

The endnotes annotating the text of the dialogue are keyed to our new Speech numbers, along with the old Stephanus numbers, but without reference to those notes in the text itself to distract the reader of the dialogue. Many readers, once it is understood who is talking and perhaps where and when, should be able to go through this dialogue without consulting any notes, except perhaps for the geometrical illustrations provided in the note for Speech 356 (86E-87B) and Appendix B of this volume. (Thus, an attempt has been made by us to permit the reader of English to come to our text much as the reader of Greek might come to Plato's original text.) Some of the endnotes provide elementary information about now-obscure references in the text, other of them are about implications of Greek words and wordplay that no translation can convey; still others are designed to help the reader address some of the more difficult questions raised by the dialogue. The endnotes also include references to other Platonic dialogues and to some ancient and modern texts where various questions touched upon in the *Meno* are treated in much greater detail than it is useful to do here. (More than one-fourth of the Speeches in the *Meno* have at least one endnote provided for them in this volume.)

Most of the exchanges in the dialogue are between Socrates, an Athenian, and Meno, a Thessalian visiting Athens. The time of the dialogue seems to be not long before Meno leaves Greece for an ill-fated military expedition in Persia. (It is well to keep in mind that the privileged Meno, for all his limitations, does seem to be able to follow easily the geometrical exercises that Socrates uses.) The infamous capital prosecution of Socrates (in 399 BCE) evidently occurred shortly after his supposed conversation presented here with Anytus, a local politician who turned out to be one of Socrates' three accusers. It is not certain precisely where in Athens this dialogue takes place or how many are present to witness its exchanges.

We have consulted, from the beginning of our joint effort, the translation of the *Meno* prepared in the 1960s by John Gormly for the Basic Program of Liberal Education for Adults at the University of Chicago. This is the Program in which both of us began our teaching careers half a century ago.

In the main, we have used for the Greek text the Oxford edition of John Burnet. Other Greek texts drawn upon by us are indicated in the endnotes, along with references to those few occasions when we have departed from the standard modern versions of the Greek text. We have also made considerable use of the grammatical and interpretive notes in the Greek text of Meno in the Alfred Mollin and Robert Williamson volume, *An Introduction to Ancient Greek*.

George Anastaplo  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Laurence Berns  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND

## PLATO'S *MENO*

[Or, About Virtue: Testing]

The Characters of the Dialogue:

MENO SOCRATES MENO'S [SLAVE] BOY ANYTUS

[1] MENO: Can you tell me, Socrates, whether virtue is something teachable? Or is it not teachable, but something that comes from practice? Or is it something neither from practice nor from learning, but something that comes to human beings by nature, or some other way? 70A

[2] SOCRATES: Meno, it used to be that Thessalians were well-reputed among the Greeks and were admired both for horsemanship and for wealth, but now, it seems to me, they are to be admired for wisdom also; and not least of them the fellow citizens of your comrade, Aristippus, the Larissians. And the one responsible for this happening to you is Gorgias. For when he came to the city, he captivated the foremost men among the Aleudai as lovers of wisdom, of whom your lover Aristippus is one, and the foremost of the other Thessalians too. And in particular this is the habit to which he has habituated you, namely, of answering both fearlessly and magnificently whenever anyone asks you anything, as is fitting for those who know; inasmuch, indeed, as he makes himself available to any Greek who wants to question him about whatever one might wish to ask, and there is no one whom he does not answer. But hereabouts, dear Meno, the opposite condition prevails: it's as if some sort of drought of wisdom has come about, and there seems to be a danger that wisdom has left these parts for yours. And so, if you 70B  
70C  
71A

are willing to ask anyone hereabouts such a question, there is no one who will not laugh and say, "Stranger, I seem to be in danger of your thinking me to be someone who is blessed—to know about virtue, whether it is something teachable or in what way it comes about. But I am so far from knowing about virtue, whether it is something teachable or not teachable, that I happen not to know at all what that thing virtue itself is."

71B

And I myself, Meno, am in this condition, too. I share the poverty of my fellow citizens in this matter and blame myself for not knowing about virtue at all. And how could I know what sort of thing something is, if I do not know what it is? Or does it seem possible to you that someone who has no cognizance of Meno at all, who he is, could know whether he is handsome or rich or well-born, or the opposite of these? Does it seem possible to you?

71C

[3] MENO: Not to me. But do you, Socrates, truly not know what virtue is, and is this really what we should report about you back home?

[4] SOCRATES: Not only that, comrade, but also that I never yet happened to meet anyone else who, in my opinion, did know.

[5] MENO: What? You didn't happen to meet Gorgias when he was here?

[6] SOCRATES: I did.

[7] MENO: Really—did he not seem to you to know?

[8] SOCRATES: I'm not a very good rememberer. Meno, so I'm not able to say at present how he seemed to me then. But, perhaps, he did know, and you know what he used to say. Then, remind me how he said it. Or, if you wish, speak yourself, for you, surely, share his opinion.

71D

[9] MENO: I do.

[10] SOCRATES: Then let's let him go, since, in fact, he is not here. But you yourself, by the gods, Meno, what do you declare virtue to be? Speak and don't be begrudging, so that I will have fabricated a most fortunate falsehood if it becomes evident that you and Gorgias do know, while I've stated that I never happened to come across anyone who knew.

71E

[11] MENO: But it's not hard to tell, Socrates. First, then, if it's

the virtue of a man you want, it's easy to say that this is the virtue of a man: to be sufficient to carry on the affairs of the city and while carrying them on to do well by his friends and harm to his enemies and to take care that he not suffer any such thing himself. And if it's the virtue of a woman you want, that's not hard to go through, in that she needs to manage the household well, conserving what is inside and being obedient to her man. And the virtue of a child is different, both female and male, and of an elderly man, and, if you want, of a freeman or, if you want, of a slave. And there are a great many other virtues, so that there is no difficulty in speaking about what virtue is. For according to each activity and each time of life relative to each task for each of us there is a virtue, and in the same way, I suppose, Socrates, there is also a vice.

72A

[12] SOCRATES: I seem to have hit upon some great good fortune, Meno, if, while seeking one virtue I have discovered a sort of swarm of virtues gathered about you. But, Meno, following up this image about swarms, if after you had been asked by me about the very being of a bee, just what it is, and you were saying that there are many and of all sorts, what would you answer me if I asked you: "Then are you saying that they are many and of all sorts and different from one another in this by which they are bees? Or that it is not this in which they differ, but in something else, such as beauty or size or something else of this sort?" Tell me, what would you answer after being questioned in this way?

72B

[13] MENO: I would answer this, that they do not differ, one from the other, in that by which they are bees.

[14] SOCRATES: If then I were to say after that: "Tell me further, Meno, this very thing in which they do not differ but are all the same thing, what do you say that is?" You could, I suppose, tell me what it is?

72C

[15] MENO: I could.

[16] SOCRATES: And so too, surely, about the virtues: even if they are many and of all sorts, still they all have some one and the same form through which they are virtues and upon which one would somehow do well to focus one's gaze, that is, the one answering him who has asked him to clarify that, namely, what does virtue happen to be. Or do you not understand what I'm saying?

