

STUDY QUESTIONS: KNOWLEDGE ANCIENT AND MODERN

1] Schleiermacher wrote: A...it is here in Plato=s philosophy that form and content are inseparable.@ The dialogue, he argued, forms a whole, a complete pattern, and the parts cannot be properly understood out of context, and without understanding of the pattern of the whole. The choice of Plato to present his philosophy in the form of a story or play has something to do with the Greek conception of knowledge. The truth about our relationship to this kosmos cannot be told adequately as a series of proofs, or in the form of a treatise [Aristotle, as well, presented all of his polished work in the form of dialogues. What we have of Aristotle is only his lecture notes]. What does it say about Plato=s understanding of knowledge that he chooses this style of presentation [note also that today no >philosopher= could get a dialogue published in any journal addressed to other philosophers- what does this say about our change of attitude?].

2] What is knowledge in the dialogue *Meno*? You can think about this both from the perspective of what is said in the dialogue, and what happens in the dialogue. There may be competing answers.

3] Why is a mathematical example chosen to illustrate the *supposed* theory of knowledge Socrates is expounding? Why this *particular* mathematical example?

4] Why is this particular mathematical example chosen to illustrate our pursuit of knowledge of *arête* [virtue, human excellence]

4] Socrates asks if we can know whether Meno is handsome or well born if we are entirely ignorant of who he is. Is this a good analogy for our position with respect to human excellence?

3] Consider these quotes from some of the founders of modernity, and put them together to form a theory [or, if more than one is implied, theories] of knowledge. How does the modern understanding of knowledge, gleaned from these quotes, contrast with the ancient, exemplified in *Meno*.

a] Knowledge and human power are synonymous. Francis Bacon

b] The Great End of life is not Knowledge but Action. Francis Bacon

c] Science is the knowledge of consequences, and dependence of one fact upon another. Thomas Hobbes

d] No man's knowledge here can go beyond his experience. John Locke

e] The only fence against the world is a thorough knowledge of it. John Locke

f] Man is the helper and interpreter of nature. He can only act and understand in so far as by working upon her or observing her he has come to perceive her order. Beyond this he has neither knowledge nor power. For there is no strength that can break the causal chain: Nature cannot be conquered but by obeying her. Accordingly those twin goals, human science and human power, come in the end to one. To be ignorant of causes is to be frustrated in action. Francis Bacon.

Lastly, I would address one general admonition to all; that they consider what are the true ends of knowledge, and that they seek it not either for pleasure of the mind, or for contention, or for superiority to others, or for profit, or fame, or power, or any of these inferior things; but for the benefit and use of Life; and that they perfect and govern it in charity. – Francis Bacon *The Great Instauration* [General Preface]

g] Human knowledge and human power meet in one; for where the cause is not known the effect cannot be produced. Nature to be commanded must be obeyed; and that which in contemplation is as the cause is in operation as the rule. Francis Bacon *Novum Organon*

h] Knowledge is the image of existence. Francis Bacon *Novum Organon*

i] On a given body, to generate and superinduce a new nature or new natures is the work and aim of human power. Of a given nature to discover the form, or true specific difference, or nature-engendering nature, or source of emanation (for these are the terms which come nearest to a description of the thing), is the work and aim of human knowledge. Francis Bacon *Novum Organon*

j] True knowledge is knowledge by causes." Francis Bacon *Novum Organon*

k] Roads to human power and to human knowledge lie close together and are nearly the same. Francis Bacon *Novum Organon*

l] For it was not that pure and uncorrupted natural knowledge whereby Adam gave names to the creatures according to their propriety, which, gave occasion to the fall. It was the ambitious and proud desire of moral knowledge to judge of good and evil...which was the form and manner of the temptation... For it was from lust of power that the angels fell, from lust of knowledge that man fell" Francis Bacon. *The Great Instauration*

m] For man is but the servant and interpreter of nature: what he does and what he knows is only what he has observed of nature's order in fact or in thought; beyond this he knows nothing and can do nothing. For the chain of causes cannot by any force be loosed or broken, nor can nature be commanded except by being obeyed. And so those twin objects, human knowledge and human power, do really meet in one; and it is from ignorance of causes that operation fails. Francis Bacon *The Great Instauration*

n] The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible. Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis*.