

MENO

By Plato

Translated by Lee Perlman

The bold numbers and letters are universal ‘stephanus’ page numbers, which provide a common reference between different translations

PERSONS OF THE DIALOGUE: Meno, Socrates, A Slave of Meno (Boy), Anytus.

70 MENO: Can you tell me¹, Socrates, whether *aretê* is something that can be taught; or if not through teaching, through practice, or if neither by practice nor through learning, does it accrue to humans by nature, or in some other way?

SOCRATES: Meno, the Thessalians used to be held in high repute and marveled **B** at among the Greeks for their horsemanship and their riches, but now, it seems to me, also for wisdom, not least the citizens of Larissa, the city of your companion Aristippus. The cause of this is Gorgias. For he came to the city and made the foremost of the Aleuadae lovers of his wisdom, among them your lover² Aristippus, as well as the other Thessalians. And he accustomed you to the habit **C** of answering any question asked of you fearlessly and magnificently, exactly like those who know; just as he himself stands ready for any question a Greek wishes to ask, and never fails to answer. But in this region, dear Meno, the opposite has come to pass. There

¹ *Exeis moi epein* means literally ‘Do you have it to tell me?’ There is some reason to think that Plato played with the conventions of the epic tradition, in which the first word set the theme for the entire poem. Here, this would suggest that the question of whether knowledge is a kind of ‘having’ or possession is central to the Meno. The question certainly comes up in Plato’s other dialogue that explicitly concerns knowledge. See *Theaetetus* xxx in the stranger’s debunking of the model of seeking knowledge as hunting birds in a bird cage. Certainly there the question is what it means to ‘have’ knowledge. The phrase could also mean something like “Tell me, if you have it in you...” That is, it could have a challenging tone. See Klein pg. 40

² Notice here the connection between Larissa and lovers. This theme will be revisited later in the dialogue as a clue to the nature of knowledge.

is a drought of wisdom here, and wisdom seems 71 to have ventured out from our land to yours. At any rate, if you want to ask any one around here, none of them will fail to laugh, and say: 'Stranger, I must appear to you blessed to know whether *aretê* is teachable, or in what way it accrues. I am so far from knowing whether it is teachable or not teachable, that I know absolutely nothing of what *aretê* happens to be.'³

B And I myself, Meno, am as poor as my fellow citizens in this matter. I accuse myself of knowing⁴ absolutely nothing at all⁵ about *aretê* ; and when I do not know the *ti esti* of anything how can I know the *hopoion*? Does it seem to you that anyone who did not know⁶ anything at all (*to parapan*) of who Meno is would know if he is beautiful or rich or nobly born, or the opposite of these? Does this seem to you the way it works?

MENO: Not to me. Is it the truth about you, Socrates, that you do not know what **C** *aretê* is? Should we bring such tidings of you home?

SOCRATES: Not only that, my companion, but I believe that I have never happened on anyone else who knew.

MENO: What's this? Did you not encounter Gorgias when he was here?

SOCRATES: I did.

³ Anytus, the only Athenian besides Socrates in this dialogue (90b), gives the lie to this claim about 'any' Athenian'.

⁴ The word used for 'know' here is *eidôs*, which is related to and close to *eidos*, which means shape, and later has a very special meaning for Plato of 'idea' that we will explore in Chapter 6. The reader will notice that the idea of 'shape' is employed a number of times in this dialogue.

⁵ The Greek here is *to parapan*, a very strong way of saying 'absolutely nothing at all.' This hints at the question that Meno will raise at 80d: whether 'knowing' is an all or nothing proposition. Meno asks, "How will you look for something if you do not know at all (*to parapan*) what it is. The question is raised whether we can truly know something without knowing it completely. A similar question is raised at 79 c about whether we can know what a part of something is if we do not know the whole of which it is a part.

⁶ The word for know here is *gignôskei*, in contrast to all the words from *oida* which surround it. *Oida* we have noted [note 18] is etymologically related to (and perhaps generative of) *eidos*, which plays an important part in the dialogue and Plato's philosophy in general. So there may be some significance in abstaining from the use of an *oida* word here. *Gignôskei* would seem to suggest something like 'familiarity', and the contrast between *Gignôskc* and *oida* suggests Russell's contrast between 'knowledge by acquaintance' and 'knowledge by description'. It is a question, which the *Meno* will touch upon, whether the *ti esti* of things is known as one knows a person, or as one knows the conclusion of a Euclidean proposition

MENO: Did it not seem to you that he knew?

SOCRATES: All said, I don't remember things well, Meno, and therefore I cannot say⁷ in the present how he seemed to me then. But perhaps he did know this, and you know what he said: remind me of what he said; or, if you wish, tell **D** me yourself what it is; for perhaps the matter seems to you just as it does to him.

MENO: It does.

SOCRATES: Since he is now far from here, let's leave him alone; Meno, you yourself say what, by the gods, you declare *aretê* to be. Tell me and do not begrudge me; my falsehood will have tricked me into the greatest fortune if you bring to light the fact that you and Gorgias do know; my having said that I have never encountered anyone who knew.

E MENO: But Socrates, it is not difficult to tell. First, if you want the *aretê* of a man, it is easy. This is a man's *aretê*: to be competent at the affairs of the city, and in so doing to do good to those he likes and bad to those he hates; taking care not to suffer harm himself. If you want the *aretê* of a woman, that is not difficult to recount: she must manage her house well, keeping the interior safe and sound, and obeying her husband. And another is the virtue **71** of a child, both female and male, and of the old man, and if you wish, the freeman and, again, the slave. And there are very many other *arêtai*, and there is no puzzle in saying what each one is. For according to each manner of acting and time of life there is for each of us an *aretê* for each kind of work. And the same may be said of *kakia*, Socrates. **SOCRATES**: Many are my blessings, Meno, if – as if consulting an oracle – seeking one virtue I discover that you have put forth a swarm of virtues. But to **B** really

⁷ *ouk echo eipeiv* see note 15. This introduces the topic of memory and links it to the notion of knowledge as something we possess or 'have'.

pursue the image⁸ of the swarm: if I were asking you what is the essence⁹ of the bee and you told me that there are many kinds of all sorts of bees, how would you answer me if I asked, “Do you say there are many kinds of all sorts of them because they differ from each other in being bees, or that they do not differ from each other in this, but in beauty or size or shape or some other such thing?” How would you answer such a question?

MENO: I would say they do not differ, one from the other, in being bees.

C SOCRATES: If, then, I further said this: Accordingly now, tell me this, Meno; what is it in virtue of which they do not differ but are everyone the same. Perhaps you are able to tell me¹⁰ this?

MENO: I can.

SOCRATES: And just so concerning the *arêtai*, even if they are many kinds of all sorts, they all have one, same, particular *eidōs*¹¹ through which they are *arêtai*; and someone who would answer the question, 'What is *aretê*?' would do well to focus **D** his attention¹² clearly on this. Or do you not understand?

MENO: I believe I understand; but I do not yet take hold of¹³ the question as I want.

SOCRATES: Does it seem to you that only virtue is like that, Meno, that there is one for a man and another for a woman? Or is it the same for health and size and strength? Does there seem to you to be one health for a man and

⁸ *Eikōna*: This word will prove important in the sections of the *Republic* we will read. See pg. xxx

⁹ *Ousia*: the word means being, and in common use can mean someone's important possessions, much like we talk of a man's property in English as his 'substance'. It developed in Greek philosophy a technical meaning of 'essence', a meaning that was solidified when the word was translated into Latin.

¹⁰ *Echeis....eipein*. again the phrase 'have it to tell me'

¹¹ This is the first appearance of this word, which plays a large role in Platonic philosophy, in the dialogue. Note that it comes in as that which brings unity to a many. It is a 'one' or a unit, through which the many become what they are.

¹² *Apoblepsanta*: from the verb *apoblepō*, which means literally and in many common uses 'look away from'. The idea that focusing on the *eidōs* of something is intimately connected with, or perhaps equivalent to 'looking away from' the many that it subtends, might be suggested by this word choice.

¹³ *Katekhō*: has a strong sense of 'take into one's possession', become master of. That Meno says this after saying he only 'believes' (*dokhō*) that he understands might be a foreshadowing of Plato's argument about 'right opinion (belief)' as a slippery grasp of moving statues (pg. xxx). It also re-poses the question of knowledge as a kind of possession, begun with the first word of the dialogue.

one for a woman, or is it everywhere the same *eidōs*, if it is really health, whether in a man or anything whatsoever?

MENO: It seems to me¹⁴ that health is the same both in a man and a woman.

SOCRATES: Accordingly also for size and strength? If a woman is strong, is it the same *eidōs* and the same strength by which she is strong. By ‘the same’ I am saying that strength, with regard to being strength, is the same whether in a man or in a woman. Or does it seem to you that there is some difference?

MENO: Not to me.

73 SOCRATES: And will *aretē* differ in being *aretē*, whether in a child or in an elder, in a woman or in a man?

MENO: This seems to me, Socrates, to be no longer the same as the others.

SOCRATES: But what? Did you not say that the *aretē* of a man was to ‘manage the house’ of a city well, and a woman of a house?

MENO: I did.

SOCRATES: And can either house or state or anything whatsoever be well managed unless managed prudently and justly?

MENO: Certainly not.

B SOCRATES: Then if they manage justly or prudently, they manage with justice and *sôphrosunê*?¹⁵

MENO: Necessarily.

SOCRATES: Then both need the same thing, if they intend to be, both women and men; justice and temperance?

MENO: It appears so.

¹⁴ *Moi dokei*: Variants of this phrase are appearing with unusual frequency. I always translate it as ‘It seems to me’. I translate *dokō* as ‘I believe’. Both of these are related to the important theme of the dialogue of the difference between knowledge and opinion (*doxe*). It is worth noting then when a character says they believe something, or something ‘seems’ to them a certain way, what is going on, as an example of what holding an opinion is like.

¹⁵ *Q.2.yy* *Is Socrates just repeating himself here, or does saying that something is done ‘with justice’ (the Greek could also mean ‘by justice’) have a different meaning than saying it is done ‘justly’?*

SOCRATES: But what then with a child or an elder; could they ever become good, if they are licentious and unjust?

MENO: Certainly not.

C SOCRATES: But they must be temperate and just?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then all humans are good in the same way, for they become good by gaining the same things?¹⁶

MENO: It seems so.

SOCRATES: And it is not possible, if they did not have the same *aretê*, for them to be good in the same way?

MENO: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: Since then the same *aretê* is in all, try to tell me, and to remember¹⁷ what Gorgias says that *aretê* is, and you with him.

MENO: Is it anything other to rule human beings, if you really seek¹⁸ one¹⁹ ‘something’ to subtend all?

SOCRATES: But that is what I seek. But is it the same *aretê* in both a child and a slave, Meno: to rule his master. And does it seem to you that he is still a slave who rules?

MENO: It does not seem that way to me at all, Socrates.

SOCRATES: For it is not reasonable, best of men. Then consider this also; you declare it to be ‘fitness to rule’, but shall we not add right there ‘justly and not unjustly’?

MENO: I certainly think so, Socrates; for justice is *aretê*.

¹⁶ This seems to solidify the sense that Justice and *Sophrosune* are substantives, not just abstractions of modifiers. Justice is something one can ‘gain’ or obtain. This also touches on the question of whether these incorporeal ‘things’ – most of all, in this dialogue, knowledge – are something we ‘have.’

¹⁷ *Anemnesthai*: the theme of knowledge as recollection or memory is foreshadowed here. See also 70c

¹⁸ *zêteis*: Once again the term for seeking, that later gets formalized in Greek mathematics meaning something like ‘the unknown’ that we reason from in analysis, and to in synthesis. See fntc 6, this chapter.

