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In Search of the Whole Truth and the Connections Between
Things (/)



What the Ancients Knew On the Elenchus & What the Socratic Method is Not!

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next

On the Elenchus & What the Socratic Method is Not!

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As the story goes, it was Socrates' doubt of the claim that the Oracle made to his friend, Chaerephon, that Socrates was the wisest man in Athens, that set Socrates out to find someone who knows more than he does,

and brought Socrates the responsibility of being gadfly to the lazy horse that was Athens.(Apology 30E) It is through this process of questioning those who call themselves 'experts' in various fields, that he discovers that the Oracle must be right, he must be the wiser, because there is at least one thing that Socrates does know, and which the others apparently do not -- which is how precious little he actually knows and how much he has to learn from others. These experts know, like Socrates, quite a bit about 'human knowledge', but when on the strength of this small understanding they go on to make claims to be able to know things which simply cannot be known, or are known only by the heavens, then they have crossed the line beyond the humility which is necessary to the search, leaving the student guided by one who is himself in unfamiliar territory.[*put oracle]

To be a 'teacher' in the Socratic sense of midwifery is to be a 'fellow student,' therefore the teacher must himself be humble enough to know that they have much to learn, even from those who are sometimes students. In fact, it might be argued that his partner's trust that Socrates always plays fair is central to the effectiveness of true Socratic dialogue. The Socratic challenge is to take the other eye-to-eye, a sort of equality which is hard for the falsely secure to muster.[i]

This is what is entailed in the Socratic method, which is conspicuously missing from much of our contemporary practice of teaching. It entails recognizing how little even the well-learned actually 'know', given all there is to be known when one aims at the whole of truth. That's how we improve one another, which is what Socratic dialogue in its truest form gives us means to do.

This Socratic method, what the ancients called the *elenchus*, is admittedly an oft' misunderstood art, one which we would do well to examine further than we tend to.

Misunderstood and misused, this method can be very destructive, yet when used as such, it is no longer the 'Socratic method' at all; on the contrary, it becomes the very thing that Socrates relentlessly criticized the Sophists for doing, i.e. only pretending to be 'teachers' by presuming to 'know' what they cannot possibly, dealing in the art of mere 'persuasion', not 'conviction', mere 'belief', not 'knowledge', mere 'appearance', not 'reality', seeking 'control', not 'understanding'.

the Socratic 'elenchus' is not an end in itself, but the means to the end of mutual understanding. "[T]he aim of the elenchus is to wake men out of their dogmatic slumbers into genuine intellectual curiosity." [Robinson, p.91] It is, Socrates says in the dialogue Gorgias, the art of showing the contradictions between beliefs.[Grgs 471D]

This process is complicated, as Socrates explains in Protagoras, because "appearances lead us astray and throw us into confusion, so that in our actions and our choices between great and small we are constantly accepting and rejecting the same things, whereas the metric art would have canceled the effect of the impression [i.e. the subjective distortion created by different appearances at varying distances] and by revealing the true state of affairs [the objective reality] would have caused the soul to live in peace and quiet and abide in the truth, thus saving our life." [356e]

Because there is a right way to accomplish this end, it is important to note that the *elenchus, or inducement of perplexity, is not the ultimate purpose or end of Socratic dialogue, but only a means to his end of understanding, and only one means among many, at that, used only when his partner in dialogue "thinks that he is saying something and is really saying nothing." For it was not true students, but the false certainty of bad teachers that Socrates was trying to break down with perplexity, and only in some, not all, students, and with

regard to some, not all beliefs. Every action of the 'true guide' must be to restore and reinforce the student's confidence in his own ability to understand, and toward this end, it is sometimes necessary to dislodge the arrogance of those who think they know enough, and so think they have nothing to learn from others, but only to teach them, whether they know the truth about what they are 'teaching' or not. Thus, Socrates did not refute all beliefs, for indeed, 'true beliefs' can and should be defended, and people who have them are generally happy to be questioned by Socrates, as were Alcibiades and Nicias.

Socrates of the early dialogues often uses the *elenchus* this way, because Socrates is an orator, so must respond honestly to his partners in dialogue. Plato, on the other hand, is a writer, challenged to show the Socratic dialogues from the outside in, as if to convince us, the jury. So to show Socrates' point, he must put him together with an opponent so to show both sides. Socrates, for his part, is always trying to prove the difference between truth and it's oft' confused counterpart, falsehood. But he is not "always" engaged in showing the answerer's thesis false, for indeed, sometimes it is not! In fact, many who take up dialogue with Socrates come out of it in full agreement with him, having enjoyed the experience, and often his opponents have the better argument of the pair. Not all of Socrates' partners in dialogue become opponents, and many teach him much along the way.(Parmenides) Hence so many, like Nicias in the dialogue Laches, who actually enjoy being questioned by Socrates.

