

MENO

Meno's is one of the leading aristocratic families of Thessaly, traditionally friendly to Athens and Athenian interests. Here he is a young man, about to embark on an unscrupulous military and political career, leading to an early death at the hands of the Persian king. To his aristocratic 'virtue' (Plato's ancient readers would know what that ultimately came to) he adds an admiration for ideas on the subject he has learned from the rhetorician Gorgias (about whom we learn more in the dialogue named after him). What brings him to Athens we are not told. His family's local sponsor is the democratic politician Anytus, one of Socrates' accusers at his trial, and apparently Anytus is his host. The dialogue begins abruptly, without stage-setting preliminaries of the sort we find in the 'Socratic' dialogues, and with no context of any kind being provided for the conversation. Meno wants to know Socrates' position on the then much-debated question whether virtue can be taught, or whether it comes rather by practice, or else is acquired by one's birth and nature, or in some other way? Socrates and Meno pursue that question, and the preliminary one of what virtue indeed is, straight through to the inconclusive conclusion characteristic of 'Socratic' dialogues. (Anytus joins the conversation briefly. He bristles when, to support his doubts that virtue can be taught, Socrates points to the failure of famous Athenian leaders to pass their own virtue on to their sons, and he issues a veiled threat of the likely consequences to Socrates of such 'slandorous' attacks.)

The dialogue is best remembered, however, for the interlude in which Socrates questions Meno's slave about a problem in geometry—how to find a square double in area to any given square. Having determined that Meno does not know what virtue is, and recognizing that he himself does not know either, Socrates has proposed to Meno that they inquire into this together. Meno protests that that is impossible, challenging Socrates with the 'paradox' that one logically cannot inquire productively into what one does not already know—nor of course into what one already does. Guided by Socrates' questions, the slave (who has never studied geometry before) comes to see for himself, to recognize, what the right answer to the geometrical problem must be. Socrates argues that this confirms something he has heard from certain wise priests and priestesses—that the soul is immortal and that at our birth we already possess all theoretical knowledge (he includes here not just mathematical theory but moral knowledge as well). Prodded by Socrates' questions, the slave was 'recollecting' this prior knowledge, not drawing new conclusions from data being presented to him for the first time. So in moral inquiry, as well, there is hope that, if we

question ourselves rightly, 'recollection' can progressively improve our understanding of moral truth and eventually lead us to full knowledge of it.

The examination of the slave assuages Meno's doubt about the possibility of such inquiry. He and Socrates proceed to inquire together what virtue is—but now they follow a new method of 'hypothesis', introduced by Socrates again by analogy with procedures in geometry. Socrates no longer asks Meno for his views and criticizes those. Among other 'hypotheses' that he now works with, he advances and argues for an hypothesis of his own, that virtue is knowledge (in which case it must be teachable). But he also considers weaknesses in his own argument, leading to the alternative possible hypothesis, that virtue is god-granted right opinion (and so, not teachable). In the second half of the dialogue we thus see a new Socrates, with new methods of argument and inquiry, not envisioned in such 'Socratic' dialogues as Euthyphro, Laches, and Charmides. Meno points forward to Phaedo, where the thesis that theoretical knowledge comes by recollection is discussed again, with a clear reference back to the Meno, but now expanded by the addition of Platonic Forms as objects of recollection and knowledge.

J.M.C.

MENO: Can you tell me, Socrates, can virtue be taught? Or is it not teachable but the result of practice, or is it neither of these, but men possess it by nature or in some other way? 70

SOCRATES: Before now, Meno, Thessalians had a high reputation among the Greeks and were admired for their horsemanship and their wealth, but now, it seems to me, they are also admired for their wisdom, not least the fellow citizens of your friend Aristippus of Larissa. The responsibility for this reputation of yours lies with Gorgias, for when he came to your city he found that the leading Aleuadae, your lover Aristippus among them, loved him for his wisdom, and so did the other leading Thessalians. In particular, he accustomed you to give a bold and grand answer to any question you may be asked, as experts are likely to do. Indeed, he himself was ready to answer any Greek who wished to question him, and every question was answered. But here in Athens, my dear Meno, the opposite is the case, as if there were a dearth of wisdom, and wisdom seems to have departed hence to go to you. If then you want to ask one of us that sort of question, everyone will laugh and say: "Good stranger, you must think me happy indeed if you think I know whether virtue can be taught or how it comes to be; I am so far from knowing whether virtue can be taught or not that I do not even have any knowledge of what virtue itself is." 71

I myself, Meno, am as poor as my fellow citizens in this matter, and I blame myself for my complete ignorance about virtue. If I do not know b

what something is, how could I know what qualities it possesses? Or do you think that someone who does not know at all who Meno is could know whether he is good-looking or rich or well-born, or the opposite of these? Do you think that is possible?

MENO: I do not; but, Socrates, do you really not know what virtue is?

c Are we to report this to the folk back home about you?

SOCRATES: Not only that, my friend, but also that, as I believe, I have never yet met anyone else who did know.

MENO: How so? Did you not meet Gorgias when he was here?

SOCRATES: I did.

MENO: Did you then not think that he knew?

d SOCRATES: I do not altogether remember, Meno, so that I cannot tell you now what I thought then. Perhaps he does know; you know what he used to say, so you remind me of what he said. You tell me yourself, if you are willing, for surely you share his views.—I do.

SOCRATES: Let us leave Gorgias out of it, since he is not here. But Meno, by the gods, what do you yourself say that virtue is? Speak and do not begrudge us, so that I may have spoken a most unfortunate untruth when I said that I had never met anyone who knew, if you and Gorgias are shown to know.

e MENO: It is not hard to tell you, Socrates. First, if you want the virtue of a man, it is easy to say that a man's virtue consists of being able to manage public affairs and in so doing to benefit his friends and harm his enemies and to be careful that no harm comes to himself; if you want the virtue of a woman, it is not difficult to describe: she must manage the home well, preserve its possessions, and be submissive to her husband; the virtue of a child, whether male or female, is different again, and so is that of an elderly man, if you want that, or if you want that of a free man
72 or a slave. And there are very many other virtues, so that one is not at a loss to say what virtue is. There is virtue for every action and every age, for every task of ours and every one of us—and Socrates, the same is true for wickedness.

b SOCRATES: I seem to be in great luck, Meno; while I am looking for one virtue, I have found you to have a whole swarm of them. But, Meno, to follow up the image of swarms, if I were asking you what is the nature of bees, and you said that they are many and of all kinds, what would you answer if I asked you: "Do you mean that they are many and varied and different from one another in so far as they are bees? Or are they no different in that regard, but in some other respect, in their beauty, for example, or their size or in some other such way?" Tell me, what would you answer if thus questioned?

MENO: I would say that they do not differ from one another in being bees.

c SOCRATES: If I went on to say: "Tell me, what is this very thing, Meno, in which they are all the same and do not differ from one another?" Would you be able to tell me?

MENO: I would.

SOCRATES: The same is true in the case of the virtues. Even if they are many and various, all of them have one and the same form which makes them virtues, and it is right to look to this when one is asked to make clear what virtue is. Or do you not understand what I mean? d

MENO: I think I understand, but I certainly do not grasp the meaning of the question as fully as I want to.

SOCRATES: I am asking whether you think it is only in the case of virtue that there is one for man, another for woman and so on, or is the same true in the case of health and size and strength? Do you think that there is one health for man and another for woman? Or, if it is health, does it have the same form everywhere, whether in man or in anything else whatever? e

MENO: The health of a man seems to me the same as that of a woman.

SOCRATES: And so with size and strength? If a woman is strong, that strength will be the same and have the same form, for by "the same" I mean that strength is no different as far as being strength, whether in a man or a woman. Or do you think there is a difference?

MENO: I do not think so.

SOCRATES: And will there be any difference in the case of virtue, as far as being virtue is concerned, whether it be in a child or an old man, in a woman or in a man? 73

MENO: I think, Socrates, that somehow this is no longer like those other cases.

