

Plato's *Meno*

trans. by J. Holbo & B. Waring (©2002)

MENO: Can you tell me, Socrates, is virtue the sort of thing you can teach someone? Or is it the sort of thing no one can teach you, but you pick it up by practicing it? Or maybe it's neither: virtue is something people are born with, or something they get some other way?

SOCRATES: Thessalians used to have a good reputation among Greeks, Meno – for being such good riders and for being so rich; now, it seems, they are famous for wisdom, particularly your friend and fellow citizen, Aristippus of Larissa. The credit goes to Gorgias, for when he moved to your city the leading Aleuadae – your lover Aristippus among them – fell in love with his wisdom, and so did the other leading Thessalians. Specifically, he got all of you into the habit of giving sweeping and confident answers to any questions put to you – as if you were all experts. In fact, he himself was always ready to answer any question put by any Greek; all questions answered. On the other hand, here in Athens, my dear Meno, the opposite is the case. Here it's as though there were a wisdom drought; it has all drained away to where you come from. So if you want to put this sort of question to one of us, everyone will have a good laugh and say to you: 'Good stranger, you must think I am a lucky man, to know whether virtue can be taught or not, or where it comes from. Me, I'm so far from knowing whether virtue can be taught or not that I don't even know what it is.' I'm just as badly off as all my fellow citizens in this regard, Meno, and I blame no one but myself for my utter ignorance about virtue. For if I don't know what something is, how could I know what it's like? Unless you think someone who has no idea who Meno is could know whether he is handsome or rich or a real gentleman, or just the opposite? Do you think that would be possible?

M: I don't; but, Socrates, you really don't know what virtue is? Should I say this about you to everyone back home?

S: Not only that, my friend. Tell everyone back home that I think I have never yet met anyone who *did* know.

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

S: I did.

M: Didn't you think then that he knew?

S: My memory is not so good, Meno, so I cannot tell you now what I thought then. Maybe he knows; you know what he used to say, so you remind me of how he spoke. You tell me yourself, if you will be so kind, for I'm sure you agree with everything he says.

M: I do.

S: Then let's leave Gorgias out of it, since he's not here right now. Meno, by the gods, what do you yourself say virtue is? Speak up and don't be a wisdom miser. For it would be a very lucky thing if I turned out not to have told the truth when I said I never met a man who knew, if I find out you and Gorgias know.

M: It's really not that hard to say, Socrates. First, if you want the virtue of a man, it is easy to say that a man's virtue consists in being able to manage public affairs and thereby help his friends and harm his enemies – all the while being careful to come to no harm himself. If you want the virtue of a woman, it's not difficult to describe: she must manage the home well, keep the household together, and be submissive to her husband; the virtue of a child, whether boy or girl, is another thing altogether, and so is that of an elderly man – if you want that – or if you want that of a free man or a slave. There are lots of different virtues, as a result of which it is not at all hard to say what virtue is. There is virtue for every action and every stage in life, for every person and every capacity, Socrates. And the same goes for wickedness.

S: It must be my lucky day, Meno! Here I was, looking for just one virtue, and you happen by with a whole swarm! But, Meno, following up on this figurative swarm of mine, if I were to ask you what sort of being a bee is, and you said, 'there are all sorts of different sorts of bees,' what would you say if I went on to ask: 'Do you mean that there are all sorts of different sorts of bees insofar as they are bees? Or are they no different, insofar as they are bees, but they differ in other respects – in how beautiful they are, for example, or how big, and so on and so forth?' Tell me, what would you answer if I asked you this?

M: I would say that they do not differ from one another insofar as they are all bees.

S: What if I went on to say: 'Tell me Meno, what is this thing that they all share, with respect to which they are all the same?' Would you be able to tell me?

M: I would.

S: The same goes for all the virtues. Even if they come in all sorts of different varieties, all of them have one and the same form which makes them virtues, and the thing to do is look to this form when someone asks you to make clear what virtue is. Do you follow me?

M: I think I understand, but – then again – not as clearly as I would like.

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

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

S: And the same goes for size and strength? If a woman is strong, her strength will be the same and have the same form; for by 'the same' I mean to indicate that strength is strength, whoever has it – man or woman. But maybe you think it makes a difference.

M: I don't think it does.

S: So will there be any difference in the case of virtue, then, insofar as something's being virtue is what is in question – whether in a child or an old person, a woman or a man?

M: I think, Socrates, that somehow this case is a bit different than the others.

S: How so? Didn't you say the virtue of a man consists in being able to manage the city well, whereas that of a woman consists in managing the household well?

M: I did.

S: Is it possible to manage a city well, or a household, or anything for that matter, while not managing it moderately and justly?

M: Certainly not.

S: Then if they manage justly and moderately, they must do so with justice and moderation?

M: Necessarily.

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

M: So it seems.

S: What about your child and your old man? Can they possibly be good if they are ill-tempered and unjust?

M: Certainly not.

S: But if they are moderate and just?

M: Yes.

S: So all people are good in the same way, since what makes them good is the fact that they exhibit the same qualities.

M: It seems so.

S: And they would not be good in the same way if they did not have the same virtue.

M: They certainly wouldn't.

S: Therefore, since everyone's virtue is the same, try to tell me – and try to remember what you and Gorgias said – that same thing is.

M: What else but to be able to rule over men, if you are seeking one formula to fit them all.

S: You are right. That's what I'm looking for. But Meno, is virtue the same for a child or a slave – namely, to be able to rule over a master? Do you think he who rules is still a slave?

M: I do not think so at all, Socrates.

S: It doesn't seem likely, my good man. Consider this further point: you say virtue is the capacity to rule. Don't you think we should add: justly and not unjustly?

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

S: Is it virtue, Meno, or is it *a* virtue? - What do you mean?

S: As with anything else; if you like, take roundness, for example, about which I would say that it is *a* shape, not that it *is* shape pure and simple. I would not say it is shape, because there are *other* shapes.

M: That's quite right. So I too say that not only justice is a virtue but that there are many other virtues as well.

S: What are they? In just the way that I could name different shapes, if you asked me to, please fill me in concerning all these other virtues.

M: I think courage is a virtue, and moderation, wisdom, and nobility, and very many others.

S: We are running into the same problem again, Meno, but from a slightly different angle; we have found many virtues while looking for one, but we cannot find the one that covers all the others.

M: I can't yet find what you're looking for, Socrates: one virtue that covers all the others, as in the other cases.

S: It seems so, but I really want to try to make progress here, for you *do* understand that it's going to be like this with everything. If someone asked you about what we were just talking about: 'what is shape, Meno?' and you told him that it was roundness, and then he asked you what I just asked – namely, 'is roundness shape or *a* shape?' – you would surely tell him it is *a* shape?

