

not it can be taught, thus guarding against the possibility that your Epimetheus might trip us up and cheat us in our inquiry, just as according to the story he overlooked us in the distribution. I liked Prometheus in the myth better than Epimetheus; so I follow his lead and spend my time on all these matters as a means of taking forethought for my whole life. If you should be willing, then as I said at the beginning, you are the one with whom I would most gladly share the inquiry.

I congratulate you on your keenness, Socrates, responded Protagoras, and your skill in exposition. I hope I am not too had a character, and I am the last man to be jealous. I have told a great many people that I never met anyone I admire nearly as much as you, certainly not among your contemporaries, and I say now that I should not be surprised if you became one of our leading philosophers. Well, we will talk of these matters at some future meeting, whenever you like, but now it is time to turn to other things.

362 So be it, said I, if that is your wish. Indeed I ought long ago to have kept the appointment I mentioned. I only stayed as a concession to the blandishments of Callias.

That was the end of the conversation, and we went away.

MENO

Can virtue be taught? asks Meno. Socrates replies that he certainly cannot do it for he does not know what virtue is. Meno does and can tell him and gives him forthwith a list of various virtuous qualities, only to be caught up by Socrates, who points out that, as people say in jest when a person breaks something, he has merely made a singular into a plural. Can Meno state what virtue is while leaving it whole and not broken into such pieces as justice, temperance, and so on? Meno finally comes out with the statement that it is the desire of the good. But, Socrates says, everyone desires the good, no one ever desires evil. "For what else is unhappiness but desiring evil things and getting them?"

The two agree to try seriously to find out what virtue is in its essential nature. Socrates thinks this can be done because people who are inspired like poets and priests believe that we are born not in entire forgetfulness nor yet in utter nakedness, but that "the soul of man is immortal. At one time it comes to an end and at another is born again, but is never finally exterminated." We can recollect if we try hard enough what our souls knew in former lives. He gives a proof of this by making one of Meno's slaves, a completely uneducated lad, reason out facts about squares and triangles all by himself without the slightest help from anyone. He was able to do so, Socrates says, because truths his soul knew before birth still existed in it and could with a great effort be recalled. Meno and he can try like the slave to recollect the knowledge they once had in another existence.

The last part of the dialogue is taken up with Socrates' demonstration and Meno's reluctant agreement that virtue is not taught anywhere so that it is not knowledge which can be and is taught. No further definition is attempted, but Socrates' conclusion, characteristically Greek, is that if ever there could be a man who in addition to being virtuous knew what virtue was and could teach it, he would be among other men like a reality among fitting shades.

The third speaker, Anytus, who comes in toward the end, is generally considered to be the Anytus who proposed at Socrates' trial that he should be put to death, and his contribution to the argument here is at all points consistent with this view.

MENO : Can you tell me, Socrates—is virtue something that can be taught? Or does it come by practice? Or is it neither teaching nor practice that gives it to a man but natural aptitude or something else?

SOCRATES : Well, Meno, in the old days the Thesalians had a great reputation among the Greeks for their wealth and their horsemanship. Now it seems they are philosophers as well—especially the men of Larissa, where your friend Aristippus comes from. It is Gorgias who has done it. He went to that city and captured the hearts of the foremost of the Aleuadae for his wisdom—among them your own admirer Aristippus—not to speak of other leading Thessalians. In particular he got you into the habit of answering any question you might be asked, with the confidence and dignity appropriate to those who know the answers, just as he himself invites questions of every kind from anyone in the Greek world who wishes to ask, and never fails to answer them. But here at Athens, my dear Meno, it is just the reverse. There is a dearth of wisdom, and it looks as if it had migrated from our part of the country to yours. At any rate if you put your question to any of our people, they will all alike laugh and say, You must think I am singularly fortunate, to know whether virtue can be taught or how it is acquired. The fact is that far from knowing whether it can be taught, I have no idea what virtue itself is.

That is my own case. I share the poverty of my fellow countrymen in this respect, and confess to my shame that I have no knowledge about virtue at all. And how can I know a property of something when I don't even know what it is? Do you suppose that somebody entirely ignorant who Meno is could say whether he is handsome and rich and wellborn or the reverse? Is that possible, do you think?

MENO : No. But is this true about yourself, Socrates, that you don't even know what virtue is? Is this the report that we are to take home about you?

SOCRATES : Not only that, you may say also that, to the best of my belief, I have never yet met anyone who did know.

MENO : What! Didn't you meet Gorgias when he was here?

SOCRATES : Yes.

MENO : And you still didn't think he knew?

SOCRATES : I'm a forgetful sort of person, and I can't say just now what I thought at the time. Probably he did know, and I expect you know what he used to say about it. So remind me what it was, or tell me yourself if you will. No doubt you agree with him.

MENO : Yes, I do.

SOCRATES : Then let's leave him out of it, since after all he isn't here. What do you yourself say virtue is? I do ask you in all earnestness not to refuse me, but to speak out. I shall be only too happy to be

From *Protagoras and Meno*, translated with an introduction by W. K. C. Guthrie (Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1956).

proved wrong if you and Gorgias turn out to know this, although I said I had never met anyone who did.

MENO : But there is no difficulty about it. First of all, if it is mainly virtue you are after, it is easy to see that the virtue of a man consists in managing the city's affairs capably, and so that he will help his friends and injure his foes while taking care to come to no harm himself. Or if you want a woman's virtue, that is easily described. She must be a good housewife, careful with her stores and obedient to her husband. Then there is another virtue for a child, male or female, and another for an old man, free or slave as you like, and a great many more kinds of virtue, so that no one need be at a loss to say what it is. For every act and every time of life, with reference to each separate function, there is a virtue for each one of us, and similarly, I should say, a vice.

SOCRATES : I seem to be in luck. I wanted one virtue and I find that you have a whole swarm of virtues to offer. But seriously, to carry on this metaphor of the swarm, suppose I asked you what a bee is, b what is its essential nature, and you replied that bees were of many different kinds. What would you say if I went on to ask, And is it in being bees that they are many and various and different from one another? Or would you agree that it is not in this respect that they differ, but in something else, some other quality like size or beauty? MENO : I should say that in so far as they are bees, they don't differ from one another at all.

SOCRATES : Suppose I then continued, Well, this is just what I want you to tell me. What is that character in respect of which they don't differ at all, but are all the same? I presume you would have something to say?

MENO : I should.

SOCRATES : Then do the same with the virtues. Even if they are many and various, yet at least they all have some common character which makes them virtues. That is what ought to be kept in view by anyone who answers the question, What is virtue? Do you follow me? MENO : I think I do, but I don't yet really grasp the question as I should wish.

SOCRATES : Well, does this apply in your mind only to virtue, that there is a different one for a man and a woman and the rest? Is it the same with health and size and strength, or has health the same character everywhere, if it is health, whether it be in a man or any other creature?

MENO : I agree that health is the same in a man or in a woman.

SOCRATES : And what about size and strength? If a woman is strong, will it be the same thing, the same strength, that makes her strong? My meaning is that in its character as strength, it is no different, whether it be in a man or in a woman. Or do you think it is?

MENO : No.

73

SOCRATES : And will virtue differ, in its character as virtue, whether it be in a child or an old man, a woman or a man?

MENO : I somehow feel that this is not on the same level as the other cases.

SOCRATES : Well then, didn't you say that a man's virtue lay in directing the city well, and a woman's in directing her household well?

MENO : Yes.

b SOCRATES : And is it possible to direct anything well—city or household or anything else—if not temperately and justly?

MENO : Certainly not.

SOCRATES : And that means with temperance and justice?

MENO : Of course.

SOCRATES : Then both man and woman need the same qualities, justice and temperance, if they are going to be good.

