, notice that in the *Meno*, Socrates is trying to find out what virtue itself is, while in the *Laches*, Socrates is looking for what courage is. In the *Meno* courage is considered as an example of virtue, and in the *Laches* it is characterised as a sub-virtue ("a part of virtue") (190b-d). In the *Charmides* (159a), the question is what is moderation (σωφροσύνη) (in the *Meno* considered as an example of virtue). In the later dialogue the *Theaetetus*, knowledge is

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<sup>11</sup> I am not sure how Burnet would react to this criticism, because Burnet's characterisation of Euthyphro's first answer (*to prosecute offenders against religion*) already focused on the second part of the sentence but he still claimed that we are dealing with a particular (Burnet 1979: 112). Nehamas, in opposition, takes it as just as obvious that it is a universal: "...and that is very general and abstract indeed; its force is that to prosecute anyone who has wronged the religious order is (the) pious..." (Nehamas 1999: 161).

sought, with knowledge being equated with wisdom (145e) (in the *Meno* considered as an example of virtue). Additionally, in the *Euthyphro*, Socrates characterises piety as part of justice (11e ff.), although as a hypothetical. It seems very reasonable that both Socrates and Meno would happily include piety in this incomplete list of virtues (“and very many others”).

But, if by saying that Meno’s third answer provides too many candidates, Socrates means that the problem was that particulars were offered instead of universals, then he would apparently himself be counting wisdom, moderation, and the “very many other” virtues as particulars. If that were the case, however, then his alleged reproach (as claimed by Burnet) in the *Euthyphro* that Euthyphro failed to provide a universal would become incoherent, and the same holds for the other dialogues. We would be forced to say that in the *Meno*, Socrates considers sub-virtues to be particulars, and that in the *Euthyphro* and elsewhere, he demands that the same things be universals. Instead of ascribing this incoherence to Socrates, the simpler explanation is that Socrates does not mean to say that Meno’s third answer provides particulars.

Sub-virtues are also well in line with our definition of universals, which is that universals are predicable of more than one thing.

So far we have seen that neither Meno’s first answer nor Meno’s third answer picks out particulars (things which are predicable of maximally one thing), and additionally we have seen that if we ascribe to Socrates the position that Meno’s third answer is providing particulars, then his demand (assuming with the confusionists that he is making such a demand) for a universal in the *Euthyphro* becomes hopelessly incomprehensible.

Consider a further point. Assuming you are by now convinced that in the *Meno*, the problem does not lie with particulars, then could you still maintain that Euthyphro provides a particular? Well, if you focus on the first part of “I say that the pious is to do what I am doing now, to prosecute the wrongdoer”, possibly. I think that it is irrelevant for our purposes. But let us suppose that Nehamas’ analysis is wrong and that in the *Euthyphro*, *contra* the *Meno*, the interlocutor does in fact offer a particular as the answer. If that is so, our situation is that the Too Many Criticism is made in two cases where universals are provided (Meno’s answers), and in one case where a particular is provided

(Euthyphro's answer) underlining my point that the Too Many Criticism is agnostic on the metaphysical status of the members of the given set. That is, whatever is wrong with lists as lists, it is not that they provide particulars (of course, Socrates would probably in the end not be happy with a particular for the definition of virtue or piety).

In this chapter I hope to have shown that Meno does not provide particulars, and that it is very unlikely that Euthyphro does. Socrates also does not complain that they do.

### **III. Geach and the Socratic Fallacy**

Another suggestion is by P. T. Geach in the article "Plato's Euthyphro: An Analysis and Commentary" (1966: 369-382). Referencing this article, Nehamas (1999: 160) lumps Geach's position together with the U-P Confusion Interpretation and takes Geach to be a paradigmatic example of the tradition. Nehamas thinks that Geach thinks that Socrates thinks that his interlocutors confuse universals with particulars (Nehamas 1999: 160-161). I doubt that this is what Geach says. And even if Nehamas is right and Geach does claim that Socrates' interlocutors confuse universals and particulars, Geach makes a separate point worth our consideration. In III.1, I will look at how Nehamas characterises Geach and show why I doubt this characterisation is correct. In III.2, I will outline what I think to be Geach's main point. I then criticise this point.