There is no threat in shaking the foundation of a true belief, for this is how one sees how strong it really is, and so only a weak or false belief is threatened; both the knowingly weak and the already strong beliefs are only made stronger. What distinguished Socrates' knowledge of virtue from Meno's true but apparently temporary opinion about it is the 'tether'. If we have one piece of the truth, we can see by tethering how the rest of what we learn fits together with it. "True opinion is as good a guide as knowledge for the purpose of acting rightly," (97b-c) Socrates says, but true opinions "are not worth much until you tether them by working out the reason...once they are tied down, they become knowledge, and are stable. That is why knowledge is something more valuable than right opinion. What distinguished one from the other is the tether."(98)

He questions his partner in dialogue to see how tethered their belief is, indeed, to help tether that belief, and to learn from the other in the process. This is a process which has its end in 'understanding'. Understanding what? "The connections between things," as he says in the Republic. But again, perplexity is sometimes necessary for achieving the state of humility necessary to further willingness to learn and ability to recognize these interconnections when we come across them. But it is not, in and of itself, a sufficient condition for Socratic learning, but only a means to the end of understanding, or at any rate, the open-mindedness which is prerequisite to it.

Socrates adds that: "Starting from this perplexity" then, see what "he will discover by seeking the truth in company with me," though I do not teach, but merely ask him questions about his own thinking.(84d) "[I]f the same questions are put to him on many occasions and in different ways ... in the end he will have knowledge on the subject as accurate as anybody's,"(85d) knowledge that will not come from teaching but from questioning, as he'll reason out the answers for himself, by spontaneous recovery of knowledge, or recollection.(85d)

So there is this positive and gentle side to the *elenchus* then, for as Robinson himself points out, in the Seventh Letter, Plato "requires that *elenchus* shall be conducted in a friendly manner."(344B)[p.93] As in Meno, where Socrates asks Meno whether this numbing perplexity was good for the slave boy, and he replies, yes, it seems to have been.

In the Seventh Letter Plato "requires that elenchus shall be conducted in a friendly manner."(344B)[p.93]

Socrates' purpose was to uplift the educational methods of his day, and thus, to reteach those who called themselves teachers. For many are not 'true' in their methods, and it is the 'false experts', especially in the realm of virtue and wisdom, which Socrates questions the presumed moral authority of. It is those who presume to 'teach' goodness, without being themselves 'good', virtue without being 'virtuous', and justice without being 'just', who provoke the ironic tones of the frustrated Socrates, who 'teaches' only by example of honest self- and other-inquiry.

It would be consistent with Socrates' position in any of many dialogues that he would hold, with Dewey, that perplexity is a part of the process of Socratic dialogue, not the end or the purpose itself; "perplexity is desirable only to the extent that it awakens thought; if, however, it overwhelms or demoralizes, then the teacher has taught badly." Practiced in this way, the so-called Socratic method is more likely to chase students away from learning (at least from this particular teacher) than it is to draw them into inquiry, no less, self-inquiry. [*put puppies]...

Socrates uses this process of inducing perplexity very selectively, and only does this when absolutely necessary, and it is instructive, I think, to notice when and with whom Socrates uses this technique, as distinct from those times and situations when he does not, but rather, is perfectly happy to reinforce the beliefs of those who are actually on the path of 'true learning', rather than blocked by the arrogance of thinking they already know as much as they need to know. Socrates has different ways of interacting with different people, and that it is only those who are puffed up about how much they know, thus misleading the rest (and charging for it no less) who Socrates feels the need to treat this way, and then only after exhausting the methods he prefers, as others get respectful dialogue from him.

At the heart of many dialogues [Meno, Republic, Theaetetus, to name a few], we see that the kind of knowledge which Socrates is searching for is 'self-knowledge'; and one 'knows himself' when he has 'worked out the reasoning' of his beliefs sufficiently, and only then is he is rightly confident that they are true (or more true at any rate than the beliefs of those who have not gone through the same process [see Mill: footnote #17]), though he is reluctant to call them 'knowledge' because, perhaps as often as not, Socrates actually is of the second type, i.e. honestly not 'knowing' more than he claims, which is that he is still and always searching. Such knowledge cannot be 'applied' from the outside in, says Socrates, and is a process that cannot be 'taught', in this sense, but must be 'arrived at' by exercise of the process itself. Socrates is confident that they can come to an understanding of the truth together, but 'knowledge' itself, he argues, is not something one can 'possess', and not "something that can be passed from one to another".

