

## How Does Aristotle Understand the Paradox of the *Meno*?

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I focus on the distinction between universal and particular knowledge or knowledge simpliciter in APo 2.21 and APo 1.1 as Aristotle's explicit response to the paradox of the *Meno*. I attempt to derive a picture of Aristotle's understanding of the philosophical problem underlying that paradox by asking what that problem would have to be in order for this distinction to make sense as a response to it. I consider two ways of taking the distinction, and argue that both point towards a problem about deriving knowledge of particulars from knowledge of universals as the fundamental problem underlying Aristotle's understanding of the *Meno* paradox.

### I. Introduction

The *Meno* contains Socrates' argument for his famous theory of recollection, that all learning is really just the recollection of knowledge we have learned in a previous life. The argument begins with a paradox that would appear to render all inquiry impossible. The would-be inquirer is, on Socrates' formulation of the paradox, stuck between two horns of a dilemma:<sup>1</sup>

A: One cannot inquire about what one already knows.

B: One cannot inquire about what one does not already know.

Socrates calls this argument "eristic"<sup>2</sup>, and apparently sees his theory of recollection as successfully evading the problem. He demonstrates this by leading an uneducated slave boy through a geometrical problem by asking him questions, taking the boy's ability to learn through this method as some kind of confirmation that the knowledge must have been recollected.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear that Aristotle does not agree with the theory of recollection.<sup>4</sup> Yet he seems to treat the paradox of the *Meno* with a degree of seriousness that suggests that he does not see it

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<sup>1</sup> 80e.

<sup>2</sup> 80e.

<sup>3</sup> 86a-b.

<sup>4</sup> C.f. 99b25-30.

as mere sophism, but as raising a real philosophical problem worth addressing.<sup>5</sup> I seek to investigate what this philosophical problem might be by analysing Aristotle's explicit response to the *Meno*: the distinction between universal and particular knowledge (hereon, "the Distinction"), given in *APr* 2.21 and *APo* 1.1.

It is, admittedly, difficult to say how explicit a response to the *Meno* paradox the Distinction is supposed to be. The *APr* reference to the *Meno* is quite ambiguous; some take it as critical of Plato<sup>6</sup>, others as highlighting resemblance between Plato's and Aristotle's views<sup>7</sup>, and still others as signalling agreement with Plato.<sup>8</sup> Yet it can be no accident that Aristotle's only two explicit mentions of the *Meno* coincide in these passages with the only two explicit discussions of this curious and somewhat counterintuitive Distinction. Further, the reference in the *APo* is much clearer in intent. Aristotle there concludes his discussion of the Distinction by saying "otherwise the puzzle in the *Meno* will result; for you will either learn nothing or what you know".<sup>9</sup> This seems to be explicitly claiming that some version of the paradox of the *Meno*, however it is understood, will arise if we deny the Distinction. I propose to take this literally, asking how the *Meno* paradox is supposed to result from denial of the Distinction, and what that tells us about Aristotle's understanding of it.<sup>10</sup>

## II. *Two ways of taking the Distinction*

We should begin by noting some ambiguities over the objects of the Distinction. In both passages, Aristotle explains the Distinction with reference to an example of a man who knows a universal, such as:

- (1) All triangles have 2R.

but who is ignorant of some particular falling under the universal, C, a particular sensible triangle. Since he is ignorant of C, not knowing that C exists, he does not have what *APr* 2.21

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<sup>5</sup> Fine G., *The Possibility of Inquiry: Meno's Paradox from Socrates to Sextus*, Oxford: OUP, 2014, 204 argues this based on Aristotle's description of the paradox as an *Aporoma*.

<sup>6</sup> Jenkinson 1984, 107.

<sup>7</sup> Ross, W. D., *Aristotle's Prior and Posterior Analytics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949, 474.

<sup>8</sup> Gifford 1999, 22-23.

<sup>9</sup> 71a30. All translations from Barnes 1984.