72D

- [17] MENO: It seems to me that I do understand. Yet somehow I don't grasp what is being asked as well as I would like.
- [18] SOCRATES: Is it about virtue only that you think in this way, Meno, that there is one for a man and another for a woman and the others; or do you think the same way about health and about size and about strength? Does the health of a man seem to you to be one thing and the health of a woman another? Or is it the same form everywhere, if it is indeed health, whether it exists in a man or in anyone else whatever?
- [19] MENO: Health, at any rate, does seem to me to be the same both for a man and for a woman.
- [20] SOCRATES: And not then also size and strength? If a woman is really strong, will she not be strong by the same form and by the same strength? For "by the same" I mean this: strength does not differ with respect to being strength whether it exists in a man or in a woman. Or does it seem to you that there is some difference?
- [21] MENO: Not to me.
- [22] SOCRATES: And will virtue differ in some way, with respect to its being virtue, whether it exists in a child or in an old man or in a woman or in a man?
- [23] MENO: It somehow seems to me, at any rate, Socrates, that this is no longer like those others.
- [24] SOCRATES: But why? Were you not saying that the virtue of a man is to manage a city well, and that of a woman, a household?
- [25] MENO: I was.
- [26] SOCRATES: Then can one manage a city well, or a household, or anything else whatever, if one does not manage it moderately and justly?
- [27] MENO: Surely not.
- [28] SOCRATES: Then if people really manage justly and moderately, will they manage by justice and moderation?
- [29] MENO: Necessarily.
- [30] SOCRATES: Then both need the same things, if they really intend to be good, both the woman and the man, namely, justice and moderation.
- [31] MENO: So it appears.
- [32] SOCRATES: What about a child and an old man? If they should be licentious and unjust, could they ever become good?
- [33] MENO: Surely not.
- [34] SOCRATES: But if they are moderate and just?
- [35] MENO: Yes.
- [36] SOCRATES: Then all human beings are good in the same way; for it is from the same things that they happen to become good.
- [37] MENO: It seems likely.
- [38] SOCRATES: They would surely not be good in the same way if they didn't have the same virtue.
- [39] MENO: Surely not.
- [40] SOCRATES: Since, therefore, virtue is the same for all, try to say and to recollect what that very thing is which Gorgias, and you with him, affirm it to be.
- [41] MENO: What else than to be able to rule over human beings—if indeed you are seeking some one thing concerning all of them?
- [42] SOCRATES: But certainly I do seek that. But then, is the virtue of both a child, Meno, and a slave the same, for the two of them to be able to rule the master, and does it seem to you that he who rules would still be a slave?
- [43] MENO: It does not at all seem so to me, Socrates.
- [44] SOCRATES: Since, my very good man, it is not likely. Then also observe the following: "to be able to rule," you say. Shall we not add to that "justly, but not unjustly"?
- [45] MENO: I, at any rate, think so. For justice, Socrates, is virtue.
- [46] SOCRATES: Is it virtue, Meno, or some particular virtue?
- [47] MENO: How do you mean that?
- [48] SOCRATES: Just as about anything else whatever. For example, about roundness, if you want, I would say that it is a particular shape, not just simply that it is shape.

72E

72E

72E

72E

72E

72E

72E

72E

72E

72E

72E

72E

72E

72E

72E

72E

72E

73C

73C

73C

73C

73C

73C

73D

73D

73D

73D

73D

73E

73E

73E

73E

73E

- The reason I would speak in this way is that there are also other shapes.
- [49] MENO: What you say is quite right, for I too say that there is not only justice, but that there are also other virtues.
- 74A [50] SOCRATES: What are these? Tell me. Just as I too could tell you that there are also other shapes, if you were to order me to do so, you too then tell me other virtues.
- [51] MENO: Well then, courage seems to me, at any rate, to be a virtue, and moderation, and wisdom, and magnificence, and a great many others.
- [52] SOCRATES: Again, Meno, we have suffered the same thing. Although seeking one, we have found many virtues, but in another way than we did just now. But the one which exists throughout all of these we are not able to find out.
- [53] MENO: No, for I am somehow not able to grasp, Socrates, as you seek it, one virtue from all, as I can in the other cases.
- 74B [54] SOCRATES: That is likely. But I am quite willing, if I am able, to help us advance. For you understand, I suppose, that this is how it holds for everything. If someone were to ask you this, which I was just now speaking of, "What is shape, Meno?"—and if you were to say to him that it is roundness, and if he were to say to you what I did, "Is roundness shape, or a particular shape?", you would surely say that it is a particular shape.
- [55] MENO: Certainly, I would.
- 74C [56] SOCRATES: Is it not because of this, that there are also other shapes?
- [57] MENO: Yes.
- [58] SOCRATES: And if he were to ask you further what sorts of shapes, you would tell him?
- [59] MENO: I would.
- [60] SOCRATES: And again, if he were to ask you about color in the same way, what it is, and you said that it is white, and after that the questioner took it up, asking, "Is the white color a particular color?", you would say that it is a particular color because there also happen to be other colors?
- [61] MENO: I would.
- [62] SOCRATES: And if then he ordered you to tell other colors, would you speak of others that happen to be colors no less than white is?
- [63] MENO: Yes.
- [64] SOCRATES: If then he, just as I, was following up the argument and said, "We always arrive at many, but this is not what I'm seeking. But since you address these many by some one name and you say of none of them that they are not shape, even those that are opposite to one another, what is this that comprises the round or the straight, which indeed you name shape, and you affirm that the round is no more shape than the straight?" Or is this not the way that you speak?
- 74E [65] MENO: I do.
- [66] SOCRATES: Whenever you do speak in this way, do you then affirm that the round is no more round than straight and that the straight is no more straight than round?
- [67] MENO: Certainly not, Socrates.
- [68] SOCRATES: But, indeed, you do affirm that the round is no more a shape than the straight, the one no more than the other.
- [69] MENO: You speak the truth.
- [70] SOCRATES: Whatever then is this of which this is the name: shape? Try to say. If then you had said to someone questioning in this way either about shape or about color, "But I don't understand what you want, fellow, nor do I know what you mean," probably he would have wondered and said, "You do not understand that what I am seeking is that which is the same over all of these?" Or would you not be able to tell about these things, Meno, if someone had asked you: "What is it that is over the round and the straight and the others, and is the same over all of those things which you, indeed, call shapes?" Try to say it, so that you can get some serious practice for the answer about virtue.
- [71] MENO: No, but you say it, Socrates.
- 75B [72] SOCRATES: You want me to gratify you?
- [73] MENO: I certainly do.

[74] SOCRATES: Will you then also be willing to tell me about virtue?

[75] MENO: I will.

[76] SOCRATES: Well then, one must be for it; for it is a worthy endeavor.

[77] MENO: By all means.

[78] SOCRATES: Come then, let us try to tell you what shape is. See then whether you can accept it to be the following: for us, indeed, let this be shape: it is that which alone, of all the things that are, which always happens to accompany color. Is that sufficient for you, or do you somehow seek it in some other way? For I would be content if you could tell me about virtue in this way.

[79] MENO: But this is really simple-minded, Socrates.

[80] SOCRATES: How do you mean that?

[81] MENO: That shape is, in some way, according to your argument, that which always accompanies color. Very well; but if, indeed, someone should declare that he does not know color but is at a loss about it in the same way that he is about shape, what do you suppose you would have answered him?

[82] SOCRATES: The truth is what I would have answered. And if the questioner were one of those wise men with a bent for strife and contention, I would tell him, "That's what I said. And if I don't speak correctly, it's your task to take up the argument and refute it." But if, being friends as both I and you are now, they should want to have a discussion with one another, then surely a somehow more gentle and more dialectical way of answering is required. And it is perhaps more dialectical to answer not only with the truth, but also through those things which he who is being questioned could agree that he knows. I too, indeed, will try to speak to you in this way. For, tell me, is there something you call an end? I mean this sort of thing, like a limit or an extremity — all these, I say, are the same thing, though perhaps Prodicus would differ from us; but you, at any rate, do call something as having been limited or ended. This is the sort of thing I want to say, nothing fancy.

[83] MENO: But I do so call it that, and I think I do understand what you mean.

[84] SOCRATES: And what then? Is there something you call a plane surface, and something else again you call a solid, as, for example, in geometry?

[85] MENO: I do so call them.

[86] SOCRATES: Therefore, you could immediately understand what I mean about shape. For I say this about every shape: that at which the solid ends, that is shape; what I could say, in summing it up, is that shape is the limit of a solid.

[87] MENO: And about color, what do you say, Socrates?

[88] SOCRATES: You are outrageous, Meno. You pose troublesome problems for an old man to answer, but you yourself are unwilling to recollect and say whatever Gorgias says virtue is.

[89] MENO: But whenever you tell me this, Socrates, I'll tell you that.

[90] SOCRATES: Even someone who is blindfolded could know, Meno, from conversing with you that you are handsome and still have lovers.

[91] MENO: Why indeed?