¹⁹ The number ‘one’ appears here again (see also 71a, 72c, 72d) perhaps to emphasize that above all of the manyness that Meno observes, there may be a unifier, and perhaps it is not incorrect to say a ‘unit’. See Ch. 7 pg. xxx

E SOCRATES: Which of these two, Meno: '*aretê*,' or 'a certain *aretê*'?

MENO: What do you mean by this?

SOCRATES: Just as with any other thing; just as, if you wish, I would say that roundness is 'a certain sort of *skhêma*' and not *skhêma*, simply. I would speak this way because there are other *skhêmata*.

MENO: You would be right to say that, since I also am saying that there is not only²⁰ justice, but also other *arêtai*.

74 SOCRATES: What are they? Tell me, just as I also would tell you the other *skhêmata* if you summoned²¹ me. Therefore, you also, tell me other *arêtai*.

MENO: Further, then, courage seems to me to be an *aretê*, and *sôphrosunê* and wisdom and magnanimity, and very many others.

SOCRATES: Again, Meno, we suffer the same result: seeking one *aretê* we have found many, though now in another way; but the one which runs through them all. we have been incapable of finding. **B**

MENO: Socrates, I am still not able to grasp that which you seek, the one *aretê* over all, just like with the others.

SOCRATES: As was to be expected; but I myself am eager to move us forward in this. For you understand how this holds the same for everything.²² If someone should ask what I just now said, "What is *skhêma*, Meno?" and if you said to him that it is 'roundness,'; and if he said to you, just as I do, "Which of the two: is roundness '*skhêma*' or 'a certain *skhêma*;' you would probably say 'a certain *skhêma*.'²³

MENO: By all means.

²⁰ *ou monon*: in this context monon means 'only' but in a mathematical context it can mean 'unit'. While Meno is agreeing with Socrates here, he is resisting Socrates' drive to find the one thing that *arête* is: the, perhaps, 'unit' of the *arêtai*.

²¹ A legal term; perhaps there is some significance in this language since Socrates' real-life accuser appears near the end of the dialogue. See xx and ftnte. xxx

²² Note at xxx that knowledge as recollection depends on a sameness that runs through everything

²³ Socrates has performed a sneaky 'conversion' (*antistrophe*) here, which is the test of a definition. If Meno says that *skhêma* is roundness, the proper question to then ask him, to discover if this is an adequate definition, is "Is roundness *skhêma*?" Only when such a turnaround is possible do we have a true definition. See Klein pg. 57

C SOCRATES: In consequence of this: that there are also other *skhêmata*?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: And if he inquired further what other *skhêmata* there are, you would have told him.

MENO: I would.

SOCRATES: And if he asked in like manner what color is, and you answered whiteness, and the questioner rejoined with this: “Which of these two: is whiteness color or a certain color?” You would reply, “A certain color, because there happen to be others also.”

MENO: I would.

SOCRATES: And if he bid you to tell him the other colors, you would tell him **D** the others, those which happen to be no less a color than white is.

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: If, then, he went after the argument as I would and said, “We are forever returning to a ‘many’. This is not what I’m after. Tell me then, since you call this many by one specific name, and say that none of them are not a *skhêma*, even those that are opposite to each other, what is that which dwells in²⁴ the round no less than the straight. You give it the name *skhêma* and say that the **E** round is not more a *skhêma* than the straight” Or is that not what you say?

MENO: It is.

SOCRATES: And when you say this, you are saying that the round is not more round than straight, nor the straight more straight than round?

MENO: Not probable, Socrates.

SOCRATES: But you are saying that the round is not more a *skhêma* than the straight, and vice-versa?

MENO: You speak the truth.

²⁴ *katechei*: could also be translated ‘possesses’, touching once again on the question of ideas as possessions. See footnote 27.

SOCRATES: Then, of what in the world is the name, *skhêma*? Make an attempt **75** to say²⁵. If, being asked something like this about either *skhêma* or color, you said, “But fellow, I myself do not understand what you want; or know²⁶ what you are saying”. Perhaps he would wonder and say, “Do you not understand that I am seeking that which is the same about all of these?” Or would you have nothing to say²⁷ about these matters, if someone asked you this, “What is it about the round and the straight, and about the others, that you call *skhêma*, which is the same about all?” Try to say; as practice,²⁸ so that you can provide an answer concerning *aretê*.

B MENO: No, Socrates, *you* say.

SOCRATES: Do you want me to indulge you?

MENO: By all means.

SOCRATES: And then you will also be willing to tell me about *aretê*?

MENO: I will.

SOCRATES: Then I must try eagerly, because it is worth it.

MENO: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: Bear with me then. Let us attempt to tell you what *skhêma* is²⁹.

Consider whether you accept that this is what it is:--*Skhêma* is the only thing

²⁵ same phrase at 73c6

²⁶ *manthano*[understand], *oida* [know]. The meaning of these two phrases hardly seems different, but Plato seems to purposefully vary the words used. The first also means learn, and is perhaps weaker than the second, which strongly means ‘know’, and, for readers of Plato, cannot help but suggest its offshoot *eidōs*. When Plato seems to be saying the same thing twice, but with deliberate alterations in words or phrasing, it is always possible that some shading is being added, or that the argument is being nudged in a direction. See 73b, footnote 29

²⁷ *ekheis eipein*: See footnote 16

²⁸ Meno asked at the start of the dialogue whether *arête* comes through teaching or practice. Socrates is here asking him to practice the art of definition, rather than teaching it to him (*meletê*: a different word for practice here, which also hints at ‘study’)

²⁹ *ti estin*: not the first appearance of this phrase. It suggests that we are about to formulate an ‘essential’ definition, but Socrates suggests a definition based on a condition that seems universally applicable to shape, but does not at all suggest itself as essential. He then says that he would be content with a similar definition of *arête*, clearly indicating that such would be a less than perfect definition.

among the existing things which always happens³⁰ to accompany color. Does this satisfy you, or do you seek some other way? I would be content if you said

C something like this to me about *aretê*.

MENO: But this is simple-minded, Socrates.

SOCRATES: How, would you say?

MENO: That *skhêma*, according to your argument, is that which always accompanies color. Fine. But if someone said that he did not know color, but was as stumped by this as he is by *skhêma*, what would you think about this answer to him

SOCRATES: I would think that it is true. And if the questioner were someone clever who is both disputatious and competitive, I should say to him, “What’s

D been said by me is there; if what I say is not right, it is your job to take hold of the argument and refute it.” But if, being friends just as you and I now are, wishing to talk to each other, I should reply in a gentler way and answer more conversationally³¹. It is probably more conversational to answer not only with the truth, but also only by means of that which the questioner concedes that he knows.³² And this is the way in which I too will attempt to speak with you. Tell

E me, then: Do you call anything ‘an end’? I am saying something like ‘a limit’ or ‘an extremity’; by all these I am saying the same thing. Prodicus would probably disagree with us: but still you, anyway, would call something ‘ended’ or ‘completed’? That is all I want to say, not anything intricate.³³

³⁰ *Tunchanei... aei*: “always happens to” perhaps, following the last footnote, this indicates the universal and accidental nature of this definition, which truly delineates, but perhaps does not truly define *skhêma*. Even if a surface is always colored, colored does not mean the same thing as surface. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1029b17-20

³¹ *Dialektikôteron*: could be translated ‘more dialectically’, suggesting that Socrates is here using a kind of ‘technical’ platonic term, which has no easy translation (“philosophically” might suggest some part of what the word means. See footnote 11

³² This is what Proclus and others will call the *homologoumenon*, a word that often substitutes for the word ‘premise’ – the ‘something agreed upon.’ Meno seems unwilling to take even simple starting points as agreed upon.

³³ *Poikilon*: multicolored. Perhaps an allusion to the recent difficulty Meno professed to have with taking the concept color’ as understood. There is some irony here in that Socrates has jumbled together a number

MENO: Yes, I would; and I believe that I understand what you are saying.

76 SOCRATES: Let's see: you call something a surface, and another a solid, in the manner of such things in geometry.

MENO: Yes, I speak in those terms.

SOCRATES: You already now should be able to understand from this what I mean by *skhêma*. Concerning all *skhêma* I say that *skhêma* is that in which the solid ends,³⁴ or, putting it more comprehensively, I would say that *skhêma* is the very thing that is the limit of solid.³⁵

MENO: And what do you say color is, Socrates?

SOCRATES: You are abusive, Meno: you stack up all of these problems for an old man to answer, but you yourself do not want to recollect³⁶, so as to tell what **B** Gorgias says *aretê* is.

MENO: When you have told this, Socrates, I will tell you.

SOCRATES: But even someone who was veiled would perceive, by the way you talk, that you are beautiful and still have lovers.

MENO: How so?

SOCRATES: Because in your words there is nothing but orders: like all delicate blossoms, you are tyrannical in blooming time; and also you have probably

of similar terms without distinguishing their nuances (as Prodicus was famous for doing). What we are agreeing to then is not a clear 'one', but in fact, as it stands, multicolored and ambiguous. Meno prefers to start at such a place.

Socrates is taking the idea of an agreed on starting place very literally. Even if we suppose that an important contemporary thinker would not agree with us, we have a starting point if the two of us agree. This is the very paradigm of the 'hypothetical' approach, taken to an extreme, that Socrates found inadequate in the passage from the *Republic* earlier in this chapter.

³⁴ This is a form of definition that Aristotle, in the portion of the *Prior Analytics* we will read in this chapter, will find inadequate:

"Thus absolutely the prior is more intelligible than the posterior, a point, for instance, than a line, a line than a plane, and a plane than a solid....Absolutely, then, it is better to try to make what is posterior known through what is prior, inasmuch as such a way of procedure is more scientific."

³⁵ Unlike Socrates' first definition of *skhêma*, this one seems to require that we already have an intuitive notion of what *skhêma* is to see that this rather procedural definition adequately delineates 'concerning all *skhêma*' what *skhêma* is. The first definition had intuitive appeal, but lacked this precise power of delineation. The 'zetetic paradox' that Meno will bring up shortly asks exactly what the relationship is between these two kinds of definition. This shift from the intuitive to the precise is also a shift from the colloquial to the technical, as Klein points out (p. 65)

³⁶ The word here is *anamnêstheis*. *Anamnesis* is the answer that Socrates offers to Meno's zetetic paradox.

C discovered that I am incapable of opposing the beautiful, and therefore I will indulge you and answer.

MENO: By all means, indulge.

SOCRATES: Then do you want me to answer you a la Gorgias, so that you can best follow?

MENO: Yes I want that. Why wouldn't I?

SOCRATES: Accordingly: Do not you two, following Empedocles, say that there are certain 'flowings' of beings?

MENO: Very much so.

SOCRATES: And flow-openings into which and through which the flowings flow³⁷?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And some of the flowings fit into the flow-openings, and some **D** of them are smaller or larger?

MENO: Yes, that's it.

SOCRATES: And there is something you call sight³⁸?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: And now, as Pindar says, "understand that which I say to you":-- color is a flowing of shapes commensurate³⁹ with and perceptible to sight.⁴⁰

³⁷ There is a triple pun in the Greek which cannot be translated, which gives the effect of pompous pseudo-scientific wording, akin to explaining sleep as the consequence of 'somniferous qualities' (or explaining that things fall down because of 'gravity')

³⁸ Therefore, he knows color, at least as shades, and the first starting point in defining shape was a *homologoumenon* for the two of them.

³⁹ The word is *summetros*, the word used to express commensurability in Greek mathematics. It occurs only 29 times in all of Plato's works. Here it seems to foreshadow the mathematics problem that Plato will pose to the slave, though the idea of incommensurability is not mentioned there. Given these two instances, it is worth considering the relationship between the problem of incommensurability and the problem of knowledge that is central in the *Meno*. The exact same use of *summetros*, describing the 'commensurability' of eye and color, occurs in the *Theaetetus* (156d), the other Platonic dialogue explicitly on knowledge. That dialogue begins with a discussion of the mathematical problem of incommensurability. See pg. xx of this volume.