#### **III.1 Nehamas' Characterisation of Geach**

Nehamas quotes two paragraphs from Geach. These paragraphs outline why Geach thinks that Socrates rejects Euthyphro's first answer:

**(G<sub>1</sub>)** [Socrates] adopts a line of argument that we find paralleled in many dialogues. If Euthyphro really knows that his own action is pious then he must be able to say what is pious; he must not just give examples of pious actions, like his own action or again the punishment of sacrilegious robbery... (Geach 1966: 370-371)

**(G<sub>2</sub>)** Let us rather concentrate on two assumptions Socrates makes: (A) that if you know you are correctly predicating a given term 'F' you must "know what it is to be F", in the sense of being able to give a general criterion of a thing's being F; (B) that

it is no use to try and arrive at the meaning of 'F' by citing examples of things that are F. (Geach 1966: 371)<sup>12</sup>

These assumptions together form what Geach calls the "Socratic fallacy" (Nehamas 1999: 160). After quoting these paragraphs, Nehamas asks: "Is it really clear that Euthyphro and others like him respond to the Socratic question by citing concrete instances of universals instead of universals themselves, and does Socrates ever complain that they do? My answer to both these questions is categorically negative" (Nehamas 1999: 161).

Nehamas, then, takes (G<sub>1</sub>-G<sub>2</sub>) as saying that Socrates' interlocutors provide particulars and that Socrates criticises this. But, first, Geach's whole article never mentions universals, and the word 'particular' occurs only three times, all of which are irrelevant, a la "...the verb 'to love' in particular" (Geach 1966: 378).

I think Nehamas is basing his claim simply on (G<sub>1</sub>-G<sub>2</sub>), which is what he is directly replying to. I can only guess why Nehamas thinks that these paragraphs make the distinction between universals and particulars. First, Geach speaks about examples. But if Nehamas makes his claim based on this fact, then he is ignoring his own point, namely that we can give examples of both universals or particulars. Since (G<sub>1</sub>-G<sub>2</sub>) make no reference to universals or particulars, I see no immediate reason to think that Geach is using the word 'example' to specifically mean 'particular'. The second possible source for Nehamas' claim is the first assumption Geach attributes to Socrates: "(A) that if you know you are correctly predicating a given term 'F' you must "know what it is to be F," in the sense of being able to give a general criterion of a thing's being F" (Geach 1966: 371). Here Geach speaks of predication. But he does not specify what is predicated of what. I could well be predicating a universal of a universal. I think that this is what happens with Meno's third answer, *courage is a virtue, and moderation, etc.* Geach says nothing about predication which would commit him to the position that predication only involves universals being predicated of particulars. Third, in (G<sub>1</sub>), Geach refers to "pious actions, like his own action or again the punishment of sacrilegious robbery" (Geach 1966: 371). In parallel to how Nehamas analysed Euthyphro's first answer, in focusing on the second part of the sentence, we might do the same courtesy to Geach. Yes, if Geach was only

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<sup>12</sup> Geach uses 'T' as the placeholder. I have changed the placeholders to 'F' in the quotes, making no other changes.

referring to Euthyphro's "own action", then we would likely have to see it as a particular, but he does say "or again, the punishment of sacrilegious robbery", which does not seem to be a particular (admittedly, I am here simply employing intuition).

Finally, perhaps Nehamas thinks that the word 'thing' in the phrase "citing examples of things that are F" (G<sub>2</sub>), can only refer to a particular. But 'thing' is a natural word to use in this phrase and I cannot think of a good alternative if I want to avoid specifically referring to either universals or particulars. One option would be to clumsily say "citing examples of universals or particulars that are F". But I think 'thing' can well be used as a vague placeholder.<sup>13</sup>

Considering all this, I think that it is an open question whether Geach thought that Socrates' interlocutors were providing particulars and that Socrates found fault with this. While admitting that I cannot show that Nehamas' interpretation is wrong, I find it unlikely. I think we should not attribute the U-P Confusion Interpretation to Geach because he does not explicitly say that Socrates' interlocutors offer particulars, and also because Geach's Socratic Fallacy argument does not depend on such attribution. The argument is phrased in terms of examples, and it can be taken seriously regardless of what (or any) metaphysical status Geach has in mind for the examples. The argument is epistemological, focusing on how we can *know*. I will now look at this argument.

### **III.2 The Socratic Fallacy, and Why Socrates Does Not Commit It**

Geach (1966: 371), then, attributes to Socrates (A) ("if you know you are correctly predicating a given term 'F' you must "know what it is to be F'") and (B) ("it is no use to try and arrive at the meaning of 'F' by citing examples of things that are F").

Geach (1966: 371) thinks that (A), taken together with (B), form a fallacy.

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<sup>13</sup> This is exactly what David Sedley (1998: 115) does when discussing the Phaedo: "When I say "the thing Responsible", my word "thing" is deliberately vague. Plato does not in this context show the slightest interest in distinguishing between metaphysically different kinds of thing: the thing considered as a candidate for the cause of some effect can just as well be a physical stuff like fire or bone, a mathematical process like addition, the good, a soul, intelligence, or a Form such as Largeness or Oddness" (Sedley 1998: 115).