Socrates frequently uses the comparison with "medical purging" to indicate that "the elenchus is not itself the instilling of knowledge, but an essential preliminary thereto, consisting in the removal of an all but complete bar to knowledge naturally present in man. This bar," he says, "is the conceit that we already know." [p.85] This point is taken to be loosely illustrated by Plato's claim, that "as the physician considers that the body will receive no benefit from taking food until the internal obstacles have been removed, so the purifier of the soul is conscious that his patient will receive no benefit from the application of knowledge until he is refuted and from refutation and learns modesty." (Plato 1969a, p.973)

Socrates' end then, far from perplexity-for-perplexities-sake, is to inspire the fellow student to want to learn, to seek, in order to better 'know' what they now only 'believe' to be true, and in the process, to help redirect this fellow seeker from following those who mislead, rather than the reason of their own soul. Perplexity and humility are means to the end of knowledge, and self-knowledge at that.

Then as now, there are two distinct attitudes one finds in students: open-minded, trusting, and ready to learn, and the defensive student who is sure he or she already knows. Both attitudes need help to navigate through change toward the good, but each needs a different means to help him forward, for one is blocked, while the other is already on his way. Thus, Socrates often uses one method for 'the sons' and another for 'the elders', at least for those who, having a vested interest in injustice, call themselves 'teachers' of 'virtue', despite not 'knowing' what it is, and hence, needed to be humbled to free them of their crippling arrogance.

And so distinguishing between those 'students' for whom such perplexity will be good and those who are already humble, and so already on their journey. It will also involve the belief that the truth is best found in the soul, and that one is better oriented toward asking reason for the truth than asking others, who may deceive, and do, every time they lead others to believe that they know what they're talking about, when they do not. Sometime, in extreme cases, it is true that Socrates will make an example of such a person, like Thasymachus, and that this often comes across as sarcastic and even apparently deceptive; but it is only because the truth goes over such a person's head that it seems Socrates is purposely humiliating him, when he is only doing so incidentally. In such cases, Socrates has no choice but to speak more to those who look on, then as now, and learn from the mistakes of his partner's ego.

Remembering is indeed the art of learning, after all. And to his constant dismay, not everyone remembers what they agree to intellectually. But this uncertainty does not condemn the method, for doing one's best as a teacher need not mean achieving perfect control (in fact, there is a Sophist assumption that teachers ought to be or at least act infallible hidden in this criticism). For any true teacher can only do for the student what he would have done for himself (as Socrates, in his last oration before his execution [Apology] implores the other teachers of Athens to do for his own sons...if they should ever forget). Like the function of the ****e* or the gardener, Socrates knows that the teacher cannot do for the student what the student must do for him or herself.[Republic] And so Socrates asks the questions which will remind himself and others where to look for "the truth about reality [which] is always in our soul" [Meno] at least helping them recall where they ought to be looking, i.e. inward.

For this reason, he avoids telling another 'the answer' (as if one person can 'know' for another) which is as good as pretending infallibility of that knowledge rather than guiding and trusting that the other will find the truth -- "one, whole, and sound"(77b) -- once they have traveled the proper path by the proper means, i.e. the humble asking and answering of questions.

The very purpose of Socratic dialogue is to convince the answerer with argument, rather than to persuade him with flattery, which is not stable learning.[see footnote #5] "The only true witness and authority is the answer himself." [Grgs 471E-472C, 474A, 475E] So Socrates will be the first to admit that the elenchus has failed and he must not be a good teacher as soon as he recognizes that Meno has already forgotten a conclusion drawn earlier -- that the truth is always in your soul, and we are better learners if we search for it there than if we pretend we already know. Socrates would have preferred for him to have chosen to go back and remember what had been agreed. But for Meno, the point slipped away like the statues of Dedalus.