[92] SOCRATES: Because you do nothing but impose commands in your arguments, the very thing that spoiled people do, so as to tyrannize as long as they are in their prime. And at the same time it is likely that you've noticed about me, that I have a weakness for beautiful people. So I will gratify you and I will answer.

[93] MENO: By all means then, gratify me.

[94] SOCRATES: Then do you want me to answer in the style of Gorgias, by which you might be, as much as possible, able to follow?

[95] MENO: I do want it. And why not?

[96] SOCRATES: Then don't you people say, as does Empedocles, that there are certain effluences from the things that are?

[97] MENO: Very much so.

[98] SOCRATES: And there are certain passageways into which and through which the effluences pass?



- [99] MENO: Yes, by all means.
- [100] SOCRATES: And that some of the effluences fit some of the passageways and others are too small or too large?
- [101] MENO: That is so.
- [102] SOCRATES: Then there is also something that you call sight?
- [103] MENO: I do.
- [104] SOCRATES: From these very agreements, as Pindar says, "understand what I mean." For color is an effluence of shapes commensurate with sight and perceptible.
- [105] MENO: You seem to me, Socrates, to have put this answer in the best possible way.
- [106] SOCRATES: Perhaps because it was said in accordance with the way in which you have been habituated. At the same time, I suppose, you consider that from this you could also say what sound is, and smell, and many other things of this sort.
- [107] MENO: By all means.
- [108] SOCRATES: For it is a tragical answer, Meno, and therefore satisfies you more than the one about shape.
- [109] MENO: It does.
- [110] SOCRATES: But it is not better, son of Alexidemus, but as I persuade myself, the other one is. And I think it would not seem so to you, if it were not necessary, as you were saying yesterday, for you to leave before the Mysteries, but were both to stay around and to be initiated.
- [111] MENO: But I would stay around, Socrates, if you would tell me about many other such things.
- [112] SOCRATES: But I certainly will in no way fall short of zeal, both for your sake and for my own, in talking about such things; but I do fear that I will not be able to talk about many such. But come now, you too try to pay back your promise to me in saying about virtue as a whole, what it is, and stop making many out of one, as those who like to jeer say each time about those who break something, but rather, leaving it whole and healthy, tell me what virtue is. The patterns, at any rate, you have got from me.

77B

- [113] MENO: Well then, it seems to me, Socrates, that virtue is just what the poet says, "both to rejoice and to be capable in beautiful things." I too say that this is virtue: to desire beautiful things and to be capable of providing them for oneself.
- [114] SOCRATES: Then do you mean that he who desires beautiful things is someone who desires good things?
- [115] MENO: Most certainly.
- [116] SOCRATES: Then are you saying that there are some people who desire bad things and others who desire good things? Does it not seem to you, my very good man, that everyone desires good things?
- [117] MENO: Not to me.
- [118] SOCRATES: But some desire bad things?
- [119] MENO: Yes.
- [120] SOCRATES: Supposing that the bad things are good, you mean, or even, while recognizing that they are bad, they nevertheless do desire them?
- [121] MENO: Both, it seems to me.
- [122] SOCRATES: Then does it really seem to you, Meno, that someone who recognizes that the bad things are bad, nevertheless desires them?
- [123] MENO: Certainly.
- [124] SOCRATES: What do you mean by "desires"? That they should become his?
- [125] MENO: Become his; what else could it be?
- [126] SOCRATES: Does he believe that the bad things benefit him whose they become, or does he recognize that bad things harm him whom they come to be with?
- [127] MENO: There are some who believe the bad things benefit, and others who recognize that they harm.
- [128] SOCRATES: Do those who believe that bad things benefit also seem to you to recognize that bad things are bad?
- [129] MENO: This does not seem to me to be so at all.
- [130] SOCRATES: Therefore it is clear that those who do not recognize bad things as bad do not desire bad things, but

77E

they desire those things which they were supposing to be good, the very things which are, in fact, bad; so that not recognizing bad things to be bad and supposing them to be good, it is clear that they desire good things. Is it not so?

[131] MENO: These, at any rate, probably do.

[132] SOCRATES: What then? Those who desire bad things, as you affirm, but who believe that the bad things harm him to whom they come to belong, they surely recognize that they are harmed by them?

78A [133] MENO: Necessarily.

[134] SOCRATES: But do not these men think that those being harmed are miserable to the extent that they are being harmed?

[135] MENO: This too is necessary.

[136] SOCRATES: And are not the miserable ill-fated?

[137] MENO: I, anyway, think they are.

[138] SOCRATES: Now is there anyone who wishes to be miserable and ill-fated?

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

[140] SOCRATES: Therefore, no one, Meno, wishes for bad things, if indeed he does not wish to be this sort of person. For what else is it to be miserable than both to desire and to acquire bad things?

78B [141] MENO: I dare say you speak the truth, Socrates, and no one wishes bad things for himself.

[142] SOCRATES: Then were you saying just now that virtue is to wish for good things and to be capable of them?

[143] MENO: I sure did say it.

[144] SOCRATES: Then from what has just been said, does not the wishing pertain to everyone, and in this respect no one is better than anyone else?

[145] MENO: So it appears.

[146] SOCRATES: But it is clear that if one man is better than another it would be by being more excellent in capability.

[147] MENO: Certainly so.

[148] SOCRATES: This, therefore, as it seems, is, according to your argument, virtue: a power of providing good things for oneself. 78C

[149] MENO: It seems to me, Socrates, altogether to hold in just the way you now understand it.

[150] SOCRATES: Now let us see in this, too, whether what you say is true, for you could perhaps be speaking well. Do you affirm that to be able to provide oneself with good things is virtue?

[151] MENO: I do.

[152] SOCRATES: Are not both health and wealth the kinds of things that you call goods?

[153] MENO: And to acquire gold, I mean, and silver, and honors in a city and offices.

[154] SOCRATES: You don't mean, I suppose, that some things other than this kind are the good things?

[155] MENO: No, but I mean everything of this kind. 78D

[156] SOCRATES: Very well; to provide oneself with gold and silver, then, is virtue, as declares Meno, the ancestral guest-friend of the Great King. Do you add the words "justly" and "piously" to this providing, Meno, or does it make no difference to you, but even if someone should provide himself with these things unjustly, would you still call these doings virtue?

[157] MENO: Surely not, Socrates.

[158] SOCRATES: But vice.

[159] MENO: By all means, surely

[160] SOCRATES: Therefore it seems likely that one should add justice or moderation or piety, or some other piece of virtue, to this providing. And, if not, it will not be virtue, even though it were a thoroughgoing provision of the good things. 78E

[161] MENO: For how could virtue come to be without these things?

[162] SOCRATES: And not procuring gold and silver, whenever it is not just, either for oneself or for another, is not this lack

of provision also virtue?

[163] MENO: So it appears.

[164] SOCRATES: Therefore, the providing of goods such as these could be virtue no more than the lack of a way of providing them; but it is likely that whatever comes about with justice will be virtue and that whatever comes about without anything of this sort will be vice.

79A

[165] MENO: It seems to me that it must be necessarily as you say.

[166] SOCRATES: Then did we not affirm a little while ago that each piece of these things was virtue, justice and moderation and everything of this sort?

[167] MENO: Yes.

[168] SOCRATES: So, Meno, are you making fun of me?

[169] MENO: How indeed is that, Socrates?

[170] SOCRATES: Because just now when you were requested by me not to shatter virtue or to change it into small coin, and I gave you patterns in accordance with which it was to be answered, yet you paid no attention to this and tell me that virtue is to be able to provide good things for oneself along with justice. And this, you declare, is a piece of virtue?

79B

[171] MENO: I do.

[172] SOCRATES: Then it follows from what you agree to, that to act, whatever one might do, with a piece of virtue, this is virtue. For you affirm that justice and each of these is a piece of virtue. Why then do I say this? Because when I begged you to talk about virtue as a whole, you fell far short of saying what it is, but you declared that every action is a virtue whenever it is done with some piece of virtue, just as if you had said what the whole, virtue, is and it was immediately recognized by me, even if you were to change it into pieces of small change. Now what you need, again from the beginning, it seems to me, my dear Meno, is the same question, What is virtue?—if every action with a piece of virtue could be virtue. For this is what it means whenever someone says that every action accompanied by justice is virtue. Does it not seem to you that the same question is required again, or do you rather suppose that someone knows what a piece of

79C

virtue is, without knowing virtue itself?