Geach (1966: 371) first claims that (B) follows directly from (A). The idea is that if (A) is true, then examples cannot help you in trying to understand the meaning of 'F' because in order to know that you are presenting correct examples you already would need to know the "general account", or "definition". Geach (1966: 371) then claims that (A) is false because you can know "heaps of things" without knowing their definition. What is more, you can explain something in terms of examples (=B is false as well) (Geach 1966: 371).

According to Geach, the reality is that parties to a discussion instead need to *either* agree to the examples they are using, and they can then look for a criterion for these examples, or agree to the criterion, and look for examples. If they agree on neither, then the discussion will be "abortive", "futile", and neither will understand what the other means by 'F' (Geach 1966: 372). But Geach denies any epistemological primacy of criterions, definitions or general accounts over examples.

I will deny that Socrates believes (A) ("if you know you are correctly predicating a given term 'F' you must "know what it is to be F"). I agree that Socrates believes a version of (B) ("it is no use to try and arrive at the meaning of 'F' by citing examples of things that are F"). But (B) alone does not constitute the fallacy Geach has in mind.

First I will look at whether there is any support for the claim that Socrates believes (A).

Geach bases his analysis on the paragraphs 5d and 6d (Geach 1966: 371) and, I think, 6e, in the *Euthyphro*, even though curiously Geach does not explicitly refer to the third. At 5d, Socrates established that the pious is "the same and alike in every action...everything [that is pious] presents us with one form". 6d added the claim that the form of piety "makes all pious things pious". At 6e, Socrates said: "Tell me then what this form itself is, so that I may look upon it, and using it as a model, say that any action of yours or another's that is of that kind is pious, and if it is not that it is not" (6e).

6e is the best support I can find for premise (A). But I agree with Nehamas' (1999: 173, footnote 7) criticism that 6e only makes the Weak Claim, which is that that if you know the form (Nehamas says "definition"), then you will know about everything (or every kind of thing) whether it is pious. But Socrates does not make the Strong Claim, which is that that if you do not know the form, then you do not know about anything whether it is pious. There may be other ways to know, but only knowing the form will give you something to

decide for every case. Geach's fallacy, however, does not result from the Weak Claim (Nehamas 1999: 173). The Weak Claim does not entail that you cannot know about a given thing (be it a particular or a universal) whether it is pious or not without knowing the form.

Geach only focuses on the *Euthyphro*. But is there any support for his claim of a Socratic Fallacy in the *Meno*? The *Meno* begins with Meno asking "Socrates, can virtue be taught?" (70a). Socrates immediately claims that he does not know whether virtue can be taught because he "does not even have any knowledge of what virtue itself is" (71a). Perhaps this can be read as saying that you cannot know what properties virtue has without knowing the general definition or account, etc., of virtue. But even if this is what Socrates is saying, it does not mean that you cannot know what things are virtuous and which are not. Knowing that something is virtuous assumes, minimally, that you can correctly predicate 'virtue' of something, but it does not assume that you know how to correctly predicate something of 'virtue'. This is also in line with Geach's own point, namely that you either have to agree on examples or a general account to carry on a conversation about what something is. It can well be the case that you know which examples you definitely want to count as virtue without yet knowing what the definition of virtue is, and that you are looking for a general criterion which would apply to all these examples. But before you know this criterion, it is likely that you will not know what properties virtue has. You will know that once you have the general criterion.

I cannot find in the *Euthyphro* or in the *Meno* the Strong Claim which is necessary for Geach's premise (A).

My second objection to Geach's approach is that Socrates himself makes good use of examples. For example, right after rejecting Euthyphro's second answer – *what is dear to the gods is pious* (7a) – Socrates gives "numbers", "heavier" and "lighter" as examples of things about which we can more easily resolve differences (7b-c), and "the just and the unjust, the beautiful and the ugly, the good and the bad" as examples of things about which disagreements can get heated and which are not easily resolved (7c-d). Even more clearly, in the *Laches*, in reply to Laches' definition of courage as *to stand one's ground against the enemy*, Socrates explains that this (*to stand one's ground against the enemy*) is only proper for certain hoplites, while (for example) chariots are not supposed to stand

their ground no matter what, but rather move about quickly and escape if necessary – Laches agrees (191a-c). In the *Meno*, we find the following use of examples:

S: I am asking whether it is only in the case of virtue that there is one for man, another for woman and so on, or is the same true in the case of health and size and strength? Do you think that there is one health for man and another for woman? Or, if it is health, does it have the same form everywhere, whether in man or in anything else whatever?...And so with size and strength? (72d-e)

Also, when Socrates rejected Meno's second answer, *virtue is to be able to rule over men*, he said: "For example, if you wish, take roundness, about which I would say that it is a shape, but not simply that it is shape" (73e).