<sup>10</sup> Thus, I do not consider the interpretation of Gifford (1999, 13) who denies that the *APr* 2.21 passage responds directly to the puzzle of the *Meno*.

calls “particular knowledge” and *APo* 1.1 calls “unqualified knowledge”.<sup>11</sup> To have unqualified/particular knowledge that C has 2R seems to entail knowing (1) while also knowing that C is a triangle, and thereby knowing that C has 2R. Yet, in virtue of knowing (1) alone, our hypothetical man still has *universal* knowledge that C has 2R. This universal knowledge appears to be a kind of implicit knowledge of a particular that falls under a universal. Universal knowledge appears to be constituted or entailed by knowledge of a universal, even when that knowledge of the universal is accompanied by ignorance of the particular. Thus, one in this situation will know and not know the same thing at the same time, in difference senses. This idea, I call the principle of “universal knowledge of particulars”:

UKP: knowledge of a universal entails universal knowledge of the particular falling under it.

Now, to speak of knowing a particular might be ambiguous between knowing a particular object or knowing a particular proposition. Do we know of this particular triangle, C, that it has 2R, or do we know the proposition “C has 2R,” or perhaps both? Aristotle does not explicitly discuss the distinction or connection between the two kinds of knowledge in these passages, and it is possible that he is simply not sensitive to this distinction. However, as far as I can tell, Aristotle is primarily talking about knowledge of objects. Unqualified/particular knowledge appears to be things like knowing that this particular mule is sterile or that this shape here is a triangle and that it has 2R.<sup>12</sup> Further, particular knowledge is described as the kind of knowledge that is “proper” to particulars<sup>13</sup>, making it natural to think that universal knowledge disagrees with particular/unqualified knowledge not in *content* so much as in manner or kind of knowledge. So, at first pass, the Distinction looks like it distinguishes two ways of knowing things about particular objects such as individual sensible triangles and mules.

There is, however, one notable place where Aristotle appears to treat the Distinction as applying to (distinguishing two ways of knowing) not a particular thing but the *universal*: “knowing that every triangle has its angles equal to two right angles is not simple – it may obtain by having universal knowledge or by particular”.<sup>14</sup> What could it mean to know a universal by particular knowledge, the kind of knowledge “proper” to particulars? A clue might

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<sup>11</sup> Aristotle’s use of the term *episteme haplos* to describe knowledge of particulars has raised some questions (Gifford 2000, 171; see LaBarge 2004, 210-213 for response) but I cannot pursue them here.

<sup>12</sup> 67a20; 67a36.

<sup>13</sup> 67a27; 67b5.

<sup>14</sup> 67a17.

be found in Aristotle's rejection of an alternate solution at 71a31-71b5. Some people, Aristotle reports, denied that you genuinely know that *every* pair is even, but only those pairs of which you already knew, citing as apparent proof pairs which you hadn't previously considered, and therefore allegedly didn't know were even. To this Aristotle responds that we know universals by demonstrations applying to every triangle or number *simpliciter*, not only ones we know of.

The presupposition underlying the rejected argument seems to be that properly knowing a universal requires knowing every particular falling under that universal, meaning that ignorance of a single pair defeats your claim to know that all pairs are even. Perhaps this is what it means to know a universal by particular knowledge. One knows a universal by particular knowledge only if one knows every particular that falls under it. For example, I know that Biden is male, I know that Trump is male, and so on, where each of these is a particular piece of knowledge about a particular individual. In this way I might in a sense know the claim that every president is a man, without knowing any general universal relationship holding between "president" and "man". In this sense, my knowledge is not properly universal but "*de re*"<sup>15</sup>, constituted by and reducible to a plurality of pieces of particular knowledge.

Particular knowledge of the universal is, on this reading, contrasted with universal knowledge of universals, which is presumably much closer to a more natural sense of knowledge of universals, whereby they are known as relations between concepts or something similar. I think that what is important for Aristotle is that universal knowledge, unlike particular knowledge, does not require knowing each particular that falls under that universal.

So, we have two ways of understanding the Distinction between universal and particular knowledge, one on which it applies to the universal, and one on which it applies to the particular falling under a universal. Which is right? There does not appear to be an explicit debate on this point in the literature, although one finds both sides represented. Fine and Bronstein<sup>16</sup>, for instance, appear to assume that universal knowledge primarily concerns the particular; Charles and LaBarge seem to presume that it applies to the universal;<sup>17</sup> and Barnes appears to read Aristotle as inconsistent<sup>18</sup>, first proposing the Distinction as applying to universals, but then failing to follow the line of thought, and switching to discussion of it as applying to the conclusion.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Borrowing an imperfect term from Ferejohn 1988, 103.