M: I certainly would.

S: That would be because there are other shapes?

M: Yes.

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

M: I would.

S: The same would go for color, if he asked you what it is, and you said it is white, and he interrupted by asking, 'is white color or *a* color?' You would say it is *a* color, because there are other colors?

M: I would.

S: Likewise, if you were asked for a list of other colors, you would list others, all of which are colors just as much as white is?

M: Yes.

S: Then if he pursued the argument, as I did, and said: 'we always end up back at the many. Don't keep answering me like this. Instead, since you call all these *many* things by *one* name, and since you say none of them is *not* a shape – even though none is the same shape as the others – tell me what *one* thing applies just as much to roundness as to straightness. Say what it is you call 'shape' – for example, when you say, 'roundness is just as much *shape* as straightness is.' You *do* say that, don't you?

M: I do.

S: And when you say that, do you say roundness is no more round than straight is, or that straightness is no more straight than round is?

M: Certainly not, Socrates.

S: All the same, you *don't* say roundness is more of a shape than straightness is – or *vice versa*?

M: That's true.

S: So what is this *one* thing to which the term shape generally applies? Try to tell me. For think what it would be like if you responded, like so, to the man who asked you all these questions about color and shape: 'I don't understand what you want, or what you mean.' He would probably find this incredible and reply: 'you don't understand that I want to know what these cases have *in common*?' Even hearing that, is it true you would *still* have nothing to say, Meno, if someone asked: 'what is the *one* thing that applies to roundness and straightness and all the other things you call shapes, and which is the same in all of them?' Try answering this question, by way of working up to the one about virtue.

M: No! You answer it for me, Socrates.

S: You want me to do this for you as a favor?

M: I certainly do.

S: *Then* you will be willing to tell me about virtue?

M: I will.

S: Let's forge on. The subject is worth it.

M: It surely is.

S: Now then, let me try to tell you what shape is. See whether you will accept the following account: shape, let's say, is the one thing that invariably accompanies color. Does this satisfy you, or do you want to go about defining the term in some other way? For myself, I would be satisfied if you defined virtue in some such way as this.

M: But this is a silly sort of definition, Socrates.

S: How so?

M: It's silly that you say shape always accompanies color. Because what if someone says he doesn't know what color is. He's just as confused about color as he is about shape. Now what do you say about your definition?

S: That it is certainly a true one; and if my questioner is going to turn out to be one of those clever debaters who turns everything into a competition I will say to him: 'I have given my answer; if it is wrong, it's up to you to refute it.' On the other hand, if we are among friends – as you and I are – and if we want to pursue the question, we must answer in a manner more conducive to agreeable, productive discussion. By this I mean that answers given must not only be true; they must also be made in terms the questioner admits to understanding. I will try to abide by these rules myself. So let me ask you: have you ever heard tell of something called 'the end'? I mean something like a 'limit' or 'boundary' – because all these terms are, so as far as I am concerned, basically synonymous. Prodicus might want to split hairs at this point, but you surely call something 'finished' or 'completed'. That is all I am trying to get at, nothing fancy.

M: I do know of such a thing, and I think I understand what you mean.

S: Additionally, you call a certain something 'a plane', and a certain something else 'a solid', as in geometry?

M: I do.

S: Then this is enough to tell you what I mean by 'shape'. For I say this of every shape: a shape is that which limits a solid; in a word, a shape is the limit of a solid.

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

S: You are outrageous, Meno! You trouble an old man to answer questions, but you yourself are not willing to recollect and tell me what Gorgias says virtue is.

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

S: Even someone who was blindfolded could tell from your way of talking that you are handsome and still have lovers.

M: How is that?

S: Because whenever there is a discussion going on, you give orders, as spoiled children do – who behave like tyrants until one day they finally grow up. I get the sense you aren't completely oblivious to the fact that I am at a disadvantage when I'm around handsome people; so I will do you the favor of answering.

M: By all means, do me the favor.

S: Do you want me to answer á la Gorgias, this being the mode you would most easily follow?

M: Of course, I want that.

S: Both of you subscribe to Empedocles' theory of effluvia, am I right?

M: Certainly.

S: And so you believe there are channels through which effluvia make their way?

M: Definitely.

S: And certain effluvia fit certain channels, while others are either too small or too big?

M: That is so.

S: And there is a thing you call sight?

M: There is.

S: From this, 'comprehend what I state,' as Pindar says, for color is an effluvium off of shapes that fits the organ of sight and is perceived.

M: That seems to me a most excellent answer, Socrates!

S: Perhaps it was delivered in the manner to which you are accustomed. At the same time, I think you can deduce from this answer what sound is, and smell, and many such things.

M: Quite so.

S: It is a theatrical answer, so it pleases you, Meno, more than the one about shape.

M: It does.

S: It is *not* better, son of Alexidemus. In fact, I am convinced the other one is, and I think you would agree if only you did not have to go away before the mysteries, as you told me yesterday that you must; if only you could stay and be initiated.

M: I *would* stay, Socrates, if you could tell me many such things as these.

S: I certainly won't be lacking enthusiasm to tell you such things, 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. Tell me the nature of virtue as a whole and stop making many out of one – as jokers say whenever someone breaks something. Please allow virtue to remain sound and whole, and tell me what it is, for I have given you examples of how to go about it.

M: I think, Socrates, that virtue is, as the poet says, "to find joy in beautiful things and have power." Therefore I say that virtue is to want all the best things in life, and to have the power to get them.

S: Do you mean that the man who desires the best things in life desires good things?

M: That's certainly right.

S: Do you take it for granted that there are people who desire bad things, and others who desire good things? Don't you think, my good man, that all men desire good things?

M: I certainly don't.

S: You think some want bad things, then?

M: Yes.

S: Do you mean that they believe the bad things to be good, or that they know they are bad and want them anyway?

M: I think there are both kinds.

S: Do you think, Meno, that anyone, knowing that bad things are bad, still wants them?

M: I certainly do.

S: Wants in what way? To have for himself?

M: What else?

S: Does he think the bad things benefit he who has them, or does he perfectly well know they will harm him?

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

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

M: No, that's something I can't quite believe.

S: It's clear, then, that those who do not know things to be bad do not want what is bad. What they want are things they think are good, that are in fact bad. It follows that those who have no knowledge about these things and believe them to be good clearly want good things. Isn't that right?

M: It is likely.

S: Well then, those who you say want bad things, believing bad things harm those who have them, know they will be harmed by them?

M: Necessarily.

S: And don't they think those who are harmed are miserable to the extent that they are harmed?