The fact that Socrates freely uses examples shows that he cannot believe (A). If he believes (B), it is for some other reason. Regardless of the status of (B), then, I deny that there is a fallacy at play, since Geach claimed that (B) follows from (A) and that together, they form the fallacy.

Admittedly, Socrates, unlike his interlocutors, is not using examples to *define* anything (e.g., in the *Laches* he is using an example to refute Laches' answer). So perhaps Socrates does believe Geach's (B): "It is no use to try and arrive at the meaning of 'F' by citing examples of things that are F", without believing (A): "If you know you are correctly predicating a given term 'F' you must "know what it is to be F"".

In the *Meno*, Socrates did say: "Even if they [virtues] are many and various, all of them have one and the same form which makes them virtues, and it is right to look to this when one is asked to make clear what virtue is" (72c).

But (B), as Geach puts it, is ambiguous. What does "no use to try" mean? If it means that examples have no useful purpose in search of a definition, then Socrates does not say this. I think Socrates does not accept examples as the *correct answer* to his question, but that is not the same as denying the usefulness of examples. But if Geach's (B) means that Socrates does not accept examples as the correct answer, then I am in agreement with Geach on (B). It is basically the same as the Too Many Criticism, according to which giving one or more examples for the candidate of the F is, for some yet unknown reason, not the correct answer.

To conclude, if Geach's approach were correct, it would explain well why lists of examples are rejected by Socrates. On this approach, Socrates would be denying that I can even know that something is an example of F if I do not know what the F is. But Geach's interpretation rests on Socrates making the Strong Claim in the *Euthyphro*, and Socrates only makes the Weak Claim. The Strong Claim is not made in the *Meno*, either. In addition, Socrates himself makes good use of examples.

#### IV. Narrowness and Explanations

In this chapter, I consider two additional suggestions of what might be wrong with the Three Answers. The first is that they do not provide what Nehamas calls a "single explanation" or "principle" for F things (Nehamas 1999: 163), and which I will also call a "cause". "Explanation" is here to be understood as a metaphysical explanation: the explanation is whatever "makes" F things be F, i.e., explains their being F. I will try to show that this is indeed what Socrates thinks is wrong with the Three Answers and that this is why Socrates complains of too many Fs given by the answers. But Nehamas (1999: 163) links this claim to another claim (specifically for the *Euthyphro*), namely that Euthyphro provides a too narrow definition. Alternatively, Nehamas calls this a failure against "generality" (Nehamas 1999: 163). He claims that when Euthyphro gives his definition of piety (*to prosecute the religious wrongdoer*) and Socrates asks whether there are other piouses<sup>14</sup>, he is offering Euthyphro the following choice: if Euthyphro says no, then his definition is too narrow; if Euthyphro says yes, then he fails to provide a single explanation (Nehamas 1999: 163). I will call this supposed difficult choice "Euthyphro's Fork". I deny that Euthyphro faces such a choice. I agree with Nehamas that Euthyphro's answer fails to provide a single explanation, but I do not agree that Socrates in any way claims that if Euthyphro denies there are other piouses then the definition is too narrow. No Too Narrow Criticism is made in the *Euthyphro*.

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<sup>14</sup> Following Nehamas (1999: 163), I deliberately use the odd-sounding 'piouses' in this chapter. In Greek, *όσιων* is vague, and could refer to things which are pious, or to something more abstract (thus the whole confusion in chapter two over universals and particulars).

Nehamas does not make a Too Narrow Criticism for the *Meno*, but I will nevertheless consider whether Meno's first and third answers might be too narrow. I will conclude that Meno's first and third answers cannot be too narrow, and that in the *Meno* Socrates makes the Too Many Criticism for exactly the same reason as he did in the *Euthyphro*: the answers do not provide a single explanation.

In IV.1, I discuss Euthyphro's Fork, and whether Euthyphro's first answer might be too narrow. I claim that it is not. I will also show why Meno's first and third answers are not too narrow.

In IV.2, I will argue that Socrates demands a single explanation for why all F things are F. The Three Answers all provide more than one explanation, and this is why Socrates makes the Too Many Criticism.<sup>15</sup> All I wish to establish is that there is some sort of explanatory relation such that the F explains the fact that F things are F; and that Socrates believes that such an explanation is provided by just a *single thing*, the form.