Some accuse Socrates of being insincere in his claim that he is not conducting an elenchus and that he does not know where the argument will go, and that this insincerity lessens the moral effect of the method. But he only seems disingenuous, I would argue, and that his inquiry into truth is in fact disinterested and sincere. He gives the impression that he possesses knowledge, but he invariably denies this, as in Charmides 165B, where he says, "'I inquire into the proposition along with you because I do not know. I will tell you whether I agree or not when I have examined it.'[Cf. Ap. 23A] For he may indeed know himself, and he may know that his beliefs are true for having tethered them, but he does not 'know', indeed cannot know where any given conversation will go, if only for not knowing where his partner will help lead it or by what questions and answers it will flow. Thus, Socrates may very well "know the end of a line of inquiry at its very beginning" (for the end is always truth) but he need not know the path that a particular dialogue will take to get there. In this way, he is not (as Rousseau's advice to teachers) merely letting the student think he is master, but he is student himself, such that the other is as much as master of the dialogue as is Socrates. What Socrates doesn't know, and what gives the dialogue its spontaneous character, is the reaches and limits of his partners understanding, or more important, of what he thinks he knows. All Socrates 'knows' is that he himself has a right to be confident about his own beliefs and that reason takes one step at a time.[see Mill: footnote #17]

Unlike sophistic methods, which are designed to perplex without recourse to the truth, Socrates actual method is designed to perplex only the arrogant and unjustifiably defensive, i.e. the one who believes they already know without being able to give justification for their beliefs, such as Thasymachus, with his argument that 'might makes right', and who gets angry rather than to defend his fascist beliefs when questioned. Socrates only rivets his questioning, after all, on those who make a claim to 'knowledge' which they cannot possibly have more than mere belief about, such as the many who teach of virtue and heaven, without the ability to demonstrate either, and who become defensive on behalf of beliefs they cannot actually defend, so that defense quickly turns from 'justification' to 'rationalization'. And it is this arrogance, this conceit within his partner which brings Socrates to resort to irony, knowing that at this point, it is the best one can hope for that at least those who listen in silence from the outside-in may learn from weighing the rationalized false beliefs they hear, with the justified true beliefs that refute it.

Socratic irony is not deception, as some have viewed it, but misunderstanding, and one which Socrates cannot bridge alone. Irony occurs when the words mean something more to Socrates, and perhaps to the rest of his audience, than they mean to his partner in dialogue, who sometimes forgets their deep meaning even before the end of the dialogue. There would be no irony if Meno would have remembered where virtue comes from in the first place, hence, it is not Socrates who brings the irony to the dialogue, but his partner/opponent who forgets or deliberately ignores the deeper meaning of the words they use. This does not make Socrates the deceiver, because it is not Socrates who is responsible for the fact that others sometimes deceive themselves, and can fail to justify their beliefs and thereby settle for mere rationalization: what distinguishes one from the other is honesty of intent, i.e. character, or if you will, justice. Socrates never claims to 'know' the truth itself, or even the course a given dialogue will take, but only where and how to find the truth, i.e. 'always in the soul'. Hence, the usefulness, but not the necessity, of a 'true guide'. In fact, he can not know for sure the character or attitudes or likely responses of the other whom he is in dialogue with, and so cannot know how any talk is likely to go between them. If the other thinks he's been deceived, it is by his false beliefs about what it means to 'know', and what Socrates means when he says that he does not.

One might argue that discovering the other is the very purpose for which genuine Socratic method is properly

used. To take the Socratic method to be devoid of sensitivity to individuals, as many do, is to make the first wrong move, for the very purpose of Socrates' inquiry is to question individuals in ways that would promote their own personal understanding of matters that they could indeed reason through by looking inward, for which it is first necessary to let down the pretense of already 'knowing'. Socrates was 'always' hoping for well-thought-out answers to his questions, and frequently got just that -- though not 'always'.

It is important to note that there are different levels of pedagogy involved in the Socratic dialogues, for as Meno learns by listening to Socrates talk with the slave boy, so we learn by 'listening to' Socrates talk with Meno. And it is when Socratic perplexity seems to set in that we are invited to learn from what has gone over his partner's head, making Socrates sometimes come off as less than fully candid, when in fact, he is only saying less than he understands because this is his way of remaining humble in the face of someone who has not yet learned (or remembered, in the case of Meno) what Socrates is perhaps well aware of, but unable to possess to hand the other.