M: That seems unavoidable.

S: And don't they think those who are miserable are unhappy?

M: I think so.

S: Does anyone want to be miserable and unhappy?

M: I do not think so, Socrates.

S: Then no one wants what is bad, Meno – unless he wants to be in such a state. For what else is misery if not wishing for bad things, and having one's wish come true?

M: You are probably right, Socrates. No one really wants what is bad.

S: Weren't you saying just now that virtue is the desire for good things, and the power to acquire them?

M: Yes, I was.

S: It seems everyone satisfies the 'desire for' part of this definition, and no one is better than anyone else in this respect.

M: So it appears.

S: Clearly then, if any man is going to turn out better than the next, it is going to be due to superior talent at actually *getting* the things.

M: Quite so.

S: So this is what virtue turns out to be, according to your argument: the power to acquire good things.

M: I think, Socrates, that now we have hit the nail on the head.

S: Let's make sure, first, that what you have said is true – for it may well be. You say that the capacity to get good things is virtue?

M: I do.

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

M: Yes. It's also a matter of amassing plenty of gold and silver – and winning honors and public office.

S: So, by 'good things' you don't mean other sorts of things than these?

M: No, I mean all things of this kind.

S: Very well. According to Meno – hereditary guest friend of the Great King – virtue is getting one's hands on the gold. Do you qualify this definition, Meno, with the words 'justly' and 'piously'? Or is it all the same to you – virtue either way – if you make your fortune unjustly?

M: Certainly not, Socrates.

S: You would call it evil, then?

M: That I would.

S: It seems, then, that the getting of gold must go along with justice or moderation or piety or some other element of virtue; if it does not, it won't be virtue, however many good things are gotten.

M: Yes. How could there be virtue if these elements were missing?

S: Then failing to acquire gold and silver, whether for oneself or for another, whenever it would not be just to do so, would be a case of virtue?

M: So it seems.

S: It follows that getting hold of the goods will not be virtue any more so than failing to do so is; apparently it's the case that whatever is done justly is virtue; whatever is not done justly is a sort of vice or evil.

M: I think it has to be as you say.

S: We said a little while ago that each of these things was a *part* of virtue – namely, justice and moderation and all such things?

M: Yes.

S: Then it seems you have been playing me for a fool, Meno.

M: How so, Socrates?

S: Because I begged you just now not to break apart or portion out virtue, and I gave examples of how you should formulate your answer. You paid no attention, going on to tell me that virtue is being able to get good things justly; and this, you say, is part of virtue.

M: Yes, I do.

S: It follows then, from what you have agreed to, that to act with *just one part* of virtue whenever you do something, is virtue. For you say that justice is a part of virtue, and that other, similar qualities are too. Why do I mention this? Because although I begged you to tell me about virtue as a whole, you haven't come close to doing so. Instead you say that every action that is virtuous in a particular sort of way is virtue, as if you had already told me all about virtue as a whole – so that I would already know all about that – even as you break it apart into bits. I think we must take it from the top and begin at the beginning, my dear Meno: what *is* virtue, if every action that is virtuous in a particular sort of way is virtue? For that is what you are saying when you say every action performed justly is virtuous. Don't you think you should have to answer the same question all over again? Or maybe you think you can know what is partly virtuous, without knowing what it is as a whole?

M: I don't think so.

S: If you will recall, when I was answering you concerning shape, we rejected all answers like that one I tried to give in terms that were not agreed upon, and that might themselves be in need of investigation.

M: And we were right to reject them.

S: Then surely, my good man, you must not think, while the nature of virtue as a whole is still under investigation, that you can make its nature clear to anyone by telling them about what is partly virtuous. The only thing that is going to happen is that the same question will be put to you all over again – namely, what do you take the nature of virtue to be when you say what you say? Or maybe you think there's no point to all this that I'm saying?

M: I think what you say is right.

S: Starting over again from the beginning: what do you and your friend say virtue is?

M: Socrates, even before I met you, I heard others talk about how you are always completely perplexed about everything, and how you drag everyone else down into the same pit of perplexity. Now I think you have been bewitching and bewildering me. You've cast some spell over me, so now I'm completely at a loss. In fact, if you don't mind me turning the whole business into a bit of a joke, on the inside you're like one of those stingrays that paralyzes everything it touches; you look a bit like one, too – broad and flat. Anyway, now you've done it to me; both my mind and my tongue are completely numb. I've got no answer to give you. And yet I must have made a thousand speeches about virtue before now – in front of large audiences, too; but now I cannot even say what it is. I think you are wise not to sail away from Athens to live in some foreign city. Because if you behaved like this, as a stranger in a strange land, you would be driven out of town as an evil enchanter.

S: You are an unscrupulous rogue, Meno, and you nearly tricked me there.

M: How is that, Socrates?

S: I know why you drew a picture of me.

M: Why do you think?

S: So that I would draw a picture of you in return. I know that all handsome men love to see pictures of themselves. They come off best that way – and I think images of beautiful people are beautiful, too; but, all the same, I won't draw you a picture. And as to this stingray – if it paralyzes itself, while paralyzing everyone else, then I resemble it; otherwise, not. For I myself don't have the answer when I reduce others to perplexity. I'm more perplexed than anyone, when I make everyone perplexed. So now I do not know what virtue is; perhaps once upon a time you knew, before you met me, but now you certainly look like someone who is ignorant. Nevertheless, I want to put my head together with yours, Meno, so that we can figure out what this thing is.

M: How will you look for it, Socrates, when you don't have the slightest idea what it is? How can you go around looking for something when you don't know what you are looking for? Even if it's right in front of your nose, how will you know *that's* the thing you didn't know?

S: Just look how it flops about, this fishy argument you have landed! I can see where *this* line will end! You are arguing 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 isn't any need to look for what's not lost. Nor can he search for what he does not know; for then he does not know what to look for.

M: Doesn't that seem like a fine argument to you, Socrates?

S: Not to me.

M: Can you tell me why not?

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

M: – What did they say?

S: Something that was – so it seemed to me – at once true and beautiful.

M: What was it, and who was it you heard?

S: The speakers were some of those priests and priestesses who take care to be able to give an account of their practices. Pindar says the same as they did, I might add, and many other divine ones among our poets. What they say is this; see whether you think they speak truth. They say the human soul is immortal; at times it comes to an end – a thing called dying; at times it is reborn, but it is never destroyed, and therefore one must live one's life as piously as possible:

Persephone sends up to the sun above the souls
On whom she will visit punishment for ancient woe,
When nine years have passed,
And from these seeds men will grow,
Noble kings, mighty in strength and greatest in wisdom, And for the rest
of time men will call them sacred heroes.