<sup>16</sup> Fine 2014, 201-3; Bronstein D., *Aristotle on Knowledge and Learning*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 26.

<sup>17</sup> LaBarge 2004, 181; Charles 2010, 132-3.

<sup>18</sup> Barnes J., *Posterior Analytics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, 88.

<sup>19</sup> Barnes 1993, 88.

However, there is no need to assume that the Distinction applies to either the universal or the particular at the exclusion of the other. For if universal and particular knowledge are different *ways* of knowing something, not necessarily requiring different *contents*, then it is natural to assume that both universals and particulars could in principle be known with both kinds of knowledge. It is relatively easy to see how this could work. Particular knowledge of a *de re* universal entails particular knowledge of the particulars. Therefore, universal knowledge of the particulars requires genuinely universal knowledge of the universal. However, it is still possible that Aristotle intended the Distinction to apply *primarily* to either the universal or the particular. This might only be a matter of emphasis, but even such emphases can be important in shedding light on Aristotle's understanding of the *Meno*. Both options, I believe, can undergird a plausible story as to how the Distinction is supposed to respond to the *Meno*, and I believe that these two stories converge on a common theme regarding the underlying problem they see Aristotle as addressing. Thus, I will not here attempt to settle whether the Distinction applies (exclusively or primarily) to the universal or the particular. Instead, I consider each option in turn.

### III. *If the Distinction applies to particulars*

If universal and particular knowledge are (primarily) ways of knowing a particular, then it would appear that Aristotle's emphasis is on *affirming* that there is a sense in which we *do* already know the particular when we only have the universal. This would indicate that Aristotle accepts (a perhaps qualified version of) horn B of the original dilemma while rejecting A. You cannot learn that which you *unqualifiedly* do not already know, but this is unproblematic since you do in a sense already know what you are learning; you know it by universal knowledge. You *can* however learn what you already know, so long as you only know it by universal knowledge.

Now, this picture commits us to thinking that the kind of learning in question does not produce knowledge that is new in *content*, only in *kind*. You already knew (by universal knowledge) that C has 2R, and when you learn that C has 2R, you are really just making explicit the knowledge which you already implicitly possessed, progressing it from universal to particular knowledge. One may think this problematic, and though I can think of various ways one might respond, I shall not pursue the point since I think there is a much more important problem with this view: namely, that it has Aristotle reject the much more reasonable horn A and accept the less plausible horn B.

Socrates' reasoning for A is, "for since he knows it there is no need of the inquiry".<sup>20</sup> This appears eminently reasonable, and Aristotle in places signals agreement with this.<sup>21</sup> The reason given for B, by contrast, is that one who does not know the conclusion of the inquiry "does not even know what he is to look for".<sup>22</sup> There is perhaps a shred of reasoning here, but one that is very specific to inquiry *per se*. The point seems to be that one cannot design a program of inquiry unless one knows something about the hoped-for conclusion of that inquiry. Yet this sort of reason plainly does not apply to the kind of learning with which Aristotle is concerned. Aristotle's examples describe a would-be learner starting with ignorance of a particular, who then learns about that particular as soon as he recognizes it as an instance of a kind about which he knows a universal. This kind of learning can presumably happen at random as and when one recognizes things as falling under universals, and does not require any intentional program of inquiry.

Why, then, would Aristotle accept the less reasonable horn of the dilemma, even in a qualified version, while rejecting the much more palatable horn? He must, on this view, think that there is some truth to B preventing him from denying it outright, and whatever grain of truth there is in B must be part of the picture of genuine difficulty that Aristotle sees as underlying Meno's paradox. Thus, specifying his reasons for accepting (his more palatable form of) B is of great importance in saying what Aristotle's basic understanding of the problem of the *Meno* is.