MENO : It looks like it.

SOCRATES : And what about your child and old man? Could they be good if they were incontinent and unjust?

MENO : Of course not.

SOCRATES : They must be temperate and just?

MENO : Yes.

c SOCRATES : So everyone is good in the same way, since they become good by possessing the same qualities.

MENO : So it seems.

SOCRATES : And if they did not share the same virtue, they would not be good in the same way.

MENO : No.

SOCRATES : Seeing then that they all have the same virtue, try to remember and tell me what Gorgias and you, who share his opinion, say it is.

d MENO : It must be simply the capacity to govern men, if you are looking for one quality to cover all the instances.

SOCRATES : Indeed I am. But does this virtue apply to a child or a slave? Should a slave be capable of governing his master, and if he does, is he still a slave?

MENO : I hardly think so.

SOCRATES : It certainly doesn't sound likely. And here is another point. You speak of 'capacity to govern.' Shall we not add, 'justly but not otherwise'?

MENO : I think we should, for justice is virtue.

SOCRATES : Virtue, do you say, or a virtue?

MENO : What do you mean?

e SOCRATES : Something quite general. Take roundness, for instance. I should say that it is a shape, not simply that it is shape, my reason being that there are other shapes as well.

MENO : I see your point, and I agree that there are other virtues besides justice.

SOCRATES : Tell me what they are. Just as I could name other 74 shapes if you told me to, in the same way mention some other virtues.

MENO : In my opinion then courage is a virtue and temperance and wisdom and dignity and many other things.

SOCRATES : This puts us back where we were. In a different way we have discovered a number of virtues when we were looking for one only. This single virtue, which permeates each of them, we cannot find.

b MENO : No, I cannot yet grasp it as you want, a single virtue covering them all, as I do in other instances.

SOCRATES : I'm not surprised, but I shall do my best to get us a bit further if I can. You understand, I expect, that the question applies to everything. If someone took the example I mentioned just now, and asked you, 'What is shape?' and you replied that roundness is shape, and he then asked you as I did, 'Do you mean it is shape or a shape?' you would reply of course that it is a shape.

MENO : Certainly.

c SOCRATES : Your reason being that there are other shapes as well.

MENO : Yes.

SOCRATES : And if he went on to ask you what they were, you would tell him.

MENO : Yes.

SOCRATES : And the same with color—if he asked you what it is, and on your replying, 'White,' took you up with, 'Is white color or a color?' you would say that it is a color, because there are other colors as well.

MENO : I should.

d SOCRATES : And if he asked you to, you would mention other colors which are just as much colors as white is.

MENO : Yes.

SOCRATES : Suppose then he pursued the question as I did, and objected, 'We always arrive at a plurality, but that is not the kind of answer I want. Seeing that you call these many particulars by one and the same name, and say that every one of them is a shape, even though they are the contrary of each other, tell me what this is which embraces round as well as straight, and what you mean by shape when you say that straightness is a shape as much as roundness. You do say that?'

MENO : Yes.

e SOCRATES : 'And in saying it, do you mean that roundness is no more round than straight, and straightness no more straight than round?'

MENO : Of course not.

SOCRATES : 'Yet you do say that roundness is no more a shape than straightness, and the other way about.'

MENO : Quite true.

SOCRATES : 'Then what is this thing which is called "shape"? Try to tell me.' If when asked this question either about shape or color you said, 'But I don't understand what you want, or what you mean,' your questioner would perhaps be surprised and say, 'Don't you see that I am looking for what is the same in all of them?' Would you even so be unable to reply, if the question was, 'What is it that is common to roundness and straightness and the other things which you call shapes?' Do your best to answer, as practice for the question about virtue.

MENO : No, you do it, Socrates.

SOCRATES : Do you want me to give in to you?

MENO : Yes.

SOCRATES : And will you in your turn give me an answer about virtue?

MENO : I will.

SOCRATES : In that case I must do my best. It's in a good cause.

MENO : Certainly.

SOCRATES : Well now, let's try to tell you what shape is. See if you accept this definition. Let us define it as the only thing which always accompanies color. Does that satisfy you, or do you want it in some other way? I should be content if your definition of virtue were on similar lines.

MENO : But that's a naïve sort of definition, Socrates.

SOCRATES : How?

MENO : Shape, if I understand what you say, is what always accompanies color. Well and good—but if somebody says that he doesn't know what color is, but is no better off with it than he is with shape, what sort of answer have you given him, do you think?

SOCRATES : A true one, and if my questioner were one of the clever, disputatious, and quarrelsome kind, I should say to him, 'You have heard my answer. If it is wrong, it is for you to take up the argument and refute it.' However, when friendly people, like you and me, want to converse with each other, one's reply must be milder and more conducive to discussion. By that I mean that it must not only be true, but must employ terms with which the questioner admits he is familiar. So I will try to answer you like that. Tell me, therefore, whether you recognize the term 'end'; I mean limit or boundary—all these words I use in the same sense. Prodicus might perhaps quarrel with us, but I assume you speak of something being bounded or coming to an end. That is all I mean, nothing subtle.

MENO : I admit the notion, and believe I understand your meaning.

SOCRATES : And again, you recognize 'surface' and 'solid,' as 76 they are used in geometry?

MENO : Yes.

SOCRATES : Then with these you should by this time understand my definition of shape. To cover all its instances, I say that shape is that in which a solid terminates, or more briefly, it is the limit of a solid.

MENO : And how do you define color?

SOCRATES : What a shameless fellow you are, Meno. You keep bothering an old man to answer, but refuse to exercise your memory and tell me what was Gorgias' definition of virtue.

MENO : I will, Socrates, as soon as you tell me this.

SOCRATES : Anyone talking to you could tell blindfold that you are a handsome man and still have your admirers.

MENO : Why so?

SOCRATES : Because you are forever laying down the law as spoiled boys do, who act the tyrant as long as their youth lasts. No doubt you have discovered that I can never resist good looks. Well, I will give in and let you have your answer.

MENO : Do by all means.

SOCRATES : Would you like an answer à la Gorgias, such as you would most readily follow?

MENO : Of course I should.

SOCRATES : You and he believe in Empedocles' theory of effluences, do you not?

MENO : Wholeheartedly.

SOCRATES : And passages to which and through which the effluences make their way?

MENO : Yes.

SOCRATES : Some of the effluences fit into some of the passages, whereas others are too coarse or too fine.

MENO : That is right.

SOCRATES : Now you recognize the term 'sight'?

MENO : Yes.

SOCRATES : From these notions, then, grasp what I would tell,¹ as Pindar says. Color is an effluence from shapes commensurate with sight and perceptible by it.

MENO : That seems to me an excellent answer.

SOCRATES : No doubt it is the sort you are used to. And you probably see that it provides a way to define sound and smell and many similar things.

MENO : So it does.

SOCRATES : Yes, it's a high-sounding answer, so you like it better than the one on shape.

¹ Pindar, fr. 82.

MENO : I do.

SOCRATES : Nevertheless, son of Alexidemus, I am convinced that the other is better, and I believe you would agree with me if you had not, as you told me yesterday, to leave before the Mysteries, but could stay and be initiated.

77 MENO : I would stay, Socrates, if you gave me more answers like this.

SOCRATES : You may be sure I shan't be lacking in keenness to do so, both for your sake and mine, but I'm afraid I may not be able to do it often. However, now it is your turn to do as you promised, and try to tell me the general nature of virtue. Stop making many out of one, as the humorists say when somebody breaks a plate. Just leave virtue whole and sound and tell me what it is, as in the examples I have given you.

MENO : It seems to me then, Socrates, that virtue is, in the words of the poet, 'to rejoice in the fine and have power,' and I define it as desiring fine things and being able to acquire them.

