

Plato's Meno: Knowledge is Justified True Belief:

402 BC

This Socratic dialogue introduces two dominant themes in Western philosophy:
What counts as virtue and what counts as knowledge.

Part 1: 70-86c: Search for a definition of "arete."

WHAT IS "ARETE"?: 70-79b

Socrates asks Meno for a formal definition of "arete" for how can we know if arete can be taught we don't have a clear idea what it is. All the examples of "arete" have something in common: The "essence" or "form" of "arete." [recognize that virtue is used interchangeably with "the good"].

70a: Can virtue be taught? 71b: Must know what virtue is before knowing its qualities. What is virtue? Meno responds: (71e-72a). Gives a plurality of examples. Socrates rejects in view of bee and swarm analogy (72b-73d). 73d: Meno: Virtue is being able to rule over people. Response: ruling requires ruling justly; Justice is a part of virtue. Analogies include colors and shapes. 77b: (a) desiring fine things and (b) being able to acquire them. 77c-78b: Response (a): Both the vicious and virtuous (everyone) desires fine things. 78b-79b: (b) requires revision into "being able to acquire them justly; but since justice is a part of virtue, this means definition explains what virtue is by referring to a part of itself.

THE SOCRATIC PARADOX:

Interlude: 80a-84c

The Socratic Paradox is the claim that "arete" is a kind of knowledge, & vice a kind of ignorance; "no one does wrong voluntarily."

Why paradox? Because people usually think a person can know the good & still not do it -for people think "arete" is more than knowing...it is also willingness. But if virtue is knowledge, as Socrates claims, anybody who really knew the good would automatically be good. Therefore, if "arete" is a kind of knowledge, it would be impossible to know the good & not be good. All wrong doing is due to lack of knowledge; virtue is knowledge:

MENO'S CHALLENGE:

80d-e

If you don't know what "arete" is already, you can't even look for it, because if you don't know what it is already, then even if you look, you will not know when you've found it.

KNOWLEDGE IS RECOLLECTION:

81a-82a

Socrates Recollection Theory: Knowing is a kind of remembering (since the soul is eternal). Thus, you do know what "arete" is already.

82b-86a

Example of recollection: Ignorant slave boy "remembering" geometry as a result of Socrates' questioning.

1. Knowledge is recollection (81a-82a)
2. Illustration of recollection with slave (82b)
3. Slave benefits from knowing what he's ignorant about.
4. 85e-86a: Conclusion of the illustration: the boy has true opinion, not knowledge.

Even though a new understanding of the nature of knowledge has been reached (86b), Meno returns to the original question (86c).

Part 2: 86d-end: Can Virtue Be Taught?

STRATEGY:

Socrates proposes that we first determine if virtue is a kind of knowledge. If it is, it can be taught. If virtue

isn't knowledge, then it can't be taught (86d-e)

Argument # 1: Virtue can be taught: (87-89c);

Argument # 2: Virtue is not knowledge (89c):

Everyone agrees that there are teachers for certain things (e.g., medicine, shoemakers), not everyone agrees whether Sophists really teach wisdom. Perhaps that is because virtue can't be taught (89e-96c)

KNOWLEDGE IS JUSTIFIED TRUE BELIEF:

Anytus enters the discussion. Anytus, who strongly opposes Sophists, does not realize that Socrates is being sarcastic when he assumes that Socrates believes that the Sophists are possible teachers of virtue. Socrates agrees with Unhitches about the Sophists but demands justification from Anytus for his opposition to them. Anytus is unable to offer justification. Finally, Anytus walks away in anger.

86d: Can virtue be taught (inquire not what virtue is, but what it is like);86e: Method: If virtue is x, then it can be taught. X= knowledge. 89d-e: Examination of the hypothesis: Is virtue knowledge? if so, there are teachers and pupils of it; 89e-96c: Elenchus (with Anytus): There are no teachers and pupils of virtue; 97a-98a: An alternative to saying virtue is knowledge: virtue is true opinion: (a) true opinion needs to be tied down to be knowledge. (b) Still, true opinion is as valuable as knowledge, if it's reliable; 98c. Then virtuous people must have true opinion as a divine gift; 99b-e: Since virtue is not knowledge, it cannot be taught; Conclusion: Socrates says that we still have not investigate what virtue is.

Knowledge

"Opinion" vs. "Knowledge"

1. may be useful as knowledge, but often fails to stay in their place; must be tethered by anamnesis: certain knowledge is innate & recollected by the soul through proper inquiry.
2. Justified true belief may be counted as knowledge.

1. **Anamnesis:** Learning truth by means of the soul recollecting what it has learned before its current human birth.
2. **Anytus:** Prominent Athenian statesmen. This well-known statesmen is clueless.
3. **Eidos:** Eidos means "stature" or "appearance." Set of ideal forms of which all worldly things are imperfect examples. These forms can be thought of as abstract models on which things in the world are built. Forms are what all things of a given kind (rocks, chairs, virtue, love), have in common. Plato connects the idea of forms with the idea of the eternal soul, suggesting that the soul comes to intimately know the form in its time out of the human body.
4. **Elenchus:** (Gr. word meaning "examination") Process of interrogation which leads to a state of uncertainty about what originally seemed to be most clear.
5. **Gorgias:** well-known Sophist of whom Meno follows. Gorgias claims to know what virtue is.
6. **Meno:** A prominent Thessalian visiting Athens.
7. **Socrates** (470-399 B.C.)
8. **Sophists:** Class of teachers who claim to understand virtue. They traveled the Greek world, giving lectures and specialized instruction.

This dialogue, which is perhaps one of Plato's earliest surviving dialogues, begins by Meno asking Socrates a critical question in ethics: What is virtue and does it count as knowledge? Though these two questions are never answered, Socrates answers the question what is knowledge by proposing the recollection theory in part 1. Though the lesson seems to return to the issue of virtue in part 2, the dialogues returns to knowledge by demonstrating that knowledge is justified true belief. Though the question regarding what is virtue is never fully answered, the lesson centers on opinion vs. knowledge (both are useful). In essence, knowledge is justified true belief (99). Though no complete answer regarding the nature of virtue is given, Socrates does conclude the following, "the result seems to be, if we at all right in our view, that virtue is neither natural or acquired, but an instinct given by God to the virtuous." In sum, Socrates connects knowledge to eternal truths by the recollection theory.

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