Indeed, failure to adequately specify Aristotle's reasons for accepting his qualified B is plausibly the biggest gap in the literature. Fine and Bronstein, for instance, both see Aristotle as committed to his version of B because of his endorsement of UKP. Fine interprets Aristotle as seeing in the *Meno* the genuine point that all learning requires some level of prior cognition.<sup>23</sup> Yet, she notes, drawing on Barnes<sup>24</sup>, that Aristotle's explicit reply appears to presuppose a "matching" prior-cognition requirement<sup>25</sup>, that we must have prior cognition *of the thing we are learning itself*, and it is not clear why we would need a matching requirement. Likewise, Bronstein identifies the original error of the *Meno* as treating knowledge in an all-or-nothing kind of way.<sup>26</sup> To this, Bronstein interprets Aristotle as responding by defining

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<sup>20</sup> 80e.

<sup>21</sup> C.f. *EN* Vi.9 "men do not inquire about the things they know about". 1142b1.

<sup>22</sup> 80e.

<sup>23</sup> Fine 2014, 191.

<sup>24</sup> Barnes 1993, 87.

<sup>25</sup> Fine 2014, 209.

<sup>26</sup> Bronstein 2016, 13.

universal knowledge as a kind of intermediate in between full unqualified knowledge and a total cognitive blank<sup>27</sup>, a kind of knowledge sufficient to facilitate learning and consistent with its content being learned.

Yet, again, we are left in want of a satisfactory explanation why being even in a total cognitive blank about a *conclusion* should prevent us from learning it. Indeed, Aristotle seems to quite explicitly state that to learn from deduction, one need merely know the premises.<sup>28</sup> It is therefore hard to see what would prevent someone who knew (1) and also:

(2) C is a triangle.

From deducing the conclusion:

(3) C has 2R.

Now, part of the problem here might be our ability to know (2), and we will have to talk about this in due time, but it is not immediately obvious how that could help motivate the Distinction. For, either way, it would remain far more natural to say that in order to know (3), we need to know (1) and (2). Why do we specifically already need to know (3)?

Fine and Bronstein both offer a suggestion whereby they see Aristotle as committed to saying that we must in some sense fore-cognize the to-be-learned conclusion precisely *because* learning it requires knowing the premises from which it follows, which *by UKP* entails that we in a sense already have knowledge of the conclusion.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps, that is, knowledge of (1) (or of (1) and (2) together) somehow constitutes universal knowledge of (3). We might then think that, since learning (3) requires knowing the premises, and since the premises constitute universal knowledge of (3), we can only make the deduction once we already possess universal knowledge of (3). However, this suggestion renders UKP logically upstream of Aristotle's acceptance of B, making it a solution to a problem that it creates in the first place. Denying UKP would remove both problem and solution and presumably leave us with a much more natural picture of learning-by-deduction whereby *new* information is learned by deduction from the premises.

It is perhaps possible that Aristotle is dialectically engaging with those who have some primitive intuitive sense that knowledge of the universal entails knowledge of the conclusion. Perhaps, that is, UKP is designed to capture this intuition by explaining in what sense it might

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<sup>27</sup> Bronstein 2016, 13.

<sup>28</sup> 71a6.

<sup>29</sup> Fine 2014, 209; Bronstein 2016, 27.

be true to say that knowledge of the universal entails knowledge of the particular. However, as Barnes notes, Aristotle gives no explanation why knowledge of the universal would even *seem* to entail knowledge of the conclusion, and his attempt to show in what sense it does “foists an entirely unnatural sense upon it”.<sup>30</sup>

The unnaturalness of UKP has notably been challenged by Morison, who gives an example of a girl, Angela, who knows she should not eat cookies, but is unaware that her parents have just baked some. Morison says that it would actually be more natural than not to answer affirmatively when asked whether Angela knows that she ought not to eat *these* cookies.<sup>31</sup> However, I doubt that such an affirmation is actually attributing *knowledge* in any real sense to Angela, so much as conveying an expectation that if/when she sees the cookies, she will know not to eat them. As evidence of this, consider that the sense of naturalness of this answer seems to depend on an expectation or possibility that she will at some point encounter the cookies. If I were to ask of some cookies that I know she will never encounter, whether she knows not to eat them, the question would seem strange.