As the soul is immortal – as it has been reborn, time and again, and has seen both the things of this world and those of the underworld, and all matters – there is nothing it has not learned. So it is in no way surprising that it can recollect that which it knew before, about virtue and other things. As everything in Nature is akin, and the soul has learned all, nothing prevents a man who has recalled one single thing - a process men call 'learning' – from discovering everything else; nothing, that is, if he is brave and does not weary of the search; for searching and learning are entirely recollection. We must, therefore, not credit your debater's quibble. It would make us lazy, and is music to the ears of spineless men; whereas my argument will make them enthusiastic and keen searchers. I trust that this is true, and so I want to inquire along with you into the nature of virtue.

M: Yes, Socrates, but what exactly do you mean when you say we 'do not learn' – that what we call learning is recollection? Can you teach me that this is so?

S: As I said just now, Meno, you are unscrupulous. Here you are, asking if I can *teach* you how there is no *learning*, only recollection, in order to show me up at once as contradicting myself.

M: No, by Zeus, Socrates, I had no such intention; I'm just used to this way of talking. If you can somehow show me things are as you say, I invite you to do so.

The Slave Boy

S: It's not so easy, but I am nevertheless willing to do my best for your sake. Call one of these many servants of yours – whichever one you like – so that I can prove to you what I say is so.

M: Certainly. You there, step forward.

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

M: Quite well. He was born in my household.

S: Pay attention, then; see whether you think he is recollecting or learning from me.

M: I will examine closely.

S: Tell me this, boy. You know that a square figure is like this?

Boy: I do.

S: A square, then, is a figure all four of whose sides are equal?

B: Yes, indeed.

S: And it also has equal lines, like so, through the middle?

B: Yes.

S: And a figure like this could be bigger or smaller?

B: Certainly.

S: If, say, this side were two feet, and this other side two feet, how many feet in area would the whole be? Think about it like this: if it were two feet this way, and only one foot that way, the figure would be one times two feet?

B: Yes.

S: But if it is two feet also that way, it would surely be twice two feet?

B: Yes.

S: How many feet is twice two feet? Work it out and tell me.

B: Four, Socrates.

S: Now let us have another figure with twice the area of this one, with the four sides equal like this one.

B: Yes.

S: How many feet will that area be?

B: Eight.

S: Come now, try to tell me how long each side of figure will be. The side of this one is two feet. What about the side of the one that is double this one?

B: Obviously, Socrates, it will be twice the length.

S: You see, Meno; I am not *teaching* the boy anything. All I do is question him. And now he thinks he knows the length of the line on which an eight square foot figure is based. Do you agree?

M: I do.

S: And does he know?

M: Absolutely not.

S: He thinks the line will be twice the length?

M: Yes.

S: Watch him now as he recollects things in order – the way one *must* recollect. Tell me, boy, do you say that a figure double the area is based on a line double the length? I have in mind a figure like this one – not long on one side and short on the other, mind you – but equal in every direction like this one, only double the area; that is, eight square feet. See whether you still believe it will be based on a line double the length.

B: I do.

S: Now the line becomes double the length if we add another of the same length, like so?

B: Yes indeed.

S: And the eight-foot area square will be based on it, if there are four lines of that length?

B: Yes.

S: Well, let us draw from it four equal lines. Surely that will be the thing you say is the eight-foot area square?

B: Certainly.

S: And within this figure we now see four squares, each of which is equal to the four-foot area square?

B: Yes.

S: How big is it, then? Isn't it four times as big?

B: Of course.

S: Is this square, then, which is four times as big, twice as big?

B: No, by Zeus!

S: How many times bigger is it?

B: Four times.

S: Then, my boy, the figure based on a line twice the length is not double but four times the area?

B: You are right.

S: And four times four is sixteen, is it not?

B: Yes.

S: On how long a line, then, should the eight-foot area square be based? Won't it be based on this double line?

B: Yes.

S: Whereas this four-foot square is based on a line half the length?

B: Yes.

S: Very well, then. Is the eight-foot area square not double the area of this one and half of that one?

B: Yes.

S: Will it not be based on a line longer than this one and shorter than that one?

B: I think so.

S: Good, you say what you think. So tell me, was this side not two feet long, and that one four feet?

B: Yes.

S: The line on which the eight-foot area square is based must then be longer than two feet, and shorter than four feet?

B: It has to be.

S: Try to tell me, then, how long a line you say it is.

B: Three feet.

S: Then if it is three feet, let us add half of this one to itself, to make three feet? For this is two feet, and that is one foot. And here, likewise, we have two feet and one foot, and so the figure you mention comes to be?

B: Yes.

S: Now if it is three feet this way and three feet that way, will the area of the whole figure be three times three feet?

B: So it seems.

S: How much is three times three feet?

B: Nine feet.

S: And the area of the double square was to be how many feet?

B: Eight.

S: So the eight-foot area figure cannot be based on the three-foot line?

B: Clearly not.

S: But on how long a line, then? Try to tell us exactly, and if you do not want to work it out, *show* me the line we want.

B: By Zeus, Socrates, I do not know.

S: 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 area square was; even now he does not yet know, but then he thought he knew. He answered confidently, as if he knew, and he did not think he was at a loss, but now he thinks he is at a loss; and so, although he does not know, neither does he think he knows.

M: That is true.

S: So he is better off now with regard to this matter he does not understand?

M: I have to agree with that.

S: Have we done him any harm by making him perplexed and paralyzed, like a couple of stingrays?

M: I don't think so.

S: In fact, we have probably achieved something relevant to the discovery of the way things really are. For now, not knowing, he would be glad to find out, whereas before he thought he could easily make many fine speeches to large audiences concerning the square of double area, and how it must have a base twice as long.

M: So it seems.

S: Do you think that before now he would have tried to find out that which he *thought* he knew, but did not – before he descended into perplexity and realized he did not know but *wanted* to know?

M: I do not think so, Socrates.

S: Has he then *benefited* from his paralysis?

M: I think so.

S: Look, then, at how he will emerge from his perplexity while searching together with me. I will do nothing but ask questions, not instruct. Watch whether you find me instructing and explaining instead of asking for his opinion. You tell me, is this not a four-foot area figure? You understand what I mean?

B: I do.

S: We add to it this figure, which is equal in area?

B: Yes.

S: And we add this third figure, equal to each of the other two?

B: Yes.

S: Could we then fill in that space in the corner?

B: Certainly.

S: So we now have four equal figures?

B: Yes.

S: Well then, how many times is the whole figure larger than this first one?

B: Four times.

S: But we were supposed to have one only twice as large, or don't you remember?

