TRANSLATION OF THE *MENO*

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Meno: Socrates: One of Meno's slaves: Anytus **St. II**

Meno Can you tell me, Socrates – does virtue come from 70a
teaching? Or does it come not from teaching but from practice? Or does it come to people neither from practice nor from being learnt, but by nature or in some other way?

Socrates Well, Meno, in the past it was for horsemanship and wealth that the Thessalians were famous among the Greeks and admired, but now, I think, it is for wisdom too, especially your b
friend Aristippus' fellow-citizens in Larisa. You owe all this to Gorgias. When he went to that city, he won over the most eminent people as lovers for his wisdom – both those within the Aleuad family (including your own lover Aristippus) and those among the other Thessalians. In particular he trained you in the habit of answering any questions anyone asks with the grand confidence that suits people with knowledge, just as he himself too volunteers c
to be asked anything that anyone in the Greek world may wish, and never leaves anyone unanswered. But here in Athens, my dear Meno, the opposite has happened. A sort of drought of wisdom has developed, and it seems that wisdom has left these parts for yours. At any rate, if you want to ask one of the people here such a 71a
question there's no one who won't laugh and say: 'Well, stranger, perhaps you think I'm some specially favoured person – I'd certainly need to be, to know whether virtue comes from teaching or in what way it does come – but in fact I'm so far from knowing whether it comes from teaching or not, that actually I don't even know at all what virtue itself is!'

And that's the situation I'm in too, Meno. I'm as impoverished as b
my fellow-citizens in this respect, and confess to my shame that I

don't know about virtue at all. And if I don't know what something is, how could I know what that thing is like? Or do you think it possible, if someone doesn't know who Meno is at all, that this person should know whether he's beautiful or rich, or whether he's well-born, or whether he's the opposite of all these? Do you think that possible?

Meno No I don't. But is it really true about *you*, Socrates, that you don't even know what virtue is? Is this the report about you c that we're to take home with us?

Soc. Not just that, my friend, but also that I don't think I've yet met anyone else who does, either.

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

Soc. Yes I did.

Meno You mean you didn't think he knew?

Soc. I don't remember things very well, Meno, so I can't now say what I thought about him then. But perhaps he does know, and perhaps you know what he used to say, so remind me what that was. Or if you like, *you* tell me yourself, for I expect you think the d same as he does.

Meno Yes I do.

Soc. Well then, let's leave him out of it, since after all he isn't here – and Meno, by all the gods, what do you yourself say that virtue is? Tell me and don't keep it back. Make it a really lucky false statement I've uttered, if what comes to light is that you and Gorgias do know, all the time I've been saying I'd never yet met anyone who did.

Meno But it's not hard to tell you, Socrates. First, if it's virtue e for a man you wish to know, that's easy: virtue for a man is the ability to conduct the city's affairs and, in so doing, to help his friends, hurt his foes, and take good care not to get hurt himself. Or if it's virtue for a woman you wish for, that's not hard to describe: she must run the home well, looking after everything in it and obeying her husband. And there is another virtue for a child, whether female or male, and another for an older man, free or slave, whichever you wish. And there are a great many other 72a virtues, so that there's no perplexity about saying what virtue is. For there is virtue for every field of practice and time of life, in connection with every activity, and for every one of us; and vice too in the same way, I think, Socrates.

Soc. I seem to be having a lot of luck, Meno, if in searching for just one virtue I've found a positive swarm of virtues in your

possession. But Meno, to follow up this metaphor of swarms: if I had asked about the nature of a bee and what that is, and b you had said that bees were many and varied, how would you answer me if I then asked, 'Do you say they are many and varied and different from one another *in respect of being bees*? Or is it not at all in *this* respect that they differ, but in some *other* respect, such as beauty or size or something else like that?' Tell me, how would you answer if you were asked that?

Meno I would say that in respect of being bees they are no different from one another.

Soc. Then if I said next, 'Well, tell me then, Meno, what do you c say this thing itself is, in respect of which they are not different but all the same?', I expect you would have an answer for me?

Meno Yes I would.

Soc. Then it's the same with the virtues too: even if they are many and various, they must still all have one and the same form which makes them *virtues*. Presumably it would be right to focus on this in one's answer and show the questioner what virtue actually *is*. Or don't you understand what I mean? d

Meno I think I understand. But I don't yet grasp the question quite as clearly as I'd like to.

Soc. Well, is it only about virtue, Meno, that you think as you do – that there is one for a man, another for a woman, and so on – or do you think the same about health and size and strength too? Do you think there is one health for a man and another for a woman? Or is it the same form in every case, if it really *is* health, whether in a man or in anything else? e

Meno With health, I think it is the same in both man and woman.

Soc. And isn't it so with size and strength too? If a woman is strong, won't it be the same form, the same strength, that makes her strong? What I mean by 'the same' is that whether strength is in a man or in a woman makes no difference with respect to its being *strength*. Or do you think it does make a difference?

Meno No I don't.

Soc. Well, will whether *virtue* is in a child, in an old man, in a 73a woman or in a man make any difference with respect to its being *virtue*?

Meno I think this is somehow no longer like those other cases, Socrates.

Soc. Well now, didn't you say that for a man, virtue was running a city well and for a woman, running a home well?

Meno Yes I did.

Soc. And is it possible to run a city or home or anything else well without running it temperately and justly?

Meno No indeed.

Soc. And to run it temperately and justly will mean running it b with temperance and justice, won't it?

Meno It must.

Soc. So they both need the same things if they're going to be good – both the man and the woman: – justice and temperance?

Meno Apparently they do.

Soc. And what about a child or old man? Surely they could never come to be good by being undisciplined and unjust?

Meno No indeed.

Soc. But rather, by being temperate and just?

Meno Yes.

Soc. So people are all good in the same way, since they all come c to be good by attaining the same things?

Meno It seems so.

Soc. Now presumably they would not have been good in the same way if the virtue they'd had were not the same?

Meno No indeed.

Soc. Well then, since virtue is the same for everyone, try to remember and tell me what Gorgias, and you with him, say it is.