⁴⁰ Note that, while before Meno would not accept a definition of shape that referred to color, here color is itself *reduced to* nothing but an epiphenomenon of shape. This process of definition by reduction has a very modern tone, despite the naivety of the 'science' here.

MENO: That, Socrates, seems to me to be the best of the answers you have given.

SOCRATES: Perhaps because it was said in the manner habitual to you⁴¹. And also, I suppose, because you hope to be able to say from this both what sound is and smell, and many other things such as these⁴².

MENO: Entirely true.

SOCRATES: The answer, Meno, was in the tragic style⁴³, so it pleases you more⁴⁴ than the one about *skhêma*.⁴⁵

MENO: It does.

SOCRATES: But it is not so, O son of Alexidemos; I myself am persuaded that the other was the better; and I believe it would seem so to you, if you were not

⁴¹ Harking back to the original question; whether virtue comes through habit. Socrates seems to be suggesting that what Meno finds an adequate *homologoumenon* and a persuasive way of proceeding from that starting point, is based entirely on habit. This, of course, must prompt the readers to ask whether our *homologoumena* – such as Euclid’s 5th postulate – are no more than the formalization of our habitual interactions with the world. Is ‘self-evidence’ nothing but habit? See Klein pg. 69

⁴² In footnote 41 we noticed that Meno has accepted this definition in part because it is ‘reductionist.’ Here we see the second important modern criterion of explanation and in this case definition that Socrates anticipates Meno accepting: what we might call ‘fecundity’ of an explanation. We tend to see a theory as more likely true the better it can unite seemingly disparate phenomena under one explanatory scheme. Surely this was part of the appeal of the Newtonian system, which offered the same basic force as an explanation for affairs under and in the heavens. Aristotle, as we will discuss in Chapter 4, specifically rejects subject spanning explanations as adequately explanatory. ‘Kind-crossing’ explanations miss precisely what is unique about the subject under explanation, and thus fail to yield true *understanding* of the subject. A similar rejoinder may be entered against reductionist arguments. In the defense of distinct kinds that stands behind both of these rejections of principles that have proven so productive in modernity, lies an important key to the ancient view of knowledge, and subsidiary topics like definition.

⁴³ Meaning here ‘stately’ and, perhaps pompous.

⁴⁴ This is the fourth reason that Socrates has given for Meno’s preference for this last definition. The two middle reasons are ‘scientific’ (fnotes 56 and 57) and the first and this one are more ‘rhetorical.’ There is some tension between the two types of reasons; the scientific ones suggest that Meno goes so far in analysis that he rejects natural kinds. The rhetorical reasons suggest that Meno follows habit, and therefore would be unable to escape traditional, habitual categories, and may even ‘romanticize’ the categories he believes things fall into, in order to make his beliefs impervious to reason. I think that Plato thinks the ‘over-rational’ and ‘under-rational’ are natural complements to each other. In the *Symposium* he represents this complementarity with the pairing of Phaedrus and Eruximachus.

⁴⁵ He does not make clear which one about *skhêma*. Meno probably thinks he means the second, ‘technical’ one, but, in contrast with the ‘tragic’ tone of his definition of color (built on the ‘scientific’ definition of *skhêma* – footnote 59), Socrates is probably referring to his first simple and intuitive definition of shape, which is the only definition he has approved.

forced to go away before the mysteries, as you said yesterday, and would only wait⁴⁶ and be initiated.

77 MENO: But I would stay, Socrates, if you would tell me many things such as this⁴⁷.

SOCRATES: I will leave nothing undone in my eagerness to tell things such as this, both for your sake and mine; but I fear I will not be able to tell you very many such things: but now you must attempt to reciprocate by making good on your promise to me, and tell, with respect to the whole of *aretê*, what it is; and stop making many out of one, as the jokers say whenever something is shattered, but leaving it ‘whole and healthy,’ tell me what *aretê* is, following the patterns you **B** have taken from me.

MENO: Then it seems to me, Socrates, that *aretê* is, just as the poet says “to cherish and have the capacity for *kalon* things.”⁴⁸ And I say that *aretê* is desiring⁴⁹ *kalon*⁵⁰ things and having the capacity to procure⁵¹ them for oneself.

SOCRATES: Do you say that desiring *kalon* things is desiring good things?

MENO: Exceedingly so.

⁴⁶ *Perimenô*: built on the verb *menô* (stay), which resembles Meno’s name. Meno seems precisely to be the one who will not wait, remain, or stay still. As we will see later with Deadalus’ statues, the inability to stay still is precisely the mark of an opinion, as opposed to knowledge.

⁴⁷ The last definition, or color.

⁴⁸ I have translated this ambiguously because there is an arc in the use of language here. First only the word for capacity is used, then the phrase ‘capacity for procuring’ and later Socrates drops the word capacity altogether (as well as the criterion of ‘desiring *kalon* things’), and gets Meno to define *arête* as the procuring of good things. In a dialogue that is about definition, it seems especially noteworthy that words are shifted and exchanged in the process. Socrates gets Meno to substitute ‘good’ for *kalon*, want/will/choose for ‘desire’, ‘unhappiness’ for ‘misery’, and ‘money and gold’ for ‘good things’. We should also note that at 76E Socrates mentions that Prodicus, who he will later acknowledge as his teacher, would have objected to his collapsing the meanings of ‘limit’ and ‘boundary’ (words which Aristotle, for one, interchanges effortlessly. See xxxx). Some point is being made here about the nuances of words in the process of definition. What do you think it is?

⁴⁹ The poet speaks of ‘cherishing’ (*kharein*) the *kalon*. Meno changes this to ‘desiring’, and uses a word (*epithoumein*) that expresses some of the lower senses of desire in Greek, used often for sexual lust and the desire for food. It could be reasonably translated as ‘having an appetite for’.

⁵⁰ It is ambiguous whether Meno means by this ‘noble acts’, as the poet clearly does or ‘fine, beautiful things’

⁵¹ The word here is *porizesthai*, which is etymologically closely related to the words for flowing and passage used in the definition of shape that Meno likes and Socrates finds inferior, at 76c-d.

SOCRATES: Then are there some who desire *kakon* things and others who desire **C** good things? Or does it not seem to you that all, best of men, desire good things?

MENO: Not to me.

SOCRATES: But some, *kakon* things?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Believing the *kaka* things to be good things, would you say; or knowing them to be *kaka* and desiring them all the same?

MENO: Both, it seems to me.

SOCRATES: And does it seem to you, Meno, that someone knowing *kaka* things to be *kaka* things, desires them all the same?

MENO: Most certainly.

SOCRATES: Desires how, would you say: To become his⁵²?

MENO: Yes, to become his. How else?

D SOCRATES: And which of these two: supposing that *kaka* things will aid him who possesses them, or knowing that the *kaka* will harm whoever obtains them?

MENO: There are some who suppose that the *kaka* will aid them, and others who know that the *kaka* will harm them.

SOCRATES: And, do those who think that *kaka* things will aid them seem to you to know that they are *kaka*?

MENO: This does not seem to me to be at all the case.

SOCRATES: It is therefore clear that they do not desire *kaka* things, not knowing **E** them as such, but they supposed to be good those things which are *kaka*. Those who do not know them as such, supposing them to be good, clearly desire the good. Or not?⁵³

⁵² The issue of ‘possession’ again. If we desire something, we want, in some sense, to possess it. Is the same true of our desire for knowledge?

⁵³ Clearly Socrates has played a kind of trick on Meno here. It seems perfectly possible for Meno to maintain that people can desire things that are ‘morally evil’ but benefit the possessor. Socrates is relying on the ambiguity of the word *kakon/kaka*, as meaning both ‘morally bad/evil’ and simply bad. It is almost

MENO: That may possibly happen⁵⁴ for those, at least.

SOCRATES: Well then, those who, as you say, desire *kaka*, and think that *kaka* things harm those they come to, know perhaps that they will be harmed by them?

78 MENO: Necessarily

SOCRATES: But do they not suppose that those who are harmed are miserable to the extent that they are harmed?

MENO: This also necessarily.

SOCRATES: Are not the miserable unhappy?

MENO: I suppose so.

SOCRATES: Is there anyone who wants⁵⁵ to be miserable and unhappy?

MENO: It does not seem so to me, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then no one wants *kaka* things, Meno, if they do not want to be like that; for what else is misery but to desire *kaka* things and acquire them?

MENO: You may very likely speak the truth⁵⁶, Socrates, and no one wants *kaka* **B** things.

SOCRATES: Accordingly, were you not saying just now that *aretê* is wanting⁵⁷ good things and having the capacity for them?

MENO: I did say that.

SOCRATES: Then having said this, the wanting already exists in everyone, and in this no one is better than another?

MENO: So it appears.

a logical linguistic deduction that nobody would desire to 'possess' something that is 'bad'. The very desire to possess it shows that they value it as good.

⁵⁴ Meno often responds to what seems like a necessary conclusion by implying that the conclusion is particular, and the causality circumstantial (he has used this word, *kinduneuô*, before in his answers, suggesting that this just 'happens' to be true, and is not a logical necessity. If one does not buy that some conclusions are logical implications of other premises, then one certainly will have skepticism about our ability to *know* anything. His next two answers unequivocally recognize the necessity of Socrates' logic. Why do you think he changes his tune?

⁵⁵ Socrates switches here from 'desire' to *boulomai*, want, wish, or will. Why?

⁵⁶ *kinduneueis*, again. Meno will not fully commit to this answer.

⁵⁷ He did not say this. Meno said that *arête* is the desire (*epithumia*) for good things. Meno is indifferent between the two words.

SOCRATES: Clearly, then, if one man is better than another, it is by virtue of his being stronger in his capacity?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Then it seems to be like this: according to your reasoning, *aretê* is **C** the capacity for procuring good things?

MENO: It seems to me, Socrates, to hold⁵⁸ wholly in the way you now apprehend it.

SOCRATES: Then let us see whether you speak the truth about this; for you have possibly spoken rightly:--You declare *aretê* to be procuring good things⁵⁹?

MENO: I do.

SOCRATES: Do you not call such as health and wealth good things?

MENO: And to acquire gold and silver, and honor and rule in the city.

SOCRATES: But do you not say that there are other good things?

D MENO: No, but I mean all such things.

SOCRATES: So be it, *aretê* is the procuring of gold and silver; so says Meno, the hereditary guest-friend of the great king. But which of these two: would you add to this procuring ‘justly and reverently’, or does that not make a difference to you? But even if someone procures them unjustly, would you equally call that *aretê*?

MENO: Perhaps not, Socrates.

SOCRATES: But *kakia*?

MENO: Maybe entirely so.

SOCRATES: Then it is necessary, it would seem, to add to these procurings

E justice or *sôphrosunê* or reverence, or some other part of *aretê*: if not, it will not be *aretê*, even if it procures good things.

MENO: Why, without these, how could *aretê* come into being?

⁵⁸ *Ekhein* I think there is some sense here of heavily ‘possessing’ the whole of an idea. Meno seems to paradoxically believe both that we can either only speak of the part of something, and that we can fully ‘posses’ the whole idea of it. Socrates, I think, wants to show that neither of these are true.

⁵⁹ Notice that Socrates has dropped ‘the power/ability to’. We are at the bare, empirical bones here – no theoretical power makes us virtuous, only the actual procurement of good things.

SOCRATES: And to not procure gold and silver whenever it would not be just, neither for oneself nor for another; is not this non-procuring⁶⁰ itself *aretê*?

MENO: So it appears.