On the whole, I think Barnes is right to point out how unnatural it is to think that someone who knows a universal thereby has genuine knowledge of all the particulars falling under that universal, even if only implicitly. For instance, if I know that all atoms are made of protons, and there are  $10^{80}$  atoms, do I implicitly know  $10^{80}$  things? Given, then, how counterintuitive UKP seems, we should hope and expect to see Aristotle’s adoption of it as motivated by some real philosophical problem.

There must therefore be some deeper reason why Aristotle thinks it necessary to affirm that there is a sense in which we do already know the particular when we only have the universal, some reason why learning about the particular by applying a universal would be impossible if it weren’t for the fact that the universal in some sense already carries knowledge about that particular.

This much might be confirmed by reflecting on what kind of knowledge universal knowledge of a particular is meant to be. There appears to be a scholarly consensus that it is knowledge in potency. There is good reason for this consensus. The *APr* passage contrasts universal knowledge with “knowledge actualized” (*energeia*), for instance, and the idea is affirmed explicitly in the *APo* 1.24 discussion of demonstrations:

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<sup>30</sup> Barnes 1993, 88.

<sup>31</sup> Morison 2012, 38.



in grasping the prior of the propositions we in a sense know the posterior too, i.e., we grasp it potentially. E.g., if you know that every triangle has two right angles, you know in a sense of the isosceles too that it has two right angles - you know it potentially -, even if you do not know of the isosceles that it is a triangle.<sup>32</sup>

W.D. Ross briefly suggests without explanation that this idea, that knowledge of the universal is knowledge in potentiality of the particular, could be a possible solution to the *Meno* paradox.<sup>33</sup> This suggestion seems to me to have some merit, and I think this could be supported by comparison with Aristotle's somewhat parallel discussion of potential and actual knowledge in *Met* M.10:

Knowledge, like knowing, is of two kinds, one potential, one actual. Potentiality, being (as matter) universal and indefinite, is of what is universal and indefinite, but actuality, being definite, is of something definite, and being individual, is of an individual.<sup>34</sup>

This passage is notoriously difficult, and while I cannot here offer a full exegesis, I wish to make a couple of simple points about it. Aristotle here addresses a puzzle arising from the universality of knowledge. If the principles of things are knowable, and knowledge is of what is universal, then the principles must be universal. But "if principles must be universal, so must what comes from them be universal, just as in proofs", and so nothing will ever be real. His solution is to qualify the claim that knowledge is of what is universal by saying that knowledge of individuals is the actuality of knowledge of universals. But then this requires that knowledge of universals is potential knowledge of particulars.

Now, Aristotle is arguably primarily concerned here with the metaphysical constitution of substances, but his reference to proofs does make it look like there is an epistemic version of his worry that only universals can come from universals, which in turn raises a worry over the possibility of deriving knowledge of particulars from universals. Perhaps, then, the claim that knowledge of the universal implicitly contains (as knowledge-in-potency) knowledge of the particular is supposed to help bridge the gap between knowledge of universals to knowledge of particulars.

Indeed, if the ultimate problem that Aristotle sees as underlying (his version of) *Meno*'s paradox is a problem about our ability to derive knowledge of particulars from knowledge of universals, such that it can only be done if our knowledge of the universal somehow contained implicit knowledge of the particular, then it would become clear why the Distinction is

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<sup>32</sup> 86a23-27.

<sup>33</sup> Ross 1949, 506.

<sup>34</sup> 1087a14-19.

necessary to prevent the paradox from arising. For without the Distinction, we would presumably think that unqualified/particular knowledge is the only kind of knowledge of particulars on the table. If, then, knowledge of the universal has to somehow contain knowledge of the particular, and particular/unqualified knowledge was the only kind of knowledge available, then we would already know the particular unqualifiedly and so could not learn it.