#### **IV.1 Euthyphro's Fork**

This is what Nehamas says regarding Euthyphro's first answer:

[Euthyphro] does not, to repeat, confuse universals with their instances: he offers too narrow a definition of what to be pious is. In this way he either excludes obviously pious things (all sacrifices before journeys, for example); or else he admits, contrary to his earlier claim, that there is, after all, nothing common to all those things that we consider pious. The "many other piouses", *pace* Burnet, are not particular pious things, but distinct explanations of what makes everything that is pious, pious. (Nehamas 1999: 163)

The way I understand Nehamas is that when Socrates asks Euthyphro whether there are other pious actions, he is offering Euthyphro a fork:

Either choose

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<sup>15</sup> I will not in this essay try to decide exactly what sort of or explanation, or cause, Socrates is assuming here. Possibly, it is some sort of metaphysical grounding. In any case, I do not think that it is material causation. See e.g., Bliss and Trogdon (2014) for a discussion on metaphysical grounding.

(V<sub>1</sub>) *piety is just what is to prosecute the religious wrongdoer, and nothing else is piety*

and your definition is too narrow; or choose

(V<sub>2</sub>) *piety is to prosecute the religious wrongdoer, and there are many other piouses* (~other explanations for what makes things pious)

and your definition is inconsistent with your admission that there is only one explanation for pious things, the one form of piety.

I agree with what Nehamas says about (V<sub>2</sub>), and I think that this is what is wrong with lists as answers to the “What is the F?” question. I will argue for this in the next chapter.

But I disagree with the other leg of the fork. I will argue that no narrowness criticism is made in the *Euthyphro* at all.

Here is a short introduction of narrowness and broadness. A definition of F is too narrow if it does not pick out all F things<sup>16</sup>. A definition is too broad if it picks out things which are not F. Let us assume that the set of all F things is, in fact, {a, b, c}. A too narrow definition would pick out, e.g. {a, b}, and a too broad definition would pick out, e.g. {a, b, c, d}. Narrowness and broadness are not mutually exclusive. One could give a definition which is both too broad and too narrow. Such a definition would pick out, e.g. {a, b, d}. It would be too narrow because it would fail to pick out c, which is F, and it would be too broad because it would pick out d, which is not F.

Now, lists need not be too narrow. Nehamas, speaking of the *Laches*, notices that “...the stronger error [as opposed to a narrow-definition-error], confusing universals with their instances, does not actually constitute a failure in respect of generality: no matter how complete we make our list of courageous individuals, we will never begin to supply the sort of answer that Socrates wants. We will never give any, let alone a single, explanation of what makes all these things courageous” (Nehamas 1999: 165). I will, for now, ignore the discussion of a “single explanation”. But I would like to emphasise that Nehamas speaks of complete lists of particulars, and that such lists would not fail against generality.

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<sup>16</sup> I am still using the word ‘thing’ in a very general way. It could refer to a particular or to a universal. See also my footnote [13].

I take it that by not failing in respect of generality he means that they would not be too narrow. But I think this logic should also apply to universals. One could give a complete list regardless of whether it consists of universals or particulars, and one would not give a too narrow answer. It is conceivable, even if pragmatically impossible, that in reply to the “What is the F?” question one gives the complete set of particulars which are F. But more importantly, it is quite possible to give a complete set of universals which are F.

So, first, complete lists are not too narrow. But also consider this. A Too Narrow Criticism can only be made about unambiguous lists, that is, against lists which explicitly enumerate all the members. If the list ends with something like “and many others”, then I will never know whether it is missing some crucial members or not. It may or may not be among the “many others”. Of course such a list could be criticised for precisely that ambiguity, but that is an entirely different matter and, as far as I can tell, Socrates never makes this criticism.

Euthyphro’s specified answer (V<sub>2</sub>) *piety is to prosecute the religious wrongdoer, and there are many other piouses* is precisely this kind of ambiguous list as it ends with “very many others”.

Now, I do think that (V<sub>1</sub>) *piety is just what is to prosecute the religious wrongdoer, and nothing else is piety*, would, according to Euthyphro’s own admission of alternative piouses (universals, explanations), be a too narrow definition of piety. But, I think that this is irrelevant, since (V<sub>1</sub>) is never Euthyphro’s answer. His unspecified answer is *piety is to prosecute the wrongdoer*, and his specified answer is (V<sub>2</sub>).

The question is, when Socrates asks whether there are other piouses, is he (1) setting up a Too Narrow Criticism, or is he simply (2) *specifying* what Euthyphro means by his definition? Since no Too Narrow Criticism is explicitly made, and instead a Too Many Criticism is made, we can conclude that Socrates was simply asking for more information to understand what Euthyphro’s answer was. If Socrates did not need further information, then he could just immediately have made either the Too Narrow Criticism or the Too Many Criticism:

On the one hand, the Too Many Criticism is plausible if it is applied to (V<sub>2</sub>), a list, but it is misapplied if it is applied to (V<sub>1</sub>). It makes no sense for Socrates to complain of “one or

two of the many piouses”, that is, for him to make the Too Many Criticism if Euthyphro’s answer is (V<sub>1</sub>).