SOCRATES: Then the procurement of such goods is no more *aretê* than the non-procurement; but, as it seems, whatever comes into being with justice is *aretê*, **79** and, without everything of that sort, *kakia*.

MENO: It seems to me to be necessarily as you say.

SOCRATES: Then, just a little earlier we said that each of them is a part of *aretê*, justice, *sôphrosunê*, and everything of that sort.

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then, Meno, you are making fun of me.

MENO: How so, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Just now I needed you to neither shatter *aretê* nor mince it finely, and I gave you patterns according to which you should answer; you neglected this and you tell me that *aretê* is the capacity for procuring good things with

B justice, which you declare to be a part of *aretê*.⁶¹

MENO: I do.

SOCRATES: Then it follows from these things you agree with⁶² that to do anything that one does with a part of *aretê*, this is *aretê*; for you declare justice,

⁶⁰ *Aporia*: this word is also used commonly in Plato to mean an intellectual impasse, which Socrates proclaims to be the origin of philosophy (). Starting back with his facetious Empedoclean definition of color (76c), meanings for ‘flowing’, and ‘passages’, ‘procuring’, and now the word for non-procuring which more commonly means a puzzle or intellectual impasse, are all drawn from the same root. Again, in a dialogue which is about finding the true definition of something, we must ourselves wonder what Plato is up to in making these connections. We might start by wondering what this clause would mean if *aporia* had its more common Platonic meaning: Is it ‘*arête* itself’ to be allow oneself to be in an intellectual *aporia*?

⁶¹ Is this a fair accusation? Once again, it is Socrates who has made the substitution of ‘justice’ for a list of *arêtai* earlier that seemed open-ended. Once again in our search for definition, Socrates allows words to seemingly slip in and out and substitute for each other without justification. Meno only goes along with his whittling the *arêtai* down to, or perhaps summing them up with, the term ‘justice’. Is the list reducible in this way (see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* xxx)? Is this similar to his collapse of the ideas of limit, boundary, and extremity earlier? **And is it similar to the way he gets the slave boy to ‘discover’ his own ideas?**

⁶² *Homolegeis*: We have been in search of the agreed upon starting point, the *homologoumenon*. See footnotes 6, 47, 53, and 56.

and also every such thing, to be a part of *aretê*. Why, then, do I say this? Because, needing you to tell me the whole of *aretê*, far from telling me that, you declare every act to be *aretê* if only it is performed with a part of *aretê*, as if you **C** had said what *aretê* is as a whole and I already knew what it was⁶³ even though you had changed it into small coins. Therefore it seems to me that there is a need for you to entertain the same question again and from the beginning (*arkhe*), Meno my friend: What is *aretê*, if every act performed with a part of *aretê* is thereby *aretê*? For this is what they are saying, whenever someone says that every act performed with justice is *aretê*. Or does it not seem to you to return to the same question; rather do you suppose that someone can know what any part of *aretê* is when he does not know what it is in itself?⁶⁴

MENO: It does not seem so to me.

D SOCRATES: If you remember when I answered you about *skhêma*, we rejected any such answer that would try to respond by means of what is still sought and not yet agreed upon⁶⁵?

MENO: And we excluded them rightly, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then, best of men, don't *you* act accordingly and suppose that, while still seeking⁶⁶ what the whole of *aretê* is you will show anyone the answer

⁶³ As we shall see, it seems to be precisely the case that we must 'already know what X is' *in some sense* if we are able to say that certain particulars are instances of X, and then seek out what the instances have in common so as to give the *ti esti* of X. This will be the only way out of Meno's zetetic paradox – there must be foreknowledge *of some sort*. Perhaps this foreknowledge is inarticulable and 'intuitive'. See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* II, 19 (99b15 ff.). The problem of regress in demonstration is similar to the zetetic paradox. Aristotle responds to those who claim: [1] All scientific knowledge comes only from demonstration [2] There must be some initial premises which are not demonstrable, therefore [3] Scientific knowledge is impossible. His answer comes in the elaboration of the *dunamis, nous*. Our 'knowing' of these initial premises is not an actual knowing, but a kind of capacity, or potentiality. Perhaps much like the principle of contradiction is something that we 'know' in the sense that it is the very structure of thinking itself, though, as such, it is *a priori* indemonstrable.

⁶⁴ Notice that 'itself' or 'in itself' has taken the place of 'as a whole.'

⁶⁵ *zêtouMenôn kai... hômologêMenôn*: The later classic words for the two starting/ending points of the two types of mathematical investigation. See Ch. xxxxx

⁶⁶ *zêtoumenês*

E by means of the pieces of it, or by saying anything at all of this sort; but the same question would again be necessary; In what you are saying, what is the being of this *aretê* you are talking about? Or do I seem to you to be saying nothing?

MENO: You seem to me to speak rightly.

SOCRATES: Then answer again from the beginning (*arkhe*); what do both you and your comrade⁶⁷ declare *aretê* to be?

MENO: O Socrates, I used to hear, before becoming acquainted with you, that you would do nothing but stump yourself⁶⁸ and make others stumped. But 80 now here's how you seem to me: you bewitch and drug and guilelessly beguile me, until I have become filled with *aporia*. And you seem to me absolutely, even if it must be put mockingly, to be a supreme resemblance, both in your *eidōs* and other aspects, of the flat torpedo fish⁶⁹; for anyone approaching and touching it is inevitably made numb, and it seems to me that you have just now done something

B like this to me; for truly my soul and my mouth are numb, and I am not able to⁷⁰ answer you; Indeed, I have given myriad long speeches about *aretê* to many people, entirely well spoken, or so it had seemed to me. But now I am not even able to say (*echo eipein*) at all what it is⁷¹. And you seem to me to have considered well in not sailing away from here or going abroad, for if you should do this sort of thing as a stranger in other cities, you would be taken off as a sorcerer.

SOCRATES: You are a scoundrel, Meno, and have almost duped me.

MENO: Really, in what way Socrates?

⁶⁷ i.e. Gorgias

⁶⁸ *aporeis*: the verb form of *aporia*. See footnote 75.

⁶⁹ *Narkê*: literally this means 'numbness'.

⁷⁰ *ekhō*: see footnote xx

⁷¹ *oud'...to parapan*: not even...at all. [1] *oude* Meno thinks that being able to say what something is should be the precondition to saying anything about it, which is certainly what Socrates has been trying to get him to see. But Meno also thinks that it should be the most elemental and easiest thing to do. Think back to the earlier passage from *The Republic*: we must climb up to a true hypothesis/definition, and only then can we find the self-grounding basis of that definition, from which we can then reconstruct all that falls out from it. [2] *to parapan*: see footnote 20. Meno admits here to being reduced to the condition that Socrates admitted to at the beginning of the dialogue, of not knowing *at all* what *arête* is.

C SOCRATES: I understand why you made an image⁷² of me.

MENO: Why, do you suppose?

SOCRATES: That I might make an image of you in return. For I know that all the *kalon* cherish having images made about them, for the images of the *kalon* are *kalos*; but I will not make an image of you in turn. As for me, if the torpedo is itself numb as well as making others numb, then I am like one, but if not, not; for I'm not clear about things⁷³ myself when I stump others, but am myself altogether more stumped, and thus I make others stumped. And now,

D concerning *aretê*, I do not know what it is; you probably knew earlier, before you touched me, but now you resemble⁷⁴ someone who does not know. All the same, I want to carefully consider and seek out with you what it is.

MENO: And in what way can you seek, Socrates, that of which you have absolutely⁷⁵ no idea what it is? For what sort of thing, of those you do not know, will you put forward as what you will seek? Even if you stumbled right on it, how would you know that it is that which you did not know?

E SOCRATES: I ascertain⁷⁶ what you wish to say, Meno, but you should see what an eristic argument you are bringing back to life: it follows that humans cannot seek either for that which they know, or that which they do not know; not for what he knows, for he knows it, and there is no need for him to seek it. Not for what he does not know, for he would not even know what to seek.

81 MENO: Then does it seem to you that the argument is beautifully stated, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Not to me.

⁷² *Eikazô*: literally to make an image, but here meaning creating a simile or comparison. The word *eikon* has important Platonic meanings, so I have translated it very literally.

⁷³ *Euporeô*: opposite of *aporia*, the word I have been translating as 'stumped'. Another in the family of *poros* words that have so populated this dialogue. See footnotes 66, 75, 83

⁷⁴ *homoios*: same word used in Euclid to express geometric similarity.

⁷⁵ *to parapan*

⁷⁶ *manthanô*: root meaning is 'I learn', related to the word mathematics – The concept of learning will soon take a central place in the dialogue's understanding of knowledge.

MENO: Are you able to say⁷⁷ why?

SOCRATES: Yes. For I have heard from men and women wise in divine matters...

MENO: Saying what?

SOCRATES: True things, it seems to me, and *kalon*.

MENO: What was it and who were the speakers?

SOCRATES: Some of the speakers were priests and priestesses, who had studied how they might give an account of the holy things in their care: Pindar speaks of it **B** also, and many other of the poets are in touch with divine things. What they say is this (consider whether it seems to you that they speak the truth): They declare that the soul of man is immortal, and at one time it has an end, which they call dying, and at another time is born again, but it is never completely destroyed. It is necessary, according to this, to live one's life through in the holiest of ways. For, from whom

Persephone shall receive compensation for bloody ancient sin

She gives back their souls again to the sun above in the ninth year

C From these grow illustrious kings and men of hot strength and great wisdom
For the rest of time they will be called purified heroes by men

Since the soul has been born into this world many times, and has thus been seeing the things of this world and the world below, there is nothing it has not learned.⁷⁸

No wonder then that it can recollect about *aretê* and other things, since it knew about these things before; for all nature being akin, and the soul having learned all

D things; nothing hinders someone, recalling (or, as people call it, learning) one thing only, from discovering all the rest himself, if only he has some courage and

⁷⁷ *Ekheis eipein*

⁷⁸ *memathêken*

does not completely weary of seeking; for the whole of seeking and learning is recollection. Therefore we must not be persuaded by these eristic arguments, for this would make us lazy; they are sweet for soft people to hear; but the other way **E** makes us hard-working seekers. I, for one, am persuaded that this is true, and I want to seek out with you what *aretê* is.

MENO: Yes, Socrates; but what do you mean by saying that we do not learn, and that what we call learning is only recollection? Are you able to teach me how this is?

SOCRATES: But, as I just said, Meno, you are a scoundrel, and now, when I said that there is no teaching, but only recollection, you ask if I am able to teach you; in **82** that I would be directly revealed as contradicting myself.

MENO: No, by Zeus, Socrates, I was not aware of what I was saying, but spoke from habit. But if you are able to show me how what you say holds, then show.

SOCRATES: But it is not easy. All the same, I want to try eagerly for your sake..

B But summon one of your many attendants to me, whoever you want, that I may show it to you in him.

MENO: Certainly. Come here.

SOCRATES: He is Greek, and speaks Greek?⁷⁹

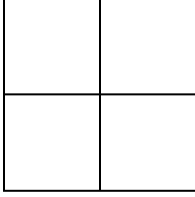
MENO: Most assuredly; he was born in my house.

SOCRATES: Turn your attention to which of these two seems to happen: recollecting, or learning from me.

MENO: I will pay attention.

SOCRATES: Tell me, boy, do you understand that a *khôrion* like this is a square?

⁷⁹ He does not ask whether the slave boy can add and subtract- that is assumed. Why?



BOY: I do.

SOCRATES: Then, does a square *khôrion* have all lines equal, the four of them?

BOY: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And also are not these through the middle equal?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then may such a space not be greater or smaller?

BOY: Certainly.

SOCRATES: If, then, this side were two feet, and this two feet, how many feet will the whole be? Consider this: if in this there are two feet, but in this one foot only, the *khôrion* would be two feet, once?

D BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: But since this also two feet, it is⁸⁰ twice two feet?

BOY: It is that.

SOCRATES: It is twice two feet?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: How many are twice two feet? Calculate and tell me.

BOY: Four, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Could there not be another twice this *khôrion*, the same as this, having all the lines equal just like this one?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: How many feet will that be?

BOY: Eight.

E SOCRATES: Come then, try to tell me what the *pêlikos*⁸¹ of each line of that one will be: for this one is two feet, what is it for the double [square]?

⁸⁰ *gignomai*: could also mean 'becomes'.

BOY: It is clear, Socrates, that it is double.

SOCRATES: Do you see, Meno, how I teach him nothing, but ask everything; but now he supposes that he knows what sort⁸² of line generates an eight foot [square] *khôrion*. Or does it not seem so to you?

MENO: It does.

SOCRATES: Then, does he know?

MENO: Of course not.

SOCRATES: But he at least imagines he knows, from the ‘doubleness.’⁸³

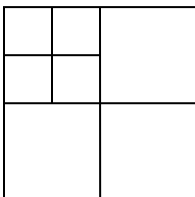
MENO: True.

SOCRATES: Observe him recollecting step by step, as it is necessary to recollect. You, tell me: from the double line you say that the double *khôrion* is generated?

83 I mean as follows: not this [side] long and that [side] short, but it must be everywhere equal just like this one⁸⁴, but double this, that is, eight feet [square]; but see if it still seems to you that it comes from the double line?

BOY: It does to me.

SOCRATES: Then does this line not become doubled if we add on another, the same size, here?



BOY: Certainly.

⁸¹ Klein argues: “...the word *pêlikos* ...hints at the non-numerical character of the expected answer. In its ‘technical’ meaning, the word *pelikos* refers mostly to continuous magnitudes (not to discrete units the assemblage of which form a ‘number’ and which we ‘count’...) and implies, therefore, possible incommensurability.” Socrates has just asked the boy to ‘calculate’ or count to arrive at the area. He will now be stymied in applying this most basic arithmetic operation.

⁸² *Hopoion*: Socrates specifically seems to be accusing the boy, not of thinking he knows the length of the side of the square with an 8 foot area, but of thinking he knows ‘what sort’ of line it is, suggesting that there might be different sorts, or qualities of lines. This word becomes the Aristotelian category ‘quality’, so in terms, Socrates is asking about the quality rather than the quantity of the line.

⁸³ The slave boy is misunderstanding the notion, or the application, of the idea of analogy or proportion.

⁸⁴ The square of area four

SOCRATES: From this, four lines of the same size, you say an eight foot *khôrion* **B** will emerge?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Let us describe [a figure] from these four equal [lines]: Is there anything else, or is this what you declare to be the eight foot [square]?

BOY: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And are there not in it these four [areas], each of which is equal to that of four feet?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then how much is it? Is it not four times as large?

BOY: How could it not be?

SOCRATES: Then is four times as large double?

BOY: No, by Zeus.

SOCRATES: But how times?

BOY: A multiple of four.⁸⁵

C SOCRATES: Then from the double, boy, not the double but the quadruple *khôrion* is generated.

BOY: You speak the truth.

SOCRATES: Four times four is sixteen. No?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: But from which line is the eight footer? Not from the one that gives a fourfold, I take it?

BOY: It appears so.

SOCRATES: And the four foot [figure] is from the half [line]?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Good; and is not the eight foot [space] double this, and half of that?⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Why does he put it in terms of multiples of four? Perhaps because that is the one common attribute of all even squares?

BOY: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Would it not come from a line larger than this one, and smaller than that? Or not?

BOY: This seems so to me.

SOCRATES: Well said; Answer as it seems to you. And tell me, was this not a line of two feet but that of four?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Is it not necessary for the line of the eight foot *khôrion* to be greater than two feet, but less than four feet?

BOY: It is necessary

E SOCRATES: Try to say which *pêlikos*⁸⁷ you declare it to be.

BOY: Three feet.

SOCRATES: Then if we add a half to this line⁸⁸, it will be three feet. This is two, while this is one; and on this side, in the same way, this is two and this one⁸⁹ and this gives birth to the *khôrion* of which you speak?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then if this is three and this three, the whole *khôrion* becomes three times three feet?

BOY: Apparently.

SOCRATES: Three times three is how many feet?

BOY: Nine.

SOCRATES: And how many feet did the double need to be?

BOY: Eight.

SOCRATES: Then from three feet we have still not produced the *khôrion* of eight feet?

⁸⁶ Double the four foot square and half the sixteen foot.

⁸⁷ See 82 E, Footnote 95

⁸⁸ the line two feet long

⁸⁹ Starting with the square of two, we take half again on one side and then repeat that on the adjacent side, then complete the square with a three foot side.

BOY: Of course not.

SOCRATES: But from what?—try to tell us precisely; and if you do not want to **84** count, then show from what⁹⁰.

BOY: But, by Zeus, Socrates, I, for one, do not know.

SOCRATES: Are you discerning, Meno, how he is slowly moving forward in his recollecting? At first he did not know which was the line of the eight foot *khôrion*, nor does he yet know, but then he supposed that he knew, and answered boldly as if he knew, and did not believe he was stumped⁹¹; now he believes he is stumped, and concomitant with his not knowing, neither **B** does he suppose that he knows.

MENO: You speak the truth.

SOCRATES: Then he is in a better state with respect to the matter he did not know?

MENO: This seems so to me, as well.

SOCRATES: Stumping him, just as the torpedo fish causes numbness, have we harmed him any?

MENO: It does not seem so to me.

SOCRATES: We have at any rate, given him some assistance, as it seems, in discovering what state he is in; now, not knowing, he will gladly seek, but then he

⁹⁰ This may be the richest and most significant line in the dialogue. First, rather than ask the length of the line which would produce the eight foot square, Socrates uses a word (*poios*) that has a deeper meaning of ‘what sort’ – a word that in Aristotle’s hands becomes the technical word for ‘quality’, as opposed to quantity. Socrates then demands ‘precision’ in identifying the line, but excuses the boy from counting (*arithmein*) – that is, from referring to numbers. (Klein notes that up until now the only answers the boy has been asked to give are a yes or no, or the result of counting. Pg. 103) Rather, he allows the boy to simply show or point to the ‘sort’ of line he means. We usually do not think that precision in mathematical matters involves a retreat from numbers, and we are not accustomed to think of straight lines as being of different sorts. Certainly there is no definition in Euclid of different sorts of straight lines. When we reach the discussion of the irrational in chapter xxx, we will refer back to this passage, and the notion that greater precision can sometimes be reached in mathematics when we do not consider the quantity but the sort or quality of the entity sought. For the question of the nature of definition now at hand, we might just notice that a turn has been made in the search for this thing: we thought we knew its nature (a straight line), but only lacked its measure. We are discovering that perhaps we do not know its nature, yet we can still pursue this thing which we do not know (*to parapan* -at all?) through our clear sense of its difference from what we do know.

⁹¹ *aporein*

could easily suppose that he could speak well many times to many people⁹² about the double *khôrion*, saying that it is necessary for it to have a **C** line of double length.

MENO: It seems so.

SOCRATES: But do you suppose that, not knowing, he would have tried to seek or to learn that which he supposed he knew before he had fallen into *aporia* through believing that he did not know, and had **yearned to know**?

MENO: It does not seem so to me, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then he was benefited from the numbing?

MENO: It seems so to me.

SOCRATES: Note carefully that starting from this state of *aporia*, he will also discover by seeking with me. But from me will come nothing but questioning,

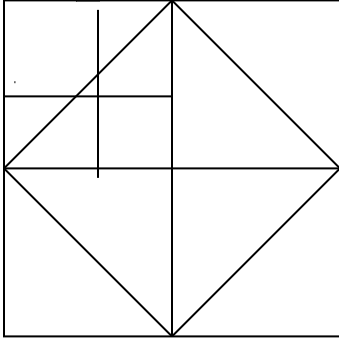
D no teaching: Keep guard if you should at anytime find me teaching or expounding to him, and not just asking for his opinions.

Now you [to the boy] tell me; is this not our four footed *khôrion*?[**square A**] Do you understand?

BOY: I do.

A **B**

⁹² a dig at Meno. See 80b2-3



C **D**

SOCRATES: And I add another one equal to it [**square B**]?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: And a third, equal to each of them [**square C**]?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then should we fill up the place in the corner⁹³ [**square D**]?

BOY: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Nothing other than four equal *khôria* has come into being?

E BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then how many times larger than this has the whole become?

BOY: Four times.

SOCRATES: But we needed it to become double, don't you remember?

BOY: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Then here is this line drawn from corner to corner; does it not **85**
slice each *khôrion* in two?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then four lines have come into being, equal and enclosing this
khôrion?

BOY: They have come into being.

SOCRATES: Consider, then: What is the *pêlikon*⁹⁴ of this *khôrion*.

BOY: I do not understand.

⁹³ *gôniai*: also means 'angle', as in 'trigonometry'

⁹⁴ See Footnote 96

SOCRATES: Isn't it the case that each inside line⁹⁵ cut each of the four spaces in half? Or not?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: And how many of this size are there in here [the middle section]?

BOY: Four.

SOCRATES: And how many in this [the first square]?

BOY: Two.

SOCRATES: And what is four in relation to two?

BOY: Double

B SOCRATES: And how many feet has this [the quadruple square] become?

BOY: Eight feet.

SOCRATES: From what line?

BOY: From this⁹⁶.

SOCRATES: That is, from the line extending from corner to corner of the four foot space?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: The sophists call this the diameter⁹⁷. So, if this has the name diameter, then, as you say, boy of Meno, the double *khôrion* is generated by⁹⁸ the diameter.

BOY: That's certainly so, Socrates.

⁹⁵ That the side of the square of area 2 is an 'inside line' – something in the structure of the first square, rather than some sort of extension of the side of the original square has real significance for understanding what knowledge is and how it is sought out.

⁹⁶ From the diagonal of the original square.

⁹⁷ There has been a significant progression in the last few lines of dialogue. The boy, after being unable (as we all would be) to identify the side of the double square by means of a number, simply points to the line *within* the original structure which plays that role perfectly. That is sufficient, and perhaps in the end the most honest way we have of grasping this entity. Socrates then simply describes that line, which formalizes it in a way that does not do apparent violence to this original grasping. But finally he attributes to the sophists the accomplishment of naming the line. This may well be a less honest move, which pretends to a level of understanding that we have not attained. It is reminiscent somewhat of the earlier Empedoclean play with names that Socrates is clearly ridiculing as an imposter to understanding. See 76c ff.

⁹⁸ another instance of *gignomai*

SOCRATES: How does it seem to you, Meno? Did he answer with any *doxa* that was not from him, himself?

C MENO: No, they were all from him.

SOCRATES: But, as we were saying a bit earlier, he did not know?

MENO: You speak the truth.

SOCRATES: Yet his *doxai* were inside⁹⁹ him; or not?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then someone who does not know, whatever his lack of knowledge concerns, may have inside him true *doxai* concerning those things that he does not know?

MENO: Apparently

SOCRATES: And just now these *doxai* were awakened in him, as if in a dream; but if he were asked the same questions many times and in many ways, you know that, finally, he will know about them no less precisely than anyone.

D MENO: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Then no one having taught him, but just having questioned him, he will know, recovering the knowledge himself, from himself?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: But to recover knowledge in himself, by himself, is to recollect, no?

MENO: Certainly

SOCRATES: Is it not the case that he must either have acquired this knowledge which he now has at some time, or had it always?

MENO: Yes.