#### IV. *If the Distinction applies to universals*

If we suppose that the Distinction applies primarily to the universal, then Aristotle would seem to be distinguishing “*de re*” knowledge of the universal – which entails unqualified/particular knowledge of all the particulars falling under it – from “universal” knowledge, which does not. It would then be natural to take Aristotle, with LaBarge and Charles, as denying that all knowledge of universals must be *de re* in this sense and thereby *denying* that knowledge of the universal entails unqualified knowledge of all particulars falling under it.<sup>35</sup>

If the alternative to the Distinction is the worry that all apparently-universal knowledge must be *de re* (hereon, the “*de-re*-universals view”), then it is clear why denying it would land learning-by-deduction in trouble. For, as LaBarge notes, if we have *de re* knowledge of a universal, then we would already know everything that could be learned from it.<sup>36</sup> This would be to read Aristotle as denying B while accepting a version of A, that one cannot learn something if one already *unqualifiedly* knows it.

Indeed, as Charles notes, we could even plausibly see something like the theory of recollection as following from the *de-re*-universals view.<sup>37</sup> For, in order to learn a particular by applying a *de re* universal, knowledge of that particular must have already been known as part of the *de re* universal, and we must be simply recollecting it. Given, then, that we can apparently learn about any particular from a universal, we must have some kind of complete knowledge of every particular stored in the soul, waiting to be recollected.

However, as with the first reading, there appears to be something missing from this picture of the philosophical problem to which Aristotle is responding. Aristotle cannot be taken as simply and straightforwardly responding to the worry that all apparently-universal knowledge is really *de re*, he must be addressing some deeper problem motivating this worry.

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<sup>35</sup> LaBarge 2004, 188; Charles 2010, 132-3.

<sup>36</sup> LaBarge 2004, 210.

<sup>37</sup> Charles 2010, 133.

There are a number of indications that this is the case. For one thing, while the *de-re*-universals view certainly would create problems for the possibility of learning-by-deduction, it is hard to see how this problem relates to the problem in the *Meno*. This is noted by LaBarge, who concludes, with evident regret, that Aristotle is “willfully taking Meno’s paradox out of context and ignoring the serious threat to the possibility of knowing universals which Plato’s version of the paradox represents”.<sup>38</sup>

Second, we noted that UKP seemed to be the most counterintuitive and philosophically interesting part of Aristotle’s response to the *Meno*, but this interpretation seems to render it almost entirely superfluous. Against the *de-re*-universals view, Aristotle’s denial that knowledge of the universal entails knowledge of the particulars falling under it would appear to be loadbearing. But this denial is, as Barnes notes<sup>39</sup>, rather obvious, and we do not need UKP to see its truth. Thus, his Distinction and UKP seem to concede rather too much to the objection. Aristotle, for instance, illustrates UKP with examples whereby one knows a universal while being ignorant of a particular falling under it, but the very possibility of such an example immediately defeats the position to which he is by hypothesis responding.

Third, as Gifford points out<sup>40</sup>, Aristotle on this view would need to provide evidence for the possibility of genuinely universal knowledge as he has described it, but instead he appears to just assume it possible. This would render his work question-begging if it is taken as intended to show the *de-re*-universals view false.

The only defence I can see against the last two problems would be to claim that Aristotle means to defeat the *de-re*-universals view by showing how, with UKP and his Distinction, he can capture whatever intuition underlies the temptation to think that all universals must be known *de re*.

Yet, again, absent some deeper philosophical problem motivating the *de-re*-universals view, it is hard to see why we should take the intuitions behind it so seriously as to propose such a counterintuitive idea as UKP in order to capture them. In order to think that without the Distinction we would be left with the *de-re*-universals view, we have to presuppose that a more natural picture, whereby we learn particulars by deduction from genuinely universal universals, cannot be assumed as a viable option. And whatever the problem with this picture is supposed to be, it cannot be a problem about the possibility of genuinely universal knowledge, since as we saw Aristotle just assumes such knowledge possible.

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<sup>38</sup> LaBarge 2004, 201.

<sup>39</sup> Barnes 1993, 88.

<sup>40</sup> Gifford 1999, 15.

The most plausible explanation would again seem to be that there is an issue over inferring knowledge of particulars from knowledge of universals in the background. For all the faults of the *de-re*-universals view, it is at least clear how we could infer knowledge of particulars from knowledge of a *de re* universal – that knowledge is simply contained within the universal. And again, the most plausible reason I can see for worrying that universals must be *de re* is if one *already* thought that deducing knowledge of a particular from knowledge of a universal required the deduced knowledge to somehow already be present in the deduced-from knowledge. Then, given that we can know apparently any particular falling under a universal by immediate deduction, we will naturally think that our knowledge of the universal must contain knowledge of all particulars falling under it, and if one did not have the Distinction, it would be natural to assume that it must contain particular/unqualified knowledge of all those particulars.