On the other hand, the Too Narrow Criticism is plausible if it is applied to (V<sub>1</sub>), but as I argued in the previous chapter, it is *not* correct against ambiguous lists, and (V<sub>2</sub>) provides just such a list.

Socrates’ Too Many Criticism is applied to (V<sub>2</sub>), which is Euthyphro’s full answer *after* the specification. If Euthyphro had denied other piouses, which was a possibility for him, then his answer would have been (V<sub>1</sub>) *piety is just what is to prosecute the religious wrongdoer, and nothing else is*, and it could possibly have been too narrow. But he did not choose (V<sub>1</sub>), and Socrates makes no comment on it. What would have happened if Euthyphro had chosen (V<sub>1</sub>) is speculation. So my conclusion is that Euthyphro’s first answer does not encounter a Too Narrow Criticism from Socrates.

This means that Socrates’ criticism does not rely on there being other “obviously pious things” besides prosecuting the religious wrongdoer, contrary to what Nehamas claimed. This would have made Socrates’ criticism be that Euthyphro’s candidate for piety, {to prosecute the religious wrongdoer}, fails against the objective, real-world set {to prosecute the religious wrongdoer, ...other *obviously* pious things}. This would have brought up a whole range of issues about how Socrates could appeal to “obviousness”, and fortunately we can avoid them altogether.

Socrates, then, does not present Euthyphro with a fork.

Let us see that Meno’s answers are not too narrow, either. Meno’s first and third answer also end with “and very many other virtues” (71e-72a). They are resistant to any narrowness criticism because they are ambiguous lists (the “very many others” conveniently “completes” the list). In order to claim that these definitions are too narrow, you would have to show that they are definitely incomplete, that missing some virtues. This perhaps *could* be done by first charging Meno with laziness and demanding that he elaborate what the “very many other” virtues are, and not to leave them unnamed. And once he has given an enumerated list which still does not include something that is in fact a virtue, then it is incomplete, and open to a Too Narrow Criticism. But Socrates does not

challenge the completeness of the lists, and makes no such demands, and instead complains that there are too many virtues.

Note that the Too Many Criticism is not the same as the Too Broad Criticism. A Too Broad Criticism would claim that an answer *picks out* some things which are not F. The Too Many Criticism claims that the answer cannot *name more than one* exclusively-intended thing in the first place, and that this one thing has to somehow explain all F things. I will now turn to explain the Too Many Criticism.

#### **IV.2 The Three Answers Fail to Provide a Single Explanation**

I will now argue that when Socrates asks the “What is the F?” question, he is looking for a single explanation.

In the *Euthyphro*, just *before* Socrates formulates the question “What is piety?”, he asks Euthyphro:

[Is] the pious not the same and alike in every action, and the impious the opposite of all that is pious and like itself, and everything that is to be impious presents us with one form or appearance in so far as it is impious? (5d)

When Euthyphro has given an answer, Socrates replies:

Bear in mind then that I did not bid you tell me one or two of the many pious actions but that form itself that makes all pious actions pious, for you agreed that all impious actions are impious and all pious actions pious through one form, or don't you remember? (6d)

So, one form “makes” pious actions pious. Similarly, in the *Meno*, soon after Meno gives his first answer, Socrates says that “even if they [virtues] are many and various, all of them have one and the same form which makes them virtues” (72c).

David Sedley (1998: 115) argues on his commentary for the later dialogue *Phaedo* that Plato interchangeably uses the following Greek words and phrases to express causation:

(1) αἴτιον/ αἰτία: “cause”/“causation”

(2) διὰ + accusative, or causal dative: “because of”

(3) ποιεῖν = “to cause (to)”, “to make (F)”

For example, in the *Euthyphro*, at 6d (“that form itself that makes all pious actions pious”), the relevant Greek phrase τὸ εἶδος ᾧ πάντα τὰ ὅσια ὁσιά ἐστὶν indeed uses the causal dative. In the *Meno*, at 72c (“all of them have one and the same form which makes them virtues”), the Greek phrase ἓν γέ τι εἶδος ταῦτόν ἅλασαι ἔχουσιν δι’ ὃ εἰσὶν ἀρεταί uses the διὰ + accusative construction.

We can divide Socrates’ claim into two. (C<sub>1</sub>) there is an explanation, or cause, for the fact that F things are F. (C<sub>2</sub>) The explanation is just one (single form) for all F things.