⁹⁹ *eneimi* Can also mean to have something in one's power, much as we would say 'he has it in him to do X'. It seems no accident that Socrates moves from talking about the 'inside line' as the side of the double square, and the inside *doxa* as the basis of the boy's understanding. What do you make of this analogy?

SOCRATES: Then if he always had it, he was always ‘knowing’. If he acquired it at some time he did not acquire it in the present life Or has **E** someone taught him geometry? For he will do the same with all geometrical matters, and with every other branch of learning. Then, is there anyone who has taught him all this? If that is possible, you would know, since he was born and raised in your house.

MENO: But I myself know that no one ever taught him.

SOCRATES: He has these *doxai*, or not?

MENO: Apparently he must, Socrates.

SOCRATES: If he did not acquire them in the present life, is it not clear that

86 he had them and had learned them in some other time?

MENO: Apparently.

SOCRATES: Then this was the time when he was not a human being?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: If, then in both the time that he was and was not a human being, true *doxai* were inside him¹⁰⁰, which are awakened by questioning to become Knowledge(s), isn’t it the case that his soul was in a state of ‘having learned’¹⁰¹ throughout all time? For it is clear that for all time he either is or is not a man?

MENO: Apparently.

SOCRATES: And if the truth of all beings is in our soul, then

¹⁰⁰ *eneimi*

¹⁰¹ the more natural translation is ‘understanding’. But it is interesting that at 86 a Plato specifically has Socrates claim not that we *learned* these things at another time, but that we *had learned* them. He seems to be implicitly recognizing the regress implied: since all of this exposition is meant to answer Meno’s challenge that we can’t search for what we don’t know, because, not knowing it, we would not recognize it when we found it, there is some paradox in trying to establish that we would recognize it because we found it at some previous time. In fact, it would have to be that we never ‘learned’ this, but have always been in a state of ‘having learned’ it. And, of course, if we have this knowledge through all time, then there was never a moment in time when we learned it.

B the soul is immortal. Wherefore be of good courage; what you do not happen to know now – that is what you do not remember – you must try to seek out and recall.

MENO: You seem to me to speak rightly, Socrates, though in what way, I do not know.

SOCRATES: I seem so to me, also, Meno. I can not confidently affirm the entirety of the argument. But I would battle wholeheartedly, as far as I am able, both in word and deed, that if we suppose we must seek after something we do not know we will be better, braver and less slothful than if

C we suppose that it is not possible to find, or that we are not obliged to seek, what we do not know¹⁰².

MENO: Here also, Socrates, you seem to me to speak rightly.

SOCRATES: Then, as we are of like mind that whatever someone does not know is to be sought, should we together try our hands at seeking out what *aretê* is?

MENO: Certainly, Socrates. And yet I, for one, would find it more pleasing to examine and hear what I first asked: whether we should attempt *aretê* as something teachable or as something that we have by nature, or as coming to humans in some other way?

D

SOCRATES: If I ruled not only myself but you, Meno, we would not have examined whether *aretê* is taught or not taught, until we had first sought out 'what it is' in itself. But since you do not try to rule yourself, so that you can be 'free', but try to rule me, and do rule me, I will yield to you, for is it not necessary for me to do so? So it seems then that an investigation of the

¹⁰² Bluck (Pg. 318) argues here that in answer to Meno's claim that it is not possible to seek after what we do not know, Socrates has given us a scenario under which it is, in fact, possible. Socrates admits that he has far from proven that his scenario is true, but now, given two claims that have not been, and perhaps cannot be proven, we are left with a 'moral decision' about which one to believe. Knowledge may not be possible here, so we are being asked to 'choose' a *doxa*. See also *Phaedo* 114d, 63b-c.

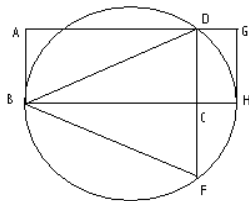
E kind (*poion*) of the thing will happen when we do not yet know what it is. At any rate, will you not relax your rule over me a little, and yield to an examination ‘from a hypothesis’, of whether it is taught or comes in some other way? By ‘from a hypothesis’, I mean just this: when certain questions are put to them geometers often examine them in this way; for instance, concerning a *khôrion*, asked whether this triangular *khôrion*¹⁰³ can be **87** inscribed in this circle, they will say something like this: ‘I do not know yet if this is the case; but believe I have a sort of ‘hypothesis’ useful in this matter: If the *khôrion* be such that when you apply it to the given line (of the circle)¹⁰⁴, it falls short by an area similar to the area so applied, then one consequence follows, and if this is impossible then some other¹⁰⁵. I want,

¹⁰³ Really, whether a certain area is capable of being inscribed as a triangle in a certain circle. There are probably 5 steps here: a particular *khôrion*, the construction of a triangle that is equal to that *khôrion*, the construction of a rectangle equal to the *khôrion* and then the inscription of the triangle in a particular circle. The transformation of space into different shapes was an important element of ‘mathematical rationality’.

¹⁰⁴ i.e. the diameter of the circle. The exact nature of this mathematical problem is unclear.

¹⁰⁵ The exact nature of this mathematical problem is unclear. The simplest interpretation (Butcher, quoted in Bluck p. 443) is this:

If the *khôrion* as applied to the diameter, as a rectangle ABCD, falls short of the entire rectangle ABHG by a figure which is similar to ABCD, then D must fall on the circumference. This can be proven thus:



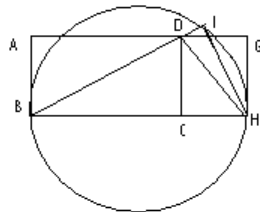
If ABCD is similar to CHGD then $B.C. : CD :: CD : CH$. By Euclid xx we know that triangle BDH is a right triangle. Now suppose that D did not fall on the circumference, thus:

B then, to hypothesize and then tell you about the inscription of the area in the circle, whether it is impossible or not.’ Surely in this way, concerning *aretê* also, since we know neither what it is or nor what sort of thing it is, let us examine it, whether it is teachable or not, under a hypothesis, speaking thus, if *aretê* is what sort of thing, among the entities of the soul, will it be taught or not taught? First, if it is unlike or like knowledge, is it taught or not, or, as we were just now saying, 'remembered'? Let’s not argue **C** about which of the two names we should use, but is it taught? Or is it clear to all that nothing other than knowledge is taught to humans?

MENO: It seems so to me.

SOCRATES: Then if *aretê* is some kind of knowledge, it is clear that it would be taught?

MENO: How could it not?



By the above reasoning, we know that BDH is a right angle, but if we extend BD to the circumference at I, we know by Euclid III xx that BIH is also a right angle. But if BDH is a right angle then HDI must also be a right angle, and then triangle IDH will contain two right angles at it’s base, which is impossible. Therefore D must be on the circumference. If it is on the circumference, then (diagram I) if we draw DC through to F, $CF = CD$, and triangle BFC = triangle BDC. BDC is half of the original *khôrion* ABCD, so triangle DBF is a triangle equal to the original *khôrion* which is inscribed in the circle. The hypothesis then is that, if the area can be formed into a rectangle which when applied to the diameter leaves a similar figure on the rest of the diameter, then a triangle equal to that *khôrion* can be inscribed in the circle. It has not been shown that if the *khôrion* does not meet this condition, a triangle equal to it cannot be so inscribed.

SOCRATES: We have settled this quickly; that which is of this kind of being is taught, and of that kind is not.

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: After this, it seems, it is necessary to investigate whether *aretê* is knowledge, or something other than knowledge.

D MENO: This seems to me, at least, to be the next thing to investigate

SOCRATES: Very well then, do we say that *aretê* is something other than a good; the hypothesis stands for us, that it is a good?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Then, if there is some good which is other than and separable from knowledge, then it immediately follows that *aretê* may not be a kind of knowledge, but if there is nothing good that is not encompassed by knowledge, then the suspicion that it is a kind of knowledge is the right suspicion.

MENO: That's so.

SOCRATES: And it is through *aretê* that we are good?

MENO: Yes.

E SOCRATES: But if good, then beneficial; for all good things are beneficial, no?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then *aretê* is beneficial?

MENO: What we have agreed on¹⁰⁶ necessitates that.

SOCRATES: Let's examine, taking up each one, what kind of things are beneficial to us. Health, we say, and strength, and beauty and wealth; surely we say these and what is like these are beneficial, no?

88 MENO: Yes.

¹⁰⁶ *homologemonon*

SOCRATES: And yet we say the same things also sometimes harm, or do you say otherwise?

MENO: No, I say just that.

SOCRATES: Consider what guides each of them into benefiting, when it does, or harming, whenever it does that. And what is the guiding principle which makes them beneficial or the reverse? Are they not beneficial when rightly used, and harmful when not?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And now, let us consider matters of the soul; you call them *sôphrosunê*, justice, courage, quick learning, memory, magnanimity, and all such things?

B MENO: I do.

SOCRATES: Consider then, any of these that seem to you to not be knowledge, but something other than knowledge; do they sometimes harm and sometimes benefit? For example, courage; if it is not *phronêsis* then courage is only some kind of boldness. Is it not so that whenever a person is bold without thought he is harmed, but whenever accompanied by *nous* he is benefited?

MENO: Yes

SOCRATES: And the same may be said of *sôphrosunê* and adeptness in learning; instances of both learning (in the second case) and discipline (in the first) accompanied by *nous* are beneficial, but without *nous* are harmful?

MENO: Most certainly.

C SOCRATES: Then in sum, all of the attempts and endurements of the soul when led by *phronêsis* should end in happiness; but by thoughtlessness in the opposite?

MENO: It seems likely.

SOCRATES: If then *aretê* is something of the soul, and is of necessity

beneficial, it must itself be *phronêsis*¹⁰⁷, since all things concerning the soul are in themselves neither beneficial or harmful, but by being allied to

D *phronêsis* or thoughtlessness they become beneficial or harmful;

according to this reasoning *aretê*, being beneficial, must be a sort of *phronêsis*.

MENO: It seems so to me.

SOCRATES: And the other things which we were just now saying are sometimes good and sometimes harmful- wealth and the like – is it not just as when *phronêsis* led the rest of the soul, it made the things of the soul beneficial, but when thoughtlessness led, harmful; in this way again, both

E using and guiding such things rightly the soul makes them beneficial, but not rightly, harmful?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: The sensible soul guides rightly, and the foolish soul misses the mark?

MENO: It is so.

SOCRATES: Then can we say this in every case? For humans, all other things are hung on the soul, and the things of the soul itself on *phronêsis*, if

89 it is to do good; and so by this reasoning *phronêsis* would be the beneficial--and we declare *aretê* to be beneficial?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And we declare *aretê* to be *phronêsis*, either all of the latter or some part of it?¹⁰⁸

MENO: What you are saying seems to me, Socrates, beautifully stated.

¹⁰⁷ This implies that *arête* is not like learning or discipline, something which must be accompanied by *phronêsis* in order to be beneficial, but is the same kind of thing as the supplement. It is what leads or guides modes of apprehension or action, rather than itself a mode of apprehending or acting in the world.

¹⁰⁸ The argument is that if *phronêsis* is *the* beneficial, and *arête* is beneficial, then *arête* is at least a part of *phronêsis* – if not equivalent to it.

SOCRATES: But if this holds, then the good are not so by nature?

MENO: It does not seem so to me.

B SOCRATES: And I suppose there is this, also: if the good had come into being by nature, we should have had among us those who can perceive who of the young are good by nature, and we would have adopted¹⁰⁹ them, and when we had got them, we would have kept watch over them in the Acropolis, sealing them in many times better than a piece of gold, in that place no one would corrupt them; but when they came of age they would become useful to their cities.

MENO: That seems likely to me, Socrates

SOCRATES: Then surely since it is not by nature that the good become

C good, is it through learning?