SOCRATES : When you speak of a man desiring fine things, do you mean it is good things he desires?

MENO : Certainly.

SOCRATES : Then do you think some men desire evil and others good? Doesn't everyone, in your opinion, desire good things?

MENO : No.

SOCRATES : And would you say that the others suppose evils to be good, or do they still desire them although they recognize them as evil?

MENO : Both, I should say.

SOCRATES : What? Do you really think that anyone who recognizes evils for what they are, nevertheless desires them?

MENO : Yes.

SOCRATES : Desires in what way? To possess them?

MENO : Of course.

d SOCRATES : In the belief that evil things bring advantage to their possessor, or harm?

MENO : Some in the first belief, but some also in the second.

SOCRATES : And do you believe that those who suppose evil things bring advantage understand that they are evil?

MENO : No, that I can't really believe.

SOCRATES : Isn't it clear then that this class, who don't recognize evils for what they are, don't desire evil but what they think is good, though in fact it is evil; those who through ignorance mistake bad things for good obviously desire the good?

MENO : For them I suppose that is true.

SOCRATES : Now as for those whom you speak of as desiring evils in the belief that they do harm to their possessor, these presumably know that they will be injured by them?

MENO : They must.

SOCRATES : And don't they believe that whoever is injured is, in so far as he is injured, unhappy?

MENO : That too they must believe.

SOCRATES : And unfortunate?

MENO : Yes.

SOCRATES : Well, does anybody want to be unhappy and unfortunate?

MENO : I suppose not.

SOCRATES : Then if not, nobody desires what is evil, for what else is unhappiness but desiring evil things and getting them?

MENO : It looks as if you are right, Socrates, and nobody desires what is evil.

SOCRATES : Now you have just said that virtue consists in a wish for good things plus the power to acquire them. In this definition the wish is common to everyone, and in that respect no one is better than his neighbor.

MENO : So it appears.

SOCRATES : So if one man is better than another, it must evidently be in respect of the power, and virtue, according to your account, is the power of acquiring good things.

MENO : Yes, my opinion is exactly as you now express it.

SOCRATES : Let us see whether you have hit the truth this time. You may well be right. The power of acquiring good things, you say, is virtue?

MENO : Yes.

SOCRATES : And by good do you mean such things as health and wealth?

MENO : I include the gaining both of gold and silver and of high and honorable office in the state.

SOCRATES : Are these the only classes of goods that you recognize?

MENO : Yes, I mean everything of that sort.

d SOCRATES : Right. In the definition of Meno, hereditary guest-friend of the Great King, the acquisition of gold and silver is virtue. Do you add 'just and righteous' to the word 'acquisition,' or doesn't it make any difference to you? Do you call it virtue all the same even if they are unjustly acquired?

MENO : Certainly not.

SOCRATES : Vice then?

MENO : Most certainly.

SOCRATES : So it seems that justice or temperance or piety, or some other part of virtue, must attach to the acquisition. Otherwise, although it is a means to good things, it will not be virtue.

MENO : No, how could you have virtue without these?

SOCRATES : In fact lack of gold and silver, if it results from

failure to acquire it—either for oneself or another—in circumstances which would have made its acquisition unjust, is itself virtue.

MENO: It would seem so.

SOCRATES: Then to have such goods is no more virtue than to lack them. Rather we may say that whatever is accompanied by justice is virtue, whatever is without qualities of that sort is vice.

MENO: I agree that your conclusion seems inescapable.

SOCRATES: But a few minutes ago we called each of these—justice, temperance, and the rest—a part of virtue?

MENO: Yes, we did.

SOCRATES: So it seems you are making a fool of me.

MENO: How so, Socrates?

SOCRATES: I have just asked you not to break virtue up into fragments, and given you models of the type of answer I wanted, but taking no notice of this you tell me that virtue consists in the acquisition of good things with justice, and justice, you agree, is a part of virtue.

MENO: True.

SOCRATES: So it follows from your own statements that to act with a part of virtue is virtue, if you call justice and all the rest parts of virtue. The point I want to make is that whereas I asked you to give me an account of virtue as a whole, far from telling me what it is itself you say that every action is virtue which exhibits a part of virtue, as if you had already told me what the whole is, so that I should recognize it even if you chop it up into bits. It seems to me that we must put the same old question to you, my dear Meno—the question, What is virtue?—if every act becomes virtue when combined with a part of virtue. That is, after all, what it means to say that every act performed with justice is virtue. Don't you agree that the same question needs to be put? Does anyone know what a part of virtue is, without knowing the whole?

MENO: I suppose not.

SOCRATES: No, and if you remember, when I replied to you about shape just now, I believe we rejected the type of answer that employs terms which are still in question and not yet agreed upon.

MENO: We did, and rightly.

SOCRATES: Then please do the same. While the nature of virtue as a whole is still under question, don't suppose that you can explain it to anyone in terms of its parts, or by any similar type of explanation. Understand rather that the same question remains to be answered; you say this and that about virtue, but what is it? Does this seem nonsense to you?

MENO: No, to me it seems right enough.

SOCRATES: Then go back to the beginning and answer my question. What do you and your friend say that virtue is?

MENO: Socrates, even before I met you they told me that in plain truth you are a perplexed man yourself and reduce others to perplexity. At this moment I feel you are exercising magic and witchcraft upon me and positively laying me under your spell until I am just a mass of helplessness. If I may be flippanant, I think that not only in outward appearance but in other respects as well you are exactly like the flat sting ray that one meets in the sea. Whenever anyone comes into contact with it, it numbs him, and that is the sort of thing that you seem to be doing to me now. My mind and my lips are literally numb, and I have nothing to reply to you. Yet I have spoken about virtue hundreds of times, held forth often on the subject in front of large audiences, and very well too, or so I thought. Now I can't even say what it is. In my opinion you are well advised not to leave Athens and live abroad. If you behaved like this as a foreigner in another country, you would most likely be arrested as a wizard.

SOCRATES: You're a real rascal, Meno. You nearly took me in.

MENO: Just what do you mean?

SOCRATES: I see why you used a simile about me.

MENO: Why do you think?

SOCRATES: To be compared to something in return. All good-looking people, I know perfectly well, enjoy a game of comparisons. They get the best of it, for naturally handsome folk provoke handsome similes. But I'm not going to oblige you. As for myself, if the sting ray paralyzes others only through being paralyzed itself, then the comparison is just, but not otherwise. It isn't that, knowing the answers myself, I perplex other people. The truth is rather that I infect them also with the perplexity I feel myself. So with virtue now. I don't know what it is. You may have known before you came into contact with me, but now you look as if you don't. Nevertheless I am ready to carry out, together with you, a joint investigation and inquiry into what it is.

MENO: But how will you look for something when you don't in the least know what it is? How on earth are you going to set up something you don't know as the object of your search? To put it another way, even if you come right up against it, how will you know that what you have found is the thing you didn't know?

SOCRATES: I know what you mean. Do you realize that what you are bringing up is the trick argument that a man cannot try to discover either what he knows or what he does not know? He would not seek what he knows, for since he knows it there is no need of the inquiry, nor what he does not know, for in that case he does not even know what he is to look for.

MENO: Well, do you think it a good argument?

SOCRATES: No.

MENO: Can you explain how it fails?

SOCRATES: I can. I have heard from men and women who understand the truths of religion . . .

MENO : What did they say?

SOCRATES : Something true, I thought, and fine.

MENO : What was it, and who were they?