B: I certainly do.

S: Doesn't a line drawn from corner to corner cut each of these figures in two?

B: Yes.

S: So now we have four equal lines enclosing a new figure?

B: They do.

S: Consider now: how large is this new figure?

B: I do not understand.

S: Each of these lines cuts off half of each of these four figures making it up, do they not?

B: Yes.

S: How many of this size are there in this figure?

B: Four.

S: How many in this?

B: Two.

S: What is the relation of four to two?

B: Double.

S: How many square feet in this?

B: Eight.

S: Based on what line?

B: *This* one.

S: That is, based on the line that stretches from corner to corner of the four-foot figure?

B: Yes.

S: Wise men call this the diagonal, so if 'diagonal' is its name, do you say the double figure would be the one based on the diagonal?

B: Most certainly, Socrates.

S: What do you think, Meno? In giving his answers, has he expressed any opinion that was not his own?

M: No, they were all his own.

S: And yet, as we said a short time ago, he did not know?

M: That is true,

S: So these opinions were in him all along, were they not?

M: Yes.

S: So the man who does not know has within himself true opinions about the things he does not know?

M: So it appears.

S: These opinions have so far just been stirred up, as in a dream, but if he were repeatedly asked these sorts of questions in various ways, you know that in the end his knowledge about these things would be as perfect as anyone's.

M: It is likely.

S: And he will know it all without having been taught, only questioned, by finding knowledge within himself?

M: Yes.

S: And isn't finding knowledge within oneself recollection?

M: Certainly.

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

M: Yes.

S: If he always had it, he would always have known. If he acquired it, he cannot have done so in his present life. Unless someone has been teaching him some geometry? Because he will do as well with all of 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.

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

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

M: It seems undeniable, Socrates.

S: If he has not acquired them in his present life, isn't it clear that he had them and learned them at some other time?

M: It seems so.

S: Then that must have been the time before he was a human being?

M: Yes.

S: If, then, there must exist in him – both while he is and while he is not a human being – true opinions which can be stirred up into knowledge by questioning, won't it have to be the case that his soul had in it all this knowledge, all along? For it's clear that throughout all time he either was or was not a human being.

M: So it would seem.

S: And if the truth about reality is always in our soul, the soul must be immortal. And therefore you should take heart and seek out and recollect what you do not presently know - that is, what you cannot presently remember?

M: I think that what you say is right, Socrates, but I don't know how.

S: I think so too, Meno. I would not swear that my argument is right down to the last word, but I would fight to the last breath, both in word and deed, that we will be better men – brave instead of lazy – if we will *believe* we must search for the things we do not know; if we will *refuse* to believe it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that there is no point in looking.

M: Here again, I think you are right, Socrates.

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

M: Certainly. But Socrates, I would really like to investigate and hear your answer to my original question – the one about whether we should proceed on the assumption that virtue is teachable, or an innate gift, or a thing that comes however it may to men.

S: If I could order *you* about, Meno – not just myself – we would not have begun looking into the teachability of virtue before investigating its very nature. But because you do not even bother to keep *yourself* in line – you want to be free – you insist on tethering me. And so it goes. What to do? It seems we have no choice but to investigate a particular quality of a thing whose general nature is – we know not what. However, please loosen my collar just one notch; please consent to investigate whether virtue is teachable or not by means of an hypothesis. I have in mind a method geometers often employ to get on with their investigations. For example, if they are asked whether a specific area is equal to that of a triangle inscribed in a given circle, one of them might say: 'I don't yet know whether *this* area has *that* property, but I think I have an

hypothesis that will move us forward, namely: if the area in question is such that when you apply it to the diameter of the circle, you find it falls short by an area equal to the applied figure, then I think you have one consequence, and if it is impossible for it to fall short by this much, then some other consequence. Using this hypothesis I am willing to tell you what will result concerning the inscription of this area in the circle, whether it is impossible or not. ' Let us do the same with virtue, since we know neither what it is, nor what properties it has. Let us investigate whether it is teachable or not by means of a hypothesis. Let us say this: of all the sorts of things existing in the soul, what sort would virtue have to be, in order to be teachable or not? First, if it is not a sort of knowledge, is there any chance of anyone being taught it – that is, as we have been saying, recollecting it? We don't need to worry ourselves too much about which name we give the process. Our question is a simple one: will it be teachable? Isn't it plain to everyone that no one is going to be taught anything but knowledge?

M: That would be my view.

S: But if virtue *is* a kind of knowledge, it is clear that it could be taught.

M: Of course.

S: That question was quickly settled, then – namely, under what condition virtue would be teachable.

M: Yes.

S: The next point to consider, it seems, will be whether virtue is knowledge, or something other than knowledge.

M: That does seem to be the next question.

S: Well now, do we say virtue is anything other than good in itself? Will this serve as our hypothesis, that it is something good?

M: Of course.

S: 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 every good thing is to be found under the general heading of knowledge, we would be right to suspect that it is a kind of knowledge.

M: That is so.

S: Surely virtue makes us good?

M: Yes.

S: And if we are good, we do good; for all that is good does good. Isn't that the way it works?

M: Yes.

S: So virtue is something that does good?

M: That follows from all this.

S: Then let us consider, one by one, the sorts of things that do us good: health, let's say, and strength, and beauty, and wealth. We say that these things, and others of the same kind, do us good, don't we?

M: We do.

S: Yet we say that these same things also sometimes do us harm. Do you agree or not?

M: I do.

S: Look then, what deciding factor determines in each case whether these things do us good or harm? Isn't goodness a function of correct use, and harm a function of misuse?

M: Certainly.

S: Let us now look at the qualities of the soul. There is a thing you call moderation, and justice, courage, intelligence, memory, nobility, so on and so forth?

M: There is.

S: Consider any and all items on this list you believe *not* to be knowledge but something else instead; don't they all at times harm us, at other times do us good? Courage, for example, when not based on forethought, is mere recklessness; when a man is thoughtlessly confident, he gets hurt; but when he is mindful of what he does, things go well.

M: Yes.

S: The same is true of patience or mental quickness. A brain like a sponge and an even temper are all very well in one who minds the proper use of such things; to anyone else, they may bring harm.*

M: Very much so.

S: Therefore, in short, all the soul does, and has done to it, concludes happily – if directed mindfully. Otherwise, things may end badly?

M: That is likely.

S: If then virtue is something in the soul, and necessarily good, it must be a matter of mindfulness. For all other qualities of soul are in themselves neither good nor harmful. As accompanied by forethought or thoughtlessness, they become good or harmful. This argument shows that virtue, being good, must be a kind of mindfulness.

M: I agree.