Meno What else but the ability to rule over people, if what you are searching for is some one thing covering them all. d

Soc. That is indeed what I'm searching for. But does a child have the same virtue too, Meno, or a slave – the ability to rule over his master? Do you think he would still *be* a slave, if he were the ruler?

Meno I don't think so at all, Socrates.

Soc. It's certainly unlikely, my good chap. For consider this too. You say 'ability to rule'. Won't we add to this the words 'justly, and not unjustly'?

Meno Yes, I think so. For justice is virtue, Socrates.

Soc. Virtue, Meno, or *a* virtue? e

Meno What do you mean by that?

Soc. The same as I would with anything else. For instance, if you like, with roundness, I'd say that it's *a* shape, not simply that it's shape. The reason I'd say this is that there are also other shapes.

Meno You're quite right, since I too say that besides justice there are also other virtues.

Soc. What are these? Tell me. Just as I'd name some other 74a shapes if you told me to, so you tell me some other virtues.

Meno Well then, courage is virtue in my opinion, and so are temperance and wisdom and grandeur, and all the many others.

Soc. The same thing has happened to us as before, Meno. Once again, though in a different way from last time, we've found many virtues while searching for one. But as for the one virtue which extends through all these, that we can't discover.

Meno No, I still can't pin down what you're searching for – one b virtue covering them all, as with the other examples.

Soc. Fair enough. But I'll do my best to get us closer[1] if I can. You understand, I expect, that it's the same with everything – if someone asked you about the example I mentioned just now, 'What is shape, Meno?', and you told him that it was roundness, and he said to you as I did, 'Is roundness shape, or *a* shape?', I expect you'd tell him that it's *a* shape.

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. Your reason being that there are also other shapes? c

Meno Yes.

Soc. And if he went on to ask you what these were, you'd tell him?

Meno Yes I would.

Soc. And again with colour, if he asked you in the same way what that was, and when you said 'White', the questioner then took you up with 'Is white colour, or *a* colour?', you'd say it was *a* colour, because there are in fact others too?

Meno Yes I would.

Soc. And if he told you to mention some other colours, you'd mention some other things which are in fact colours no less than d white is?

Meno Yes.

Soc. Well, if he pursued the argument as I did and said, 'We keep ending up with many – not that way please, but since you refer to these many things by the one name and say that none of them fails to be a shape even though they are positively inconsistent with each other, tell me what this is, which includes round no less than

[1] 'get . . . closer' translates Bluck's reading προσβιβάσαι. OCT has προβιβάσαι, 'help . . . on'.

straight, and which you call shape when you say that roundness is a shape no less than straightness is? – Or don't you say this?' e

Meno Yes I do.

Soc. 'Well, when you say it are you saying that roundness is no more round than straight, or straightness no more straight than round?'

Meno Certainly not, Socrates.

Soc. 'Yet you do say that straightness is no more a *shape* than roundness is, and the same the other way about?'

Meno What you say is true.

Soc. 'Then what is this thing which has this name "shape"? Try to tell me'. Well, if when asked this question, whether about shape 75a or about colour, you said, 'But I don't even understand what you want, man, and I don't know what you mean, either', he would perhaps be surprised and say, 'Don't you understand that I'm searching for the thing which is *the same* in all of these?' Or would you have no answer in this case either, Meno, if someone asked you, 'What is it in roundness and straightness and the other things you call shapes, that is the same in all of them?' Try and tell me, to get some practice for your answer about virtue. b

Meno No! You tell me, Socrates.

Soc. You'd like me to do you a favour?

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. Then you'll be ready to tell me about virtue in your turn?

Meno Yes I will.

Soc. Well then, I must do my best; it's a fair deal.

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. Well now, let's try to tell you what shape is. See whether you accept that it's this: let us say that shape is the only thing there is which always accompanies colour. Will that do for you, or is it something different you are searching for? I'd be pleased enough if you could tell me about virtue even in this sort of way. c

Meno But that's silly, Socrates.

Soc. How do you mean?

Meno Shape, according to your account, is what always accompanies colour. Right. But now if someone were to say he didn't know colour, and raised the same problem about that as about shape, what kind of answer do you think the one you've given would be?

Soc. A true one! And if the questioner were one of the wise, one of those disputatious debaters, I'd say to him 'I have said my d

say. If it's not right, then it's your job to take up the argument and prove me wrong.' However, if friends, like you and me today, wished to engage in discussion with one another, then they should reply in some milder way more appropriate to discussion. And perhaps what's more appropriate to discussion is to give answers which are not only true but also in terms which the questioner has first agreed he knows.[2] So I'll try to answer you like that. – Tell me, do you call something an 'end'? I mean something such as a c limit or boundary – I mean the same by all of these; perhaps Prodicus would disagree with us, but I dare say you do speak of things as having a limit or coming to an end. That's the kind of thing I wish to express – nothing complicated.

Meno I do speak like that, and I think I understand what you mean.

Soc. Next, do you call something a 'plane' and something else a 76a 'solid' – the planes and solids in geometry, for instance?

Meno Yes I do.

Soc. Well then, that's enough for you to understand what I say shape is. I say that, for every case of shape, shape is that in which a solid comes to its limit, or summing this up, I'd say that shape is the limit of a solid.

Meno And what do you say colour is, Socrates?

Soc. You are quite outrageous, Meno! You bother an old man with your demands for answers, but you yourself won't use your memory and tell me what Gorgias says virtue is. b

Meno But I will, Socrates, once you've told me this.

Soc. One could tell blindfold, Meno, just from the way you talk, that you're beautiful and still have lovers.

Meno How so?

Soc. Because you do nothing but make demands when you speak, as favourites always do – after all they're the kings while their season lasts. Perhaps you've also discovered my own susceptic bility to beauty. So I'll do you the favour and answer you.

Meno Yes indeed, *do* do me the favour.

Soc. Would you like me to answer like Gorgias then, to make it easy for you to follow?

Meno Yes, of course, I would.