Now, in reply to Euthyphro’s answer, *piety is to prosecute the religious wrongdoer*, Socrates asked whether there were “many other piouses”, and Euthyphro agreed (6d). Nehamas (1999: 163) suggests that these “other piouses” are “other, nonoverlapping explanations; for example, sacrificing before a journey” (Nehamas 1999: 163). I agree with this characterisation. If this is correct, then the lists are lists of explanations. For example, Meno’s third answer, *courage is a virtue, moderation is a virtue, and so on*, gives different explanations for why particular pious things are pious. This could go something like this: Euthyphro is pious because he is prosecuting the religious wrongdoer, x is pious because he prays every day, etc. Similarly, following Meno’s first answer, explanations for why someone is virtuous would be: this woman is virtuous because she manages the household well, this man is virtuous because he manages public affairs well, and so on. Regarding Meno’s third answer, the explanations would be, a la, Laches is virtuous because he is courageous, Euthyphro is virtuous because he is pious, and so on.

Socrates’ complaint, then, that the interlocutors give too many “piouses” or “virtues”, means that there are too many explanations for the fact that F things are F. The interlocutors make a mistake against premise (C<sub>2</sub>). In the case of Euthyphro, since Euthyphro agreed to (C<sub>2</sub>) *before* giving his answer, Socrates’ criticism could perhaps be seen as saying that Euthyphro is not consistent. Euthyphro’s answer is contrary to premise (C<sub>2</sub>) which he himself admitted. Nehamas claims something like this: “...Euthyphro’s answer, in characteristic elenctic fashion, is shown to be inconsistent” (Nehamas 1999: 163).

However, in the *Meno*, unlike in the *Euthyphro*, Socrates does not secure Meno's agreement with the premise that there is a single form or explanation before the formulation of his question. So when he makes his Too Many Criticism in the *Meno*, his reason cannot be Meno's inner inconsistency on the grounds that Meno's answer does not provide a single explanation – Meno never promised a single explanation. Instead, Socrates *actively argues* in favour of a single explanation, *after* Meno's first answer. He brings up his bees-analogy (72a-c), claiming that bees are the same in being bees (and Meno agrees to this). Socrates then says:

Even if they [virtues] are many and various, all of them have one and the same form which makes them virtues, and it is right to look to this when one is asked to make clear what virtue is. (72c)

Meno denies that in case of virtues there is such a thing, but Socrates tries to convince him otherwise (72e-73c). Because Socrates actively defends the claim, I think that Socrates is himself committed to the premise there is such a single form (explanation) for virtue. When Socrates makes his Too Many Criticism, both for Meno's first and third answers, his point is not that Meno is inconsistent with any earlier claims he admitted to. Socrates' claim is stronger: there is, in fact, only one explanation, and Meno unfortunately provided more.

Taking this into account, and considering that in the *Euthyphro*, Euthyphro did not bring up the single form himself (he simply agreed with Socrates that there is such a thing), I conclude that the Too Many Criticism is, in the Three Answers, made by Socrates against answers which provide a list, and that its force is to actually deny that there is more than one explanation for why F things are F.<sup>17</sup>

I hope to have established in this chapter that Socrates assumes there is something which explains why F things are F. And that this explanatory relation, whatever it is, is such that only *one* thing (the form) explains why all F things are F.

Socrates rejects many explanations, and instead appeals to the one common form which “makes” all F things be F (i.e., explains them). This means that Socrates has very strong

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<sup>17</sup> See David Wolfsdorf (2013) for an overview of the literature on the Socratic Method and whether Socrates is testing his interlocutors' inner consistency or whether he is making objective claims about ethical subjects.

sense of what can and what cannot count as an explanation. His understanding of explanation is such that it probably excludes a lot of explanations which ordinarily would be counted as explanations. That there can be only one explanation for why F things are F is a surprising claim and in the *Meno* and the *Euthyphro*, it is simply asserted by Socrates, but we do not find out *why*. This remains the task of another work.<sup>18</sup>

## Conclusion

I considered two dialogues where Socrates asks the “What is the F?” question: the *Meno* (“What is virtue?”) and the *Euthyphro* (“What is piety?”). I focused on three answers: Euthyphro’s first, and Meno’s first and third. In chapter I, I established *that* Socrates makes a Too Many Criticism against all the Three Answers. This is the complaint that Socrates’ interlocutors name more than one F.

I first showed that in the *Meno*, Meno gives a list for his first and third attempts at answering the “What is virtue?” question. It was immediately clear from the text that Meno provides a list. But, a bit more controversially, I also claimed that Euthyphro’s first answer to the question “What is piety?” gives a list. I had to motivate this claim. Euthyphro’s first answer was that piety is *to prosecute the religious wrongdoer* and this did not seem to be a list at first sight. But right after Euthyphro provided his answer, Socrates asked whether there were “many other [kinds of] pious actions”, and Euthyphro agreed. I showed that *this* is what Socrates took as the answer: piety is *to prosecute the religious wrongdoer, and there are very many other (kinds of) pious actions*. That is, Euthyphro’s intent was to name a member of a list. I showed that Euthyphro’s answer, and Meno’s first and third answers, all encounter, in various wordings, the Too Many Criticism from Socrates, (“one or two of the pious...”, “...swarm of virtues”, “...we have found many virtues while looking for one...”).