S: Furthermore, those other items we were considering – wealth and the like – are at times good, at times harmful. Here again it is as with the soul: mindfulness produces benefits; thoughtlessness causes harm; so in these cases, if the soul uses and directs things rightly, benefits result; bad use causes harm?

M: Quite

S: The mindful soul directs rightly, the thoughtless soul wrongly?

M: That is so.

S: So we can generalize: all human activities depend on the soul, and those of the soul depend on mindfulness, if they are to be good. According to this argument what does good would be mindfulness, and we say that virtue does good?

M: Certainly.

S: Virtue then, as a whole or in part, is a matter of mindfulness?

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

S: Then, if that is how it is, the good are so by nature?

M: I do not think they are.

S: For if they were, this would follow: if the good were so by nature, we would have people who recognized those among the young who were naturally good; we would take those they pointed out and guard them in the Acropolis. We would vault them up there more carefully than gold, lest someone corrupt them. When they reached maturity they would be useful to their cities.

M: Reasonable proposal, Socrates.

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

M: I now think that must necessarily be so, Socrates. And clearly, on our hypothesis, if virtue is knowledge, it can be taught.

S: Perhaps, by Zeus, but mightn't it turn out we were wrong to agree to this?

M: Yet it seemed right at the time.

S: We should not only think it right at the time. We should think so now, and in the future, if it is indeed sound.

M: What is the trouble? Something is making you doubt virtue is knowledge?

S: I will tell you, Meno. I am not saying it is wrong to say virtue is teachable if it is knowledge, but see whether it isn't reasonable of me to doubt whether it is knowledge. Tell me this: if you take virtue, or any sort of teachable thing, won't there necessarily be those who teach it and others who learn it?

M: I think so.

S: On the other hand, if there are no teachers or learners of a given something, won't we be right to assume the subject cannot be taught?

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

S: I have often tried to find out whether there are any teachers of it, but in spite of my best efforts I cannot find any. This in spite of the fact that I have searched for them with the help of many people, in particular many whom I believed to be most qualified in this matter. And now, Meno, Anytus has by great good fortune wandered over to sit by us. Let us include him in our search party. Doing so makes perfect sense, for Anytus is, in the first place, the son of Anthemion, a man both wealthy and wise – and who did not become rich by sitting on his hands, nor by being handed a gift like Ismenias the Theban, who recently acquired the possessions of Polycrates. No, he rose up thanks to his own wisdom and hard work. What's more, he did not become offensive, or get a swelled head – get too big for his britches. He was a well-mannered and well-behaved man. Also he raised our friend here well – gave him a good education; so the majority here in Athenians believe, for they are electing him to the highest offices. It is right then to look for teachers of virtue – to see whether there are any and, if so, who – in the company of such a man as this. Therefore, Anytus, please join me and your guest-friend Meno here in our inquiry into the identities of teachers of virtue. Look at it in this way: if we wanted Meno to become a good doctor, to what teachers would we send him? Wouldn't we send him to the doctors?

Anytus: Certainly.

S: And if we wanted him to be a good shoemaker, to shoemakers?

A: Yes.

S: And so with other professions?

A: Certainly.

S: Let's go around the same point again, like so: we say that we would be right to send him to the doctors if we want to make a doctor of him; whenever we say this sort of thing, we mean that it would be reasonable to send him to those who practice the discipline in question rather than to those who do not, and to those who charge fees for this very discipline, and who have shown themselves to be teachers of those who wish to come to them and study. Isn't this what we would think, in sending him off, and wouldn't we be right?

A: Yes.

S: And the same goes for flute-playing and the other disciplines? It wouldn't make a lot of sense if those who wanted to make someone a flute-player refused to send him to those who teach the instrument, and make their living that way, and instead sent our would-be flautist to pester with requests for instruction those who neither teach the thing in question, nor have a single pupil studying it? Now don't you think this would be an unreasonable way to go about it?

A: By Zeus, that's right; a stupid thing to do.

S: Quite right. However, you can now enter into a little argument with me about our guest-friend Meno here. He has been telling me for some time, Anytus, that he longs to acquire the understanding and virtue that enables men to manage well their households and their cities – to care for parents, to know how and when to welcome and send away strangers and citizens alike, as a worthy man should. Now consider to whom we should send him to learn this virtue. Or maybe it is obvious, in light of what has just been said, that we should send him to those who profess to teach virtue, and have made themselves available to any Greek who wishes to learn – for a fixed fee?

A: Who exactly do you have in mind, Socrates?

S: I am sure you know yourself; all those men people call 'sophists'.

A: By Heracles, don't even say such things, Socrates! May no member of my household – may none of my friends, be they citizens or strangers – be crazy enough to ruin themselves by running after these people, who patently plague and corrupt those who follow them.

S: How do you mean, Anytus? Of all the people who set themselves up as professional practitioners of beneficial knowledge, are only this lot so different from the rest that they not only fail to improve the things they are given to work on, but they actually corrupt them – and they plainly think they'll make money in the process? I can't believe it is true, because I know that one man, Protagoras, made more money off his wisdom than Pheidias, who crafted such remarkably fine works, or any other ten sculptors put together. Surely what you say is bizarre, given that anyone who set up to repair old shoes, or old clothes, and returned all items in a more tattered state than when received, would be out of business in a month. Anyone who did business like that would starve to death, and yet you would have me believe all of Greece has neglected to notice – for lo these forty years – that Protagoras corrupts those who follow him, and sends them back out into the world in a worse moral condition than when he took them into his care. I think the man was seventy when he died, and he had plied his craft for forty years. During all that time, down to this very day, his reputation has stood very high. And it isn't just Protagoras; there are lots of others, some born before him, some still alive today. Are we to say that you say they deceive and harm the young knowingly, or that they themselves are not aware of it? Are we to consider those whom some people the wisest of men to be so crazy as that?

A: They are far from being crazy, Socrates. It is more a question of crazy young people being willing to pay their fees, and – even more so – parents entrusting children to such company; most of all it is a matter of cities not driving out any citizen or stranger who tries to conduct himself in this manner.

S: Some sophist has done you wrong, Anytus. Otherwise, why would you be so hard on them?

A: No, by Zeus, I have never met a single one of them, nor would I allow any member of my household to do so.

S: So then you are wholly unacquainted with these people?

A: And may I remain so.

S: How then, my good sir, can you know whether there is any good in what they teach or not, if you are altogether without experience of it?

A: Easily, for I know who they are, whether I have made their acquaintance or not.

S: You must be psychic, Anytus, for I wonder how else you can know about these things, given what you say. However, let's set aside the question of where to send Meno to make him wicked; let us grant it would be to the sophists. But tell us – and benefit your family friend here in the telling – to whom a stranger should go in such a large city as this to acquire, to some degree, that quality of virtue I was just talking about.