[2] 'which the questioner has first agreed he knows' translates Bluck's reading ὧν ἂν προομολογῇ εἰδέναι ὁ ἐρωτῶν. OCT has προσομολογῇ ὁ ἐρωτώμενος, 'which the person being questioned agrees further that he knows'.

Soc. Well then, do you and he follow Empedocles and say that things give off effluxes?

Meno Very much so.

Soc. And that there are channels into and through which the effluxes pass?

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. And some of the effluxes fit into some of the channels, while others are too small or too big? d

Meno That is so.

Soc. And you also call something 'sight'?

Meno Yes I do.

Soc. From this then 'grasp what I say to thee' as Pindar said: – colour is an efflux of shapes, commensurate with and perceptible to sight.

Meno I think that is an excellent answer you've given, Socrates.

Soc. Yes – I've given it the way you're used to, perhaps. And besides, I expect you realize you could use it to say what sound is too, or smell, or many other such things. e

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. Yes, it's a showy kind of answer, Meno, so you prefer it to the one about shape.

Meno Yes I do.

Soc. All the same, O son of Alexidemus, I am sure myself that it's not a *better* one – the other was. And I expect you wouldn't think so either, if only you didn't have to leave before the mysteries, as you were saying yesterday, but could stay and be initiated instead. 77a

Meno Well, I would stay if you'd tell me many more things like this, Socrates.

Soc. Well, I certainly shan't lack the will to tell you such things, for both your sake and my own; it's rather that I might not be *able* to tell you many. But come on, now you try and do what you promised for me, and say what virtue is as a whole. Stop making many out of one, as the jokers say whenever someone breaks something, and instead say what virtue is, leaving it whole and sound. After all, I've provided you with the models. b

Meno Well then, Socrates, I think virtue is, as the poet says, 'To glory in fine things and hold the power'. That's what *I* say virtue is, too: desiring fine things and having the power to achieve them.

Soc. Do you say that desiring *fine* things means having a desire for *good* things?

Meno Yes, certainly.

Soc. Is that assuming that some people desire bad things and others good ones? Don't you think everyone desires good things, c my good chap?

Meno No I don't.

Soc. But some people desire bad things?

Meno Yes.

Soc. Supposing the bad things to be good, do you mean? Or do they still desire them even when they know they are bad?

Meno Both, I think.

Soc. Really? You think someone can still desire bad things even when he knows they are bad?

Meno Certainly.

Soc. How do you mean 'desires'? Is it 'desires that they should happen to him'? d

Meno Yes, that – what else?

Soc. Is this in the belief that the bad things benefit everyone to whom they happen, or while knowing that they always harm their possessor?

Meno There are some people who believe the bad things are beneficial; there are also others who know they are harmful.

Soc. But do the people who believe the bad things are beneficial really know they are *bad*, do you think?

Meno No, I don't think that at all.

Soc. Then clearly this first group don't desire bad things, do they, seeing these ones don't know the things *are* bad. Isn't it things e they supposed to be *good* that they desire, even while in fact these things are bad? So the people who don't know the things are bad and suppose them to be good clearly desire *good* things. Or don't they?

Meno Yes, these ones perhaps do.

Soc. Next, the ones whom you say desire bad things while believing that bad things harm everyone to whom they happen – they know they are going to be harmed by them, presumably?

Meno They must do.

Soc. But don't they suppose that people who are suffering 78a harm are miserable to the degree that they are being harmed?

Meno They must do that, too.

Soc. And that people who are miserable are wretched?

Meno Yes, so I'd suppose.

Soc. And does anyone wish to be miserable and wretched?

Meno I don't think so, Socrates.

Soc. So no one wishes for bad things then, Meno, if no one wishes to be that. For what else *is* it to be miserable, but to desire bad things and get them?

Meno Perhaps what you say is true, Socrates, and no one wishes b for bad things.

Soc. Well, you were saying just now that virtue was wishing for good things and having the power, weren't you?

Meno Yes, that is what I said.

Soc. Then in what you said the 'wishing' applies to everyone, and as far as this goes no one is better than anyone else – isn't that so?

Meno Apparently.

Soc. But if one person *is* better than another, it's clear he must be better in having the power.

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. So what virtue seems to be on your account is this: power c to achieve good things.

Meno My opinion is exactly as you now understand it, Socrates.

Soc. Let's look at this too then to see whether what you say is true, for it may be that it's well said. Virtue is the ability to achieve good things, you say?

Meno Yes I do.

Soc. And the things you call good would be things like health and wealth, wouldn't they?

Meno I mean both getting gold and silver, and also honours and high office in one's city.

Soc. And there's nothing else you mean by good things, apart from things like these? d

Meno No, I mean all the things like these.

Soc. Right. And so achieving gold and silver is virtue, says Meno the hereditary guest-friend of the Great King. Do you add the words 'justly and holily' to the 'achieving'? Or does that make no difference for you, and even if someone achieves them *un*justly you call it virtue just the same?

Meno Certainly not, Socrates.

Soc. But rather, vice?

Meno Yes, definitely.

Soc. So it seems that the achievement must be accompanied by justice or temperance or holiness or some other part of virtue, or e else it will not be virtue despite achieving good things.

Meno Yes, how could it be virtue without these?

Soc. And *not* to achieve gold and silver either for oneself or for anyone else, when to do so wouldn't be just – isn't this non-achievement also virtue?

Meno Apparently.

Soc. So the achievement of this sort of good thing can't be virtue any more than the non-achievement can. Rather, it seems that whatever comes about with *justice* will be virtue, and what comes about without anything of that kind will be vice. 79a

Meno I think it must be as you say.

Soc. Then didn't we say a little while ago that each of these things – justice, temperance, and everything of that kind – was a *part* of virtue?

Meno Yes.

Soc. So you're playing games with me, are you, Meno?

Meno How so, Socrates?

Soc. A moment ago I asked you not to break virtue up or cut it in pieces and gave you models of how to answer, and you've disregarded all that and tell me that virtue is the ability to achieve good things with justice – and you say justice is a part of virtue? b

Meno Yes I do.