At this point in a given dialogue, much of what is said (such as Socrates' comment about 'divine dispensation' and that Meno should go tell Anytus what he now believes to be true) is for our benefit, (as is his mocking of Meno's bragging about having been able to speak before large audiences about virtue, even though when questioned has no clue what virtue is). Socrates is not deceiving Meno, he is simply talking over his head, seeing that Meno has forgotten what they earlier concluded to be true. Socrates concedes that they themselves must not be true guides, for the conclusion they end up at, i.e. that virtue is dispensed by the gods, has failed to remember the conclusion arrived at earlier, i.e. that virtue can not be implanted in another, whether by gods or so-called teachers, but rather, that it comes from within. Whether by self-examination, or by dialogue with other genuine seekers of knowledge, the process is one of finding one's center, so to speak, and of helping others to find the same center within themselves. When the Socratic method is practiced well then, the student (which might be both parties) is helped by being reoriented toward an internal locus of control, such that one knows where to look for answers, and by wise use of reason, to dialogue with others.

They have the wrong idea at the outset if they think that one man can make another good, and worse, that they can do it by behavior that is not good. For it is not 'good' to attempt to perplex another for perplexities' sake, that is, when one has not tethered one's own beliefs around the truth, so to be able to guide the other toward something that is in some sense 'better'.

This process is very different from the Sophists' teaching, which Socrates abhorred, for listening, unidirectionally, to those who 'teach' by simply creating new and ever more impressive words to account for the phenomenon of the world (as Meno wants to define color), is not necessarily learning, but is often a mere pretense of wisdom. This, rather than being the self-called wise man who invents new languages in order to specialize their knowledges and close out the uninitiated, which they then sell to the public, who pay to be 'taught' (for better or worse) so many different ways of talking/thinking about the world (except perhaps honestly). Being a true guide involves asking and answering questions that can be answered from within with other fellow searchers. Such a 'teacher' is one who can guide another from his biases and prejudices and toward a state of gentleness toward others. And as Socrates says in the Sophist, when the elenchus works well, Socrates says, such a student grows:

"angry with himself, and gentle toward others, and thus is entirely delivered from great prejudices and harsh notions, in a way which is most amusing to the hearer, and produces the most lasting good effect on the person who is the subject of the operation."(Plato, 1969b, p. 363)

In the case of the innocent and open-minded, Socrates' method is not to cross-examine harshly, but honest mutual searching, joint inquiry, as he frequently said. Teaching brings a responsibility to give permission to speak, to give encouragement to think, and reason to say what one thinks when asked, and to ask what one wonders of others. The role of the teacher should not be one of critic, authority, and most especially not disciplinarian but one of fellow student. As Socrates would have us remember, dialogue is a delicate art, one in which progress requires teacher to be, not a judge, but a gentle guide, never simply telling the truth, but rather nudging others toward it by carefully asking questions, while allowing oneself to be likewise directed.

Only one who 'knows' he does not 'know' can ever be either a 'true guide' or a true student of the logos, for that matter. Socrates is constantly baffled by how many are neither. These are the Meno's, and Anytus' and Thrasymachus' of the dialogues, who condemned Socrates to die for the threat his questions posed to their authority, as if to be able to kill an idea or prevent spread of the truth by silencing one voice. This pretense of power is characteristic of the one who pretends to knowledge, and this brings such a one to overreact to truth, thus exposing himself to those who are not so actively ignorant as some with vested interest in injustice can be. Socrates on the other hand, while he is extremely confident about the soundness of his tethered beliefs (as in Apology, Crito, and Euthydemus [293B]), admits to knowing only small matters, except at Meno 98B, one place where Socrates admits to knowing something important, that we will be better knowers by searching than by thinking we already know.[*put meno trick argument] The so-called 'trick argument' in Meno is helpful to show the importance of humility, for we are better searchers, they show, if we believe that we have much to learn than if we think we already 'know' and so don't bother to look -- and this is the critical if -- the variable that makes dialogue truly Socratic.

Meno is reduced to perplexity and humility, if only temporarily, no longer overconfident as he was when he boasted about being able to speak before large audiences about virtue, which he realizes at length he knows very little of.[Plato, 1969b, p.363] Meno accuses Socrates of being like the stingray who numbs the minds and lips of those who, "like myself" he says, "have spoken about virtue hundreds of times, held forth often on the subject in front of large audiences, and very well too, or so I thought. Now I can't even say what it is." (80b) Socrates replies by citing the paradox of such inquiry -- indicating himself to be more like the second type -- for this is only a fair simile, he says, if the stingray itself is numbed in paralyzing others. For the truth is that I infect others with the doubt and perplexity that I myself feel, he says, and sometimes that makes those who thought they knew the answers realize that they did not actually know as much as they thought they did: we are both left with questions then, Socrates says. (80d)

It is not merely perplexity for its own sake then, but for the sake of, and only if, it is needed to dislodge a stubborn false belief. Just as it may very well be the case that perplexity will help an overconfident student, it may also be the case that the student is already humble, and so the so-called 'elenchus' is not needed, but is useful if and only if the other is arrogant about his 'knowledge', and so does not believe he has much to learn from others, and thinks all his beliefs true, whether he has tethered them or not.