[173] MENO: It does not seem so to me.

[174] SOCRATES: For, if you also remember, when I had just answered you about shape, we, I think, rejected the kind of answer that tries to answer through those things that are still being sought and are not yet agreed upon.

79D

[175] MENO: And we were right in rejecting it, Socrates.

[176] SOCRATES: Therefore, my very good man, while what virtue is as a whole is still being sought, do not suppose that in answering through its pieces you will in any way clarify it, or anything else, by speaking of it in this same way, but consider that you will be in need again of the very same question. What is this virtue that you speak about as you speak? Or does it seem to you that I'm not saying anything?

79E

[177] MENO: You seem to me to speak rightly.

[178] SOCRATES: Then answer again, from the beginning: what do you affirm virtue to be, both you and your comrade?

[179] MENO: Socrates, I certainly used to hear, even before meeting you, that you never do anything else than exist in a state of perplexity yourself and put others in a state of perplexity. And now you seem to me to be bewitching me and drugging me and simply subduing me with incantations, so that I come to be full of perplexity. And you seem to me, if it is even appropriate to make something of a joke, to be altogether, both in looks and in other respects, like the flat torpedo-fish of the sea. For, indeed, it always makes anyone who approaches and touches it grow numb, and you seem to me now to have done that very sort of thing to me, making me numb. For truly, both in soul and in mouth, I am numb and have nothing with which I can answer you. And yet thousands of times I have made a great many speeches about virtue, and before many people, and done very well, in my own opinion anyway; yet now I'm altogether unable to say what it is. And it seems to me that you are well-advised not to sail away or emigrate from here: for, if you, a foreigner in a different city, were to do this sort of thing, you would probably be arrested as a sorcerer.

80B

[180] SOCRATES: You are a clever rogue, Meno, and you almost deceived me.



[181] MENO: What are you getting at, Socrates?

80C [182] SOCRATES: I'm aware of why you portrayed me in a likeness.

[183] MENO: Why, indeed, do you suppose?

[184] SOCRATES: So that I would make a likeness of you in return. And I know this about all beautiful people, that they delight in having images made of them; it pays for them. Because, I suppose, even the images of beautiful people are beautiful. But I will not make an image of you in return. And I—if the torpedo-fish itself is numb in its way even as it also makes others numb—I am like it: but if not, not. For it is not while being well-provided myself that I make others unprovided or perplexed, but it is while I myself, more than anyone, am unprovided or perplexed, that I make others unprovided or perplexed. And now about virtue, I do not know what it is; but you, of course, perhaps, did know it earlier, before you came into contact with me, but now you are certainly like one who does not know. Nevertheless, I am willing to look with you and seek together for whatever it is.

[185] MENO: And in what way will you seek, Socrates, for that which you know nothing at all about what it is? What sort of thing among those things which you do not know are you proposing to seek for yourself? Or, even if, at best, you should happen upon it, how will you know it is that which you did not know?

80E [186] SOCRATES: I understand the sort of thing you want to say, Meno. Do you not see how inclined to strife this argument you are drawing out is, that it is not possible for a human being to seek either what he knows or what he does not know? For he could not seek for what he knows, because he knows it and then there's no need of any seeking for this sort of person; nor could he seek for what he does not know, because then he does not know what he is seeking.

81A [187] MENO: Doesn't this argument seem to you to have been said beautifully, Socrates?

[188] SOCRATES: No, not to me.

[189] MENO: Can you say in what way?

[190] SOCRATES: I can. For I have heard from both men and

women wise about things divine—

[191] MENO: What was the account they gave?

[192] SOCRATES: A true one, it seems to me, and a beautiful one.

[193] MENO: What is it, and who are those who say it?

[194] SOCRATES: Those who say it are among those priests and priestesses who have made it their concern to be able to give an account about those things they have taken in hand. And Pindar speaks too and many others of those poets who are divine. And what they say is this—but look whether they seem to you to speak the truth—for they declare the human soul to be immortal, and that at one time it comes to an end, which indeed they call dying, and again, at another time, it comes into being, but it is never destroyed. Indeed, because of this, one is required to live through one's life as piously as possible. "For those from whom

Persephone has accepted redemption for the ancient affliction, of these in the ninth year she sends the souls above again to the upper sun. From them glorious kings grow up, men with sweeping strength and greatest wisdom, and for the rest of time they are called holy heroes by mankind.

81D Inasmuch as the soul is immortal and has been born many times and has seen all things both here and in the house of Hades, there is nothing which it has not learned. So that there is nothing wondrous about its also being able to recollect about virtue and about other things, which it already knew before. For inasmuch as all nature is akin and the soul has learned all things, there is nothing to prevent someone who recollects (which people call learning) one thing only from discovering all other things, so long as he is brave and does not grow tired of seeking. For seeking and learning therefore consist wholly in recollection. So then one must not be persuaded by this contentious argument. For it would make us lazy and is pleasant only for fainthearted people to hear, but the other argument makes us both ready to work and to seek. Trusting in this one to be true, I am willing with you to seek for whatever virtue is.

[195] MENO: Yes, Socrates. But how do you mean this: that we do

not learn, but that what we call learning is recollection?  
Can you teach me how this can be?

82A [196] SOCRATES: And after I just now said, Meno, that you are a clever rogue, you ask me now if I can teach you—I who deny that teaching is anything but recollection—in order that I may straightway be shown up to be contradicting myself.

[197] MENO: No, by Zeus, Socrates, I was not looking to that when I spoke, but it was just by habit. But if you somehow can point out to me that it is as you say, point it out.

82B [198] SOCRATES: But it's not easy, nevertheless I'm willing to make the effort for your sake. But call over one of these many followers of yours here for me, whichever you want, so that in him I'll be able to exhibit things for you.

[199] MENO: By all means. You, come here.

[200] SOCRATES: He is Greek, then, and speaks Greek?

[201] MENO: By all means, very much so, he was born in the house.

[202] SOCRATES: Now then turn your mind to which of the two ways he seems to you to exhibit, recollecting or learning from me.

[203] MENO: Of course, I'll turn my mind to it.

[204] SOCRATES: Now tell me, Boy, do you know that a square area is this sort of thing? [*Figure 1*]

[205] BOY: I do.

82C [206] SOCRATES: Then a square area has all these lines, being four in number, equal? [*Figure 1*]

[207] BOY: Certainly.

[208] SOCRATES: Does it not also have these lines here, through the middle [of each side of the square] equal? [*Figure 2*]

[209] BOY: Yes.

[210] SOCRATES: Then could not this sort of area be larger or smaller?

[211] BOY: Certainly.

[212] SOCRATES: If then this side were two feet and this other side two feet, how many feet would the whole be? [*Figure*

3] Look at it this way: if this side were two feet and this other side only one foot, would not the area be once times two feet? [*Figure 4*]

[213] BOY: Yes.

[214] SOCRATES: But as this other side is also two feet [*Figure 5*], does it not become twice two? [*Figure 6*] 82D

[215] BOY: It does.

[216] SOCRATES: Therefore, it becomes two times two feet?

[217] BOY: Yes.

[218] SOCRATES: How many, then, are the two times two feet? After you have calculated it, tell me.

[219] BOY: Four, Socrates. [*Figure 7*]

[220] SOCRATES: Then could there not come to be another area two times as large as this one, and of the same sort, having all its lines equal, just as this one? [*Figure 8*]

[221] BOY: Yes.

[222] SOCRATES: How many feet, then, will it be?

[223] BOY: Eight.

[224] SOCRATES: Come then, try to tell me how large each line of that area will be. For the line of this one is two feet. [*Figure 9*] What then is the line of that area two times as large? 82E

[225] BOY: It is clear, Socrates, that the line is two times as large.