SOCRATES : Those who tell it are priests and priestesses of the sort who make it their business to be able to account for the functions b which they perform. Pindar speaks of it too, and many another of the poets who are divinely inspired. What they say is this—see whether you think they are speaking the truth. They say that the soul of man is immortal. At one time it comes to an end—that which is called death—and at another is born again, but is never finally exterminated. On these grounds a man must live all his days as righteously as possible. For those from whom

Persephone receives requital for ancient doom,

In the ninth year she restores again

Their souls to the sun above.

From whom rise noble kings

And the swift in strength and greatest in wisdom,

And for the rest of time

They are called heroes and sanctified by men.²

c Thus the soul, since it is immortal and has been born many times, and has seen all things both here and in the other world, has learned everything that is. So we need not be surprised if it can recall the knowledge of virtue or anything else which, as we see, it once possessed. All nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, so that when a man has recalled a single piece of knowledge—*learned* it, in ordinary language—there is no reason why he should not find out all the rest, if he keeps a stout heart and does not grow weary of the search, for seeking and learning are in fact nothing but recollection.

We ought not then to be led astray by the contentious argument you quoted. It would make us lazy, and is music in the ears of e weaklings. The other doctrine produces energetic seekers after knowledge, and being convinced of its truth, I am ready, with your help, to inquire into the nature of virtue.

MENO : I see, Socrates. But what do you mean when you say that we don't learn anything, but that what we call learning is recollection? Can you teach me that it is so?

82 SOCRATES : I have just said that you're a rascal, and now you ask me if I can teach you, when I say there is no such thing as teaching, only recollection. Evidently you want to catch me contradicting myself straightaway.

MENO : No, honestly, Socrates, I wasn't thinking of that. It was just habit. If you can in any way make clear to me that what you say is true, please do.

SOCRATES : It isn't an easy thing, but still I should like to do

² Pindar, fr. 133.

what I can since you ask me. I see you have a large number of retainers b here. Call one of them, anyone you like, and I will use him to demonstrate it to you.

MENO : Certainly. [To a slave boy.] Come here.

SOCRATES : He is a Greek and speaks our language?

MENO : Indeed yes—born and bred in the house.

SOCRATES : Listen carefully then, and see whether it seems to you that he is learning from me or simply being reminded.

MENO : I will.

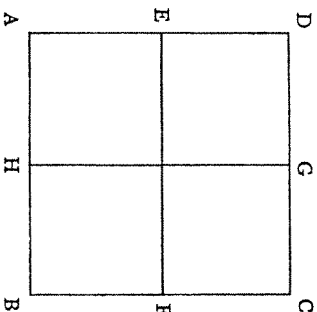
SOCRATES : Now boy, you know that a square is a figure like this?

(Socrates begins to draw figures in the sand at his feet. He points to the square ABCD.)

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : It has all these four sides equal?

e



BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : And these lines which go through the middle of it are also equal? [EF, GH.]

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : Such a figure could be either larger or smaller, could it not?

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : Now if this side is two feet long, and this side the same, how many feet will the whole be? Put it this way. If it were two feet in this direction and only one in that, must not the area be two feet taken once?

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : But since it is two feet this way also, does it not become twice two feet?

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : And how many feet is twice two? Work it out and tell me.

BOY : Four.

SOCRATES : Now could one draw another figure double the size of this, but similar, that is, with all its sides equal like this one?

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : How many feet will its area be?

BOY : Eight.

SOCRATES : Now then, try to tell me how long each of its sides will be. The present figure has a side of two feet. What will be the side of the double-sized one?

BOY : It will be double, Socrates, obviously.

SOCRATES : You see, Meno, that I am not teaching him anything, only asking. Now he thinks he knows the length of the side of the eight-foot square.

MENO : Yes.

SOCRATES : But does he?

MENO : Certainly not.

SOCRATES : He thinks it is twice the length of the other.

MENO : Yes.

SOCRATES : Now watch how he recollects things in order—the proper way to recollect.

83 You say that the side of double length produces the double-sized figure? Like this I mean, not long this way and short that. It must be equal on all sides like the first figure, only twice its size, that is, eight feet. Think a moment whether you still expect to get it from doubling the side.

BOY : Yes, I do.

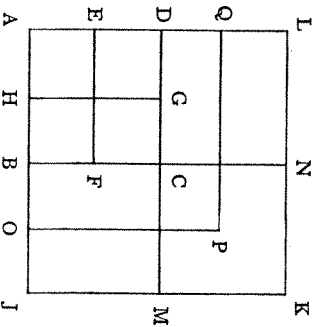
SOCRATES : Well now, shall we have a line double the length of this [AB] if we add another the same length at this end [BJ]?

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : It is on this line then, according to you, that we shall make the eight-foot square, by taking four of the same length?

BOY : Yes.

b SOCRATES : Let us draw in four equal lines [i.e., counting AJ and adding JK, KL, and LA made complete by drawing in its second half LD], using the first as a base. Does this not give us what you call the eight-foot figure?



BOY : Certainly.

SOCRATES : But does it contain these four squares, each equal to the original four-foot one?

(Socrates has drawn in the lines CM, CN to complete the squares that he wishes to point out.)

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : How big is it then? Won't it be four times as big?

BOY : Of course.

SOCRATES : And is four times the same as twice?

BOY : Of course not.

SOCRATES : So doubling the side has given us not a double but a fourfold figure?

BOY : True.

SOCRATES : And four times four are sixteen, are they not?

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : Then how big is the side of the eight-foot figure? This one has given us four times the original area, hasn't it?

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : And a side half the length gave us a square of four feet?

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : Good. And isn't a square of eight feet double this one and half that?

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : Will it not have a side greater than this one but less than that?

BOY : I think it will.

SOCRATES : Right. Always answer what you think. Now tell me. Was not this side two feet long, and this one four?

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : Then the side of the eight-foot figure must be longer than two feet but shorter than four?

BOY : It must.

SOCRATES : Try to say how long you think it is.

BOY : Three feet.

SOCRATES : If so, shall we add half of this bit [BO, half of BJ] and make it three feet? Here are two, and this is one, and on this side similarly we have two plus one, and here is the figure you want. (Socrates completes the square AOPQ.)

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : If it is three feet this way and three that, will the whole area be three times three feet?

BOY : It looks like it.

SOCRATES : And that is how many?

BOY : Nine.

SOCRATES : Whereas the square double our first square had to be how many?

BOY : Eight.

SOCRATES : But we haven't yet got the square of eight feet even from a three-foot side?

BOY : No.

SOCRATES : Then what length will give it? Try to tell us exactly. 84 If you don't want to count it up, just show us on the diagram.

BOY : It's no use, Socrates, I just don't know.

SOCRATES : Observe, Meno, the stage he has reached on the path of recollection. At the beginning he did not know the side of the square of eight feet. Nor indeed does he know it now, but then he thought he knew it and answered boldly, as was appropriate—he felt no perplexity. Now however he does feel perplexed. Not only does he not know the answer, he doesn't even think he knows.

MENO : Quite true.

SOCRATES : Isn't he in a better position now in relation to what he didn't know?

MENO : I admit that too.

SOCRATES : So in perplexing him and numbing him like the sting ray, have we done him any harm?

MENO : I think not.

SOCRATES : In fact we have helped him to some extent toward finding out the right answer, for now not only is he ignorant of it but he will be quite glad to look for it. Up to now, he thought he could speak well and fluently, on many occasions and before large audiences, on the subject of a square double the size of a given square, maintaining that it must have a side of double the length.

MENO : No doubt.

SOCRATES : Do you suppose then that he would have attempted to look for, or learn, what he thought he knew, though he did not, before he was thrown into perplexity, became aware of his ignorance, and felt a desire to know?

MENO : No.

SOCRATES : Then the numbing process was good for him?

MENO : I agree.