The worst of these, Socrates thinks, is the false guide, who pretends to be able to give someone the truth, and worse, takes money for it, is claiming the impossible, and thus, deceiving when they say they 'know' how to 'teach'. What Socrates is trying to do away with in Sophist teaching methods is the conceit and deceit, often self-deceit, and often collective ignorance (the corresponding verb to which is 'to ignore') of what many so-called 'experts' apparently have yet to learn. Socrates does not merely pretend he does not know, he knows he does

not know; indeed, this is the one thing that he does know, and that which qualifies him, according to the Oracle at Delphi, as the wisest man in Greece.

Rather than condemning the method itself, however, this only serves to highlight our need to understand it better -- especially before we presume to use it on our students who, as Pekarsky worries, may very well be 'harmed' in various ways by our mistakes about the best ways to 'teach'. This method, used as it too often is by those who find it an effective tool with which to undermine student's confidence, even while they do not have the ability to help reorient the student or restore them to equilibrium regarding their beliefs, is not at all what Socrates thought himself up to, and is, arguably, more near the very thing Socrates was working to undermine in the Sophistic method of teaching so popular in his day as it is now. Such so-called teachers as the Sophists were, Socrates shows in *Meno*, are not 'true guides', but themselves misguided, believing, falsely, that to 'teach' is to present "contentious arguments", such as *Meno's* high-sounding definition of color, which "make us lazy, and is music in the ears of weaklings." (81e).

Such so-called teachers as the Sophists were, Socrates shows in *Meno*, are not 'true guides', but themselves misguided, believing, falsely, that to 'teach' is to present "contentious arguments", such as *Meno's* high-sounding definition of color, which "make us lazy, and is music in the ears of weaklings." (81e).

By this point, I hope to have shown that it was not the elenchus which had the effect of making its victims angry with Socrates, after all (Rp I 337a), but rather the wrong use of it by those who "treat it as a game and imitated it in and out of season." (Rp.VII 539B) As Socrates himself says in his *Apology*, it was precisely the way in which some of the more spoiled youth of Athens, themselves badly taught by Sophists, went forth from dialogues with Socrates' and put his method to use, i.e. badly, to which Socrates indeed attributes the misunderstanding that led to his being sentenced to die. [Apology 21C-D-E, 23A] Again, though, this is not attributable to Socrates' own view, but to history's persistent misunderstanding of what Socrates was up to.

The Sophist is a 'false guide', from which the true guide is distinguished by his humility about how much he or she actually knows or has to learn from the other. When Socrates says he does not 'know' where a given dialogue is going, he is not being insincere, but clearly means that he never presumes his own infallibility, and never de-legitimizes his partner's perspective, not at least until his partner turns opponent by asserting his own infallibility.

As John Stuart Mill said well, one must be open to the possibility that he has something to learn from the other. When Socrates says he is not conducting an elenchus, he means he does not 'know' the path the particular discussion will go because he does not 'know' how the other will answer, what questions he will ask, or what turns the dialogue might take along the way, or, for that matter, where the dialogue will end, or if it will not continue at another intersection down the road toward truth. Of course truth is always the admitted ideal, but Socrates cannot know or say ahead of time how, where, or even if they will find it in any given exchange, for the truth can be elusive if false belief prevents insight. Still, the truth is there to be discovered by the earnest searcher, travelers of sorts, and sometimes a true guide can be a great help along the way.

[i] This is how humility, or what Thomas Hobbes called 'equality of subjectivity' (*Leviathan*), and Barry Stevens and other humanist psychologists idealized as 'perfect equality' [Barry Stevens, *Person to Person: The Problem of Being Human*, with Carl Rogers, Eugene T. Gendlin, John M. Shlien, and Wilson Van Dusen (Real People Press:

Moab, Utah, 1967) pp.261-262.], and some label merely 'relativistic'. But, appreciative of diversity as he was, Socrates/Plato would have been the last to think of this as 'mere relativity' -- for it was in this very relativity of perspectives from which the objective truth emerged.[Aristotle, Protagoras, Mill]

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