A: Why haven't you just told him yourself?

S: I did mention those whom I thought to be teachers of virtue, but you say I am wrong, and maybe you're right. So you tell him, now it's your turn, to whom among the Athenians he should turn. Tell him the name of anyone you want.

A: Why give him the name of one individual? Any Athenian gentleman he may meet – any good man and true – could make a better man out of him than any sophist, if persuaded to do so.

S: And have these good men – and true – become virtuous automatically, without taking instruction from anyone, and are they able to instruct others in this thing they themselves never studied?

A: I believe these men have learned at the feet of other good men before them; or don't you think that there are many good men to be found in our city?

S: I believe, Anytus, that there are many men here who are good and handling public affairs, and that there have been many more just like them in the past. But have they been good teachers of this virtue of theirs? That is the point under consideration, not whether or not there are good men here, nor whether there have been in the past. Instead, we have been investigating for some time whether virtue can be taught. Pursuing that investigation we now inquire whether the good men of today, and of the

past, knew how to pass on their virtue to others, or, on the other hand, whether a man cannot impart virtue or get it from someone else. This is what Meno and I have been investigating for some time. Look at it this way, from what you yourself have said. Would you not say that Themistocles was a good man?

A: Yes. One of the very best.

S: He would have been a good teacher of his virtue, if anyone was?

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

S: But do you think he did *not* want other citizens to be good men and true, especially his own son? Can you seriously think he begrudged this to his son, deliberately *not* passing on his own virtue? Haven't you heard that Themistocles taught his son, Cleophantus, to be a good horseman? He could stand upright on horseback and shoot javelins from there and do many other remarkable things – all skills his father had taught to him, all requiring good teachers. Haven't you heard about this from your elders?

A: I have.

S: So you couldn't say the son lacked virtue because he lacked natural aptitude altogether?

A: Perhaps not.

S: But have you ever heard anyone, young or old, say that Cleophantus, the son of Themistocles, was accomplished and good at the same pursuits as his father?

A: Never.

S: Are we supposed to believe he wanted to educate his son well, except when it came to that wisdom he himself possessed, in which his son was to be no better than his neighbors – still assuming that virtue can be taught?

A: Perhaps not, by Zeus.

S: Yet he was – you yourself have said so – among the best teachers of virtue in the past. Let us consider another man, Aristides, son of Lysimachus. You will agree he was a good man?

A: I very definitely do.

S: He too gave his own son Lysimachus the best Athenian education in all subjects that have teachers, but do you think he made him a better man than anyone else? You have been in his company and seen the kind of man he is. Or take Pericles, whose consummate skills befit his towering accomplishments. You know that he brought up two sons, Paralus and Xanthippus?

A: I know.

S: You also know that he taught them to ride horses as well as any Athenian; he educated them in the arts, in gymnastics, and generally raised them up to be – in matters of skill – inferior to none; but didn't he want to make good men of them? 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, I remind you that Thucydides too brought up two sons, Melesias and Stephanus, whom he educated well in all other things. They became 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 time, or don't you remember?

A: I remember I have heard that said.

S: It is surely clear that he would not have had his boys taught what it takes money to learn, but have failed to teach them what costs nothing – turning them into good men – if that could be taught? But perhaps Thucydides was an inferior person, who had not many friends among the Athenians and their allies? No, he belonged to a great house; he had great influence in the city and among the Greeks. So if virtue could be taught he would have found the man to make his sons good men, be that man a citizen or a foreigner – if he himself could not spare the time due to his public commitments. But, friend Anytus, virtue can certainly not be taught.

A: I think, Socrates, that you are too quick to speak ill of people. I would advise you – if you will take my advice – to take care. Perhaps it works this way in other cities; certainly it does here: it is easier to injure people than to benefit them. But I think you knew that already.

S: I think, Meno, that Anytus is angry, and I am not the least bit surprised. He thinks, first of all, that I am slandering these men; next, he thinks he is one of them. If it ever occurs to him what slander really is, his anger will evaporate, but the light hasn't dawned yet. So you tell me now, aren't there good men and true to be found among your people?

M: Certainly.

S: Well, then, do they make themselves available to the young as teachers? Do they agree that they are teachers, and that virtue can be taught?

M: No, by Zeus, Socrates; sometimes you can hear them say it can be taught; other times, that it cannot.

S: Should we say that they are teachers of this subject, when they do not even agree on this point?

M: I do not think so, Socrates.

S: Furthermore, do you think these sophists – who alone profess to be so crafty and wise – are teachers of virtue?

M: This is what I admire most in Gorgias, Socrates – that you would never hear him promising such a thing. Indeed, he makes fun of others when he hears them making this claim. He says you should turn people into clever speakers.

S: You do not think, then, that the sophists are teachers of virtue?

M: I cannot say, Socrates; like most people, at times I think they are, at other times I think they are not.

S: Are you aware that it isn't just you – and lots of other public figures – who think sometimes that virtue can be taught, sometimes that it can't be. The poet Theognis says the very same thing?

M: In which verses?

S: In his elegiacs, where he says:

And with those men eat, and drink, and with them
go about, and please those whose power is great.
For it is from the good that you will learn good; if you mingle
with wicked men you will lose even what wit you possess.

You see how here he speaks as if virtue can be taught?

M: So it seems.

S: Elsewhere, he changes his tune: “if this could be done,” he says, “and wit implanted in a man,” those who could do this “would collect wages great and many.”
Furthermore:

Never would come from good father evil son,
for he would be persuaded by wise words. But by teaching
you will never make an evil man good.

You do see that the poet is contradicting himself concerning the subject at hand?

M: He does seem to be.

S: Can you think of any other subject concerning which those who set themselves up as teachers are not only unrecognized as teachers of others, but aren't even acknowledged to know about the subject themselves? Indeed, they are thought to be poor practitioners of the very thing they profess to profess, while those agreed to be excellent men sometimes say the thing can be taught, sometimes that it cannot? Would you say that people who are so confused about a subject can be effective teachers of it?

M: No, by Zeus, I would not.

S: If, then, neither the sophists nor the noble and good are teachers of this subject, clearly there would be no others?

M: I do not think there are.

S: Where there are no teachers, there are no learners?

M: I think it's as you say.

S: We agreed that a subject boasting neither teachers nor learners is not teachable?

M: We have so agreed.

S: And there seem to be no teachers of virtue anywhere to be found?

M: That is so.

S: If there are no teachers, there are no learners?

M: That seems so.

S: Then virtue cannot be taught?