SOCRATES: How so? Did you not say that the virtue of a man consists of managing the city well, and that of a woman of managing the household?—I did.

SOCRATES: Is it possible to manage a city well, or a household, or anything else, while not managing it moderately and justly?—Certainly not.

SOCRATES: Then if they manage justly and moderately, they must do so with justice and moderation?—Necessarily. b

SOCRATES: So both the man and the woman, if they are to be good, need the same things, justice and moderation.—So it seems.

SOCRATES: What about a child and an old man? Can they possibly be good if they are intemperate and unjust?—Certainly not.

SOCRATES: But if they are moderate and just?—Yes.

SOCRATES: So all human beings are good in the same way, for they become good by acquiring the same qualities.—It seems so. c

SOCRATES: And they would not be good in the same way if they did not have the same virtue.—They certainly would not be.

SOCRATES: Since then the virtue of all is the same, try to tell me and to remember what Gorgias, and you with him, said that that same thing is.

MENO: What else but to be able to rule over people, if you are seeking one description to fit them all. d

SOCRATES: That is indeed what I am seeking, but Meno, is virtue the same in the case of a child or a slave, namely, for them to be able to rule over a master, and do you think that he who rules is still a slave?—I do not think so at all, Socrates.

SOCRATES: It is not likely, my good man. Consider this further point: you say that virtue is to be able to rule. Shall we not add to this *justly and not unjustly*?

MENO: I think so, Socrates, for justice is virtue.

e SOCRATES: Is it virtue, Meno, or a virtue?—What do you mean?

SOCRATES: As with anything else. For example, if you wish, take roundness, about which I would say that it is a shape, but not simply that it is shape. I would not so speak of it because there are other shapes.

MENO: You are quite right. So I too say that not only justice is a virtue but there are many other virtues.

74 SOCRATES: What are they? Tell me, as I could mention other shapes to you if you bade me do so, so do you mention other virtues.

MENO: I think courage is a virtue, and moderation, wisdom, and munificence, and very many others.

SOCRATES: We are having the same trouble again, Meno, though in another way; we have found many virtues while looking for one, but we cannot find the one which covers all the others.

b MENO: I cannot yet find, Socrates, what you are looking for, one virtue for them all, as in the other cases.

SOCRATES: That is likely, but I am eager, if I can, that we should make progress, for you understand that the same applies to everything. If someone asked you what I mentioned just now: "What is shape, Meno?" and you told him that it was roundness, and if then he said to you what I did: "Is roundness shape or a shape?" you would surely tell him that it is a shape?—I certainly would.

c SOCRATES: That would be because there are other shapes?—Yes.

SOCRATES: And if he asked you further what they were, you would tell him?—I would.

SOCRATES: So too, if he asked you what color is, and you said it is white, and your questioner interrupted you, "Is white color or a color?" you would say that it is a color, because there are also other colors?—I would.

d SOCRATES: And if he bade you mention other colors, you would mention others that are no less colors than white is?—Yes.

e SOCRATES: Then if he pursued the argument as I did and said: "We always arrive at the many; do not talk to me in that way, but since you call all these many by one name, and say that no one of them is not a shape even though they are opposites, tell me what this is which applies as much to the round as to the straight and which you call shape, as you say the round is as much a shape as the straight." Do you not say that?—I do.

SOCRATES: When you speak like that, do you assert that the round is no more round than it is straight, and that the straight is no more straight than it is round?

MENO: Certainly not, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Yet you say that the round is no more a shape than the straight is, nor the one more than the other.—That is true.

SOCRATES: What then is this to which the name shape applies? Try to tell me. If then you answered the man who was questioning about shape or color: "I do not understand what you want, my man, nor what you mean," he would probably wonder and say: "You do not understand that I am seeking that which is the same in all these cases?" Would you still have nothing to say, Meno, if one asked you: "What is this which applies to the round and the straight and the other things which you call shapes and which is the same in them all?" Try to say, that you may practice for your answer about virtue. 75

MENO: No, Socrates, but you tell me. b

SOCRATES: Do you want me to do you this favor?

MENO: I certainly do.

SOCRATES: And you will then be willing to tell me about virtue?

MENO: I will.

SOCRATES: We must certainly press on. The subject is worth it.

MENO: It surely is.

SOCRATES: Come then, let us try to tell you what shape is. See whether you will accept that it is this: Let us say that shape is that which alone of existing things always follows color. Is that satisfactory to you, or do you look for it in some other way? I should be satisfied if you defined virtue in this way. c

MENO: But that is foolish, Socrates.

SOCRATES: How do you mean?

MENO: That shape, you say, always follows color. Well then, if someone were to say that he did not know what color is, but that he had the same difficulty as he had about shape, what do you think your answer would be?

SOCRATES: A true one, surely, and if my questioner was one of those clever and disputatious debaters, I would say to him: "I have given my answer; if it is wrong, it is your job to refute it." Then, if they are friends as you and I are, and want to discuss with each other, they must answer in a manner more gentle and more proper to discussion. By this I mean that the answers must not only be true, but in terms admittedly known to the questioner. I too will try to speak in these terms. Do you call something "the end?" I mean such a thing as a limit or boundary, for all those are, I say, the same thing. Prodicus¹ might disagree with us, but you surely call something "finished" or "completed"—that is what I want to express, nothing elaborate. d e

MENO: I do, and I think I understand what you mean.

SOCRATES: Further, you call something a plane, and something else a solid, as in geometry? 76

MENO: I do.

SOCRATES: From this you may understand what I mean by shape, for I say this of every shape, that a shape is that which limits a solid; in a word, a shape is the limit of a solid.

1. Prodicus was a well-known sophist who was especially keen on the exact meaning of words.

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

b SOCRATES: You are outrageous, Meno. You bother an old man to answer questions, but you yourself are not willing to recall and to tell me what Gorgias says that virtue is.

MENO: After you have answered this, Socrates, I will tell you.

SOCRATES: Even someone who was blindfolded would know from your conversation that you are handsome and still have lovers.

MENO: Why so?

c SOCRATES: Because you are forever giving orders in a discussion, as spoiled people do, who behave like tyrants as long as they are young. And perhaps you have recognized that I am at a disadvantage with handsome people, so I will do you the favor of an answer.

MENO: By all means do me that favor.

SOCRATES: Do you want me to answer after the manner of Gorgias, which you would most easily follow?

MENO: Of course I want that.

SOCRATES: Do you both say there are effluvia of things, as Empedocles² does?—Certainly.

SOCRATES: And that there are channels through which the effluvia make their way?—Definitely.

d SOCRATES: And some effluvia fit some of the channels, while others are too small or too big?—That is so.

SOCRATES: And there is something which you call sight?—There is.

SOCRATES: From this, “comprehend what I state,” as Pindar said,³ for color is an effluvium from shapes which fits the sight and is perceived.

MENO: That seems to me to be an excellent answer, Socrates.

e SOCRATES: Perhaps it was given in the manner to which you are accustomed. At the same time I think that you can deduce from this answer what sound is, and smell, and many such things.—Quite so.

SOCRATES: It is a theatrical answer so it pleases you, Meno, more than that about shape.—It does.

SOCRATES: It is not better, son of Alexidemus, but I am convinced that the other is, and I think you would agree, if you did not have to go away before the mysteries as you told me yesterday, but could remain and be initiated.

77 MENO: I would stay, Socrates, if you could tell me many things like these.

b SOCRATES: I shall certainly not be lacking in eagerness to tell you such things, both for your sake and my own, but I may not be able to tell you many. Come now, you too try to fulfill your promise to me and tell me the nature of virtue as a whole and stop making many out of one, as jokers say whenever someone breaks something; but allow virtue to remain whole and sound, and tell me what it is, for I have given you examples.

2. Empedocles (c. 493–433 B.C.) of Acragas in Sicily was a philosopher famous for his theories about the world of nature and natural phenomena (including sense-perception).

3. Frg. 105 (Snell).

MENO: I think, Socrates, that virtue is, as the poet says, "to find joy in beautiful things and have power." So I say that virtue is to desire beautiful things and have the power to acquire them.

SOCRATES: Do you mean that the man who desires beautiful things desires good things?—Most certainly.

SOCRATES: Do you assume that there are people who desire bad things, and others who desire good things? Do you not think, my good man, that all men desire good things?

MENO: I do not.

SOCRATES: But some desire bad things?—Yes.

SOCRATES: Do you mean that they believe the bad things to be good, or that they know they are bad and nevertheless desire them?—I think there are both kinds.

SOCRATES: Do you think, Meno, that anyone, knowing that bad things are bad, nevertheless desires them?—I certainly do.

SOCRATES: What do you mean by desiring? Is it to secure for oneself?—What else?

SOCRATES: Does he think that the bad things benefit him who possesses them, or does he know they harm him?

MENO: There are some who believe that the bad things benefit them, others who know that the bad things harm them.

SOCRATES: And do you think that those who believe that bad things benefit them know that they are bad?

MENO: No, that I cannot altogether believe.

SOCRATES: It is clear then that those who do not know things to be bad do not desire what is bad, but they desire those things that they believe to be good but that are in fact bad. It follows that those who have no knowledge of these things and believe them to be good clearly desire good things. Is that not so?—It is likely.

SOCRATES: Well then, those who you say desire bad things, believing that bad things harm their possessor, know that they will be harmed by them?—Necessarily.

SOCRATES: And do they not think that those who are harmed are miserable to the extent that they are harmed?—That too is inevitable.

SOCRATES: And that those who are miserable are unhappy?—I think so.

SOCRATES: Does anyone wish to be miserable and unhappy?—I do not think so, Socrates.

SOCRATES: No one then wants what is bad, Meno, unless he wants to be such. For what else is being miserable but to desire bad things and secure them?

MENO: You are probably right, Socrates, and no one wants what is bad.

SOCRATES: Were you not saying just now that virtue is to desire good things and have the power to secure them?—Yes, I was.

SOCRATES: The desiring part of this statement is common to everybody, and one man is no better than another in this?—So it appears.

SOCRATES: Clearly then, if one man is better than another, he must be better at securing them.—Quite so.

c SOCRATES: This then is virtue according to your argument, the power of securing good things.

MENO: I think, Socrates, that the case is altogether as you now understand it.

SOCRATES: Let us see then whether what you say is true, for you may well be right. You say that the capacity to acquire good things is virtue?—I do.

SOCRATES: And by good things you mean, for example, health and wealth?

MENO: Yes, and also to acquire gold and silver, also honors and offices in the city.

SOCRATES: By good things you do not mean other goods than these?

MENO: No, but I mean all things of this kind.

d SOCRATES: Very well. According to Meno, the hereditary guest friend of the Great King, virtue is the acquisition of gold and silver. Do you add to this acquiring, Meno, the words justly and piously, or does it make no difference to you but even if one secures these things unjustly, you call it virtue none the less?

MENO: Certainly not, Socrates.

SOCRATES: You would then call it wickedness?—Indeed I would.

e SOCRATES: It seems then that the acquisition must be accompanied by justice or moderation or piety or some other part of virtue; if it is not, it will not be virtue, even though it provides good things.

MENO: How could there be virtue without these?

SOCRATES: Then failing to secure gold and silver, whenever it would not be just to do so, either for oneself or another, is not this failure to secure them also virtue?

MENO: So it seems.

79 SOCRATES: Then to provide these goods would not be virtue any more than not to provide them, but apparently whatever is done with justice will be virtue, and what is done without anything of the kind is wickedness.

MENO: I think it must necessarily be as you say.

SOCRATES: We said a little while ago that each of these things was a part of virtue, namely, justice and moderation and all such things?—Yes.

SOCRATES: Then you are playing with me, Meno.—How so, Socrates?

b SOCRATES: Because I begged you just now not to break up or fragment virtue, and I gave examples of how you should answer. You paid no attention, but you tell me that virtue is to be able to secure good things with justice, and justice, you say, is a part of virtue.

MENO: I do.

c SOCRATES: It follows then from what you agree to, that to act in whatever you do with a part of virtue is virtue, for you say that justice is a part of virtue, as are all such qualities. Why do I say this? Because when I begged you to tell me about virtue as a whole, you are far from telling me what it is. Rather, you say that every action is virtue if it is performed with a part of virtue, as if you had said what virtue is as a whole, so I would already know that, even if you fragment it into parts. I think you must

face the same question from the beginning, my dear Meno, namely, what is virtue, if every action performed with a part of virtue is virtue? For that is what one is saying when he says that every action performed with justice is virtue. Do you not think you should face the same question again, or do you think one knows what a part of virtue is if one does not know virtue itself?—I do not think so.

SOCRATES: If you remember, when I was answering you about shape, we rejected the kind of answer that tried to answer in terms still being the subject of inquiry and not yet agreed upon.—And we were right to reject them. d

SOCRATES: Then surely, my good sir, you must not think, while the nature of virtue as a whole is still under inquiry, that by answering in terms of the parts of virtue you can make its nature clear to anyone or make anything else clear by speaking in this way, but only that the same question must be put to you again—what do you take the nature of virtue to be when you say what you say? Or do you think there is no point in what I am saying?—I think what you say is right. e

SOCRATES: Answer me again then from the beginning: What do you and your friend say that virtue is?

MENO: Socrates, before I even met you I used to hear that you are always in a state of perplexity and that you bring others to the same state, and now I think you are bewitching and beguiling me, simply putting me under a spell, so that I am quite perplexed. Indeed, if a joke is in order, you seem, in appearance and in every other way, to be like the broad torpedo fish, for it too makes anyone who comes close and touches it feel numb, and you now seem to have had that kind of effect on me, for both my mind and my tongue are numb, and I have no answer to give you. Yet I have made many speeches about virtue before large audiences on a thousand occasions, very good speeches as I thought, but now I cannot even say what it is. I think you are wise not to sail away from Athens to go and stay elsewhere, for if you were to behave like this as a stranger in another city, you would be driven away for practising sorcery. 80

SOCRATES: You are a rascal, Meno, and you nearly deceived me.

MENO: Why so particularly, Socrates?

SOCRATES: I know why you drew this image of me. c

MENO: Why do you think I did?

SOCRATES: So that I should draw an image of you in return. I know that all handsome men rejoice in images of themselves; it is to their advantage, for I think that the images of beautiful people are also beautiful, but I will draw no image of you in turn. Now if the torpedo fish is itself numb and so makes others numb, then I resemble it, but not otherwise, for I myself do not have the answer when I perplex others, but I am more perplexed than anyone when I cause perplexity in others. So now I do not know what virtue is; perhaps you knew before you contacted me, but now you are certainly like one who does not know. Nevertheless, I want to examine and seek together with you what it may be. d

MENO: How will you look for it, Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know?

e SOCRATES: I know what you want to say, Meno. Do you realize what a debater's argument you are bringing up, that a man cannot search either for what he knows or for what he does not know? He cannot search for what he knows—since he knows it, there is no need to search—nor for what he does not know, for he does not know what to look for.

81 MENO: Does that argument not seem sound to you, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Not to me.

MENO: Can you tell me why?

SOCRATES: I can. I have heard wise men and women talk about divine matters . . .

MENO: What did they say?

SOCRATES: What was, I thought, both true and beautiful.

MENO: What was it, and who were they?

SOCRATES: The speakers were among the priests and priestesses whose
b care it is to be able to give an account of their practices. Pindar too says it, and many others of the divine among our poets. What they say is this; see whether you think they speak the truth: They say that the human soul is immortal; at times it comes to an end, which they call dying, at times it is reborn, but it is never destroyed, and one must therefore live one's life as piously as possible:

c *Persephone will return to the sun above in the ninth year
the souls of those from whom
she will exact punishment for old miseries,
and from these come noble kings,
mighty in strength and greatest in wisdom,
and for the rest of time men will call them sacred heroes.*⁴

As the soul is immortal, has been born often and has seen all things here and in the underworld, there is nothing which it has not learned; so it is in no way surprising that it can recollect the things it knew before, both
d about virtue and other things. As the whole of nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, nothing prevents a man, after recalling one thing only—a process men call learning—discovering everything else for himself, if he is brave and does not tire of the search, for searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection. We must, therefore, not believe that debater's
e argument, for it would make us idle, and fainthearted men like to hear it, whereas my argument makes them energetic and keen on the search. I

4. Frg. 133 (Snell).

trust that this is true, and I want to inquire along with you into the nature of virtue.

MENO: Yes, Socrates, but how do you mean that we do not learn, but that what we call learning is recollection? Can you teach me that this is so?

SOCRATES: As I said just now, Meno, you are a rascal. You now ask me if I can teach you, when I say there is no teaching but recollection, in order to show me up at once as contradicting myself. 82

MENO: No, by Zeus, Socrates, that was not my intention when I spoke, but just a habit. If you can somehow show me that things are as you say, please do so.

SOCRATES: It is not easy, but I am nevertheless willing to do my best for your sake. Call one of these many attendants of yours, whichever you like, that I may prove it to you in his case. b

MENO: Certainly. You there come forward.

SOCRATES: Is he a Greek? Does he speak Greek?

MENO: Very much so. He was born in my household.

SOCRATES: Pay attention then whether you think he is recollecting or learning from me.

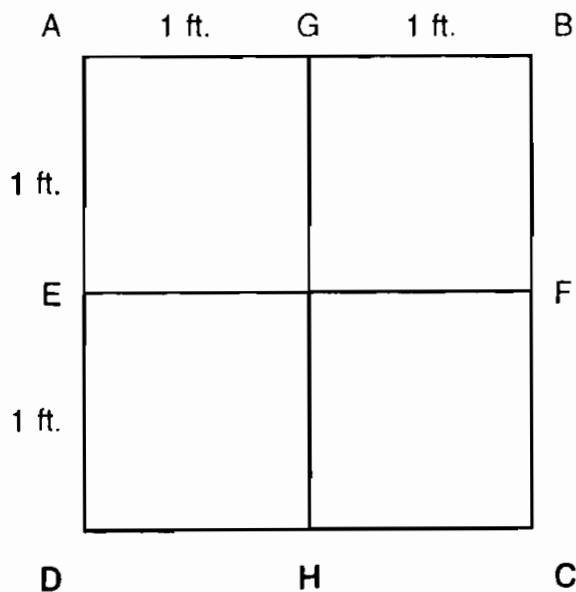
MENO: I will pay attention.

SOCRATES: Tell me now, boy, you know that a square figure is like this?—I do.

SOCRATES: A square then is a figure in which all these four sides are equal?—Yes indeed. c

SOCRATES: And it also has these lines through the middle equal?⁵—Yes.

5. Socrates draws a square ABCD. The “lines through the middle” are the lines joining the middle of these sides, which also go through the center of the square, namely EF and GH.



SOCRATES: And such a figure could be larger or smaller?—Certainly.

SOCRATES: If then this side were two feet, and this other side two feet, how many feet would the whole be? Consider it this way: if it were two feet this way, and only one foot that way, the figure would be once two feet?—Yes.

d SOCRATES: But if it is two feet also that way, it would surely be twice two feet?—Yes.

SOCRATES: How many feet is twice two feet? Work it out and tell me.—Four, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Now we could have another figure twice the size of this one, with the four sides equal like this one.—Yes.

SOCRATES: How many feet will that be?—Eight.

SOCRATES: Come now, try to tell me how long each side of this will be.
e The side of this is two feet. What about each side of the one which is its double?—Obviously, Socrates, it will be twice the length.

SOCRATES: You see, Meno, that I am not teaching the boy anything, but all I do is question him. And now he thinks he knows the length of the line on which an eight-foot figure is based. Do you agree?

MENO: I do.

SOCRATES: And does he know?

MENO: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: He thinks it is a line twice the length?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Watch him now recollecting things in order, as one must recollect. Tell me, boy, do you say that a figure double the size is based
83 on a line double the length? Now I mean such a figure as this, not long on one side and short on the other, but equal in every direction like this one, and double the size, that is, eight feet. See whether you still believe that it will be based on a line double the length.—I do.

SOCRATES: Now the line becomes double its length if we add another of the same length here?—Yes indeed.

SOCRATES: And the eight-foot square will be based on it, if there are four lines of that length?—Yes.

b SOCRATES: Well, let us draw from it four equal lines, and surely that is what you say is the eight-foot square?—Certainly.

SOCRATES: And within this figure are four squares, each of which is equal to the four-foot square?—Yes.

SOCRATES: How big is it then? Is it not four times as big?—Of course.

SOCRATES: Is this square then, which is four times as big, its double?—No, by Zeus.

SOCRATES: How many times bigger is it?—Four times.

c SOCRATES: Then, my boy, the figure based on a line twice the length is not double but four times as big?—You are right.

SOCRATES: And four times four is sixteen, is it not?—Yes.

SOCRATES: On how long a line should the eight-foot square be based? On *this* line we have a square that is four times bigger, do we not?—Yes.

SOCRATES: Now this four-foot square is based on this line here, half the length?—Yes.

SOCRATES: Very well. Is the eight-foot square not double this one and half that one?⁶—Yes.

SOCRATES: Will it not be based on a line longer than this one and shorter than that one? Is that not so?—I think so. d

SOCRATES: Good, you answer what you think. And tell me, was this one not two-feet long, and that one four feet?—Yes.

SOCRATES: The line on which the eight-foot square is based must then be longer than this one of two feet, and shorter than that one of four feet?—It must be.

SOCRATES: Try to tell me then how long a line you say it is.—Three feet. e

SOCRATES: Then if it is three feet, let us add the half of this one, and it will be three feet? For these are two feet, and the other is one. And here, similarly, these are two feet and that one is one foot, and so the figure you mention comes to be?—Yes.

SOCRATES: Now if it is three feet this way and three feet that way, will the whole figure be three times three feet?—So it seems.

SOCRATES: How much is three times three feet?—Nine feet.

SOCRATES: And the double square was to be how many feet?—Eight.

SOCRATES: So the eight-foot figure cannot be based on the three-foot line?—Clearly not.

SOCRATES: But on how long a line? Try to tell us exactly, and if you do not want to work it out, show me from what line.—By Zeus, Socrates, I do not know. 84

SOCRATES: You realize, Meno, what point he has reached in his recollection. At first he did not know what the basic line of the eight-foot square was; even now he does not yet know, but then he thought he knew, and answered confidently as if he did know, and he did not think himself at a loss, but now he does think himself at a loss, and as he does not know, neither does he think he knows. b

MENO: That is true.

SOCRATES: So he is now in a better position with regard to the matter he does not know?

MENO: I agree with that too.

SOCRATES: Have we done him any harm by making him perplexed and numb as the torpedo fish does?

MENO: I do not think so.

SOCRATES: Indeed, we have probably achieved something relevant to finding out how matters stand, for now, as he does not know, he would be glad to find out, whereas before he thought he could easily make many

6. I.e., the eight-foot square is double the four-foot square and half the sixteen-foot square—double the square based on a line two feet long, and half the square based on a four-foot side.

c fine speeches to large audiences about the square of double size and said that it must have a base twice as long.

MENO: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Do you think that before he would have tried to find out that which he thought he knew though he did not, before he fell into perplexity and realized he did not know and longed to know?

MENO: I do not think so, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Has he then benefitted from being numbed?