Soc. Then it follows from what you yourself agree, doesn't it, that what virtue is, is to do everything one does with some part of virtue? For justice and each of these things is a part of virtue, you say. So why am I saying this? Because I asked you to tell me about virtue as a whole, but far from telling me what *virtue* is you just say that any action is virtue provided it's done with a part of virtue – as though you'd already said what the whole of virtue was, so I'd c recognize it even if you cut it up into parts.

So the same question has to be put to you all over again I think, my dear Meno. What *is* virtue, if any action can be virtue when done with a part of virtue? – for that's what is being said if one claims that every action done with justice is virtue. Or don't you think the same question has to be put again? – do you suppose one can know what a part of virtue is without knowing virtue itself?

Meno No, I don't think so.

Soc. No, and if you remember when I answered you about d shape a moment ago, I believe we rejected this kind of answer, which tries to answer in terms of things which are still being searched for and not yet agreed on.

Meno Yes, and we were right to do so, Socrates.

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Soc. Well then, my good chap, neither must you suppose that, while we're still searching for what *virtue* is as a whole, you can explain it to anyone by answering in terms of its parts or saying anything else in that same old way, without the same question having to be put again: What *is* this 'virtue' about which you say e what you do? Or do you think I'm talking nonsense?

Meno No, I think what you say is right.

Soc. Well, answer all over again then: what do you – and your friend too – say virtue is?

Meno Socrates, I used to hear even before I met you how all you ever do is to be perplexed and to make other people perplexed too, 80a and what I feel now is that you're applying your spells and potions to me and positively mesmerizing me, till I'm brimful of perplexity. If a little joke's in order, I think that what you're just exactly like, both in looks and everything else, is that flat-fish the sea torpedo. The torpedo fish always torpifies whoever comes near and gets into contact with it, and I think you've done something of the same sort to me now too, for I'm truly torpid in both mind and b mouth and I've got no answer for you. And yet I've spoken a great many words about virtue in front of many people on thousands of occasions, and did it very well too – at least, so I thought. But now I can't even say what virtue is at all. And I think you're well advised in not taking ship and going abroad from Athens, for if you were a visitor in another city doing things like this, you would probably be arrested as a sorcerer!

Soc. You're a rascal, Meno – you almost had me tricked.

Meno Just how, Socrates?

Soc. I know why you played 'what you're like' with me. c

Meno Why then, do you suppose?

Soc. So that I'd say what *you*'re like back. I know how all beautiful boys enjoy hearing what they're like – they come out of it well, for if one is beautiful the things one is like are beautiful too, I suppose – but I'm not going to say what you're like back. As for me, if the torpedo fish is torpid itself and that's how it makes other people torpid too, I *am* like it, but not otherwise. For it's not that I myself have the solutions when I make other people perplexed, but that I'm utterly perplexed myself and that's how I come to make other people perplexed as well. That's how it is with virtue now; I d on my side *don't* know what it is, while you on yours *did* know, perhaps, till you came into contact with me, while now you're just like someone who *doesn't* know. All the same I'm ready to consider

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it with you and join you in searching for what it might be.

Meno And how are you going to search for this when you don't know at all what it is, Socrates? Which of all the things you don't know will you set up as target for your search? And even if you actually come across it, how will you know that it *is* that thing which you didn't know?

Soc. I know what you mean, Meno. Do you see what a disputa- e tious argument you're bringing down on us – how it's impossible for a person to search either for what he knows or for what he doesn't? He couldn't search for what he knows, for he knows it and no one in that condition needs to search; on the other hand he couldn't search for what he doesn't know, for he won't even know what to search for.

Meno And don't you think that's a fine argument, Socrates? 81a

Soc. No I don't.

Meno Can you tell me why?

Soc. Yes I can. I've heard men and women wise in matters divine –

Meno Saying what?

Soc. Something both true and beautiful in my opinion.

Meno What is it, and who are the people saying it?

Soc. The people saying it are those priests and priestesses who have made it their concern to be able to give an account of their practices; Pindar says it too and many other divinely inspired poets. b And as for what they say, it's this – but consider if you think what they say is true. They say the soul of man is immortal; sometimes it comes to an end – which people call dying – while at other times it is reborn, but it never perishes. So because of this one should live out one's life in the holiest possible way, since for those from whom

> 'Persephone receives
> Requital for long grief, their souls she yields
> In the ninth year once more to the sun above;
> From whom grow noble kings, and men c
> Swift in strength and great in wisdom;
> And to the end of time men call them heroes holy.'

Well, since the soul is immortal, and has been born many times and seen both what is here, and what is in Hades, and everything, there is nothing it has not learnt. So no wonder it's possible that it should recollect both virtue and other things, as after all it did

know them previously. For seeing that the whole of nature is akin and the soul has learnt everything, there's nothing to prevent someone who recollects – which people call learning – just one thing, from discovering everything else, if he's courageous and doesn't give up searching; – for searching and learning are just recollection. So we shouldn't be persuaded by that disputatious argument. That argument would make us lazy, and weak-willed people love to hear it, but this one makes us industrious and eager to search. It's because I'm confident that this one is true that I'm ready to search with you for what virtue is.

Meno Yes Socrates – but what do you mean by saying we don't learn, but what we call learning is recollection? Can you teach me how that is so?

Soc. Only a minute ago I said you were a rascal, Meno, and now you ask me if I can teach you – I who say there's no teaching, only recollecting – obviously all to show me up as immediately contradicting myself.

Meno No by Zeus, Socrates, I didn't speak with any such thought, but out of habit. But if there's any way you can show me that it is as you say, do show me.

Soc. Well, it's not easy, but all the same I'm ready to do my best for your sake. Call me one of these many attendants you have, whichever one you wish, so that I can demonstrate on him for you.

Meno Yes, certainly. Come here!

Soc. First, is he Greek and does he speak Greek?

Meno Very much so; he was born in our home.

Soc. Observe carefully then which of the two things he shows himself to be doing, recollecting or learning from me.

Meno I shall do.

Soc. Tell me now, boy, you know that a square figure is like this?

Boy Yes I do.

Soc. So a square figure is one which has all these four lines equal?