[226] SOCRATES: Do you see, Meno, that I am not teaching him anything, but all that I do is ask questions? And now he supposes that he knows what sort of line it is from which the eight-foot area will come to be. Or does it not seem so to you?

[227] MENO: It does to me.

[228] SOCRATES: Does he know then?

[229] MENO: Surely not.

[230] SOCRATES: For he supposes that it comes from the double line?

[231] MENO: Yes.

[232] SOCRATES: Watch him now recollecting in order, just as one should recollect.

83A

And you, [Boy,] tell me: do you affirm that from the double line the double area comes to be? I mean this sort of thing: let it be an area that is not long on this side and short on the other, but equal on every side, just like this one here [Figure 10], and the double of this area, that is, an eight-foot area. But see if it still seems to you that it will be that from the double line.

[233] BOY: It does to me.

[234] SOCRATES: Then does this line become double of that if we add another of the same length here? [Figure 11]

[235] BOY: Certainly.

[236] SOCRATES: From this line then, you affirm, there will be the eight-foot area, whenever four lines of that length come to be? [Figure 11]

83B

[237] BOY: Yes.

[238] SOCRATES: Then let us fill out the drawing from this line with four equal lines. [Figure 12] Then would not this one here be what you affirm is the eight-foot area? [Figure 13]

[239] BOY: Certainly.

[240] SOCRATES: Then in this one here there are four areas [Figure 14], each of which is equal to this four-foot area? [Figure 15]

[241] BOY: Yes.

[242] SOCRATES: How many then does it become? Is it not four times as great?

[243] BOY: How not?

[244] SOCRATES: Then is the area which is four times as great a double-area?

[245] BOY: No, by Zeus!

[246] SOCRATES: But how many times as much is it?

[247] BOY: Four times as much.

[248] SOCRATES: Therefore, Boy, from the double line, not the double area, but the fourfold area comes into being.

83C

[249] BOY: You speak the truth.

[250] SOCRATES: For four times an area of four feet is sixteen feet.

Isn't it?

[251] BOY: Yes. [Figure 16]

[252] SOCRATES: And from what sort of line does the eight-foot area come to be? Doesn't the fourfold area come from this line? [Figure 17]

[253] BOY: I say so.

[254] SOCRATES: And the four-foot area came from this half-line right here? [Figure 18]

[255] BOY: Yes.

[256] SOCRATES: Very well. Is not the eight-foot area double of this one [Figure 19] and half of that one [Figure 20]? Will it not be from a line greater than this one [Figure 21] but less than this one here [Figure 22]? Or not?

[257] BOY: It seems so to me.

83d

[258] SOCRATES: Fine. Keep answering this very thing, what seems so to you. And tell me, is not this line, as we said, two feet [Figure 23] and that line four [Figure 24]?

[259] BOY: Yes.

[260] SOCRATES: It must be, therefore, that the line of the eight-foot area is greater than this two-foot line [Figure 25], but less than the four-foot line [Figure 26].

[261] BOY: It must.

[262] SOCRATES: Try now to say what size you affirm it to be.

83e

[263] BOY: Three feet.

[264] SOCRATES: Then if it is to be three feet, let's take of this line [Figure 27] one half in addition [Figure 28] and it will be three feet [Figure 29]? For the feet of this one [Figure 30] is two and that of the other [Figure 31] is one; and the same way here these are two [Figure 32] and the other is one [Figure 33]; and this area of which you spoke comes into being. [Figure 34]

[265] BOY: Yes.

[266] SOCRATES: Then whenever it is three feet this way [Figure 35] and three feet that way [Figure 36], does the whole area become three times three feet? [Figure 37]

[267] BOY: It appears so.

- [268] SOCRATES: And how many feet are three times three?
- [269] BOY: Nine. [Figure 38]
- [270] SOCRATES: And how many feet was the required double area to be?
- [271] BOY: Eight.
- [272] SOCRATES: Therefore, in no way does the eight-foot area come to be from the three-foot line. [Figure 39]
- [273] BOY: Surely not.
- [274] SOCRATES: But from what sort of line? Try to tell us precisely: and if you don't want to count, show us rather, from what sort of line.
- 84A
- [275] BOY: But, by Zeus, Socrates, I, for one, do not know.
- [276] SOCRATES: Are you considering again, Meno, how far it is that he has now gone in his recollecting? That, at first, he did not know what the line of the eight-foot area is, just as now he does not yet know, but, however that may be, then he thought he knew it, and boldly answered as one who knows, and he did not believe that he was unprovided and perplexed. But now, at this time, he believes that he is unprovided and perplexed, and just as he does not know, he does not think that he knows.
- 84B
- [277] MENO: You speak the truth.
- [278] SOCRATES: Then is he not better off now, about the thing which he did not know?
- [279] MENO: This too seems to me so.
- [280] SOCRATES: Then by making him unprovided and perplexed and numbing him, just like the torpedo-fish, have we in any way harmed him?
- [281] MENO: It does not seem so to me.
- [282] SOCRATES: Then, at any rate, we have done something useful for the work at hand, as is fitting for discovering how things are. For now he, not knowing, can even carry on the search gladly, whereas then he could easily think that both before many people and many times he could speak well about the double area, how it required having the line that was double in length.
- 84C
- [283] MENO: It seems likely.

- [284] SOCRATES: Well, do you think that before he would have tried to seek for or to learn that which he thought he knew while he did not know—before he fell down into perplexity and want and came to believe that he did not know, and longed to know?
- [285] MENO: It does not seem so to me, Socrates.
- [286] SOCRATES: Did he benefit, then, from being numbed?
- [287] MENO: It seems so to me.
- [288] SOCRATES: Look, now, at what he will discover from this perplexity and want, searching along with me, while I do nothing but ask questions and do not teach. And watch out for whether you might discover me somehow teaching and explaining things to him instead of asking for his own opinions about the matter.
- 84D
- For you, [Boy,] tell me: Is not this our four-foot area? [Figure 40] Do you understand?
- [289] BOY: I do.
- [290] SOCRATES: And can we not add here another area equal to it? [Figure 41]
- [291] BOY: Yes.
- [292] SOCRATES: And this third one equal to each of these? [Figure 42]
- [293] BOY: Yes.
- [294] SOCRATES: Then can we add this one in the corner so as to fill it out? [Figure 43]
- [295] BOY: Certainly.
- [296] SOCRATES: Then would it not come about that there are these four equal areas? [Figure 44]
- 84e
- [297] BOY: Yes.
- [298] SOCRATES: What then? How many times more does this whole area [Figure 45] become than that one [Figure 46]?
- [299] BOY: Four times.
- [300] SOCRATES: But what we needed was the double area. Or don't you remember?
- [301] BOY: I certainly do.

85A [302] SOCRATES: Is this not, then, a line [Figure 47] going from corner to corner [Figure 48], and cutting each of these areas in two [Figure 49]?

[303] BOY: Yes.

[304] SOCRATES: Then do not these four equal lines come about containing this area here? [Figure 50]

[305] BOY: They sure do.

[306] SOCRATES: Look now: what size is this area?

[307] BOY: I don't understand.

[308] SOCRATES: Has not each of these inside lines [Figures 51, 52] cut off half of each of these four areas [Figure 53]? Or not?

[309] BOY: Yes.

[310] SOCRATES: Then how many areas of this size [Figure 54] are there in this area? [Figure 55]

[311] BOY: Four. [Figure 56]

[312] SOCRATES: And how many in this area here? [Figure 57]

[313] BOY: Two. [Figure 58]

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

[315] BOY: Double.

[316] SOCRATES: Then how many feet does this area become? [Figure 59]

[317] BOY: Eight feet. [Figures 60, 61]

[318] SOCRATES: From what kind of line?

[319] BOY: From this one. [Figure 62]

[320] SOCRATES: From the one stretching from corner to corner of the four-foot area? [Figure 63]

[321] BOY: Yes.

[322] SOCRATES: The Sophists call this line the diagonal; so that if diagonal is its name, it would be from the diagonal, as you, Meno's boy, declare, that the double area would come to be. [Figure 64]

[323] BOY: By all means, Socrates.

[324] SOCRATES: What does it seem to you, Meno? Is there any opinion which he gave in his answers that was not his own?