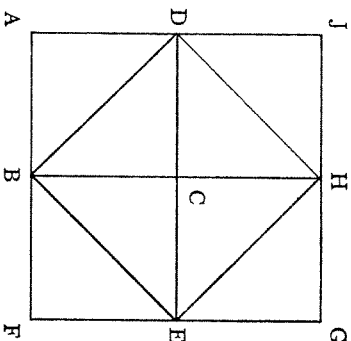
SOCRATES : Now notice what, starting from this state of perplexity, he will discover by seeking the truth in company with me, though I simply ask him questions without teaching him. Be ready to catch me if I give him any instruction or explanation instead of simply interrogating him on his own opinions.

(Socrates here rubs out the previous figures and starts again.)

Tell me, boy, is not this our square of four feet? [ABCD.] You understand?

MENO

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BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : Now we can add another equal to it like this?

[BCEF.]

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : And a third here, equal to each of the others?

[CEGH.]

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : And then we can fill in this one in the corner?

[DCHJ.]

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : Then here we have four equal squares?

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : And how many times the size of the first square is the whole?

BOY : Four times.

SOCRATES : And we want one double the size. You remember?

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : Now does this line going from corner to corner cut each of these squares in half?

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : And these are four equal lines enclosing this area?

[BEND.]

BOY : They are.

SOCRATES : Now think. How big is this area?

BOY : I don't understand.

SOCRATES : Here are four squares. Has not each line cut off the inner half of each of them?

BOY : Yes.

SOCRATES : And how many such halves are there in this figure?

[BEND.]

BOY : Four.

SOCRATES : And how many in this one? [ABCD.]

BOY : Two.

SOCRATES: And what is the relation of four to two?

BOY: Double.

SOCRATES: How big is this figure then?

BOY: Eight feet.

SOCRATES: On what base?

BOY: This one.

SOCRATES: The line which goes from corner to corner of the square of four feet?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: The technical name for it is 'diagonal'; so if we use that name, it is your personal opinion that the square on the diagonal of the original square is double its area.

BOY: That is so, Socrates.

SOCRATES: What do you think, Meno? Has he answered with any opinions that were not his own?

MENO: No, they were all his.

SOCRATES: Yet he did not know, as we agreed a few minutes ago.

MENO: True.

SOCRATES: But these opinions were somewhere in him, were they not?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: So a man who does not know has in himself true opinions on a subject without having knowledge.

MENO: It would appear so.

SOCRATES: At present these opinions, being newly aroused, have a dreamlike quality. But if the same questions are put to him on many occasions and in different ways, you can see that in the end he will have a knowledge on the subject as accurate as anybody's.

MENO: Probably.

SOCRATES: This knowledge will not come from teaching but from questioning. He will recover it for himself.

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: And the spontaneous recovery of knowledge that is in him is recollection, isn't it?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Either then he has at some time acquired the knowledge which he now has, or he has always possessed it. If he always possessed it, he must always have known; if on the other hand he acquired it at some previous time, it cannot have been in this life, unless somebody has taught him geometry. He will behave in the same way with all geometric knowledge, and every other subject. Has anybody taught him all these? You ought to know, especially as he has been brought up in your household.

MENO: Yes, I know that no one ever taught him.

SOCRATES: And has he these opinions, or hasn't he?

MENO: It seems we can't deny it.

SOCRATES: Then if he did not acquire them in this life, isn't it immediately clear that he possessed and had learned them during some other period?

MENO: It seems so.

SOCRATES: When he was not in human shape?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: If then there are going to exist in him, both while he is and while he is not a man, true opinions which can be aroused by questioning and turned into knowledge, may we say that his soul has been forever in a state of knowledge? Clearly he always either is or is not a man.

MENO: Clearly.

SOCRATES: And if the truth about reality is always in our soul, the soul must be immortal, and one must take courage and try to discover—that is, to recollect—what one doesn't happen to know, or, more correctly, remember, at the moment.

MENO: Somehow or other I believe you are right.

SOCRATES: I think I am. I shouldn't like to take my oath on the whole story, but one thing I am ready to fight for as long as I can, in word and act—that is, that we shall be better, braver, and more active men if we believe it right to look for what we don't know than if we believe there is no point in looking because what we don't know we can never discover.

MENO: There too I am sure you are right.

SOCRATES: Then since we are agreed that it is right to inquire into something that one does not know, are you ready to face with me the question, 'What is virtue?'

MENO: Quite ready. All the same, I would rather consider the question as I put it at the beginning, and hear your views on it—that is, are we to pursue virtue as something that can be taught, or do men have it as a gift of nature or how?

SOCRATES: If I were your master as well as my own, Meno, we should not have inquired whether or not virtue can be taught until we had first asked the main question—what it is. But not only do you make no attempt to govern your own actions—you prize your freedom, I suppose—but you attempt to govern mine. And you succeed too, so I shall let you have your way. There's nothing else for it, and it seems we must inquire into a single property of something about whose essential nature we are still in the dark. Just grant me one small relaxation of your sway, and allow me, in considering whether or not it can be taught, to make use of a hypothesis—the sort of thing, I mean, that geometers often use in their inquiries. When they are asked, for example, about a given area, whether it is possible for this area to be inscribed as a triangle in a given circle, they will probably reply, 'I don't know yet whether it fulfills the conditions, but I think I have a

hypothesis which will help us in the matter. It is this. If the area is such that, when one has applied it [sc. as a rectangle] to the given line [i.e., the diameter] of the circle, it is deficient by another rectangle similar to the one which is applied, then, I should say, one result follows; if not, the result is different. If you ask me, then, about the inscription of the figure in the circle—whether it is possible or not—I am ready to answer you in this hypothetical way.^b

Let us do the same about virtue. Since we don't know what it is or what it resembles, let us use a hypothesis in investigating whether it is teachable or not. We shall say, 'What attribute of the soul must virtue be, if it is to be teachable or otherwise?' Well, in the first place, if it is anything else but knowledge, is there a possibility of anyone teaching it—or, in the language we used just now, reminding someone of it? We needn't worry about which name we are to give to the process, but simply ask, Will it be teachable? Isn't it plain to everyone that a man is not taught anything except knowledge?

MENO: That would be my view.

SOCRATES: If on the other hand virtue is some sort of knowledge, clearly it could be taught.

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: So that question is easily settled—I mean, on what condition virtue would be teachable.

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: The next point then, I suppose, is to find out whether virtue is knowledge or something different.

MENO: That is the next question, I agree.

SOCRATES: Well then, do we assert that virtue is something good? Is that assumption a firm one for us?

MENO: Undoubtedly.

SOCRATES: That being so, if there exists any good thing different from, and not associated with, knowledge, virtue will not necessarily be any form of knowledge. If on the other hand knowledge embraces everything that is good, we shall be right to suspect that virtue is knowledge.

MENO: Agreed.

SOCRATES: First then, is it virtue which makes us good?^e

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: And if good, then advantageous. All good things are advantageous, are they not?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: So virtue itself must be something advantageous? MENO: That follows also.

SOCRATES: Now suppose we consider what are the sorts of things that profit us. Take them in a list. Health, we may say, and strength and good looks, and wealth—these and their like we call advantageous, you agree?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Yet we also speak of these things as sometimes doing harm. Would you object to that statement?

MENO: No, it is so.

SOCRATES: Now look here. What is the controlling factor which determines whether each of these is advantageous or harmful? Isn't it right use which makes them advantageous, and lack of it, harmful?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: We must also take spiritual qualities into consideration. You recognize such things as temperance, justice, courage, quickness of mind, memory, nobility of character, and others?

MENO: Yes, of course I do.