M: Apparently not, if we have looked into this business correctly. I am led to wonder, Socrates, whether there are no good men either, or in what way good men come to be.

S: We are probably poor specimen samples, you and I, Meno. Gorgias has not adequately cultured you, nor Prodicus me. We must then at all costs make our selves our own concern 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 quite failed to notice that it is not only by the light of knowledge that men succeed in their affairs; that is perhaps why the understanding of how good men come to be eludes us.

M: How do you mean, Socrates?

S: I mean this: we were right to agree that good men must do good, and that things cannot be otherwise. Isn't that so?

M: Yes.

S: And that they will do good if they guide us correctly in conducting our affairs. We did well in agreeing to this?

M: Yes.

S: But that one cannot guide correctly without knowledge: our agreement to this proposition is likely to be incorrect.

M: How do you mean?

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

M: Certainly.

S: What if someone had a true opinion about which way was the right way, but he hadn't gone there himself and wasn't acquainted with the place. Wouldn't he also lead the way correctly?

M: Certainly.

S: As long as he has the right opinion concerning that which other people know, he will not be a worse guide than one who knows. For he has a true opinion, though not knowledge.

M: In no way worse.

S: So true opinion is in no way an inferior guide to action than knowledge. This is what we overlooked in our investigation of the nature of virtue, when we said only knowledge can culminate in proper action; for true opinion can do just as well.

M: So it seems.

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

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

S: How do you mean? Won't the one with the right opinion always be right, as long as his opinion is right?

M: That appears to be necessarily the case, and it makes me wonder, Socrates – this being the way of it – why knowledge is rated so much more highly than correct opinion, and what the difference is.

S: Do you know what is puzzling you, or shall I tell you?

M: Go ahead, tell me.

S: It is because you have paid no attention to the statues of Daedalus – but perhaps you don't have any over in Thessaly.

M: What are you driving at, Socrates?

S: That they too run away and escape if you forget to tie them down; but they stay put if properly tethered.

M: So what?

S: Acquiring an untied work of Daedalus is not worth much; it's like a runaway slave – for it won't stay put. A statue that is tied down, though, is very valuable, because the man's works are very beautiful. What am I driving at here? True opinions. True opinions, for as long as they remain, are fine things and do nothing but good. But they don't hang around for long; they escape from a man's mind, so that they are not worth much until one tethers them with chains of reasons *why*. And these, Meno my friend, are threads of *memory*, as previously agreed. After opinions are tied down, in the first place they become knowledge; secondly, they remain in place. That is why knowledge is prized more highly than correct opinion; knowledge differs from correct opinion in being tied down.

M: Yes, by Zeus, Socrates, it does seem to go something like that.

S: Indeed, I too speak now like a man offering guess-work in lieu of knowledge. However, I certainly do not think I am guessing when I say that true opinion is a different thing from knowledge. If I do claim to know anything else – and I would make that claim about few things – I would put this down on the list as one thing I do know.

M: Rightly so, Socrates.

S: Well then, isn't it the case that when true opinion guides the course of each action, it comes off no worse than knowledge?

M: I think you are right here too.

S: True opinion, then, is neither inferior to knowledge nor does less good in action, nor does the man who has true opinion in lieu of knowledge come off the worse.

M: That is so.

S: And we agreed that the good man does good.

M: Yes.

S: Since, then, it is not only through knowledge but also through true opinion that men are good, and do good to their cities; and since neither knowledge nor true opinion is innate in men, but both are acquired – unless you think either of these is naturally in-born?

M: I don't think so.

S: Then if these things are not innate, men are not naturally good.

M: Surely not.

S: As goodness is not innate, we inquired next whether it could be taught.

M: Yes.

S: We thought it could be taught if it was knowledge?

M: Yes.

S: And that it was knowledge if it could be taught?

M: Quite so.

S: And that if there were teachers of it, it could be taught, but if there were not, not?

M: That is so.

S: And then we agreed that there were no teachers of it?

M: We did.

S: So we agreed that it was neither teachable nor knowledge?

M: Quite so.

S: But we certainly agree that virtue is a good thing?

M: Yes.

S: And that which guides correctly is both useful and good?

M: Certainly.

S: 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.

M: I think that is so.

S: Now because it cannot be taught, virtue no longer seems to be knowledge?

M: It seems not.

S: So one of the two good and useful things has been excluded, and knowledge is not the guide in public affairs.

M: I don't think it can be.

S: So it not through some wisdom, or by being wise, that such men lead their cities – I mean the likes of Themistocles, and those others mentioned by Anytus just now? Here

is the reason they cannot make others like themselves: it is not knowledge that makes them what they are.

M: You are probably right, Socrates.

S: Therefore, if it isn't through knowledge, the only alternative is that it is through true opinion that statesmen settle on the right course for their cities. As regards knowledge, they are no different from seers and prophets. They too say many true things when the divine inspiration strikes them, but they don't actually *know* what they are talking about.

M: That is probably so.

S: Likewise, Meno, don't these other men deserve to be called 'divine': those who fail to comprehend the true import of what they say and do, yet say and do much that is truly important? – Certainly.

S: So we would be right to say the seers and prophets just mentioned are 'divine' and 'inspired' – likewise, everyone with a knack for poetry. Likewise, politicians and public figures are nothing less than divine and possessed when – under some god's inspiration and influence – they give speeches that lead to success in important matters, even they have no idea what they are talking about. – Quite so.

S: Women are always calling good men 'god-like', and the Spartans do the same when they deliver a eulogy; they say, 'this man is divine.'

M: And they seem to be, Socrates – though perhaps Anytus here will be annoyed with you for saying so.

S: I don't mind about that. We can hash it out with him some other time. But for now, if we have been right in how we investigated and what we said, virtue turns out to be neither innate nor earned. It is something that comes to those who possess it as a free gift from the gods – with understanding not included; unless, that is, you can point to some statesmen who could make another man a statesman. If there were such a one, he could be said to rank among the living as Homer said Teiresias ranked among the dead: namely, 'he alone kept his wits collected while the others flitted about like shadows.' In the same way such a man would, as far as virtue is concerned, stand forth as someone of substance – opposed, as it were, to mere shadows.

M: I think that is an excellent way to put it, Socrates

S: It follows from this whole line of reasoning, Meno, that virtue appears present in those who have it only as a gift from the gods. We will only really know about this, however, if and when we try to investigate what virtue itself is – an investigation that must come before that of how it comes to be in men. But the time has come for me to go. Now you persuade your guest friend Anytus here of all these things you have been persuaded to agreed to, in order that he himself may become more agreeable. If you succeed, you will also thereby confer a benefit upon the Athenians.