MENO: At this point, this seems to me to be necessary, and clearly, Socrates, according to the hypothesis, if *aretê* is knowledge, then it is taught¹¹⁰.

SOCRATES: Possibly, by God; but what if this was not rightly agreed upon¹¹¹?

MENO: But it seemed to me just now to be finely stated.

SOCRATES: But it needs to seem finely stated not only ‘just now’, but in ‘the now and the then’, if there is any soundness in it.

D MENO: What’s this then? What is it that you can see in it that dissatisfies you and makes you suspect that *aretê* is not knowledge?

SOCRATES: I will tell you, Meno. That it is taught, if it is knowledge, I do not take back the assertion that this was finely stated; but consider whether it

¹⁰⁹ *Paralambanô*: could also mean ‘take prisoner’.

¹¹⁰ Socrates has just demonstrated that *arête* is *phronêsis*, not that it is knowledge. Further, the first part of the dialogue purported to show that knowledge may be something that is learned, but may not be taught.

¹¹¹ *Hômologêsamen*: again, this has not been agreed on at all, and has not operated as a *homologoumenon* of the demonstration.

ought to seem doubtful to you that it is knowledge. Tell me this: if any matter whatsoever is teachable, not *aretê* alone, is it not necessary for there to be teachers and learners of it?

MENO: It seems so to me.

E SOCRATES: Then, again, to the contrary, if there is something of which there are neither teachers nor learners, would it be a right inference if we were to infer that it is not teachable?

MENO: That's so; but does it seem to you that there are no teachers of *aretê*?

SOCRATES: I have, at any rate, often sought out whether there were any teachers of it but, doing everything, I have not been able to discover any, and indeed I have searched with many – with those I supposed to be the most experienced in the matter. And now, Meno, just at the right time, Anytus has sat down near us, let's give him a share of the search¹¹². It's reasonable that

90 we should give him a share. For, first, Anytus is son of a wealthy and wise father, who did not come to be wealthy through chance or some gift, like Ismenias the Theban, who has recently received the wealth of Polycrates, but acquired through his own wisdom and care; next, he¹¹³ seems to be a citizen who is neither haughty nor puffed up and oppressive, but is an **B** orderly and well-mannered man; then, he trained and educated him well, or so it seems to the majority of Athenians: for they elect him to the highest offices. It is right to seek out¹¹⁴ with such men whether there are or are not teachers of *aretê*, and who they might be. Therefore, will you seek out¹¹⁵

¹¹² *zêtêseôs*

¹¹³ it's not clear here whether Socrates is speaking of Anytus or his father

¹¹⁴ *zêtein*

¹¹⁵ *szêtêson*

with us, your guest-friend Meno and myself, who the teachers of this matter might be? Consider it like this: If we wished Meno to become a good **C** doctor, to which teachers would we send him? Would it not be to the doctors?

ANYTUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: What if we wished him to be a good cobbler, would it not be to the cobblers?

ANYTUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And others thus?

ANYTUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Returning to these matters, tell me this. We stated rightly that when we wish them to become doctors, we should send them to doctors,; when saying this, are we saying that we are being sensible in sending him to **D** those who lay claim to the *techne*, rather than to those who do not, and to those who exact a fee for this itself, making their teaching known all who wish to come and learn? Looking to such things, would we not send them rightly?

ANYTUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then the same for flute playing, and other such things?

E Wishing to make someone a flute player, it is very foolish to not want to send him to those who profess to teach the *techne* and who exact a fee, but to trouble some others who neither purport to be teachers nor have any students of the branch of learning that we think it worthwhile for him to learn, for which we are sending him? Does this not seem to you much *alogia*?

ANYTUS: Yes, by Zeus, it seems so to me; and ignorance¹¹⁶ too.

SOCRATES: Well said. Now, then, you are in a position to ally with me in **91** deliberating about this guest-friend of yours, Meno. For the fact is, Anytus, he has long been telling me that he desires¹¹⁷ the wisdom (*Sophia*) and *aretê* by which people manage homes and cities well, and care for their parents, and know how to receive and to send away citizens and guest-friends as is worthy of a good man¹¹⁸. Consider, then, to whom should we send him for **B** this *aretê* - correctly send him, that is. Or is it not clear from the previous reasoning that it is to those who purport to be teachers of *aretê* and make it known that they are readily available to anyone in Greece who wants to learn, charging a settled fee for this?

ANYTUS: But of whom do you speak, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Surely you also know, that these are those whom people call Sophists?

C ANYTUS: By Heracles, Socrates, keep a sacred silence! Let none of my relatives nor friends, neither citizen nor foreigner¹¹⁹, be taken by such madness as to go and be deformed by them; for they are plainly a deformation and destruction of all who associate with them.

SOCRATES: What are you saying, Anytus? Are these of all the people who profess that they know how to do men good, do you mean to say that these are the only ones who not only do them no good, but positively corrupt

¹¹⁶ *amathia*: literally, unlearned, or showing lack of learning.

¹¹⁷ *Epithumai*: Plato could have said that Meno wished or wanted wisdom, but he uses a more base word – one that in the *Republic* designates the lowest region of the soul. The word here could mean ‘has an appetite for..’. It is especially jarring because Socrates has just asked Anytus to ‘deliberate’ with him – they are apparently deliberating about Meno’s appetites.

¹¹⁸ Meno never claimed that he wants to learn this, and it seems an odd thing to list as an essential of *arête*. We do know he is the guest friend of Anytus, and there seems some implication that Anytus has not considered when is the right time to invite or send away foreign guests.

¹¹⁹ *Xenon*: same word used to describe Meno as his ‘guest-friend’.

D those who are entrusted to them, and in return for this *kakia* have the face to demand money? Indeed, I cannot believe you; for I know of a single man, Protagoras, who made more out of his craft than the illustrious Pheidias, who created such noble works, or any ten other statuary. How could that be? A mender of old shoes, or patcher up of clothes, who made the shoes or clothes worse than he received them, could not have remained **E** thirty days undetected, and would very soon have starved; whereas during more than forty years, Protagoras was corrupting all Hellas, and sending his disciples from him worse than he received them, and he was never found out. For, if I am not mistaken, he was about seventy years old at his death, forty of which were spent in the practice of his profession; and during all that time he had a good reputation, which to this day he retains: and not only Protagoras, **92** but many others are well spoken of; some who lived before him, and others who are still living. Now, when you say that they deceived and corrupted the youth, are they to be supposed to have corrupted them knowingly or unawares? Can those who were deemed by many to be the wisest men of Hellas have been out of their minds?

ANYTUS: Out of their minds! No, Socrates; the young men who gave their money to them were out of their minds, and their relations and guardians **B** who entrusted their youth to the care of these men were still more out of their minds, and most of all, the cities who allowed them to come in, and did not drive them out, citizen and stranger alike.

SOCRATES: Has any of the Sophists wronged you, Anytus? What makes you so angry with them?

ANYTUS: No, indeed, neither I nor any of my belongings has ever had, nor would I suffer them to have, anything to do with them.

SOCRATES: Then you are entirely (*pantapasi*) unacquainted (*apeiras*) with them¹²⁰?

ANYTUS: And I have no wish to be acquainted.

C

SOCRATES: Then, my dear friend, how can you know whether a thing is good or bad of which you are completely inexperienced (*pantapasi apeiras*)?

ANYTUS: Quite well; I am sure that I know what manner of men these are, whether I am acquainted with them or not.

SOCRATES: You must be a diviner, Anytus, for I really cannot make out, judging from your own words, how, if you are not acquainted with them, you know about them. But I am not enquiring of you who are the teachers who will corrupt **D** Meno (let them be, if you please, the Sophists); I only ask you to tell him who there is in this great city who will teach him how to become eminent in the *aretê* which I was just now describing. He is the friend of your family, and you will oblige him.

ANYTUS: Why do you not tell him yourself?

SOCRATES: I have told him whom I supposed to be the teachers of these things; but I learn from you that I am utterly at fault, and I dare say

E that you are right. And now I wish that you, on your part, would tell me to whom among the Athenians he should go. Whom would you name?

¹²⁰ This accusation brings to mind Socrates' earlier question of how he could know if someone is beautiful if absolutely (*to parapan*) did not know him. This does not seem to trouble Anytus.

ANYTUS: Why name one of the people? Any Athenian gentleman¹²¹, taken at random, if he will mind him, will do far more good to him than the Sophists.

SOCRATES: And did those gentlemen grow of themselves; and without having been taught by any one, were they nevertheless able to teach others that which they had never learned themselves?

ANYTUS: I imagine that they learned of the previous generation of gentlemen. Have there not been many good men in this city?

SOCRATES: Yes, certainly, Anytus; and many good statesmen also there always have been and there are still, in the city of Athens. But the question is whether they were also good teachers of their own *aretê*; --not whether there are, or have been, good men in this part of the world, but whether *aretê* can **B** be taught, is the question which we have been discussing. Now, do we mean to say that the good men of our own and of other times knew how to impart to others that *aretê* which they had themselves; or is *aretê* a thing incapable of being communicated or imparted by one man to another? That is the question which I and Meno have been arguing. Look at the matter in **C** your own way: Would you not admit that Themistocles was a good man?

ANYTUS: Certainly; no man better.

SOCRATES: And must not he then have been a good teacher, if any man ever was a good teacher, of his own *aretê* ?

¹²¹ *Kalon kagathon* the 'noble (beautiful) good' people. This phrase elides the question of whether the *kalon* is *agathon*, which comes up here and in *The Symposium*.

ANYTUS: Yes certainly, if he wanted to be so.

SOCRATES: But would he not have wanted? He would, at any rate, have desired to make his own son a good man and a gentleman; he could not have been jealous of him, or have intentionally abstained from imparting to him **D** his own *aretê* . Did you never hear that he made his son Cleophantus a famous horseman; and had him taught to stand upright on horseback and hurl a javelin, and to do many other marvelous things; and in anything which could be learned from a master he was well trained? Have you not heard from our elders of him?

ANYTUS: I have.

SOCRATES: Then no one could say that his son showed evidence of a bad nature?

E

ANYTUS: Very likely not.

SOCRATES: But did any one, old or young, ever say in your hearing that Cleophantus, son of Themistocles, was a wise or good man, as his father was?

ANYTUS: I have certainly never heard anyone say so.

SOCRATES: And if *aretê* could have been taught, would his father Themistocles have sought to train him in these minor accomplishments, and allowed him who, as you must remember, was his own son, to be no better than his neighbors in those qualities in which he himself excelled?

ANYTUS: Indeed, indeed, I think not.

SOCRATES: Here was a teacher of *aretê* whom you admit to be among the best men of the past. **94A** Let us take another, Aristides, the son of Lysimachus: would you not acknowledge that he was a good man?

ANYTUS: To be sure I should.

SOCRATES: And did not he train his son Lysimachus better than any other Athenian in all that could be done for him by the help of masters? But what has been the result? Is he a bit better than any other mortal? He is an acquaintance of yours, and you see what he is like. **B** There is Pericles, again, magnificent in his wisdom; and he, as you are aware, had two sons, Paralus and Xanthippus.

ANYTUS: I know.

SOCRATES: And you know, also, that he taught them to be unrivalled horsemen, and had them trained in music and gymnastics and all sorts of arts--in these respects they were on a level with the best--and had he no wish to make good men of them? Nay, he must have wished it. But *aretê*, as I suspect, could not be taught. And that you may not suppose the incompetent teachers to be only the meaner sort of Athenians and few in number, remember again that Thucydides had two sons, Melesias and Stephanus, whom, besides giving them a good education in other things, he trained in wrestling, and they were the best wrestlers in Athens: one of them he committed to the care of Xanthias, and the other of Eudorus, who had the reputation of being the most celebrated wrestlers of that day. Do you remember them?

ANYTUS: I have heard of them.

SOCRATES: Now, can there be a doubt that Thucydides, whose children were taught things for which he had to spend money, would have taught them **D** to be good men, which would have cost him nothing, if *aretê* could have been taught? Will you reply that he was a mean man, and had not many friends among the Athenians and allies? Nay, but he was of a great family, and a man of influence at Athens and in all Hellas, and, if *aretê* could have been taught, he would have found out some Athenian or foreigner who would have made good men of his sons, if he could not himself spare the time from **E** cares of state. Once more, I suspect, friend Anytus, that *aretê* is not a thing which can be taught?

ANYTUS: Socrates, I think that you are too ready to speak *kakon* of men: and, if you will take my advice I would recommend you to be careful. Perhaps there is no city in which it is not easier to do men harm than to do them good, and this is certainly the case at Athens, **95A** as I believe that you know.

SOCRATES: Oh Meno, I think that Anytus is in a rage. And he may well be in a rage, for he thinks, in the first place, that I am defaming these gentlemen; and in the second place, he is of opinion that he is one of them himself. But some day he will know what is the meaning of defamation, and if he ever does, he will forgive me. Meanwhile I will return to you, Meno; for I suppose that there are gentlemen in your region too?

MENO: Certainly there are.

B

SOCRATES: And are they willing to teach the young? and do they profess to be teachers? and do they agree that *aretê* is taught?

MENO: No indeed, Socrates, they are anything but agreed; you may hear them saying at one time that *aretê* can be taught, and then again the reverse.

SOCRATES: Can we call those teachers who do not acknowledge the possibility of their own vocation?

C

MENO: I think not, Socrates.

SOCRATES: And what do you think of these Sophists, who are the only professors? Do they seem to you to be teachers of *aretê*?

MENO: I often wonder, Socrates, that Gorgias is never heard promising to teach *aretê* : and when he hears others promising he only laughs at them; but he thinks that men should be taught to speak.

SOCRATES: Then do you not think that the Sophists are teachers?

MENO: I cannot tell you, Socrates; like the rest of the world, I am in doubt, and sometimes I think that they are teachers and sometimes not.

SOCRATES: And are you aware that not only you and other politicians have doubts whether *aretê* can be taught or not, but that Theognis the poet **D** says the very same thing?

MENO: Where does he say so?

SOCRATES: In these elegiac verses (Theog.):

'Eat and drink and sit with the mighty, and make yourself agreeable to them; for from the good you will learn what is good, but if you mix with

E the bad you will lose the intelligence which you already have.'

Do you observe that here he seems to imply that *aretê* can be taught?

MENO: Clearly.

SOCRATES: But in some other verses he shifts about and says (Theog.):

'If understanding could be created and put into a man, then they' (who were able to perform this feat) 'would have obtained great rewards.'

And again:

96A

'Never would a bad son have sprung from a good sire, for he would have heard the voice of instruction; but not by teaching will you ever make a bad man into a good one.'

And this, as you may remark, is a contradiction of the other.

MENO: Clearly.

SOCRATES: And is there anything else of which the professors are affirmed not only not to be teachers of others, but to be ignorant themselves, and bad at the knowledge of that which they are professing to teach? or is

B there anything about which even the acknowledged 'gentlemen' are sometimes saying that 'this thing can be taught,' and sometimes the opposite? Can you say that they are teachers in any true sense whose ideas are in such confusion?

MENO: I should say, certainly not.

SOCRATES: But if neither the Sophists nor the gentlemen are teachers, clearly there can be no other teachers?

MENO: No.

C

SOCRATES: And if there are no teachers, neither are there pupils¹²²?

MENO: Agreed.

SOCRATES: And we have admitted that a thing cannot be taught of which there are neither teachers nor disciples?

MENO: We have.

SOCRATES: And there are no teachers of *aretê* to be found anywhere?

MENO: There are not.

SOCRATES: And if there are no teachers, neither are there scholars?

MENO: That, I think, is true.

¹²² Literally 'learners'

SOCRATES: Then *aretê* cannot be taught?

D

MENO: Not if we are right in our view. But I cannot believe, Socrates, that there are no good men: And if there are, how did they come into existence?

SOCRATES: I am afraid, Meno, that you and I are not good for much, and that Gorgias has been as poor an educator of you as Prodicus has been of me. Certainly we shall have to look to ourselves, and try to find some one who will help in some way or other to improve us. This I say, because I observe that in the previous search (*zetesis*) none of us remarked that right and good action is possible to man under other guidance than that of knowledge (*episteme*); and indeed if this be denied, there is no seeing how there can be any good men at all.

MENO: How do you mean, Socrates?

SOCRATES: I mean that good men are necessarily useful or beneficial.

97A Were we not right in admitting this? It must be so.

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: And in supposing that they will be useful only if they are true guides to us of action--there we were also right?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: But when we said that a man cannot give right guidance unless he possesses sagacity(*phronêmos*), this we were wrong.

MENO: What do you mean by the word 'right'?

SOCRATES: I will say. Knowing the road to Larissa¹²³, or anywhere else you wish, if someone wanted to go there and lead others, he could guide another rightly and well?

MENO: Certainly.

B SOCRATES: And what if someone is rightly opining the road, but had never gone and did not know it, could he not guide correctly?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And so long as he should have right opinion concerning that which the other knows, he will be no worse a guide supposing the truth but not understanding, as he who understands?

MENO: No worse

SOCRATES: Then true opinion is no worse a guide to rightness of action than wisdom¹²⁴; and this is what we left out just now when, considering what

C sort of thing *aretê* is, we said that wisdom alone guides right action; there is also true opinion.

MENO: It seems so.

SOCRATES: Then right opinion is not less beneficial than knowledge?

MENO: Just this much, Socrates: one having knowledge will always hit the mark; but he who has right opinion will sometimes hit it, and sometimes not.

¹²³ Larissa is the abode of Meno's lover Aristippus, and also the place where Gorgias visited and added wisdom to the Thessalians' traditional 'virtues' of wealth and horsemanship. See 70b **Q.2.zz** *Plato chooses the road to Larissa, a place that has been given a specific meaning at the beginning of the dialogue, to represent that which we know without knowing. What hint is he giving us about this kind of knowing?*

¹²⁴ *Phronêseôs*: the word suggests practical or ethical wisdom. In the last paragraph *phronôn* and *phronountos* could only be translated as 'understanding', but they clearly are sliding towards this idea of wisdom. One of the sub-themes in the dialogue is the question of whether knowledge is wisdom, or wisdom requires something else. The substitution of this word for knowledge also moves the example in the moral direction.

SOCRATES: What do you mean? Wouldn't the one who always has right opinion always hit the mark, so long as he has opines rightly?

MENO: That's necessary, it appears to me: therefore, Socrates, I wonder that knowledge should ever be much more valued than right opinion, and

D what makes them different from each other.

SOCRATES: Do you know the reason why you wonder? Shall I tell you?

MENO: Tell me, certainly.

SOCRATES: It is because you have not paid attention to the statues of Daedalus; but perhaps there are none in your parts?

MENO: You are saying this with regard to what?

SOCRATES: Because of this: when they are not bound, they escape and run away, when bound, they stand fast.

E **MENO**: So what?

SOCRATES: I mean to say that they are not very valuable possessions if they are at liberty, for they will walk off like runaway slaves; but when fastened, they are of great value, for they are really beautiful works of art. Now this is an illustration of the nature of true opinions: while they abide with us they are beautiful and fruitful, but they run away out of the human soul, and do not remain long, and therefore they are not of **98A** much value until they are fastened by the tie of the cause; and this fastening of them, friend Meno, is recollection, as you and I have agreed to call it. But when they are bound, in the first place, they have the nature of knowledge; and, in the second place, they are abiding. And this is why knowledge is more honorable and excellent than true opinion, because fastened by a chain.

MENO: What you are saying, Socrates, seems to be very like the truth.

B

SOCRATES: I too speak rather in ignorance; I only conjecture. And yet

that knowledge differs from true opinion is no matter of conjecture with me. There are not many things which I profess to know, but this is most certainly one of them.

MENO: Yes, Socrates; and you are quite right in saying so.

SOCRATES: And am I not also right in saying that true opinion leading the way perfects the work of action quite as well as knowledge?

MENO: There again, Socrates, I think you are right.

SOCRATES: Then right opinion is not a whit inferior to knowledge, or less useful in action; nor is the man who has right opinion inferior to him who has knowledge?

MENO: True.

SOCRATES: And surely the good man has been acknowledged by us to be useful?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Seeing then that men become good and useful to states, not only because they have knowledge, but because they have right opinion, and that neither knowledge nor right opinion is given to man by nature or acquired by him, do you imagine either of them to be given by nature?

MENO: Not I.

SOCRATES: Then if they are not given by nature, neither are the good by nature good?

MENO: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: And nature being excluded, then came the question whether *aretê* is acquired by teaching?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: If *aretê* was *phronêsis*, then, as we thought, it was taught?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: And if it was taught it was *phronêsis*?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And if there were teachers, it might be taught; and if there were no teachers, not?

MENO: True.

SOCRATES: But surely we agreed (*homologekamen*) that there were no teachers of *aretê*?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then we agreed (*homologekamen*) that it was not taught, and was not *phronesis*?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And yet we agreed (*homologoumen*) that it was a good?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: And the right guide is useful and good?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And the only right guides are knowledge and true opinion—these are the guides of man; for things which happen by chance are not under the guidance of man: but the guides of man are true opinion and knowledge.

MENO: I think so too.

SOCRATES: But if *aretê* is not taught, neither is *aretê* knowledge.

MENO: Clearly not.

SOCRATES: Then of two good and useful things, one, which is knowledge, has been set aside, and cannot be supposed to be our guide in political life.

MENO: I think not.

SOCRATES: And therefore not by any wisdom, and not because they were wise, did Themistocles and those others of whom Anytus spoke govern states. This was the reason why they were unable to make others like themselves—because their *aretê* was not grounded on knowledge.

MENO: That is probably true, Socrates.

SOCRATES: But if not by knowledge, the only alternative which remains is that statesmen must have guided states by right opinion, which is in politics what divination is in religion; for diviners and also prophets say many things truly, but they know not what they say.

MENO: So I believe.

SOCRATES: And may we not, Meno, truly call those men 'divine' who, having no understanding, yet succeed in many a grand deed and word?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Then we shall also be right in calling divine those whom we were just now speaking of as diviners and prophets, including the whole tribe of poets. Yes, and statesmen above all may be said to be divine and illumined, being inspired and possessed of God, in which condition they say many grand things, not knowing what they say.

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: And the women too, Meno, call good men divine--do they not? And the Spartans, when they praise a good man, say 'that he is a divine man.'

MENO: And I think, Socrates, that they are right; although very likely our friend Anytus may take offence at the word.

SOCRATES: I do not care; as for Anytus, there will be another opportunity of talking with him. To sum up our enquiry--the result seems to be, if we are at all right in our view, that *aretê* is neither natural nor acquired, but an divine dispensation (*theia moira*) without understandin (*nou*) to the virtuous, unless there may be supposed to be among statesmen some one who is capable of educating statesmen. And if there be such an one, he may be said to be among the living what Homer says that Tiresias was among the dead, 'he alone has understanding; but the rest are flitting shades'; and he and his *aretê* in like manner will be a reality among shadows.

MENO: That is excellent, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then, Meno, the conclusion is that *aretê* comes to the virtuous by the gift of God. But we shall never know the certain truth until, before asking how *aretê* is given, we enquire into the actual nature of *aretê*. I fear that I must go away, but do you, now that you are persuaded yourself, persuade our friend Anytus. And do not let him be so exasperated; if you can conciliate him, you will have done good service to the Athenian people.

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