Please Remind Me of Anamnesis: 
A Double-Entendre in Plato’s Phaedo

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Meno 98A 3-4 αἰτίας λογισμοῦ is widely assumed nowadays to refer to some type of discursive procedure, though this interpretation is neither linguistically necessary nor is it consistent with Plato’s otherwise severely realistic epistemology and metaphysics. It is not even consistent really with Phdr. 249BC, which contains a quite obvious and deliberate reference back to Meno 98A. Indeed, if we may trust in the Phaedo, it is precisely the εἶδος or ιδέα that is the object of anamnesis (see esp. 72E-77A).

Now, Plato does not allow his vocabulary to harden into a technical terminology. For various reasons, he prefers to use common idioms to express even the most abstruse concepts, and then to allow that same vocabulary to slip back into its common garb. This tendency keeps his thought alive and his readers alert, and it helps to focus our attention away from the iridescent glint of the language itself to the underlying realities that language denotes. As such, he often toys irreverently with his most technical vocabulary in a deliberately playful fashion that perfectly exemplifies that semi-jocular seriousness ("le jeu sérieux"), that Ernst und Spiel (παιδιά/παιπούδι) that the commentators often note. There is just such a

1. See 98A 1-5 πολλὰν δὲ χρόνου σὸν ἔθελον παραμένειν, ἄλλα δὲ παραπέμψαν ἐκ τῆς λεγόμενος τούτῳ αἰθόσοι, διότι καὶ πολλοῖς ἔχειται ἡ ἀλήθεια, ἡ δὲ γίνεται δι’ αἰτίας λογισμοῦ. γοῦν δ’ ἐστὶν, ὃς Μένος ἔστηκε, ἀναμνήσθης, ὡς ἐν τοῖς πρόσωποι ἦμαν ὁμολογηθέντες.

2. Esp. B 6ff. δὲ γὰρ ἀνθρώπων συνέχεια καὶ εἶδος λεγόμενον, ἐκ πολλῶν Ἴναιν αἰθόσοις ἀεὶ ἐν λογισμῷ συναφοῦς τούτῳ δ’ ἐστιν ἀναμνήσθης καὶ τῶν δ’ ἐθεύν ἡμῶν ἡ τρυφή κτλ.

This passage of the Phaedrus gives additional proof (if such were needed) against the αἰτία λογισμοῦ reported by P. Berol. 9782 (Anon. Comm. in Pl. Tht.); on this whole question, see A. Carlini, 'Plato, Meno 98a3 (αἰτίας λογισμοῦ/αἰτίας λογισμοῦ: utrum in alterum?'), in Studia classica Johanni Tarditi obieta II, Milano 1995, 1017-1027, who rightly infers that the reading of P. Berol. is most likely the result of mechanical error (pace cf. III, Firenze 1995, 485).

play in the *Phaedo*, a dialogue to which the *Phaedrus* makes direct allusion (242B3), and precisely in that section where the *Phaedo* itself alludes to the *Meno* (cp. *Phd.* 73A 7-B 2 with *Meno* 81C-86C), and precisely to the *Meno*’s discussion of *anamnesis*.

The pre-existence of the soul, which had been indicated by the fact that everything that comes-to-be comes to be from contraries (76C-72D), is confirmed, Cebes adds, by the familiar doctrine (ὅπως ἐξώθης θαμά λέγων) of *anamnesis* (72E). Simmias, humorously, cannot recall the doctrine and asks for assistance (ὑπομηνύσω με: ο’ γάρ σφόδρα ἐν τῷ παρόντι μέμνημαι - 73A 5f.). Cebes rehearses the argument (λόγῳ) of the *Meno* (73A 7-B 2), whereupon Socrates adds another (cp. B 3f.), lest the first fails to persuade. He begins by describing recollection in its familiar form, adding instances first from dissimilars and then from similars, in a passage that serves to set the stage for a discussion of the theory of Ideas (74A-77A), not just the Ideas of Equal (αὐτὸ τὸ ίσον - 74A 11f., C 1, 4f., 78D 3f., etc.), Beauty (αὐτοῦ τοῦ καλοῦ - 75C 11), Goodness (αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἄγαθοῦ), and the like, but ἐπεὶ ἀπόκτων οἱ ἐπιφανειοχόρεζον τοῦτο, τὸ δ’ ἔστι (75D 1-2). And there, in the context of this discussion of similars and dissimilars, Plato, *Menexenos* Stuttgart-Leipzig 1998, 89ff.; G. Press (ed.), *Who Speaks for Plato?*, Lanham 2000, 31 n. 15.

4. Everything, that is, has a contrary; for the qualification, see 70B 1-2 (with J. Burnet, *Plato’s Phaedo*, Oxford 1911, ad loc.), B 5, 71A 10, C 6f., D 6-9. As is usual, Plato never forgets the assumption on which the argument rests; see P. Shorey, *What Plato Said*, Chicago 1933, 458 ad 73B, 471 ad 76B.

5. The theory of Ideas, of course, had been referred to earlier in Socrates’ account of the way in which philosophy is a rehearsal for death. For it is only when the soul (αὐτὴ καθ’ αὐτήν - 63D 4f.) is separated from the body that it can grasp (ὑπομηνύσω δημήτριας - C 9) its own proper objects. These objects, distinct from the objects of sense (see 74A 9-12, B 4C 6, 78B-79E, etc.), are the Ideas: 65C 2-3 ἀγ’ ἀνὰ ἐκ τῆς λογικῆς ἑπετείον τοῦ ἐκ τοῦ ἱερὸν, with C 5-9; D 4f. ὑπομηνύσω μὲν οἱ ἄνωθεν αὐτό ὑπεράνων διάκρισιν ἀπάνων, ὑπεράνων διάκρισιν ἀπάνων τῶν ἄνωθέν; E 1-2 αὐτά τὰ πράγματα; 67B 1; and cp. 74A-77A. For αὐτός (with or without concord) of the Ideas, see Fr. Ast, *Lexicon Platonicum* I, Lipsiae 1875-85, 35f.; É. DesPlaces, *Études platoniciennes* 1929-1979, Leiden 1981, 56-59 (orig. 1962); *Platon. Oeuvres complètes* xiv, *Lexique*, Paris 1964, 88-90; R.S. Bluck, *Plato’s Meno*, Cambridge, 1964, 233f.; G. Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, Ithaca 1962, 73 n. 126. For Aristotle’s discussion of this distinctively Platonic usage, cp. H. Bonitz, *Index Aristotelicus*, Berlin 1870, 124B 52-125A 14; also H. Cherniss, *Aristotle’s Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, Baltimore 1944, 201-203, 308-312, 577f. Though Burnet and Robin proposed (quite elegantly) τὸ αὐτὸ δ’ ἔστιν at 75D 2 (cp. 74B 2, D 6, 78D 3-4, Crat. 389D 6f., etc.); see W.D. Ross, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics II*, Oxford 1953, 46A). Verdenius (*Notes on Plato’s Phaedo*, *Mnemosyne* S. iv 11, 1958, 211) defends the vulgate’s τὸ αὐτὸ δ’ ἔστιν, which appears to be the reading of all the ms. (see E.A. Duke et al., *Platonis Opera*, Oxford 1999, app. crit. ad loc.; pace Burnet, ms. tradition is rather supported by lambli. Proterp. 63,3 Pratelli e πάντα οἱ ἐπιφανειοχόρεζον τὸ δ’ ἔστιν; on this passage of the Protrepticus, see R. Loriaux, *Le Phédon de Platon I*, Namur 1969-75, 151; DesPlaces 1981, 57; for
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similars, Socrates states, in what can only be seen as a slyly deliberate play with the initiated reader, that the sight of the beloved’s lyre allows one to recollect the form of the beloved (τὸ ἐίδος τοῦ παιδὸς οὐ ἦν ἡ λύρα; τούτῳ δὲ ἔστιν ἀνάμνησις κτλ. – 73D 7-8; cp. nn. 1-2 supra), and that seeing a portrait of Simmias will remind one of Simmias himself (καὶ Συμμίαν ἴδοντα γεγομένον αὐτοῦ Συμμίου ἀναμνησθήναι – E9-10).

Εἶδος, to be sure, has not been used thus far in the Phaedo of the Ideas, and so the double-entendre at 73D 7-8 will only be grasped by the reader who knows of the dialogue’s outcome. But there is something more going on here than mere punning on ἐίδος. This term is used (as is often the case with Plato) in a non-technical fashion several times before it is introduced as a term of art of the fully developed theory, whereupon it is allowed to slip back into a more pedestrian usage near the end of the dialogue, in what we might call a ‘geographical’ context (110D 1-2). A similar arc can be seen with ἰδέα. This non-technical use of our chosen terms, especially the delightfully ambiguous appearance of ἐίδος and αὐτός at 73D 7f. and E 9, thus helps to prepare the reader, by a type of compositional anticipation or ‘prolepsis’ found in abundance on nearly every page of the Corpus, for the developed theory of Ideas that is soon to be presented.

And it helps to confirm, to return to our initial point, albeit in


6. Fortunately, the existence of such an omniscient reader or auditor need not be simply hypothesized; we actually have him in Phaedo.

7. Often, curiously, in a quite similar context: ἐν τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ ἐίδε (73A 1-2, 76C 12, 87A 2, 92B 5). Other non-technical uses are αὐτός at 79B 4, D 9, 91D 1, 98A 2.

8. And even then, only as the anchor of a periphrasis: cp. 100B 3-7, esp. τῆς σιγής τὸ ἐίδος δ ἀπαραμείνειν, καὶ εἰ μὴ πᾶλιν ἐκ τῆς ἔκκεντρα τὸ πολυθρύλλη τα κτλ.; then 102B 1 (but this, in the mouth of Phaedo!), 103E 3, 104C 7, 106D 6.

9. First, used technically (104B 9, D 2, 6, 9, E 1, 105D 13); then ‘geographically’ (108D 9, 109B 5). Compare the astute observations of E. DesPlaces 1981, 38: “D’une manière générale, Platon emprunte à la langue courante des mots qu’il charge de sens neufs; c’est une forme de la transposition décrite par A. Diès.... [Sans écarter l’acceptation courante, il les a élevés à l’ordre métaphysique] (also 55); and for the largely ‘popular’ origins of ἐίδος/ἰδέα, see (alongside the well-known debate between Taylor and Gillespie [Ross. I, xlviii, with comm. ad 987B 6]), Festugière’s valuable note at Hippocrate. L’Ancienne médecine, Paris 1948, 47-53.

10. Shorey noted this trick long ago: e.g., ‘The Question of the Socratic Element in Plato’ (1927), in Selected Papers I, ed. L. Tarán, New York 1980, 317f.: “In Plato the termi-
none too serious a fashion, that it is indeed the εἰδος itself that is the object of anamnesis."

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... technology that dramatically explains to an interlocutor innocent of logic what a definition is, passes into the terminology of the transcendental idea by such insensible gradations that it is impossible to say where the one ends and the other begins. 11 I do not wish at this point to enter into any controversies concerning the relationships between individual dialogues or groups of dialogues. Ch. Kahn’s recent use of the term ‘prolepsis’ (e.g., Plato and the Socratic Dialogue, Cambridge 1996) thus has a broader reach than is intended here. But it should be obvious to any reader of the Greek that Plato likes to verbally anticipate the major doctrines or themes of a given dialogue early on in innocuous ways. I append a small sample, though the list could be extended indefinitely: Meno 71C 8-D 2 oú πάντα εἰμὶ μνημήν. ... ἀναμνήσθητον σὺν με. 75C 7 εἷς καὶ ἀναμνήσθητον, 76B 1, etc., with 81C-86C (R. Weiss, Virtue in the Cave, Oxford 2001, 68f.); 85C 6-7 ἀληθείας δόξα, with 96E-fin.; Symp. 174A 9 καλός (R. G. Bury, The Symposium of Plato, Cambridge 1932 e lxxv; also 12-12xv); cp. 173E 7 ἀπειροτής, with 219C 5; Phd. 60C 6 ὑπὸ τοῦ δημοσίου, with 67D 1f.; 92D 6 ἐποδήσας (93C 3, 10, 94B 1), with 100AB and 101D-E; Resp. 498D, with 608C ff. (A. Diès, La République, Paris 1912, ‘Introduction’, cxvff.); Phdr. 241C-2 τὸ σῶμα, ὁ πρὸς τε καὶ ὁ ἐκ τοῦ βιβλίου ὑποθείκ, with 275D 4-276A 9, 277D 1-278B 4 (cp. 262C 5f.); 265B 7 διηρήσατο (De Vries, ad loc.; also R. Hackforth, Plato’s Phaedrus, Cambridge 1952, 132 n. 3), with 265E ff., 277B; Soph. 217A 6-8 διασφάλειν (cp. 220A 8-9), with 253C-254B; 232A ff. φανεται τὸ φανεται, with 236F 1 and 264C ff. (F. Cornford, Plato’s Theory of Knowledge, London 1935, 189 n. 2); 248AB κοινωνεῖν (cp. 250B 9f.), with 251A-259D; Tim. 50B 2 τιγγον, with 53Cff. (Cornford’s objection [Plato’s Cosmology, London 1937, 182f.; cp. 1935, 239 n. 1] is thus entirely beside the point; note the instance which he himself adduces at 1937, 268 n. 3); Th. 156DE (καὶ ἐγκέκεισθαι αὐτὰν λεικοτίσας ἀλλὰ λεικόν; also 159B), with 182A ἡ λοιπόν, is essentially of the same type. So, to broaden slightly, the close similarity between Apol. 19A-24B and the formal antomosia of 24B 8-C 1 is, whatever its historical value, stylistically true to form.