SOCRATES: Then take any such qualities which in your view are not knowledge but something different. Don't you think they may be harmful as well as advantageous? Courage, for instance, if it is something thoughtless, just a sort of confidence. Isn't it true that to be confident without reason does a man harm, whereas a reasoned confidence profits him?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Temperance and quickness of mind are no different. Learning and discipline are profitable in conjunction with wisdom, but without it harmful.

MENO: That is emphatically true.

SOCRATES: In short, everything that the human spirit undertakes or suffers will lead to happiness when it is guided by wisdom, but to the opposite, when guided by folly.

MENO: A reasonable conclusion.

SOCRATES: If then virtue is an attribute of the spirit, and one which cannot fail to be beneficial, it must be wisdom, for all spiritual qualities in and by themselves are neither advantageous nor harmful, but become advantageous or harmful by the presence with them of wisdom or folly. If we accept this argument, then virtue, to be something advantageous, must be a sort of wisdom.

MENO: I agree.

SOCRATES: To go back to the other class of things, wealth and the like, of which we said just now that they are sometimes good and sometimes harmful, isn't it the same with them? Just as wisdom when it governs our other psychological impulses turns them to advantage, and folly turns them to harm, so the mind by its right use and control of these material assets makes them profitable, and by wrong use renders them harmful.

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And the right user is the mind of the wise man, the wrong user the mind of the foolish.

MENO: That is so.

SOCRATES: So we may say in general that the goodness of non-spiritual assets depends on our spiritual character, and the goodness of that on wisdom. This argument shows that the advantageous element must be wisdom, and virtue, we agree, is advantageous; so that amounts to saying that virtue, either in whole or in part, is wisdom.

MENO: The argument seems to me fair enough.

SOCRATES: If so, good men cannot be good by nature.

MENO: I suppose not.

SOCRATES: There is another point. If they were, there would probably be experts among us who could recognize the naturally good at an early stage. They would point them out to us and we should take them and shut them away safely in the Acropolis, sealing them up more carefully than bullion to protect them from corruption and ensure that when they came to maturity they would be of use to the state.

MENO: It would be likely enough.

SOCRATES: Since then goodness does not come by nature, is it got by learning?

MENO: I don't see how we can escape the conclusion. Indeed it is obvious on our assumption that, if virtue is knowledge, it is teachable.

SOCRATES: I suppose so. But I wonder if we were right to blind ourselves to that.

MENO: Well, it seemed all right just now.

SOCRATES: Yes, but to be sound it has got to seem all right not only 'just now' but at this moment and in the future.

MENO: Of course. But what has occurred to you to make you turn against it and suspect that virtue may not be knowledge?

SOCRATES: I'll tell you. I don't withdraw from the position that if it is knowledge, it must be teachable, but as for its being knowledge, see whether you think my doubts on this point are well founded. If anything—not virtue only—is a possible subject of instruction, must there not be teachers and students of it?

MENO: Surely.

SOCRATES: And what of the converse, that if there are neither teachers nor students of a subject, we may safely infer that it cannot be taught?

MENO: That is true. But don't you think there are teachers of virtue?

SOCRATES: All I can say is that I have often looked to see if there are any, and in spite of all my efforts I cannot find them, though I have had plenty of fellow searchers, the kind of men especially whom I believe to have most experience in such matters. But look, Meno, here's a piece of luck. Anytus has just sat down beside us. We couldn't do better than make him a partner in our inquiry. In the first place he

is the son of Anthemion, a man of property and good sense, who didn't get his money out of the blue or as a gift—like Ismenias of Thebes who has just come into the fortune of a Croesus—but earned it by his own brains and hard work. Besides this he shows himself a decent, modest citizen with no arrogance or bombast or offensiveness about him. Also he brought up his son well and had him properly educated, as the Athenian people appreciate. Look how they elect him into the highest offices in the state. This is certainly the right sort of man with whom to inquire whether there are any teachers of virtue, and if so who they are.

Please help us, Anytus—Meno, who is a friend of your family, and myself—to find out who may be the teachers of this subject. Look at it like this. If we wanted Meno to become a good doctor, shouldn't we send him to the doctors to be taught?

ANYTUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: And if we wanted him to become a shoemaker, to the shoemakers?

ANYTUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And so on with other trades?

ANYTUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now another relevant question. When we say that to make Meno a doctor we should be right in sending him to the doctors, have we in mind that the sensible thing is to send him to those who profess the subject rather than to those who don't, men who charge a fee as professionals, having announced that they are prepared to teach whoever likes to come and learn?

ANYTUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: The same is surely true of flute playing and other accomplishments. If you want to make someone a performer on the flute it would be very foolish to refuse to send him to those who undertake to teach the art and are paid for it, but to go and bother other people instead and have him try to learn from them—people who don't set up to be teachers or take any pupils in the subject which we want our young man to learn. Doesn't that sound very unreasonable?

ANYTUS: Sheer stupidity, I should say.

SOCRATES: I agree. And now we can both consult together about our visitor Meno. He has been telling me all this while that he longs to acquire the kind of wisdom and virtue which fits men to manage an estate or govern a city, to look after their parents, and to entertain and send off guests in proper style, both their own countrymen and foreigners. With this in mind, to whom would it be right to send him? What we have just said seems to show that the right people are those who profess to be teachers of virtue and offer their services freely to any Greek who wishes to learn, charging a fixed fee for their instruction.

ANYTUS: Whom do you mean by that, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Surely you know yourself that they are the men called Sophists.

ANYTUS: Good heavens, what a thing to say! I hope no relative of mine or any of my friends, Athenian or foreign, would be so mad as to go and let himself be ruined by those people. That's what they are, the manifest ruin and corruption of anyone who comes into contact with them.

SOCRATES: What, Anytus? Can they be so different from other claimants to useful knowledge that they not only don't do good, like the rest, to the material that one puts in their charge, but on the contrary spoil it—and have the effrontery to take money for doing so? I for one find it difficult to believe you. I know that one of them alone, Protagoras, earned more money from being a Sophist than an outstandingly fine craftsman like Phidias and ten other sculptors put together. A man who mends old shoes or restores coats couldn't get away with it for a month if he gave them back in worse condition than he received them; he would soon find himself starving. Surely it is incredible that Protagoras took in the whole of Greece, corrupting his pupils and sending them away worse than when they came to him, for more than forty years. I believe he was nearly seventy when he died, and had been practicing for forty years, and all that time—indeed to this very day—his reputation has been consistently high, and there are plenty of others besides Protagoras, some before his time and others still alive. Are we to suppose from your remark that they consciously deceive and ruin young men, or are they unaware of it themselves? Can these remarkably clever men—as some regard them—be mad enough for that?

ANYTUS: Far from it, Socrates. It isn't they who are mad, but rather the young men who hand over their money, and those responsible for them, who let them get into the Sophists' hands, are even worse. Worst of all are the cities who allow them in, or don't expel them, whether it be a foreigner or one of themselves who tries that sort of game.

SOCRATES: Has one of the Sophists done you a personal injury, or why are you so hard on them?

ANYTUS: Heavens, no! I've never in my life had anything to do with a single one of them, nor would I hear of any of my family doing so.

SOCRATES: So you've had no experience of them at all?

ANYTUS: And don't want any either.

SOCRATES: You surprise me. How can you know what is good or bad in something when you have no experience of it?

ANYTUS: Quite easily. At any rate I know *their* kind, whether I've had experience or not.

SOCRATES: It must be second sight, I suppose, for how else you

know about them, judging from what you tell me yourself, I can't imagine. However, we are not asking whose instruction it is that would ruin Meno's character. Let us say that those are the Sophists, if you like, and tell us instead about the ones we want. You can do a good turn to a friend of your father's house if you will let him know to whom in our great city he should apply for proficiency in the kind of virtue I have just described.

ANYTUS: Why not tell him yourself?

SOCRATES: Well, I did mention the men who in my opinion teach these things, but apparently I was talking nonsense. So you say, and you may well be right. Now it is your turn to direct him; mention the name of any Athenian you like.

ANYTUS: But why mention a particular individual? Any decent Athenian gentleman whom he happens to meet, if he follows his advice, will make him a better man than the Sophists would.

SOCRATES: And did these gentlemen get their fine qualities spontaneously—self-taught, as it were, and yet able to teach this untaught virtue to others?

ANYTUS: I suppose they in their turn learned it from forebears who were gentlemen like themselves. Would you deny that there have been many good men in our city?

SOCRATES: On the contrary, there are plenty of good statesmen here in Athens and have been as good in the past. The question is, have they also been good teachers of their own virtue? That is the point we are discussing now—not whether or not there are good men in Athens or whether there have been in past times, but whether virtue can be taught. It amounts to the question whether the good men of this and former times have known how to hand on to someone else the goodness that was in themselves, or whether on the contrary it is not something that can be handed over, or that one man can receive from another. That is what Meno and I have long been puzzling over. Look at it from your own point of view. You would say that Themistocles was a good man?

ANYTUS: Yes, none better.

SOCRATES: And that he, if anyone, must have been a good teacher of his own virtue?

ANYTUS: I suppose so, if he wanted to be.

SOCRATES: But don't you think he must have wanted others to become worthy men—above all, surely, his own son? Do you suppose he grudged him this and purposely didn't pass on his own virtue to him? You must have heard that he had his son Cleophantus so well trained in horsemanship that he could stand upright on horseback and throw a javelin from that position, and many other wonderful accomplishments the young man had, for his father had him taught and made expert in every skill that a good instructor could impart. You must have heard this from older people?

ANYTUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: No one, then, could say that there was anything wrong with the boy's natural powers?

ANYTUS: Perhaps not.

SOCRATES: But have you ever heard anyone, young or old, say that Cleophantus, the son of Themistocles, was a good and wise man in the way that his father was?

ANYTUS: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: Must we conclude then that Themistocles' aim was to educate his son in other accomplishments, but not to make him any better than his neighbors in his own type of wisdom—that is, supposing that virtue could be taught?

ANYTUS: I hardly think we can.

SOCRATES: So much then for Themistocles as a teacher of virtue, whom you yourself agree to have been one of the best men of former times. Take another example. Aristides, son of Lysimachus. You accept him as a good man?

ANYTUS: Surely.

SOCRATES: He too gave his son Lysimachus the best education in Athens, in all subjects where a teacher could help, but did he make him a better man than his neighbor? You know him, I think, and can say what he is like. Or again there is Pericles, that great and wise man. He brought up two sons, Paralus and Xanthippus, and had them taught riding, music, athletics, and all the other skilled pursuits till they were as good as any in Athens. Did he then not want to make them good men? Yes, he wanted that, no doubt, but I am afraid it is something that cannot be done by teaching. And in case you should think that only very few, and those the most insignificant, lacked this power, consider that Thucydides also had two sons, Melesias and Stephanus, to whom he gave an excellent education. Among other things they were the best wrestlers in Athens, for he gave one to Xanthias to train and the other to Eudoxus—the two who, I understand, were considered the finest wrestlers of their time. You remember?

ANYTUS: I have heard of them.

SOCRATES: Surely then he would never have had his children taught these expensive pursuits and yet refused to teach them to be good men—which would have cost nothing at all—if virtue could have been taught? You are not going to tell me that Thucydides was a man of no account, or that he had not plenty of friends both at Athens and among the allies? He came of an influential family and was a great power both here and in the rest of Greece. If virtue could have been taught, he would have found the man to make his sons good, either among our own citizens or abroad, supposing his political duties left him no time to do it himself. No, my dear Anytus, it looks as if it cannot be taught.

MENO

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ANYTUS: You seem to me, Socrates, to be too ready to run people down. My advice to you, if you will listen to it, is to be careful. I dare say that in all cities it is easier to do a man harm than good, and it is certainly so here, as I expect you know yourself.

SOCRATES: Anytus seems angry, Meno, and I am not surprised. He thinks I am slandering our statesmen, and moreover he believes himself to be one of them. He doesn't know what slander really is; if he ever finds out he will forgive me.

However, tell me this yourself: Are there not similar fine characters in your country?

MENO: Yes, certainly.

SOCRATES: Do they come forward of their own accord to teach the young? Do they agree that they are teachers and that virtue can be taught?

MENO: No indeed, they don't agree on it at all. Sometimes you will hear them say that it can be taught, sometimes that it cannot.

SOCRATES: Ought we then to class as teachers of it men who are not even agreed that it can be taught?

MENO: Hardly, I think.

SOCRATES: And what about the Sophists, the only people who profess to teach it? Do you think they do?

MENO: The thing I particularly admire about Gorgias, Socrates, is that you will never hear him make this claim; indeed he laughs at the others when he hears them do so. In his view his job is to make clever speakers.

SOCRATES: So you too don't think the Sophists are teachers?

MENO: I really can't say. Like most people I waver—sometimes I think they are and sometimes I think they are not.

SOCRATES: Has it ever occurred to you that you and our statesmen are not alone in this? The poet Theognis likewise says in one place that virtue is teachable and in another that it is not.

MENO: Really? Where?

SOCRATES: In the elegiacs in which he writes:

Eat, drink, and sit with men of power and weight,
Nor scorn to gain the favor of the great.
For fine men's teaching to fine ways will win thee;
Low company destroys what wit is in thee.³

There he speaks as if virtue can be taught, doesn't he?

MENO: Clearly.

SOCRATES: But elsewhere he changes his ground a little.

Were mind by art created and instilled
Immense rewards had soon the pockets filled
of the people who could do this. Moreover,

³ Theognis 33 sq.

96 No good man's son would ever worthless be,
Taught by wise counsel. But no teacher's skill
Can turn to good what is created ill.⁴

Do you see how he contradicts himself?

MENO : Plainly.

a SOCRATES : Can you name any other subject, in which the professed teachers are not only not recognized as teachers of others, but are thought to have no understanding of it themselves, and to be no good at the very subject they profess to teach, whereas those who are acknowledged to be the best at it are in two minds whether it can be taught or not? When people are so confused about a subject, can you say that they are in a true sense teachers?

MENO : Certainly not.

b SOCRATES : Well, if neither the Sophists nor those who display fine qualities themselves are teachers of virtue, I am sure no one else can be, and if there are no teachers, there can be no students either.

MENO : I quite agree.

c SOCRATES : And we have also agreed that a subject of which there were neither teachers nor students was not one which could be taught.

MENO : That is so.

d SOCRATES : Now there turn out to be neither teachers nor students of virtue, so it would appear that virtue cannot be taught.

e MENO : So it seems, if we have made no mistake, and it makes me wonder, Socrates, whether there are in fact no good men at all, or how they are produced when they do appear.

f SOCRATES : I have a suspicion, Meno, that you and I are not much good. Our masters Gorgias and Prodicus have not trained us properly. We must certainly take ourselves in hand, and try to find someone who will improve us by hook or by crook. I say this with our recent discussion in mind, for absurdly enough we failed to perceive that it is not only under the guidance of knowledge that human action is well and rightly conducted. I believe that may be what prevents us from seeing how it is that men are made good.

MENO : What do you mean?

97 SOCRATES : This. We were correct, were we not, in agreeing that good men must be profitable or useful? It cannot be otherwise, can it?

MENO : No.

a SOCRATES : And again that they will be of some use if they conduct our affairs aright—that also was correct?