[325] MENO: No, they were all his own.

[326] SOCRATES: And yet he did not know, as we were saying a little while ago.

[327] MENO: You speak the truth.

[328] SOCRATES: Still, these opinions were in him, were they not?

[329] MENO: Yes.

[330] SOCRATES: Then in someone who does not know about that which he does not know, there are true opinions about those things which he does not know?

[331] MENO: So it appears.

[332] SOCRATES: And now those very opinions have just been stirred up in him, like a dream. But if someone were to ask him these same questions many times and in different ways, you know that he will finally understand them no less precisely than anyone else.

[333] MENO: It seems likely.

[334] SOCRATES: Then with no one teaching, but someone only asking questions, he will understand, he himself taking up the knowledge again out of himself?

[335] MENO: Yes.

[336] SOCRATES: And his taking up knowledge again that is in himself, is this not recollecting?

[337] MENO: Certainly.

[338] SOCRATES: Then concerning the knowledge which he now has, is it not either that at some time he acquired it or that he always had it?

[339] MENO: Yes.

[340] SOCRATES: Then if he always had it, he was also always one who knows; but, if he acquired it at some time, he could not have acquired it in his present life. Or has someone taught him how to do geometry? For then he will do these same things with all of geometry and all the other subjects of learning. Is there then any one who has

85C

85D

85E



taught him all these things? For you, I guess, are just the man to know, especially since he was born and raised in your house.

[341] MENO: But I know that no one ever taught him.

[342] SOCRATES: Does he have these opinions or not?

[343] MENO: Necessarily, Socrates, it appears so.

[344] SOCRATES: But if he did not acquire them in his present life, is this not now clear that he had them and learned them in some other time?

[345] MENO: So it appears.

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

[347] MENO: Yes.

[348] SOCRATES: If then both during the time in which he is and the time in which he is not a human being, true opinions will exist within him, which after being aroused by questioning become matters of knowledge, then will not his soul for all time be in a condition of having learned? For it is clear that for all time he is, or he is not, a human being.

[349] MENO: So it appears.

[350] SOCRATES: Then if the truth about the things which are is always in our soul, the soul would be immortal, so that you must be bold about what you now happen not to know, that is, what is not remembered, to try to seek and to recollect it?

[351] MENO: You seem to me to speak well, Socrates, I don't know how.

[352] SOCRATES: And so do I to myself, Meno. And for the rest of the points I would not assert myself altogether confidently on behalf of my argument; but that in supposing one ought to seek what one does not know we would be better, more able to be brave and less lazy than if we supposed that which we do not know we are neither capable of discovering nor ought to seek—on behalf of that I would surely battle, so far as I am able, both in word and in deed.

[353] MENO: That, too, you seem to me to speak well, Socrates.

[354] SOCRATES: Do you want us, then, since we are of one mind that one ought to seek for what one does not know, to try to seek in common for what virtue is?

[355] MENO: By all means. Not, Socrates, but that I would with most pleasure both look for and hear about that which I asked about at first, whether one ought to undertake it as being itself teachable, or as by nature, or as in whatever way virtue comes to human beings.

[356] SOCRATES: Yet, Meno, if I were ruling not only myself, but you too, we would not first look at whether virtue is something teachable or not teachable before we first sought what it itself is: but, since you don't even try to rule yourself, in order indeed that you might be free, you both try to rule me and do rule me, I will yield to you—for what can I do? It seems, then, that we must look into what sort of thing something is, something about which we don't yet know what it is. If you won't do anything else, at least relax your rule a little for me and agree to examine it hypothetically, whether it is teachable or whatever. And I mean by "hypothetically" the following: just as geometers often look at things whenever someone asks them, for example, about a figure, whether this triangular figure is able to be inscribed in this circle,

someone might say: "I don't yet know if this is that sort of figure, but I think I have, as it were, a certain hypothesis useful for the problem, as follows: If this is the sort of figure which, after someone applies it to the given line of itself, falls short by that sort of figure like the one which has been itself applied, then one thing seems to me to result, and some other thing results if, on the other hand, it is impossible for this to fall out. So then it is on the hypothesis of the inscription of the figure in the circle that I am willing to tell you whether the result is impossible or not." In this way then, about virtue too—since we know neither what it is, nor what sort of thing it is—let us look hypothetically at it, whether it is teachable or not teachable, speaking in the following way: If virtue is some sort of thing among those things that have regard to the soul, would it be teachable or not teachable? First, then, if it's the kind of thing that is different from, or like, knowledge, is it teachable or not, or, as we were just now saying it, is it recollectable?—let it make no difference to us about whatever name we use—but is it teachable? Or is this, at any rate, clear to everyone, that a human being

87B

87C

is taught nothing else than knowledge?

[357] MENO: It seems so to me.

[358] SOCRATES: And if virtue is some kind of knowledge, it is clear that it could be taught.

[359] MENO: For how not?

[360] SOCRATES: Well, we are rid of this quickly, that if virtue is one sort of thing it is teachable, if it is another sort, it is not.

[361] MENO: Certainly.

[362] SOCRATES: And after this, it seems likely, that whether virtue is knowledge or the kind of thing that is different from knowledge should be looked into.

87D [363] MENO: It seems to me, anyway, that this should be looked into after that.

[364] SOCRATES: Well, what then? Do we not affirm that virtue is a good thing in itself, and does this same hypothesis remain with us, that it is a good thing in itself?

[365] MENO: By all means.

[366] SOCRATES: Then, if there is something good and it is something else separated from knowledge, it may be that virtue would not be some sort of knowledge; but if there is nothing good which knowledge does not encompass, then we would be right in suspecting what we suspected, that it is some sort of knowledge.

[367] MENO: That is so.

87E [368] SOCRATES: And surely it is by means of virtue that we are good?

[369] MENO: Yes.

[370] SOCRATES: And if we are good, we are beneficent: for all good things are beneficial. Are they not?

[371] MENO: Yes.

[372] SOCRATES: Now virtue, too, is beneficial?

[373] MENO: Necessarily, from what has been agreed to.

[374] SOCRATES: Now let us see, taking them up one by one, what sorts of things are beneficial for us: health, we affirm, and

strength, and beauty and, surely, wealth: these and these kinds of things we say are beneficial. Do we not?

[375] MENO: Yes. 88A

[376] SOCRATES: But these same things, we affirm, sometimes also harm; or do you affirm it otherwise than this?

[377] MENO: No, but this way.

[378] SOCRATES: Now look, what directs each of these things whenever it benefits us and whenever it harms? Then is it not that whenever right usage directs, it benefits; but when not, it harms?

[379] MENO: Certainly.

[380] SOCRATES: Now, then, let us look also at those things that pertain to the soul. Is there something that you call moderation, as well as justice and courage and readiness-to-learn and memory and magnificence, and all such kinds of things?

[381] MENO: I do.

[382] SOCRATES: Now look at whether any of these things seem to you to be not knowledge, but something other than knowledge; whether they don't sometimes harm and sometimes benefit? For example, courage, if the courage is not prudence, but some sort of boldness—is it not the case that when a human being is bold without intelligence that he is harmed and whenever with intelligence he is benefited? 88B

[383] MENO: Yes.

[384] SOCRATES: Then is it also the same with moderation and readiness to learn; when they are learned and trained for with intelligence, they are beneficial, but without intelligence, harmful?

[385] MENO: Very much so.

[386] SOCRATES: Then, in sum, all the things undertaken and endured by the soul when directed by prudence come to end in happiness, but when controlled by thoughtlessness in the opposite? 88C

[387] MENO: It seems likely.

[388] SOCRATES: If then virtue is something in the soul and is itself necessarily beneficial, it must be prudence:

88D

since, indeed, all things that pertain to the soul are, themselves in themselves neither beneficial nor harmful, but when prudence or thoughtlessness is added to them, they become harmful or beneficial. According to this argument, indeed, virtue being beneficial, it must be some kind of prudence.

[389] MENO: It seems so to me.

[390] SOCRATES: And plainly also the other things we were just now talking about, wealth and those kinds of things, are sometimes good and sometimes harmful. Then just as prudence directing the rest of the soul makes the things of the soul beneficial and thoughtlessness makes them harmful, in this way again does not the soul, by rightly using and directing these things too, make them beneficial, but if not rightly makes them harmful?

[391] MENO: Certainly.

[392] SOCRATES: And does the thoughtful soul direct rightly, but the thoughtless mistakenly?

[393] MENO: That is so.

[394] SOCRATES: Then is it possible to speak in just this way about everything, that for a human being all other things depend upon the soul, but the things of the soul itself depend upon prudence, if they are going to be good: and by this argument the beneficial would be prudence: and do we affirm that virtue is beneficial?

89A

[395] MENO: Certainly.

[396] SOCRATES: Therefore, do we affirm that prudence is virtue, either virtue altogether or some part of it?

[397] MENO: It seems to me, Socrates, that the things which have been said have been finely said.

[398] SOCRATES: Then if this is how it is, the good could not be good by nature.

[399] MENO: It doesn't seem so to me.

[400] SOCRATES: For even if this somehow were so, this too would follow: if the good were to become so by nature, we would, I guess, have people who recognized those among the youth with good natures, whom, after we took them from those who had revealed them, we would guard on the Acropolis, setting our seal on them much

89B

more than we do with gold, so that no one could corrupt them, and that when they should come of age, they could become useful to their cities.

[401] MENO: That is surely likely, Socrates.

[402] SOCRATES: Since, then, the good become good not by nature, then is it by learning?

89C

[403] MENO: It now seems to me to be necessary: and it is clear, Socrates, according to the hypothesis, that if virtue is indeed knowledge, it is teachable.

[404] SOCRATES: Perhaps, by Zeus; but maybe we did not agree rightly about this?

[405] MENO: And yet it did seem just now to have been said rightly.

[406] SOCRATES: But it ought not to seem to have been said rightly only just now, but also in the present time and in the time to come, if there's going to be some soundness about it.

[407] MENO: What then is this? What are you seeing that bothers you about it and makes you doubt that virtue is knowledge?

89D

[408] SOCRATES: I will tell you, Meno. For that it is teachable, if, indeed, it is knowledge, I don't take back as not being said rightly; but that it may not be knowledge, see whether I seem to you to be reasonable in my doubt about that. For tell me this: if anything whatever is teachable, and not only virtue, are there not necessarily also teachers and learners of it?

[409] MENO: It seems so to me.

[410] SOCRATES: Then, again, on the contrary, that of which there would be neither teachers nor learners, would we not liken it rightly if we should liken it to what is not teachable?

89E

[411] MENO: That is so. But does it seem to you that there are no teachers of virtue?

[412] SOCRATES: I've sought, surely, many times, whether there might be some teachers of it and, trying everything, I'm not able to find out. And yet I share the search with many people, and especially those whom I suppose to be most experienced in this matter. And now indeed, Meno, just at

90A the right moment. Anytus here has sat down beside us, to whom we should give a share in the search. And it would be fitting for us to give him a share: for Anytus here, first of all, is the son of a father both wealthy and wise, Anthenion, who became wealthy not by chance, nor from some gift, like the one who has just recently received Polycrates' goods. Ismenias the Theban, but acquired it by his own wisdom and diligence. Then, in other respects too, he did not seem to be a haughty citizen, nor puffed-up and offensive, but an orderly and well-mannered man. Then he brought up and educated our man here well, as the majority of the Athenians judge; they elect him, at any rate, to the highest offices. Now it is only just to search for teachers of virtue with such men, whether there are or are not any and whoever they might be.

90B You, then, Anytus, do search along with us, both with me and your guest-friend, Meno, here, whether in this matter there might be any teachers. And look at it this way: if we should want Meno here to become a good doctor, to whom would we send him as teachers? Would it not be to the doctors?

90C [413] ANYTUS: Certainly.

[414] SOCRATES: And what if we should want him to become a good shoemaker, would we not send him to the shoemakers?

[415] ANYTUS: Yes.

[416] SOCRATES: So, too, with the others?

[417] ANYTUS: Certainly.

90D [418] SOCRATES: Now tell me again about these same cases, in this way. To the doctors, we say, we would send him rightly, if we were to send him, wanting him to become a doctor. Now whenever we say that, do we also say this, that we would be sensible, if we sent him to those who claim to practice the art, rather than to those who don't, and because they practice the art charge fees for it, who have declared themselves to be teachers for anyone who wants to come and learn? Then, if we had looked to these things, would we not be right in sending him?

[419] ANYTUS: Yes.

[420] SOCRATES: Then do not these same things hold for flute-playing and the rest? It's very foolish of those who want to make someone a flute-player to be unwilling to send him to those who undertake to teach the art and who charge a fee for it, but who make trouble by having the student seek to learn from those who neither pretend to be teachers nor have any student in that very subject which we consider the one for which we would send someone to learn from them. Does this not seem very unreasonable to you?

[421] ANYTUS: Yes, by Zeus, to me it does, and stupid as well.

91A [422] SOCRATES: Finely spoken. Then now it should be possible for you to deliberate in common with me about this guest-friend of ours, Meno here. For he, Anytus, has been saying to me for some time now that he desires that wisdom and virtue by which people manage both households and cities finely, and take care of their own parents, and know how to receive and to send off both citizens and foreigners hospitably, in a way worthy of a good man. Then in order to learn this virtue, consider to whom, if we sent him, we would rightly send him. Or, is it clear, indeed, according to the argument just made, it should be to those who undertake to be teachers of virtue and have professed themselves publicly to any Greek who wants to learn, and have fixed fees that they charge for it?

[423] ANYTUS: And just who are these people you speak of, Socrates?

[424] SOCRATES: Surely you too know that these are those whom people call Sophists.

91C [425] ANYTUS: By Heracles, watch what you're saying, Socrates. May such madness not seize any of my own people, neither my family nor my friends, neither fellow-citizen nor foreigner, so as to be debased by going to them, since it is evident that these men are the debasement and corruption of those who associate with them.

91D [426] SOCRATES: How do you mean that, Anytus? Then do these alone of those who claim to know some way of doing good differ by so much from the others, that they not only do not benefit whatever one hands over to them, but even, on the contrary, ruin it? And for these services they openly consider themselves entitled to demand money?

Now I cannot believe you: for I know one man, Protagoras, who acquired more money from this wisdom of his than Phidias, who produced such manifestly beautiful works, and any ten other sculptors. And yet how portentous what you say is, considering that those who work on old shoes and mend clothes would not be able to get away, for thirty days, with giving back the clothes and shoes in more miserable condition than they received them, but if they ever did such things, they would soon die of hunger. And yet Protagoras hid it from the whole of Greece for forty years that he was corrupting his associates and sending them back more miserable than he received them. For I think when he died he was nearly seventy years old, after being in his art for forty years. And in all this time, up to this very day, he has not ceased to be well thought of; and not only Protagoras, but very many others as well, some born before him and others still alive now. Then, indeed, should we declare, according to your argument, that they knowingly deceived and ruined the youth, or that it had been hidden from themselves too? And shall we deem those whom some declare to be the wisest of human beings to be so mad?

92A

[427] ANYTUS: They are far from being mad, Socrates; but much more so are the youth who give them money, and even more than these are the relatives who turn them over to them, but most of all are the cities that permit them to come in and don't drive them out, whether it's some foreigner that undertakes to do something of this sort, or a fellow citizen.

92B

[428] SOCRATES: Has any one of the Sophists wronged you, Anytus, that you should be so hard on them?

[429] ANYTUS: No, by Zeus, I never associated with any of them, and I would not allow anyone else of my people to do so.

[430] SOCRATES: Then you are altogether without experience of these men?

[431] ANYTUS: I am and may I remain so.

92C [432] SOCRATES: How then, my daemonic one, could you know about this business, whether there is anything good or worthless in that of which you are altogether without experience?

[433] ANYTUS: Easily: I still know what these people are, whether I am without experience of them or not.

[434] SOCRATES: You are perhaps a diviner, Anytus, for how else, I might wonder, do you know about them, from what you yourself say about them. But we are not searching for those from whose company Meno would become worthless after he came to them,—for these, if you want, let them be the Sophists—but tell us, and do your hereditary comrade here a good turn by telling him, to whom to go in so great a city as this so that he might become worthy of mention in the virtue I was just now going through.

92D

[435] ANYTUS: Why don't you tell him?

[436] SOCRATES: Well, I did say who I thought were teachers of these things; but it happened that I made no sense, as you say. And perhaps there is something to what you say. But you now, in your turn, tell him to whom among the Athenians he should go. Tell him the name of anyone you want.

92E

[437] ANYTUS: Why should one hear the name of just one man? For of any Athenian gentleman he should happen to meet, there is none who will not make him better than the Sophists would, if he is willing to listen.

[438] SOCRATES: Did these gentlemen become such spontaneously, and yet without learning from anyone are they nevertheless able to teach others what they themselves did not learn?

93A

[439] ANYTUS: I claim that they too learned from those who were gentlemen before them: or don't you think that there have been many good men in this city?

[440] SOCRATES: I, too, do think, Anytus, that there are good men in politics here, and before now there have been men no worse than they are, but have they also been good teachers of this virtue of theirs? For this is what our discussion happens to be about: not whether or not there are good men here, nor whether there have been such before, but we have for some time been looking into whether virtue is teachable. And in looking into this, we look into the following, whether the good men, both those now and those before, knew how to hand over to another the virtue in which they were good, or whether

93B



93C this is not something able to be handed over or to be received by any human being from another. This is what I and Meno have for some time been seeking. Now, look at it this way, out of your own argument: would you not affirm that Themistocles was a good man?

[441] ANYTUS: I would, even the best of all.

[442] SOCRATES: And therefore that he was a good teacher, if anyone was a teacher of his own virtue?

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

[444] SOCRATES: But do you think that he would not have wanted any others to become gentlemen, and especially his own son? Or do you think he begrudged him getting it, and purposely did not pass on the virtue in which he himself was good? Or haven't you heard that Themistocles had his son Cleophantus taught to be a good horseman. He could even stay on horses while standing upright and hurl javelins from horses while upright; and he accomplished many other marvelous things in which his father had him educated and made him skilled; there were so many things for which he depended on good teachers. Haven't you heard about them from your elders?

[445] ANYTUS: I've heard.

[446] SOCRATES: So then no one could have charged his son with having a nature that was bad.

93E [447] ANYTUS: Perhaps not.

[448] SOCRATES: And what about this? Have you ever heard from anyone, either young or old, that Cleophantus, the son of Themistocles, became a good and wise man in those very things in which his father did?

[449] ANYTUS: Surely not.

[450] SOCRATES: Then are we to suppose that he wanted to educate his son in those other things, but in that wisdom in which he was himself wise, not to make him any better than his neighbors, if indeed virtue really is, as we were saying, teachable?

[451] ANYTUS: Perhaps not, by Zeus.

[452] SOCRATES: Here then is just such a teacher of virtue, whom you also agree to be among the best of those from former times. But let us look into another one, Aristides, the son

94A

of Lysimachus. Do you not agree that he was good?

[453] ANYTUS: I certainly do, in every way.

[454] SOCRATES: Then did he too not give his son, Lysimachus, the finest education of the Athenians, in all those things for which he had teachers, and does he seem to you to have made him a better man than anyone else? For you, I suppose, have been in his company, and see what sort of man he is. And, if you want, there is Pericles, so magnificently wise a man; do you know that he brought up two sons, Paralus and Xanthippus?

94B

[455] ANYTUS: I do.

[456] SOCRATES: He certainly taught them, as you also know, to be no worse horsemen than any Athenian, and educated them in music and gymnastics and everything else that could be had by art to be inferior to no one; and did he not want to make them good men? I would think he wanted to, but it was not something teachable. And lest you think that only a few and the lowest Athenians are incapable in this affair, consider that Thucydides also brought up two sons, Melesias and Stephanus, and he educated them well both in other things and to be the finest wrestlers in Athens—he turned over the one to Xanthias, and the other to Eudorus; and they were, I guess, reputed to be the finest wrestlers of that time—or don't you remember?

94C

[457] ANYTUS: I do, by hearsay.

[458] SOCRATES: Then is it clear that he would never, on the one hand, where it was required to go to considerable expense to teach, teach his own sons those things; but, on the other hand, where it was not required to spend a lot of money, to make them good men, fail to teach them, if that was something teachable? Or perhaps Thucydides was a low person and did not have many friends among Athenians and the allies? Yet he was from a great house and capable of great things in his city and among the other Greeks, so that if this thing were teachable, he would have found out who was going to make his sons good, either one of his countrymen, or some foreigner, if he himself had no leisure time because of his tending to the city. But I fear, Anytus, my comrade, that virtue may not be something teachable.

94E

[459] ANYTUS: Socrates, it seems to me that you easily speak badly of people. Now I could give you some advice, if

94F

95A

you're willing to be persuaded by me, to be careful: since it is perhaps easier to do harm to people than to benefit them in other cities too, and in this city that is certainly so. But I suppose you know that yourself.

[460] SOCRATES: Meno. Anytus seems angry to me, and I don't wonder at it: for, first of all, he supposes me to be speaking badly about those men, and then he also believes himself to be one of them. But if he should ever know what sort of thing talking badly is, he will cease being angry, yet now he does not know. But you, tell me, are there not men among your people who are gentlemen too?

[461] MENO: Certainly.

95B [462] SOCRATES: What then? Are these men willing to offer themselves as teachers to the youth, and to agree both that they are teachers and that virtue is something teachable?

[463] MENO: No, by Zeus, Socrates, for sometimes you can hear from them that it is something teachable, and sometimes that it is not.

[464] SOCRATES: Should we affirm then that these men, about whom there is no agreement on this very thing, are teachers of this subject?

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

[466] SOCRATES: Well, what then? Do these Sophists, who alone proclaim it, seem to you to be teachers of virtue?

95C [467] MENO: Now that is something I admire most in Gorgias, Socrates, that you would never hear him promising this, but he even laughs at the others whenever he hears them promising that. But he does think that there is a need to make men speak skillfully.

[468] SOCRATES: Then the Sophists do not seem to you to be teachers?

[469] MENO: I cannot say, Socrates. For I too undergo the very thing that most people do: sometimes it seems to me they are and sometimes not.

[470] SOCRATES: Do you know that it seems so not only to you and to the other political men, that some times they think this is teachable and other times not; but do you know that Theognis the poet, too, says these same things?

95D

[471] MENO: In which verses?

[472] SOCRATES: In his elegiacs, where he says:

Drink and eat with them, and with them sit.  
And gratify them whose power is great.  
For from good men you will be taught good things.  
But if you mingle with the bad, you will simply lose  
Even the mind you have.

95E

Do you see that in these verses he speaks of virtue as being something teachable?

[473] MENO: It does appear so.

[474] SOCRATES: But in other verses, he changes course a bit: "And if it was able to be done," he says, "and intelligence could be put into a man,"—he says something like that—many and great fees would they bear off, those who could do this," and,

Never would a bad man be born from a good father,  
Being persuaded by sober speech. But by teaching  
You will never make the bad man good.

96A

Do you understand that he is saying opposite things about the same things to himself again?

[475] MENO: It appears so.

[476] SOCRATES: Can you tell me then of any other subject whatever where these who affirm that they are teachers are not only not acknowledged by others to be teachers but are not even recognized as understanding it themselves, being regarded instead as worthless in the very subject in which they declare themselves to be teachers—while, on the other hand, those who are acknowledged gentlemen sometimes declare it to be teachable and, at other times, not? Could you declare that people who are so confused by any subject are, in any authoritative sense, teachers of it?

96B

[477] MENO: By Zeus, I certainly could not.

[478] SOCRATES: Then if neither the Sophists nor those who are themselves gentlemen are teachers of the subject, is it clear that there could not be any other teachers of it?

[479] MENO: It does not seem so to me.

[480] SOCRATES: And if there are no teachers, there are no learners?

96C