Boy Yes indeed.

Soc. And it is one which also has these lines through the middle equal, isn't it? [*See Figure 1, opposite. Throughout his conversation with the slave we must imagine Socrates drawing figures as he describes them.*]

Boy Yes.

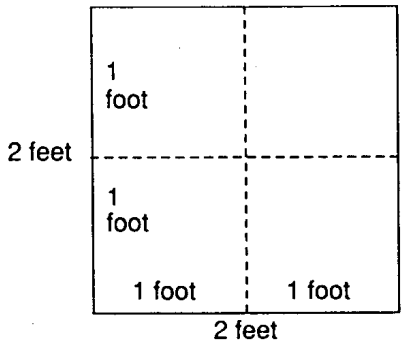

Figure 1

Soc. And there could be both bigger and smaller figures like this, couldn't there?

Boy Yes indeed.

Soc. Well, if this side were two feet long and this other side two feet, how many feet big would the whole be? Think of it like this: if it had been two feet this way and only one foot that way, wouldn't the figure have been two feet times one?

Boy Yes.

Soc. But since it's two feet that way also, doesn't it come to two times *two*?

Boy It does.

Soc. So it comes to two times two feet?

Boy Yes.

Soc. Well, how many are two times two? Work it out and tell me.

Boy Four, Socrates.

Soc. Well, there could be another figure twice the size of this one but like it, couldn't there, having all its lines equal just like this one?

Boy Yes.

Soc. How many feet big will it be, then?

Boy Eight.

Soc. Well now, try to tell me how long each line of that one will be. The line for this one is two feet long; what about the line for that one which is twice the size?

Boy Clearly it'll be twice the length, Socrates.

82e

Soc. Do you see, Meno, how I'm not teaching him anything but instead asking him everything? And at present he supposes he knows what kind of line the eight-foot figure will come from – or don't you think he does?

Meno Yes I do.

Soc. And does he know?

Meno No indeed.

Soc. But he supposes it will come from a line twice the length?

Meno Yes.

Soc. Then watch him recollecting in order, as one has to do.

Now, you tell me. You say that a figure twice the size comes from a line twice the length? I mean a figure like this one, not long 83a one way and short the other, but it's to be equal in each direction just like this one, only twice the size, eight feet big – but see whether you still think it will comé from the line twice the length.

Boy I do.

Soc. Well, *this* line comes to twice the length of this one, doesn't it, if we add on another of the same length starting here?

Boy Yes indeed.

Soc. Then this is the line you say the eight-foot figure will come from, if there came to be four lines of the same length.

Boy Yes. b

Soc. Let's draw four equal lines starting from it, then. Isn't this what you say would be the eight-foot figure?

Boy Yes indeed.

Soc. And inside it, aren't there these four figures, of which each one is equal to this four-foot figure? [*See Figure* 2, *opposite*]

Boy Yes.

Soc. How big is it then? Isn't it four times the size?

Boy Yes, of course.

Soc. So what's four times the size is twice the size?

Boy No, by Zeus.

Soc. But how many times the size *is* it?

Boy Four times.

Soc. So it's not a figure *twice* the size that comes from a line twice the length, my boy, but one *four times* the size. c

Boy What you say is true.

Soc. For four times four is sixteen, isn't it?

Boy Yes.

Soc. But what line does an *eight*-foot figure come from? From this line comes a figure four times the size, doesn't it?

83c

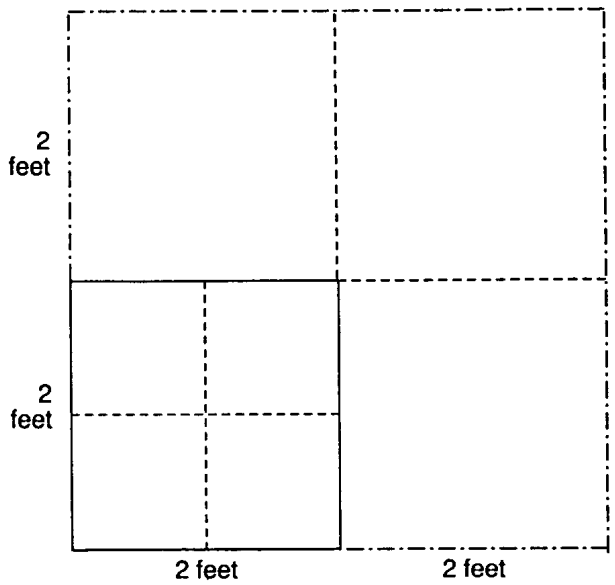

Figure 2

Boy I agree.

Soc. And this quarter-size[3] figure comes from this half-length line, doesn't it?

Boy Yes.

Soc. Right. The eight-foot figure is twice the size of this one and half the size of that one, isn't it?

Boy Yes.

Soc. Won't it be from a line bigger than this one but smaller than that? Or not?

Boy I think that is so. d

Soc. Fine; always answer what you think. And tell me, wasn't this line two feet long and the other one four feet?

Boy Yes.

Soc. So the line for the eight-foot figure needs to be bigger than this two-foot line, but smaller than the four-foot one.

Boy It does.

Soc. Then try to tell me how long a line you say it is. e

Boy Three feet.

Soc. Well, if it's to be three feet long, we'll add on half as much

[3] 'quarter-size' translates Bluck's reading τέταρτον. OCT has τετράπουν, 'four-foot'.

again of this line and that will be three feet, won't it? – these two feet here, plus this one more. And over here in the same way there will be these two feet here plus this one more, and here comes the figure you say. [*See Figure 3, below*]

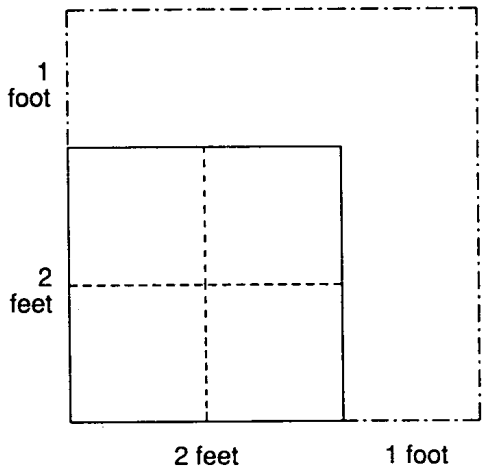

Figure 3

Boy Yes.