MENO : Yes.

b SOCRATES : But in insisting that knowledge was a *sine qua non* for right leadership, we look like being mistaken.

⁴ Theognis 435 sq.

MENO : How so?

a SOCRATES : Let me explain. If someone knows the way to Larissa, or anywhere else you like, then when he goes there and takes others with him he will be a good and capable guide, you would agree?

MENO : Of course.

b SOCRATES : But if a man judges correctly which is the road, though he has never been there and doesn't know it, will he not also guide others aright?

MENO : Yes, he will.

c SOCRATES : And as long as he has a correct opinion on the points about which the other has knowledge, he will be just as good a guide, believing the truth but not knowing it.

MENO : Just as good.

d SOCRATES : Therefore true opinion is as good a guide as knowledge for the purpose of acting rightly. That is what we left out just now in our discussion of the nature of virtue, when we said that knowledge is the only guide to right action. There was also, it seems, true opinion.

MENO : It seems so.

e SOCRATES : So right opinion is something no less useful than knowledge.

f MENO : Except that the man with knowledge will always be successful, and the man with right opinion only sometimes.

g SOCRATES : What? Will he not always be successful so long as he has the right opinion?

h MENO : That must be so, I suppose. In that case, I wonder why knowledge should be so much more prized than right opinion, and indeed how there is any difference between them.

i SOCRATES : Shall I tell you the reason for your surprise, or do you know it?

MENO : No, tell me.

j SOCRATES : It is because you have not observed the statues of Daedalus. Perhaps you don't have them in your country.

MENO : What makes you say that?

k SOCRATES : They too, if no one ties them down, run away and escape. If tied, they stay where they are put.

MENO : What of it?

98 SOCRATES : If you have one of his works untethered, it is not worth much; it gives you the slip like a runaway slave. But a tethered specimen is very valuable, for they are magnificent creations. And that, I may say, has a bearing on the matter of true opinions. True opinions are a fine thing and do all sorts of good so long as they stay in their place, but they will not stay long. They run away from a man's mind; so they are not worth much until you tether them by working out the reason. That process, my dear Meno, is recollection, as we agreed earlier. Once they are tied down, they become knowledge,

and are stable. That is why knowledge is something more valuable than right opinion. What distinguishes one from the other is the tether.

MENO: It does seem something like that, certainly.

b SOCRATES: Well of course, I have only been using an analogy myself, not knowledge. But it is not, I am sure, a mere guess to say that right opinion and knowledge are different. There are few things that I should claim to know, but that at least is among them, whatever else is.

MENO: You are quite right.

SOCRATES: And is this right too, that true opinion when it governs any course of action produces as good a result as knowledge?

MENO: Yes, that too is right, I think.

c SOCRATES: So that for practical purposes right opinion is no less useful than knowledge, and the man who has it is no less useful than the one who knows.

MENO: That is so.

SOCRATES: Now we have agreed that the good man is useful.

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: To recapitulate then, assuming that there are men good and useful to the community, it is not only knowledge that makes them so, but also right opinion, and neither of these comes by nature but both are acquired—or do you think either of them is natural?

MENO: No.

SOCRATES: So if both are acquired, good men themselves are not good by nature.

MENO: No.

SOCRATES: That being so, the next thing we inquired was whether their goodness was a matter of teaching, and we decided that it would be, if virtue were knowledge, and conversely, that if it could be taught, it would be knowledge.

MENO: Yes.

e SOCRATES: Next, that if there were teachers of it, it could be taught, but not if there were none.

MENO: That was so.

SOCRATES: But we have agreed that there are no teachers of it, and so that it cannot be taught and is not knowledge.

MENO: We did.

SOCRATES: At the same time we agreed that it is something good, and that to be useful and good consists in giving right guidance.

MENO: Yes.

99 SOCRATES: And that these two, true opinion and knowledge, are the only things which direct us aright and the possession of which makes a man a true guide. We may except chance, because what turns out right by chance is not due to human direction, and say that where human control leads to right ends, these two principles are directive, true opinion and knowledge.

MENO: Yes, I agree.

SOCRATES: Now since virtue cannot be taught, we can no longer believe it to be knowledge, so that one of our two good and useful principles is excluded, and knowledge is not the guide in public life.

MENO: No.

SOCRATES: It is not then by the possession of any wisdom that such men as Themistocles, and the others whom Anytus mentioned just now, became leaders in their cities. This fact, that they do not owe their eminence to knowledge, will explain why they are unable to make others like themselves.

MENO: No doubt it is as you say.

SOCRATES: That leaves us with the other alternative, that it is well-aimed conjecture which statesmen employ in upholding their countries' welfare. Their position in relation to knowledge is no different from that of prophets and tellers of oracles, who under divine inspiration utter many truths, but have no knowledge of what they are saying.

MENO: It must be something like that.

SOCRATES: And ought we not to reckon those men divine who with no conscious thought are repeatedly and outstandingly successful in what they do or say?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: We are right therefore to give this title to the oracular priests and the prophets that I mentioned, and to poets of every description. Statesmen too, when by their speeches they get great things done yet know nothing of what they are saying, are to be considered as acting no less under divine influence, inspired and possessed by the divinity.

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Women, you know, Meno, do call good men 'divine,' and the Spartans too, when they are singing a good man's praises, say, 'He is divine.'

MENO: And it looks as if they are right—though our friend Anytus may be annoyed with you for saying so.

SOCRATES: I can't help that. We will talk to him some other time. If all we have said in this discussion, and the questions we have asked, have been right, virtue will be acquired neither by nature nor by teaching. Whoever has it gets it by divine dispensation without taking thought, unless he be the kind of statesman who can create another like himself. Should there be such a man, he would be among the living practically what Homer said Thetis was among the dead, when he described him as the only one in the underworld who kept his wits—the others are mere flitting shades.⁵ Where virtue is concerned such a man would be just like that, a solid reality among shadows.

⁵ *Odyssey* 10.494.

b MENO : That is finely put, Socrates.

SOCRATES : On our present reasoning then, whoever has virtue gets it by divine dispensation. But we shall not understand the truth of the matter until, before asking how men get virtue, we try to discover what virtue is in and by itself. Now it is time for me to go, and my request to you is that you will allay the anger of your friend Anytus by convincing him that what you now believe is true. If you succeed, the Athenians may have cause to thank you.

EUTHYDEMUS

This is perhaps of all the dialogues the one that makes the Athens of Socrates and Plato seem farthest removed from us. We are taken back to a time when language had begun to be of great importance in itself and reasoning was largely verbal. A pun or a double meaning might decide a serious discussion. Here Socrates confronts Euthydemus and his brother who are both so-called eristics, or fighters with words, and in their fight with Socrates, who professes to be only their pupil, this sort of verbal trickery occurs constantly and becomes extremely tiresome. For instance, when Socrates asks the sense of a phrase used by Dionysodorus, he is in turn asked, "Is there soul in things which have sense, when they have sense? Or have also the soulless things sense?" Socrates answers, "Only the things with soul." He is then triumphantly refuted, "Then do you know any phrase which has soul?" And to Socrates' answer he replies, "Then why did you ask me just now what sense my phrase had?" This is acknowledged by the large audience gathered around them to be a knockout blow.

Plato, of course, is holding up to ridicule all that sort of talk, but he is also concerned to point out how hard it is to put an idea into words. A Russian poet with all the resources of modern dictionaries at his disposal has said, "A thought when spoken is a lie." Something like that must often have been in Plato's mind as he sought not only to know the truth, but to discover a way to express it. He had to devise his own language, the language all philosophy would henceforth use, at a time when it was becoming the fashion to use words without regard to sense. The Euthydemus shows vividly what Plato had to contend with.