MENO: I think so.

d SOCRATES: Look then how he will come out of his perplexity while searching along with me. I shall do nothing more than ask questions and not teach him. Watch whether you find me teaching and explaining things to him instead of asking for his opinion.

SOCRATES: You tell me, is this not a four-foot figure? You understand?—I do.

SOCRATES: We add to it this figure which is equal to it?—Yes.

SOCRATES: And we add this third figure equal to each of them?—Yes.

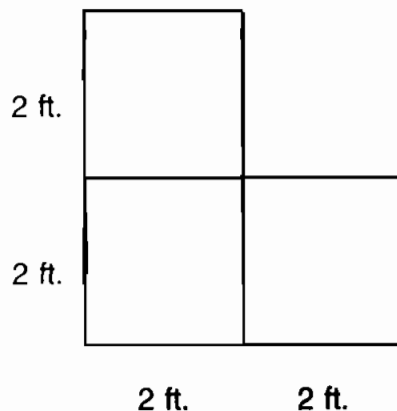
SOCRATES: Could we then fill in the space in the corner?—Certainly.⁷

SOCRATES: So we have these four equal figures?—Yes.

e SOCRATES: Well then, how many times is the whole figure larger than this one?⁸—Four times.

SOCRATES: But we should have had one that was twice as large, or do you not remember?—I certainly do.

7. Socrates now builds up his sixteen-foot square by joining two four-foot squares, then a third, like this:



Filling "the space in the corner" will give another four-foot square, which completes the sixteen-foot square containing four four-foot squares.

8 "This one" is any one of the inside squares of four feet.

SOCRATES: Does not this line from one corner to the other cut each of these figures in two?⁹—Yes. 85

SOCRATES: So these are four equal lines which enclose this figure?¹⁰—They are.

SOCRATES: Consider now: how large is the figure?—I do not understand.

SOCRATES: Within these four figures, each line cuts off half of each, does it not?—Yes.

SOCRATES: How many of this size are there in this figure?¹¹—Four.

SOCRATES: How many in this?¹²—Two.

SOCRATES: What is the relation of four to two?—Double. b

SOCRATES: How many feet in this?¹³—Eight.

SOCRATES: Based on what line?—This one.

SOCRATES: That is, on the line that stretches from corner to corner of the four-foot figure?—Yes.—Clever men call this the diagonal, so that if diagonal is its name, you say that the double figure would be that based on the diagonal?—Most certainly, Socrates.

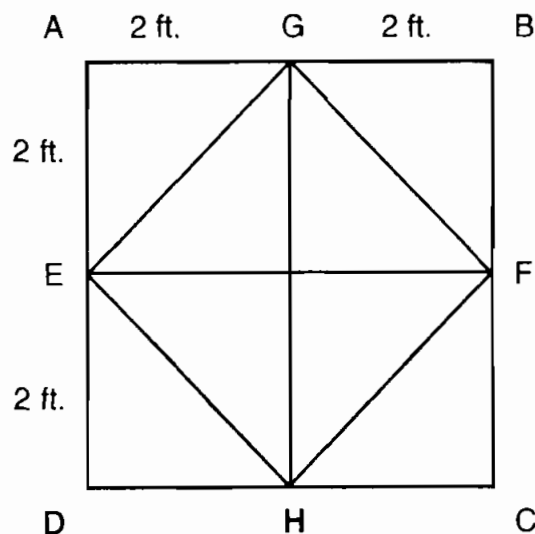
SOCRATES: What do you think, Meno? Has he, in his answers, expressed any opinion that was not his own? c

MENO: No, they were all his own.

SOCRATES: And yet, as we said a short time ago, he did not know?—That is true.

SOCRATES: So these opinions were in him, were they not?—Yes.

9. Socrates now draws the diagonals of the four inside squares, namely, FH, HE, EG, and GF, which together form the square GFHE.



10. I.e., GFHE.

11. Again, GFHE: Socrates is asking how many of the triangles "cut off from inside" there are inside GFHE.

12. I.e., any of the interior squares.

13. GFHE again.

SOCRATES: So the man who does not know has within himself true opinions about the things that he does not know?—So it appears.

SOCRATES: These opinions have now just been stirred up like a dream, but if he were repeatedly asked these same questions in various ways, d you know that in the end his knowledge about these things would be as accurate as anyone's.—It is likely.

SOCRATES: And he will know it without having been taught but only questioned, and find the knowledge within himself?—Yes.

SOCRATES: And is not finding knowledge within oneself recollection?—Certainly.

SOCRATES: Must he not either have at some time acquired the knowledge he now possesses, or else have always possessed it?—Yes.

SOCRATES: If he always had it, he would always have known. If he e acquired it, he cannot have done so in his present life. Or has someone taught him geometry? For he will perform in the same way about all geometry, and all other knowledge. Has someone taught him everything? You should know, especially as he has been born and brought up in your house.

MENO: But I know that no one has taught him.

SOCRATES: Yet he has these opinions, or doesn't he?

MENO: That seems indisputable, Socrates.

86 SOCRATES: If he has not acquired them in his present life, is it not clear that he had them and had learned them at some other time?—It seems so.

SOCRATES: Then that was the time when he was not a human being?—Yes.

SOCRATES: If then, during the time he exists and is not a human being he will have true opinions which, when stirred by questioning, become knowledge, will not his soul have learned during all time? For it is clear that during all time he exists, either as a man or not.—So it seems.

b SOCRATES: Then if the truth about reality is always in our soul, the soul would be immortal so that you should always confidently try to seek out and recollect what you do not know at present—that is, what you do not recollect?

MENO: Somehow, Socrates, I think that what you say is right.

SOCRATES: I think so too, Meno. I do not insist that my argument is right in all other respects, but I would contend at all costs both in word and deed as far as I could that we will be better men, braver and less idle, if c we believe that one must search for the things one does not know, rather than if we believe that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it.

MENO: In this too I think you are right, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Since we are of one mind that one should seek to find out what one does not know, shall we try to find out together what virtue is?

MENO: Certainly. But Socrates, I should be most pleased to investigate and hear your answer to my original question, whether we should try on d the assumption that virtue is something teachable, or is a natural gift, or in whatever way it comes to men.

SOCRATES: If I were directing you, Meno, and not only myself, we would not have investigated whether virtue is teachable or not before we had investigated what virtue itself is. But because you do not even attempt to rule yourself, in order that you may be free, but you try to rule me and do so, I will agree with you—for what can I do? So we must, it appears, inquire into the qualities of something the nature of which we do not yet know. However, please relax your rule a little bit for me and agree to investigate whether it is teachable or not by means of a hypothesis. I mean the way geometers often carry on their investigations. For example, if they are asked whether a specific area can be inscribed in the form of a triangle within a given circle, one of them might say: "I do not yet know whether that area has that property, but I think I have, as it were, a hypothesis that is of use for the problem, namely this: If that area is such that when one has applied it as a rectangle to the given straight line in the circle it is deficient by a figure similar to the very figure which is applied, then I think one alternative results, whereas another results if it is impossible for this to happen. So, by using this hypothesis, I am willing to tell you what results with regard to inscribing it in the circle—that is, whether it is impossible or not."¹⁴ So let us speak about virtue also, since we do not know either what it is or what qualities it possesses, and let us investigate whether it is teachable or not by means of a hypothesis, and say this: Among the things existing in the soul, of what sort is virtue, that it should be teachable or not? First, if it is another sort than knowledge, is it teachable or not, or, as we were just saying, recollectable? Let it make no difference to us which term we use: is it teachable? Or is it plain to anyone that men cannot be taught anything but knowledge?—I think so.

SOCRATES: But, if virtue is a kind of knowledge, it is clear that it could be taught.—Of course.

SOCRATES: We have dealt with that question quickly, that if it is of one kind it can be taught, if it is of a different kind, it cannot.—We have indeed.

SOCRATES: The next point to consider seems to be whether virtue is knowledge or something else.—That does seem to be the next point to consider.

SOCRATES: Well now, do we say that virtue is itself something good, and will this hypothesis stand firm for us, that it is something good?—Of course.

SOCRATES: If then there is anything else good that is different and separate from knowledge, virtue might well not be a kind of knowledge; but if there is nothing good that knowledge does not encompass, we would be right to suspect that it is a kind of knowledge.—That is so.

SOCRATES: Surely virtue makes us good?—Yes.

SOCRATES: And if we are good, we are beneficent, for all that is good is beneficial. Is that not so?—Yes.

SOCRATES: So virtue is something beneficial?

MENO: That necessarily follows from what has been agreed.

14. The translation here follows the interpretation of T. L. Heath, *A History of Greek Mathematics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), vol. I pp. 298 ff.

SOCRATES: Let us then examine what kinds of things benefit us, taking them up one by one: health, we say, and strength, and beauty, and also wealth. We say that these things, and others of the same kind, benefit us, do we not?— We do.

88 SOCRATES: Yet we say that these same things also sometimes harm one. Do you agree or not?—I do.

SOCRATES: Look then, what directing factor determines in each case whether these things benefit or harm us? Is it not the right use of them that benefits us, and the wrong use that harms us?—Certainly.

SOCRATES: Let us now look at the qualities of the soul. There is something you call moderation, and justice, courage, intelligence, memory, munificence, and all such things?—There is.

b SOCRATES: Consider whichever of these you believe not to be knowledge but different from it; do they not at times harm us, at other times benefit us? Courage, for example, when it is not wisdom but like a kind of recklessness: when a man is reckless without understanding, he is harmed; when with understanding, he is benefitted.—Yes.

SOCRATES: The same is true of moderation and mental quickness; when they are learned and disciplined with understanding they are beneficial, but without understanding they are harmful?—Very much so.

c SOCRATES: Therefore, in a word, all that the soul undertakes and endures, if directed by wisdom, ends in happiness, but if directed by ignorance, it ends in the opposite?—That is likely.

d SOCRATES: If then virtue is something in the soul and it must be beneficial, it must be knowledge, since all the qualities of the soul are in themselves neither beneficial nor harmful, but accompanied by wisdom or folly they become harmful or beneficial. This argument shows that virtue, being beneficial, must be a kind of wisdom.—I agree.

e SOCRATES: Furthermore, those other things we were mentioning just now, wealth and the like, are at times good and at times harmful. Just as for the rest of the soul the direction of wisdom makes things beneficial, but harmful if directed by folly, so in these cases, if the soul uses and directs them right it makes them beneficial, but bad use makes them harmful?—Quite so.

SOCRATES: The wise soul directs them right, the foolish soul wrongly?—That is so.

89 SOCRATES: So one may say this about everything; all other human activities depend on the soul, and those of the soul itself depend on wisdom if they are to be good. According to this argument the beneficial would be wisdom, and we say that virtue is beneficial?—Certainly.

SOCRATES: Then we say that virtue is wisdom, either the whole or a part of it?

MENO: What you say, Socrates, seems to me quite right.

SOCRATES: Then, if that is so, the good are not so by nature?—I do not think they are.

b SOCRATES: For if they were, this would follow: if the good were so by nature, we would have people who knew which among the young were

by nature good; we would take those whom they had pointed out and guard them in the Acropolis, sealing them up there much more carefully than gold so that no one could corrupt them, and when they reached maturity they would be useful to their cities.—Reasonable enough, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Since the good are not good by nature, does learning make them so? c

MENO: Necessarily, as I now think, Socrates, and clearly, on our hypothesis, if virtue is knowledge, it can be taught.

SOCRATES: Perhaps, by Zeus, but may it be that we were not right to agree to this?

MENO: Yet it seemed to be right at the time.

SOCRATES: We should not only think it right at the time, but also now and in the future if it is to be at all sound.

MENO: What is the difficulty? What do you have in mind that you do not like about it and doubt that virtue is knowledge? d

SOCRATES: I will tell you, Meno. I am not saying that it is wrong to say that virtue is teachable if it is knowledge, but look whether it is reasonable of me to doubt whether it is knowledge. Tell me this: if not only virtue but anything whatever can be taught, should there not be of necessity people who teach it and people who learn it?—I think so.

SOCRATES: Then again, if on the contrary there are no teachers or learners of something, we should be right to assume that the subject cannot be taught? e

MENO: Quite so, but do you think that there are no teachers of virtue?

SOCRATES: I have often tried to find out whether there were any teachers of it, but in spite of all my efforts I cannot find any. And yet I have searched for them with the help of many people, especially those whom I believed to be most experienced in this matter. And now, Meno, Anytus¹⁵ here has opportunely come to sit down by us. Let us share our search with him. It would be reasonable for us to do so, for Anytus, in the first place, is the son of Anthemion, a man of wealth and wisdom, who did not become rich automatically or as the result of a gift like Ismenias the Theban, who recently acquired the possessions of Polycrates, but through his own wisdom and efforts. Further, he did not seem to be an arrogant or puffed up or offensive citizen in other ways, but he was a well-mannered and well-behaved man. Also he gave our friend here a good upbringing and education, as the majority of Athenians believe, for they are electing him to the highest offices. It is right then to look for the teachers of virtue with the help of men such as he, whether there are any and if so who they are. Therefore, Anytus, please join me and your guest friend Meno here, in our inquiry as to who are the teachers of virtue. Look at it in this way: if we wanted Meno to become a good physician, to what teachers would we send him? Would we not send him to the physicians? b c

15. Anytus was one of Socrates' accusers at his trial. See *Apology* 23e.

ANYTUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And if we wanted him to be a good shoemaker, to shoemakers?—Yes.

SOCRATES: And so with other pursuits?—Certainly.

SOCRATES: Tell me again on this same topic, like this: we say that we would be right to send him to the physicians if we want him to become
 d a physician; whenever we say that, we mean that it would be reasonable to send him to those who practice the craft rather than to those who do not, and to those who exact fees for this very practice and have shown themselves to be teachers of anyone who wishes to come to them and learn. Is it not with this in mind that we would be right to send him?—Yes.

SOCRATES: And the same is true about flute-playing and the other crafts?
 e It would be very foolish for those who want to make someone a flute-player to refuse to send him to those who profess to teach the craft and make money at it, but to send him to make trouble for others by seeking to learn from those who do not claim to be teachers or have a single pupil in that subject which we want the one we send to learn from them? Do you not think it very unreasonable to do so?—By Zeus I do, and also very ignorant.

SOCRATES: Quite right. However, you can now deliberate with me about
 91 our guest friend Meno here. He has been telling me for some time, Anytus, that he longs to acquire that wisdom and virtue which enables men to manage their households and their cities well, to take care of their parents, to know how to welcome and to send away both citizens and strangers
 b as a good man should. Consider to whom we should be right to send him to learn this virtue. Or is it obvious in view of what was said just now that we should send him to those who profess to be teachers of virtue and have shown themselves to be available to any Greek who wishes to learn, and for this fix a fee and exact it?

ANYTUS: And who do you say these are, Socrates?

SOCRATES: You surely know yourself that they are those whom men call sophists.

c ANYTUS: By Heracles, hush, Socrates. May no one of my household or friends, whether citizen or stranger, be mad enough to go to these people and be harmed by them, for they clearly cause the ruin and corruption of their followers.

SOCRATES: How do you mean, Anytus? Are these people, alone of those who claim the knowledge to benefit one, so different from the others that they not only do not benefit what one entrusts to them but on the contrary
 d corrupt it, even though they obviously expect to make money from the process? I find I cannot believe you, for I know that one man, Protagoras, made more money from this knowledge of his than Phidias who made such notably fine works, and ten other sculptors. Surely what you say is extraordinary, if those who mend old sandals and restore clothes would

be found out within the month if they returned the clothes and sandals in a worse state than they received them; if they did this they would soon die of starvation, but the whole of Greece has not noticed for forty years that Protagoras corrupts those who frequent him and sends them away in a worse moral condition than he received them. I believe that he was nearly seventy when he died and had practiced his craft for forty years. During all that time to this very day his reputation has stood high; and not only Protagoras but a great many others, some born before him and some still alive today. Are we to say that you maintain that they deceive and harm the young knowingly, or that they themselves are not aware of it? Are we to deem those whom some people consider the wisest of men to be so mad as that?

e

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ANYTUS: They are far from being mad, Socrates. It is much rather those among the young who pay their fees who are mad, and even more the relatives who entrust their young to them and most of all the cities who allow them to come in and do not drive out any citizen or stranger who attempts to behave in this manner.

b

SOCRATES: Has some sophist wronged you, Anytus, or why are you so hard on them?

ANYTUS: No, by Zeus, I have never met one of them, nor would I allow any one of my people to do so.

SOCRATES: Are you then altogether without any experience of these men?

ANYTUS: And may I remain so.

SOCRATES: How then, my good sir, can you know whether there is any good in their instruction or not, if you are altogether without experience of it?

c

ANYTUS: Easily, for I know who they are, whether I have experience of them or not.

SOCRATES: Perhaps you are a wizard, Anytus, for I wonder, from what you yourself say, how else you know about these things. However, let us not try to find out who the men are whose company would make Meno wicked—let them be the sophists if you like—but tell us, and benefit your family friend here by telling him, to whom he should go in so large a city to acquire, to any worthwhile degree, the virtue I was just now describing.

d

ANYTUS: Why did you not tell him yourself?

SOCRATES: I did mention those whom I thought to be teachers of it, but you say I am wrong, and perhaps you are right. You tell him in your turn to whom among the Athenians he should go. Tell him the name of anyone you want.

e

ANYTUS: Why give him the name of one individual? Any Athenian gentleman he may meet, if he is willing to be persuaded, will make him a better man than the sophists would.

SOCRATES: And have these gentlemen become virtuous automatically, without learning from anyone, and are they able to teach others what they themselves never learned?

93

ANYTUS: I believe that these men have learned from those who were gentlemen before them; or do you not think that there are many good men in this city?

SOCRATES: I believe, Anytus, that there are many men here who are good at public affairs, and that there have been as many in the past, but have they been good teachers of their own virtue? That is the point we are discussing, not whether there are good men here or not, or whether there
 b have been in the past, but we have been investigating for some time whether virtue can be taught. And in the course of that investigation we are inquiring whether the good men of today and of the past knew how to pass on to another the virtue they themselves possessed, or whether a man cannot pass it on or receive it from another. This is what Meno and I have been investigating for some time. Look at it this way, from what
 c you yourself have said. Would you not say that Themistocles¹⁶ was a good man?—Yes. Even the best of men.

SOCRATES: And therefore a good teacher of his own virtue if anyone was?

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

SOCRATES: But do you think he did not want some other people to be worthy men, and especially his own son? Or do you think he begrudged
 d him this, and deliberately did not pass on to him his own virtue? Have you not heard that Themistocles taught his son Cleophantus to be a good horseman? He could remain standing upright on horseback and shoot javelins from that position and do many other remarkable things which his father had him taught and made skillful at, all of which required good teachers. Have you not heard this from your elders?—I have.

SOCRATES: So one could not blame the poor natural talents of the son
 e for his failure in virtue?—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 at the same pursuits as his father?—Never.

SOCRATES: Are we to believe that he wanted to educate his son in those other things but not to do better than his neighbors in that skill which he himself possessed, if indeed virtue can be taught?—Perhaps not, by Zeus.

SOCRATES: And yet he was, as you yourself agree, among the best teachers
 94 of virtue in the past. Let us consider another man, Aristides, the son of Lysimachus. Do you not agree that he was good?—I very definitely do.

SOCRATES: He too gave his own son Lysimachus the best Athenian education in matters which are the business of teachers, and do you think he made him a better man than anyone else? For you have been in his company
 b and seen the kind of man he is. Or take Pericles, a man of such magnificent wisdom. You know that he brought up two sons, Paralus and Xanthippus?—I know.

16. Famous Athenian statesman and general of the early fifth century, a leader in the victorious war against the Persians.

SOCRATES: You also know that he taught them to be as good horsemen as any Athenian, that he educated them in the arts, in gymnastics, and in all else that was a matter of skill not to be inferior to anyone, but did he not want to make them good men? I think he did, but this could not be taught. And lest you think that only a few most inferior Athenians are incapable in this respect, reflect that Thucydides¹⁷ too brought up two sons, Melesias and Stephanus, that he educated them well in all other things. They were the best wrestlers in Athens—he entrusted the one to Xanthias and the other to Eudorus, who were thought to be the best wrestlers of the day, or do you not remember?

ANYTUS: I remember I have heard that said.

SOCRATES: It is surely clear that he would not have taught his boys what it costs money to teach, but have failed to teach them what costs nothing—making them good men—if that could be taught? Or was Thucydides perhaps an inferior person who had not many friends among the Athenians and the allies? He belonged to a great house; he had great influence in the city and among the other Greeks, so that if virtue could be taught he would have found the man who could make his sons good men, be it a citizen or a stranger, if he himself did not have the time because of his public concerns. But, friend Anytus, virtue can certainly not be taught.

ANYTUS: I think, Socrates, that you easily speak ill of people. I would advise you, if you will listen to me, to be careful. Perhaps also in another city, and certainly here, it is easier to injure people than to benefit them. I think you know that yourself.

SOCRATES: I think, Meno, that Anytus is angry, and I am not at all surprised. He thinks, to begin with, that I am slandering those men, and then he believes himself to be one of them. If he ever realizes what slander is, he will cease from anger, but he does not know it now. You tell me, are there not worthy men among your people?—Certainly.

SOCRATES: Well now, are they willing to offer themselves to the young as teachers? Do they agree they are teachers, and that virtue can be taught?

MENO: No, by Zeus, Socrates, but sometimes you would hear them say that it can be taught, at other times, that it cannot.

SOCRATES: Should we say that they are teachers of this subject, when they do not even agree on this point?—I do not think so, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Further, do you think that these sophists, who alone profess to be so, are teachers of virtue?

MENO: I admire this most in Gorgias, Socrates, that you would never hear him promising this. Indeed, he ridicules the others when he hears them making this claim. He thinks one should make people clever speakers.

SOCRATES: You do not think then that the sophists are teachers?

MENO: I cannot tell, Socrates; like most people, at times I think they are, at other times I think that they are not.

17. Not the historian but Thucydides the son of Melesias, an Athenian statesman who was an opponent of Pericles and who was ostracized in 440 B.C.

d SOCRATES: Do you know that not only you and the other public men at times think that it can be taught, at other times that it cannot, but that the poet Theognis¹⁸ says the same thing?—Where?

e SOCRATES: In his elegiacs: “Eat and drink with these men, and keep their company. Please those whose power is great, for you will learn goodness from the good. If you mingle with bad men you will lose even what wit you possess.” You see that here he speaks as if virtue can be taught?—So it appears.

96 SOCRATES: Elsewhere, he changes somewhat: “If this could be done” he says, “and intelligence could be instilled,” somehow those who could do this “would collect large and numerous fees,” and further: “Never would a bad son be born of a good father, for he would be persuaded by wise words, but you will never make a bad man good by teaching.” You realize that the poet is contradicting himself on the same subject?—He seems to be.

b SOCRATES: Can you mention any other subject of which those who claim to be teachers not only are not recognized to be teachers of others but are not recognized to have knowledge of it themselves, and are thought to be poor in the very matter which they profess to teach? Or any other subject of which those who are recognized as worthy teachers at one time say it can be taught and at other times that it cannot? Would you say that people who are so confused about a subject can be effective teachers of it?—No, by Zeus, I would not.

SOCRATES: If then neither the sophists nor the worthy people themselves are teachers of this subject, clearly there would be no others?—I do not think there are.

c SOCRATES: If there are no teachers, neither are there pupils?—As you say.

SOCRATES: And we agreed that a subject that has neither teachers nor pupils is not teachable?—We have so agreed.

SOCRATES: Now there seem to be no teachers of virtue anywhere?—That is so.

SOCRATES: If there are no teachers, there are no learners?—That seems so.

SOCRATES: Then virtue cannot be taught?

d MENO: Apparently not, if we have investigated this correctly. I certainly wonder, Socrates, whether there are no good men either, or in what way good men come to be.

e SOCRATES: We are probably poor specimens, you and I, Meno. Gorgias has not adequately educated you, nor Prodicus me. We must then at all costs turn our attention to ourselves and find someone who will in some way make us better. I say this in view of our recent investigation, for it is ridiculous that we failed to see that it is not only under the guidance of knowledge that men succeed in their affairs, and that is perhaps why the knowledge of how good men come to be escapes us.

MENO: How do you mean, Socrates?

18. Theognis was a poet of the mid-sixth century B.C. The quotations below are of lines 33–36 and 434–38 (Diehl) of his elegies.

SOCRATES: I mean this: we were right to agree that good men must be beneficent, and that this could not be otherwise. Is that not so?—Yes.

SOCRATES: And that they will be beneficent if they give us correct guidance in our affairs. To this too we were right to agree?—Yes. 97

SOCRATES: But that one cannot guide correctly if one does not have knowledge; to this our agreement is likely to be incorrect.—How do you mean?

SOCRATES: I will tell you. A man who knew the way to Larissa, or anywhere else you like, and went there and guided others would surely lead them well and correctly?—Certainly.

SOCRATES: What if someone had had a correct opinion as to which was the way but had not gone there nor indeed had knowledge of it, would he not also lead correctly?—Certainly. b

SOCRATES: And as long as he has the right opinion about that of which the other has knowledge, he will not be a worse guide than the one who knows, as he has a true opinion, though not knowledge.—In no way worse.

SOCRATES: So true opinion is in no way a worse guide to correct action than knowledge. It is this that we omitted in our investigation of the nature of virtue, when we said that only knowledge can lead to correct action, for true opinion can do so also.—So it seems. c

SOCRATES: So correct opinion is no less useful than knowledge?

MENO: Yes, to this extent, Socrates. But the man who has knowledge will always succeed, whereas he who has true opinion will only succeed at times.

SOCRATES: How do you mean? Will he who has the right opinion not always succeed, as long as his opinion is right?

MENO: That appears to be so of necessity, and it makes me wonder, Socrates, this being the case, why knowledge is prized far more highly than right opinion, and why they are different. d

SOCRATES: Do you know why you wonder, or shall I tell you?—By all means tell me.

SOCRATES: It is because you have paid no attention to the statues of Daedalus, but perhaps there are none in Thessaly.

MENO: What do you have in mind when you say this?

SOCRATES: That they too run away and escape if one does not tie them down but remain in place if tied down.—So what? e

SOCRATES: To acquire an untied work of Daedalus is not worth much, like acquiring a runaway slave, for it does not remain, but it is worth much if tied down, for his works are very beautiful. What am I thinking of when I say this? True opinions. For true opinions, as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all they do is good, but they are not willing to remain long, and they escape from a man's mind, so that they are not worth much until one ties them down by (giving) an account of the reason why. And that, Meno my friend, is recollection, as we previously agreed. After they are tied down, in the first place they become knowledge, and then they remain in place. That is why knowledge is prized higher than correct 98

opinion, and knowledge differs from correct opinion in being tied down.

MENO: Yes, by Zeus, Socrates, it seems to be something like that.

- b SOCRATES: Indeed, I too speak as one who does not have knowledge but is guessing. However, I certainly do not think I am guessing that right opinion is a different thing from knowledge. If I claim to know anything else—and I would make that claim about few things—I would put this down as one of the things I know.—Rightly so, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Well then, is it not correct that when true opinion guides the course of every action, it does no worse than knowledge?—I think you are right in this too.

- c SOCRATES: Correct opinion is then neither inferior to knowledge nor less useful in directing actions, nor is the man who has it less so than he who has knowledge.—That is so.

SOCRATES: And we agreed that the good man is beneficent.—Yes.

- d SOCRATES: Since then it is not only through knowledge but also through right opinion that men are good, and beneficial to their cities when they are, and neither knowledge nor true opinion come to men by nature but are acquired—or do you think either of these comes by nature?—I do not think so.

SOCRATES: Then if they do not come by nature, men are not so by nature either.—Surely not.

SOCRATES: As goodness does not come by nature, we inquired next whether it could be taught.—Yes.

SOCRATES: We thought it could be taught, if it was knowledge?—Yes.

SOCRATES: And that it was knowledge if it could be taught?—Quite so.

- e SOCRATES: And that if there were teachers of it, it could be taught, but if there were not, it was not teachable?—That is so.

SOCRATES: And then we agreed that there were no teachers of it?—We did.

SOCRATES: So we agreed that it was neither teachable nor knowledge?—Quite so.

SOCRATES: But we certainly agree that virtue is a good thing?—Yes.

SOCRATES: And that which guides correctly is both useful and good?—Certainly.

- 99 SOCRATES: And that only these two things, true belief and knowledge, guide correctly, and that if a man possesses these he gives correct guidance. The things that turn out right by some chance are not due to human guidance, but where there is correct human guidance it is due to two things, true belief or knowledge.—I think that is so.

SOCRATES: Now because it cannot be taught, virtue no longer seems to be knowledge?—It seems not.

- b SOCRATES: So one of the two good and useful things has been excluded, and knowledge is not the guide in public affairs.—I do not think so.

SOCRATES: So it is not by some kind of wisdom, or by being wise, that such men lead their cities, those such as Themistocles and those mentioned by Anytus just now? That is the reason why they cannot make others be

like themselves, because it is not knowledge which makes them what they are.

MENO: It is likely to be as you say, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Therefore, if it is not through knowledge, the only alternative is that it is through right opinion that statesmen follow the right course for their cities. As regards knowledge, they are no different from soothsayers and prophets. They too say many true things when inspired, but they have no knowledge of what they are saying.—That is probably so. c

SOCRATES: And so, Meno, is it right to call divine these men who, without any understanding, are right in much that is of importance in what they say and do?—Certainly.

SOCRATES: We should be right to call divine also those soothsayers and prophets whom we just mentioned, and all the poets, and we should call no less divine and inspired those public men who are no less under the gods' influence and possession, as their speeches lead to success in many important matters, though they have no knowledge of what they are saying.—Quite so. d

SOCRATES: Women too, Meno, call good men divine, and the Spartans, when they eulogize someone, say "This man is divine."

MENO: And they appear to be right, Socrates, though perhaps Anytus here will be annoyed with you for saying so. e

SOCRATES: I do not mind that; we shall talk to him again, but if we were right in the way in which we spoke and investigated in this whole discussion, virtue would be neither an inborn quality nor taught, but comes to those who possess it as a gift from the gods which is not accompanied by understanding, unless there is someone among our statesmen who can make another into a statesman. If there were one, he could be said to be among the living as Homer said Tiresias was among the dead, namely, that "he alone retained his wits while the others flitted about like shadows."¹⁹ In the same manner such a man would, as far as virtue is concerned, here also be the only true reality compared, as it were, with shadows. 100

MENO: I think that is an excellent way to put it, Socrates. b

SOCRATES: It follows from this reasoning, Meno, that virtue appears to be present in those of us who may possess it as a gift from the gods. We shall have clear knowledge of this when, before we investigate how it comes to be present in men, we first try to find out what virtue in itself is. But now the time has come for me to go. You convince your guest friend Anytus here of these very things of which you have yourself been convinced, in order that he may be more amenable. If you succeed, you will also confer a benefit upon the Athenians.

19. *Odyssey* x.494–95.