Soc. Then if it's three feet this way and three feet this way, doesn't the whole figure come to three times three feet?

Boy Apparently.

Soc. And how many feet are three times three?

Boy Nine.

Soc. And how many feet big did the figure which is twice the size have to be?

Boy Eight.

Soc. So a three-foot line is still not what an eight-foot figure comes from, either?

Boy No indeed.

Soc. But what line *is*? Try to tell us exactly, and if you don't wish to put a number to it, *show* us what it is instead.

Boy But by Zeus, Socrates, *I* certainly don't know. 84a

Soc. Are you observing again, Meno, what stage he's reached now in recollecting? At first he didn't know what the baseline of the eight-foot figure was, just as he still doesn't know it now either, but at that time he supposed he *did* know, and answered boldly like someone with knowledge, and didn't think he was perplexed. But

now he *has* begun to think he's perplexed, and besides not knowing, he doesn't suppose he knows either. b

Meno What you say is true.

Soc. And isn't he in a better state now in relation to the thing he doesn't know?

Meno I think that is so too.

Soc. Well, in making him perplexed and torpifying him like a torpedo fish does, we've done him no harm, have we?

Meno No, I don't think so.

Soc. In fact it seems we've done him a service towards finding the real answer, for now he'd gladly search for what he doesn't know, whereas then he'd have supposed he could speak well with ease in front of many people and on many occasions, about how a figure twice the size has to have its baseline twice the length. c

Meno It seems so.

Soc. Well, do you think he would have attempted to search out or learn what he supposed he knew but in fact didn't, till he fell into perplexity on coming to think he didn't know, and began longing for knowledge?

Meno I don't think so, Socrates.

Soc. So he has benefited from being torpified?

Meno I think so.

Soc. Now look what he'll go on from this state of perplexity to discover as he searches with me, while I do nothing but ask questions, not teach him. Watch out in case you ever find me d teaching and instructing him instead of drawing out his own opinions.

You tell me, this is our four-foot figure, isn't it? You understand?

Boy Yes I do.

Soc. And we could add on to it this other equal one here.

Boy Yes.

Soc. And this third one equal to each of the others?

Boy Yes.

Soc. Then we could fill in this one in the corner as well, couldn't we?

Boy Yes indeed.

Soc. And these would come out four equal figures, wouldn't they?

Boy Yes.

Soc. Now then, how many times the size of this one here does e this whole thing here come to?

84e

Boy Four times the size.

Soc. While what we had to get was one twice the size. Or don't you remember?

Boy I do indeed.

Soc. Then there's a line here from corner to corner, isn't there, cutting each of the figures in two? 85a

Boy Yes.

Soc. And these four lines come out equal, don't they, and surround this figure here? [*See Figure 4, below*]

Boy Yes they do.

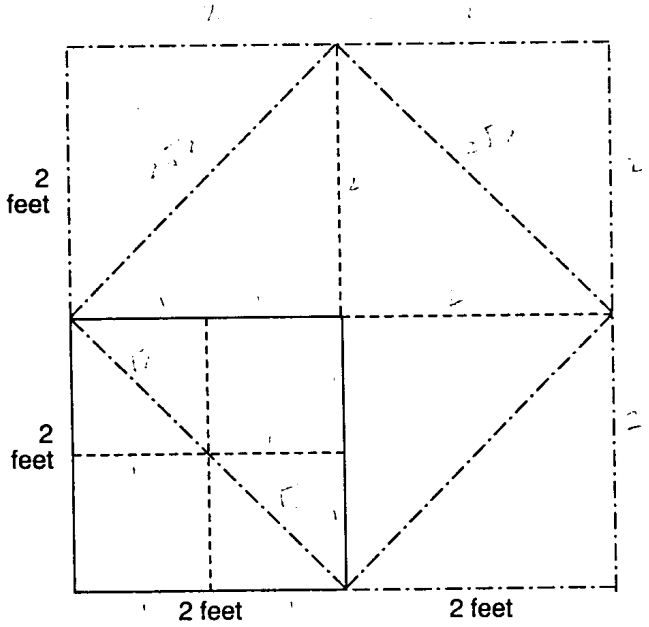

Figure 4

Soc. Now consider. How big is this figure?

Boy I don't understand.

Soc. Of these four figures here, hasn't half of each been cut off and enclosed by each line? Or is that not so?

Boy Yes.

Soc. Then how many bits of that size are there inside here?

Boy Four.

Soc. And how many inside here?

Boy Two.

85a

Soc. And how much is four as compared to two?

Boy Twice as much.

Soc. Then how big does this figure come out?

Boy Eight feet big. b

Soc. And what line does it come from?

Boy This one.

Soc. The one stretching from corner to corner of the four-foot figure?

Boy Yes.

Soc. What the experts call that is the diagonal. So if the diagonal is the name of this line then you, Meno's boy, say that a figure of twice the size would come from the diagonal.

Boy Yes indeed, Socrates.

Soc. What do you think, Meno. Has he answered with any opinions but his own?

Meno No, only with his own. c

Soc. And yet he certainly didn't *know*, as we said a little while ago.

Meno What you say is true.

Soc. But he certainly had these opinions in him – or didn't he?

Meno Yes.

Soc. So someone who doesn't know something, whatever it may be he doesn't know, has true opinions in him about the very thing he doesn't know?

Meno It appears so.

Soc. And at present it's as though in a dream that these opinions have just been aroused in him. But if someone questions him many times and in many ways about the same things as now, you may be sure he will end up knowing them as precisely as anyone does. d

Meno It seems so.

Soc. And it won't be through being taught by anyone that he knows, will it, but through being questioned, recovering the knowledge from within him for himself?

Meno Yes.

Soc. And recovering knowledge which is within one for oneself is recollecting, isn't it?

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. Well, the knowledge which this boy has now – he either acquired it sometime or else always had it, didn't he?

Meno Yes.

Soc. Then if he always had it, it follows that he was always in a

state of knowledge. On the other hand, if he acquired it sometime, it could certainly not be in his present life that he has done so. Or has someone taught him geometry? For he will do just the same e with anything in geometry or any other subject of knowledge. *Has* someone taught him everything, then? Presumably you should know, especially as he's been born and brought up in your home.

Meno No, I know that no one ever taught him.

Soc. And does he have these opinions or not?

Meno Apparently he must do, Socrates.

Soc. And if that is without acquiring them in his present life, doesn't it clearly follow that he had them and had learnt them at 86a some other time?

Meno Apparently.

Soc. And that means the time when he was not a human being, doesn't it?

Meno Yes.

Soc. Well, if both during the time that he is a human being, and during the time that he is not, there are going to be true opinions within him which become knowledge when aroused by questioning, isn't[4] his soul going to be for *all* time in a state of having learnt? For it's clear that at every time he either is, or is not, a human being.

Meno Apparently.

Soc. Then if the truth about the things which are is in our souls b always, the soul must be immortal, must it not? So shouldn't you boldly try to search for and recollect what you happen not to know – that is, not to remember – at present?

Meno I think that is well said, somehow or other, Socrates.

Soc. Yes, I think so too, Meno. I wouldn't be absolutely adamant about the rest of the argument, but that we shall be better people, more manly and less slothful, by supposing that one should enquire about things one doesn't know, than if we suppose that when we don't know things we can't find them out either and needn't search for them – *this* is something for which I absolutely c *would* fight, both in word and deed, to the limit of my powers.

Meno That too is well said I think, Socrates.

Soc. Then since we agree that one should search for what one doesn't know, would you like us to try to search together for what virtue may be?

[4] 'isn't . . .?' translates Bluck's reading ἆρ' οὐ. OCT has ἆρ' οὖν, 'then is . . .?'

Meno Yes indeed. But no – what I'd like best to consider and hear about is what I first asked: should we make the attempt on virtue as something that comes from teaching, or as coming to d people by nature, or in what way?

Soc. Well, Meno, if I were the one who ruled not just over myself but over you as well, we wouldn't consider whether or not virtue comes from teaching before first searching for what virtue itself is. But since on the contrary it's you who, while not even attempting to rule over yourself – to keep yourself free, no doubt – attempt to rule over me instead, and succeed too, I'll give way to you – what else can I do? So it seems we have to consider what e something is like when we still don't know what it is. Then please slacken your rule just one little bit at least, and consent to start from a hypothesis in considering whether virtue comes from teaching or whatever. By 'starting from a hypothesis' I mean doing what geometricians often do when considering questions they get asked – about a figure for instance, whether the given figure can be inscribed in a given circle as a triangle. 'I don't yet know whether 87a this figure *is* such as this', one of them might say, 'but I think I have a sort of hypothesis which helps with the question, as follows: *if* this figure is such that, when laid out on its given baseline, it leaves remaining a figure similar to that one which has been laid out itself, *then*, I think, one consequence follows, and a different one on the other hand if this *cannot* be done to it. So once I've set up a hypothesis, I'll willingly tell you what follows about inscribing the b figure in the circle and whether or not it can be done.' Let us deal with virtue in this same way, too. As we don't know either what it is or what it's like, let us examine whether or not it comes from teaching by setting up a hypothesis, and saying 'What *kind* of thing among those belonging to the soul would virtue have to be, for it to come from teaching or not come from teaching?' Now first, if it's a different kind of thing from knowledge, would it, or would it not, come from teaching? – or as we were saying just now, recollecting; let's treat it as making no difference which name we use – but *would* c it come from teaching? Or is at least this much clear to everyone, that a person isn't taught anything but knowledge?

Meno Yes, I think so.

Soc But if virtue *is* some sort of knowledge, clearly it *must* come from teaching?

Meno Of course.

Soc. So we've quickly disposed of the first point, how if it's one

kind of thing virtue would come from teaching, but if it's another, it wouldn't. 87c

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. Next, then, it seems we have to examine whether virtue *is* knowledge or some different kind of thing.

Meno Yes, I think that should be examined next. d

Soc. Well then, we say virtue is good, don't we, and this hypothesis 'Virtue is good' is a firm one for us?

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. Then if there's anything else, apart from knowledge, that is good, in that case virtue may perhaps not be any sort of knowledge. If on the other hand there's nothing good that is not included within knowledge, then we'd be right to suspect that virtue is some sort of knowledge.

Meno That is so.

Soc. Now, virtue is what makes us good?

Meno Yes.

Soc. And if good then beneficial, for everything good is beneficial, isn't it? e

Meno Yes.

Soc. So virtue too is beneficial?

Meno It must be, from what has been agreed.

Soc. Then let's examine what kinds of thing benefit us, taking them one by one. We say health does so, and strength, and beauty, and of course wealth – these and things like them are what we call beneficial, aren't they?

Meno Yes.

Soc. But we say these same things also sometimes do harm – 88a or would you say that's not so?

Meno No, I'd say it is so.

Soc. Consider then: what is the guiding principle which makes each of them beneficial or harmful to us as the case may be? Isn't it when guided by *right use* that they are beneficial, and when not, harmful?

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. Well then, let's go on and examine the things in the soul too. Are there things you call temperance, justice, courage, quickness in learning, memory, grandeur, and everything like these?

Meno Yes there are.

Soc. Consider then: among these things, aren't those which b you think are not knowledge but something other than knowledge,

sometimes harmful while at other times beneficial? Courage, for instance, if it's not wisdom but just a sort of boldness – when people are bold without reason they get harmed, don't they, but when they're bold with reason they benefit? 88b

Meno Yes.

Soc. And isn't it the same with temperance and with quickness in learning: *with* reason both learning and discipline are beneficial, but *without* reason they are both harmful?

Meno Yes, very much so.

Soc. To sum up, then, everything the soul endeavours or c endures under the guidance of wisdom ends in happiness, doesn't it, and the opposite under the guidance of folly?

Meno It seems so.

Soc. So if virtue is a thing in the soul and must necessarily be beneficial, it has to be wisdom, since none of the things in the soul are either beneficial or harmful in themselves, but it's the addition of wisdom or folly which makes them either harmful or beneficial. d According to this argument, once granted that virtue is beneficial, it has to be some sort of wisdom.

Meno Yes, I think so.

Soc. Now what is more, isn't it the same with the other things which we were saying just now are sometimes good and sometimes harmful – wealth and things like that? Just as we found that wisdom made the things in the soul beneficial when it guided the rest of the soul, so again with these other things too, it's by using e and guiding them rightly that the soul makes them beneficial, and by doing so wrongly that it makes them harmful – isn't that so?

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. And is it the wise soul which guides rightly, and the foolish one which guides wrongly?

Meno It is.

Soc. Then it can be said about everything, can't it, that everything else a person has depends on his soul, and the things within the soul itself depend on wisdom, if they're going to be good; and 89a by this argument what is beneficial will be wisdom. And we say virtue is beneficial?

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. So we say virtue is wisdom – either the whole or a part?

Meno I think what you're saying is finely said, Socrates.

Soc. Then if that is so, good people do not come into being by nature.

Meno I think not.

Soc. Yes, and presumably there's this point as well. If good people came into being by nature, presumably we'd have had people who could recognize children with good natures, and we'd take the ones they pointed out and guard them in the Acropolis, sealing them up much more carefully than gold bullion, so that no one should corrupt them and when they grew up they could come to be useful to their cities.

Meno Very likely so, Socrates.

Soc. Well, since good people don't come to be so by nature, is it by learning?

Meno I think that must necessarily follow. And it's clear on the basis of the hypothesis, Socrates, that virtue comes from teaching if it's knowledge.

Soc. Perhaps, by Zeus. But I'm afraid we may not have done so finely in agreeing on that.

Meno Yet it seemed finely said a moment ago.

Soc. But I'm afraid it needs to seem finely said not only a moment ago but also in the present and the future, if there's to be anything sound about it.

Meno What's all this? What do you see to make you dissatisfied with it, and doubtful about virtue being knowledge?

Soc. I'll tell you, Meno. It's not the statement that it comes from teaching *if* it's knowledge that I retract as other than finely said. But as to whether it *is* knowledge, consider whether you think I'm reasonable in my doubts about *that*. Tell me this: if *anything at all* – not just virtue – comes from teaching, must there not be teachers and learners of it?

Meno Yes, I think so.

Soc. And conversely, given something of which there were no teachers or learners, shouldn't we be making a fair guess if we guessed that this didn't come from teaching?

Meno That is so – but don't you think there are teachers of virtue?

Soc. Well, I've often searched to see if there were any teachers of it, but for all my efforts I can't find any. And yet I make the search in company with many people, and for choice with the ones I suppose to be most experienced in the matter. And look, Meno, we're in luck now, too – here's Anytus just sat down beside us; let's invite him to share our search. It would make good sense; first, Anytus here had a father Anthemion who was wise as well as rich –

he didn't come to be rich by sheer chance or by a gift from someone (like Ismenias the Theban who has just taken over the fortune of Polycrates) but by achieving it through his own wisdom and diligence; and besides that, he was a citizen who didn't seem to be arrogant, or pompous and disagreeable, but a peaceful, modest man. Besides, he brought up and educated Anytus well, in the view of the Athenian public – at any rate, they elect him to the highest offices. Obviously this is the right kind of person to have with one in the search for whether or not there are teachers of virtue and who they are. So do join your guest-friend Meno and myself, Anytus, in our search for who the teachers of this subject might be. Consider it like this: if we wished Meno here to become a good doctor, what teachers would we send him to? Wouldn't it be to doctors?

Anytus Yes indeed.

Soc. What if we wished him to become a good cobbler? Wouldn't it be to cobblers?

Any. Yes.

Soc. And the same for everything else?

Any. Yes indeed.

Soc. Now tell me this about the same examples as before. We'd do well to send him to doctors if we wished him to become a doctor, we say. In saying this, do we mean we'd be acting sensibly in sending him to the people who profess the skill rather than to those who don't, people who charge a fee precisely on these grounds and advertise themselves as teachers for anyone who wants to go and learn? Isn't it with this in mind that we'd do well to send him?

Any. Yes.

Soc. And it's the same with flute-playing and everything else, isn't it? If we wish to make a flute-player of someone, it would be very foolish to refuse to send him to the people who undertake to teach the skill and charge fees, and instead bother other people[5] who neither claim to be teachers, nor have a single pupil, in the subject we expect them to teach the person we're sending. Don't you think it would be very irrational?

Any. Yes I do, by Zeus, and very ignorant too.

Soc. Finely spoken. Well then, possibly you'll join me now in

[5] OCT includes here an additional phrase, ζητοῦντα μανθάνειν παρὰ τούτων, 'seeking to learn from them', which I have followed Bluck in omitting.

planning for your guest-friend Meno here. He's been telling me for a long time, Anytus, how he desires the wisdom and virtue through which people run homes and cities finely, look after their parents, and know how to receive and send off both fellow-citizens and guest-friends from abroad in the manner worthy of a good man. So consider: who would be the right people to send him to for this virtue? Or is it quite clear, on the basis of what we've just said, that it would be those who profess to be teachers of virtue and advertise themselves as available to anyone in Greece who wishes to learn, fixing and charging fees for it?

Any. And who are these you are speaking of, Socrates?

Soc. Surely you too must know – they're the men people call Sophists.

Any. By Heracles, Socrates, say no such thing! Let none of my friends or associates, whether Athenian or guest-friend from abroad, be seized by such madness as to go to them and be made havoc of – since *they're* just plain havoc and corruption to everyone in their company.

Soc. What do you mean, Anytus? Are these people so uniquely different from all the others who claim to know how to provide a service, that they not merely fail to do any benefit to what's put in their hands as the others do, but actually corrupt it? And this is what they openly think fit to charge money for? