

dent likely to conceive a passion for philosophical thinking by watching it. It's soft-core, quite obviously not the real thing. Even the historical interest of the series is limited. Oxford Philosophy is not the rage any more: its distinctive features have been merged into the main stream, and Oxford itself is not the philosophical storm center it once was, at least not in this country.

Some middle-aged philosophers, this reviewer among them, found watching this film enjoyable. We were graduate students during the Oxford heyday, and we took part in some of the battles that ensued when it began to take hold on these shores. The film took us back, and we found it agreeable to watch some of the giants of our industry in action again, even going through the motions. But neither our younger colleagues nor our students found much to divert them. Not having seen the whole series, I cannot speak about it. But I could not in conscience recommend this film for any serious *pedagogical* purpose.

—Vere Chappell

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\*Other parts of this series were reviewed by Harvey Mullane and Michael Scriven in *Teaching Philosophy* 1:1 (Editor).

*Plato's Cave*. 1974. 20 min. color 16 mm. film. Pyramid Films. Rental \$25, Sale \$275. Recommended by the producer for junior high, high school, college, and adult audiences.

*Plato's Cave* is a dramatization of the allegory of the cave from Book VII of *The Republic*. The film opens with prisoners chained in a cave faithfully reproduced to Plato's specifications. They sit watching images cast upon a wall by a flame illuminating demonic figures behind them. One individual, the philosopher, is released from his bonds, and reluctantly emerges from the cave to behold the sun. Frightened at first, he gradually engages in ten minutes of exquisitely photographed sensory exploration of flowers, mountains, waterfalls, and other beauties of nature. Finally he returns to the cave, confident from his new knowledge of the

outside world, and tries to persuade the other prisoners to leave the cave. They become terrified and beat him to death with their chains.

The film is done largely in mime, with no speaking and exaggerated gestures. This gives it a certain universality, but it can appear ludicrous to an unprepared audience. (e.g., A screening before forty college freshmen produced spontaneous laughter throughout the film. A second group warned to expect mime responded seriously and favorably to the film.)

*Plato's Cave* is a visually beautiful film with quality photography, including imaginative laser imagery used to suggest underlying forms and future possibilities envisioned by the philosopher studying the world of appearances. It would be easily understandable to a junior high school student. For maximum satisfaction with college age audiences, however, I believe fundamental simplicity needs to be pregnant with deeper meanings so that a film is adequately instructional as well as entertaining. In this respect, *Plato's Cave* is a bit one-dimensional.

The body of the film is dedicated to sensory explorations of every variety. This is entertaining to watch but not particularly stimulating to the mind and somewhat misleading. It gives the impression that Plato, the great rationalist dialectician, was really a hedonist praising the delights of the senses or perhaps a Zen devotee basking in the immediate experiences of the moment. To an extent, the visual success of *Plato's Cave* is the reason for its conceptual failure. Often the film seems in conflict with the spirit of *The Republic* expressed in passages such as this:

Our own account signifies that the soul of every man does possess the power of learning the truth and the organ to see it with; and that, just as one might have to turn the whole body round in order that the eye should see light instead of darkness, so the entire soul must be turned away from this changing world, until its eye can bear to contemplate reality and that supreme splendour which we have called the Good.

The film seems to me a new and useful medium for introducing Plato to younger audiences. For college students, howev-

er, it does not supersede other quality films on the Socratic-Platonic philosophy, such as the newer *Trial of Socrates* and the old but good *Death of Socrates*.

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## Correspondence

### *Teaching the Meno*

I was delighted to see Robert Brumbaugh's proposal, with comments (*Teaching Philosophy* 1:2, pp. 107-124), that Plato's *Meno* might be suitable for use in secondary schools as I have enjoyed using the *Meno* for eight years in a high school Humanities course.

But the successful use of the *Meno* in secondary schools depends on a number of conditions. Unlike some works, Hesse's *Siddhartha*, for example, the *Meno* is neither automatically appealing nor particularly fashionable with high school students. A proper edition for high school use, as Brumbaugh recommends, would help both teacher and students. But more helpful is a commitment of the teacher to the form-content issue as Brumbaugh describes it and the realization of this commitment in classroom practice. I can imagine teachers agreeing with Brumbaugh that an understanding of the form of the dialogue is essential to any understanding of the content and still encouraging their students to look primarily for *what* Plato says in the *Meno*. Teachers may need more specific suggestions for using the *Meno*, and I would like to respond to this with a description of an approach that I have found both exciting and successful.

One day last year, the students in my class spent about twenty minutes making up words to describe what Socrates is doing in the *Meno* if he is *not* "teaching." One student pointed out that we could simply remind ourselves that the word, "teaching," can be used in different ways, but the rest of the class continued to work on a long list of new words. The winning word, after a final contest, was "inquirify."

The lesson was a delight, not just because students always enjoy inventing and arguing about words, but also because the students had caught the spirit of the book, and they knew it. They had recognized that the *Meno* is a display of the very process that is its subject. Socrates "inquirifies" Meno, showing him the technique of inquiry and demonstrating its value in the lesson with the slave boy. Plato "inquirifies" us, as we observe the lesson with Meno. Meno is given the tools with which to question his assumptions; we are given the tools with which to question the dialogue itself, especially the apparently inconclusive ending. It is easy to assume that nothing has happened in the dialogue; Socrates even seems to say so. The boy and Meno, too, begin with easy assumptions and then must admit that they are perplexed. The boy goes on to a third stage, remedying his ignorance, and we hope that Meno, and we ourselves, will do so as well.

There are hints within the dialogue that Meno is changing. Brumbaugh describes Meno as becoming more virtuous. And there may be suggestions that he is learning to inquire (96d to 97a). My students, too, change as they share their questions about the book. Perhaps they become more virtuous; certainly they become better inquirers. Sometimes, after an initial discussion of the book, I write on the board, "The *Meno* doesn't get anywhere," and ask them to question that statement in as many ways as they can. Some of them admit to having thought just that, and I admit to having thought so, too, the first time I read it. They are relieved to hear this, and then they can go on to discover why such an assumption may be too simple.

Because the *Meno* is indirect, because Plato refuses to *tell* us things except when he has Socrates say, ". . . we shall be better and braver and less helpless if we think that we ought to inquire . . ." the reader's sense of discovery is increased. Brumbaugh has described the "elegant surprise" in store for the reader who persists, and my students are delighted when they catch on, especially if they feel they have done it for themselves by working