#### V. *Why is there a problem?*

Let us summarize what we have said so far. If we take the Distinction as applying primarily to the particular, then it would appear that Aristotle's emphasis would be on affirming that knowledge of the universal entails a certain sense of implicit knowledge of the particular falling under it. The fact that he sees this affirmation as necessary to avoid Meno's Paradox would seem to suggest that he sees some kind of difficulty in a more natural picture of deduction, such that if knowledge of the universal did not in some sense contain knowledge of the particular, then we could not derive knowledge of particulars from knowledge of universals.

If, on the other hand, the Distinction applies primarily to the universal, then Aristotle's emphasis would be on denying that knowledge of universals must be *de re*. Yet, again, there must be some deeper worry motivating the threat of the *de-re*-universals view, and the most plausible candidate for such a worry is again a concern about how we could derive knowledge of particulars from knowledge of universals, where again the driving thought of that worry seems to be the idea that knowledge of the universal must somehow contain knowledge of the particulars, and the Distinction illuminates a benign way for this to work.

On both accounts, then, the primary philosophical problem that Aristotle sees as possibly threatening a *Meno*-style paradox appears to be a worry about our ability to derive knowledge of particulars from knowledge of universals, whereby it seems that such derivations require knowledge of a universal to somehow contain knowledge of the particulars. The solution, then, is to deny that knowledge of universals entails unqualified/particular knowledge

of particulars, and to define a middle-ground kind of knowledge – universal knowledge – by which the particulars are implicitly contained in the universal, a kind consistent with their being learned.

This allows us to see the two emphases we identified earlier not as separate interpretations of a single response, but perhaps rather as two dimensions of the response to a single basic problem. This would in turn allow us to see Aristotle not as rejecting one horn of Socrates' dilemma while accepting the other, but as steering a path between both, rejecting both horns as stated, but accepting qualified versions of both which, with their due qualifications, do not jeopardize learning. This further explains why it might *seem* that knowledge of the universal has to entail knowledge of the particular, and allows us to dignify Aristotle's claim that without his Distinction, the paradox of the *Meno* results. Without the Distinction, the universal would have to entail either unqualified knowledge of the particular, in which case we will learn what we already know, or else no knowledge of the particular, in which case we cannot learn it from the universal.

Yet, we might still wonder why Aristotle would think that the universal needs to implicitly contain the particulars in this sense. One possibility was already touched upon in our discussion of *Met* M.10, whereby we proposed that Aristotle sees an epistemic gap between universals and particulars, where the idea that knowledge of universals is knowledge-in-potency of particulars is perhaps needed to help bridge the gap. A related suggestion might be that it could have something to do with the distinction between knowledge of propositions and knowledge of particular items, where perhaps UKP is supposed to help clarify how we move from universal propositional knowledge to knowledge of concrete particulars.<sup>41</sup>

However, these suggestions are speculative, and I think a more concrete clue could be found in the discussion of a phenomenon known as “simultaneous learning” that immediately precedes the *APo* 1.1 discussion of the Distinction. Simultaneous learning appears to be something of an exception to the rule, introduced at the beginning of *APo* 1.1, that “all teaching and all intellectual learning come about from already existing knowledge”.<sup>42</sup> It happens when we recognize something as falling under a universal. In Aristotle's example, we already knew (1), but we learn (3) simultaneously with (2) when we realize that this is a triangle. This idea

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<sup>41</sup> Note that these two suggestions, which I do not explore further, are not inconsistent with the suggestion in my ensuing discussion of simultaneous learning. It is possible that there are multiple problems with deriving particulars from universals, or that one of these problems grounds another.

<sup>42</sup> 71a1.

is also referenced in the *APr* 2.21 passage, in a way that strongly indicates that Aristotle sees it as relevant to his solution to the *Meno*:

The argument in the *Meno* that learning is recollection may be criticised in a similar way. For it never happens that a man has foreknowledge of the particular, but in the process of induction he receives a knowledge of the particulars, as though by an act of recognition. For we know some things directly; e.g. that the angles are equal to two right angles, if we see that the figure is a triangle. Similarly in all other cases.<sup>43</sup>

What could simultaneous learning have to do with the *Meno* paradox? We earlier stated that there must be some reason why (3) cannot be straightforwardly deduced from (1) and (2), and the discussion of simultaneous learning provides an answer. For, Aristotle specifically denies that we learn conclusions like (3) through such deductions, “the last term does not become familiar through the middle”.<sup>44</sup> The point seems to be that we don’t already know (2) when we come to learn (3), we learn it simultaneously with (3), and so we can’t have deduced (3) from (2) with (1).

From here, the idea that knowledge of the universal must contain knowledge of the particular starts to look understandable. For, the learner learns (3) when he previously only knew (1) and apparently did not learn anything new, making it plausible to assume that his knowledge of (3) must have been somehow implicit in (1). I believe that this is also the grounds of the commonality between Aristotle’s example and that in the *Meno*. In the *Meno*, Socrates and Meno marvel at the slave boy’s ability to learn a conclusion which he did not consciously already know, and which he had apparently not been taught. They conclude that the knowledge must have come from within him, and “the spontaneous recovery of knowledge that is in him is recollection”.<sup>45</sup> In like manner, we may wonder where Aristotle’s learner gets his knowledge about C from, which he apparently also spontaneously acquires “as though by an act of recognition”<sup>46</sup>, and we might also conclude that it must have in some sense come from within him. We naturally need to specify a sense of “within” that does not preclude such knowledge being learned. For Socrates, this sense is that the knowledge is latent and innate; for Aristotle, I suggest, the knowledge is within in the sense of being implicit in what is already known, as universal knowledge or as potentiality. To know something by universal knowledge or in

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<sup>43</sup> 67a21-26.

<sup>44</sup> 71a23.

<sup>45</sup> 85c-d.

<sup>46</sup> 67a24.

potentiality is consistent with learning it, as Aristotle repeatedly emphasizes, since the act of learning is simply that whereby it is actualized and made particular.

#### VI. *The scope of the problem.*

One difficulty with this view is that it sees Aristotle as responding to a rather narrow problem of applying universals to particulars, when both the original paradox in the *Meno* and Aristotle's reformulation of it at 71a29 look like they refer more broadly to all inquiry or learning. It is of course possible that this just is the scope of the problem Aristotle sees in the *Meno*, and that the 71a29 reference to learning is supposed to be taken as implicitly qualified by context.

However, it is also possible that this is a particular instance of a more general problem. The requirement that the conclusion of a deduction must be implicit in the premises appears at least in principle universalizable to all deductions. It is relatively straightforward to see how this could work. The above-quoted *APo* 1.24 claim that premises contain potential knowledge of conclusions appears to apply broadly to all deductions. And even when we have both a major and a minor premise, we still need to put the two together to get new knowledge.<sup>47</sup> Again, it will be perfectly reasonable to wonder where this new knowledge came from and to conclude that it must have come from 'within' in some sense that is consistent with its being learned, namely, it was already held as potential in the premises.

Perhaps, then, Aristotle's focus on the case of particulars falling under a universal is meant to be primarily explanatory or a matter of emphasis rather than exhaustive of the problem. For instance, perhaps Aristotle thinks that the question of how particulars can be implicit in the universal is more obscure than the question of how one universal can be implicit in another. Alternatively, perhaps the focus is on knowledge of particulars because, as he says in *Met* M.10 and *APr* 2.21<sup>48</sup>, such knowledge is the most actual, and therefore presumably most real, kind of knowledge. If, on this reading, such knowledge is in jeopardy, then perhaps all knowledge is.

Either way, the paradox that is supposed to result from denying the Distinction bears more than a passing resemblance to the paradox in the *Meno*. I therefore think that this idea of a problem about deriving particulars from universals, or conclusions from premises more

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<sup>47</sup> 67a36.

<sup>48</sup> 67b5, 1087a14-19.

generally, is a promising candidate for the problem Aristotle ultimately sees as underlying the paradox of the *Meno*.

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