In chapter II, I started to look at *why* the Too Many Criticism is made, i.e., why Socrates rejects the Three Answers. I considered a well-known interpretation which is that the

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<sup>18</sup> See for a discussion of explanations the later dialogue the *Phaedo* (100d-105c).

issue might be that the interlocutors are providing particulars whereas Socrates is looking for a universal. I agree that Socrates is looking for a universal, but for several reasons I rejected the suggestion that the interlocutors provide particulars instead, among others for the reason that what should on this interpretation be particulars in the *Meno*, are elsewhere the very things about which Socrates asks his question “What is the F?” The other main argument was that the candidates for the F which are offered by Meno and Euthyphro are predicable of many things, and are therefore universals.

In chapter III, I considered another suggestion – by Geach (1966) – which was that Socrates rejects Euthyphro’s answer because Socrates commits a fallacy (the so-called Socratic Fallacy). The main premise of this interpretation was that Socrates thought that it is not possible to know whether something is an example of F if you do not know the definition of F. I did not dispute Geach’s position that we do not, in fact, need to know the definition of F in order to be able to predicate F. But I denied that Socrates believes such a position in the first place, and as proof I showed that Socrates himself freely uses examples.

In chapter IV, I introduced Nehamas’ position. Socrates asked Euthyphro (whose answer was *piety is to prosecute the religious wrongdoer*) whether he thought that there were other piouses. Nehamas’ claim was that with this, Socrates was giving Euthyphro a choice: if he says yes, Euthyphro will fail to give a single explanation (which is what was asked for, and with which Euthyphro earlier agreed) for pious things; if he says no, then his answer is too narrow, excluding obviously pious things. I called this “Euthyphro’s Fork”. On the one hand, I disagreed with Nehamas that if Euthyphro had said no, then his answer would have been too narrow. Socrates makes no Too Narrow Criticism at all. But I agree with the other leg of the fork, that Euthyphro provided an answer which failed to give a single explanation. I argued that the Too Many Criticism makes the point that Euthyphro gives too many explanations (and that the same holds for the *Meno*). Socrates is assuming that there is only one explanation for why F things are F. He rejects, for example, explanations of the type that Euthyphro could be virtuous because he is pious, and Laches is virtuous because he is courageous. He only accepts explanations for consideration which claim to explain for all F why they are F.

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## **Lists in the *Meno* and the *Euthyphro***

Mark Hallap

Abstract

In Plato's Socratic dialogues the *Meno* and the *Euthyphro*, all attempts at answering Socrates' "What is the F?" question are rejected, but some answers are rejected in a peculiar way. Socrates complains that Euthyphro's first answer, and Meno's first and third answers, provide "too many" things for the F. This thesis considers several competing suggestions for why Socrates rejects these answers. The following suggestions are argued to be unhelpful: (1) that Socrates' interlocutors provide particulars instead of universals, (2) that Socrates makes an assumption that examples cannot be known before you know the definition, and (3) that the interlocutors offer too narrow definitions. None of these explains why Socrates says that there are too many things provided. Finally, the author argues that the answers are rejected because Socrates assumes there is only one explanation for why F things are F.

## “Nimekirjad “Menonis” ja “Euthyphronis””

Mark Hallap

Resüme

Platoni “sokraatilistes” dialoogides “Menonis” ja “Euthyphronis” kukuvad läbi kõik Sokratese vestluskaaslaste katsed vastata Sokratese “Mis on F?” küsimusele. Osad vastused kukuvad aga läbi omapärasel moel. Euthyphroni esimene ning Menoni esimene ja kolmas vastus nimetavad “liiga palju” kandidaate. Antud töö vaatab mitut konkureerivat tõlgendust. Järgnevad tõlgendused lükkab autor tagasi: 1) Sokratese vestluskaaslased annavad vastuseks partikulaari, mitte universaali; 2) Sokrates eeldab, et näiteid ei saa teada enne definitsiooni; 3) vestluskaaslaste vastused on liiga kitsad. Ükski neist vastusevariantidest ei seleta, miks Sokrates leiab, et vestluskaaslased nimetavad “liiga palju” asju. Autor väidab, et vastused lükatakse kõrvale põhjusel, et Sokrates eeldab, et on ainult üks *seletus*, miks F asjad on F.

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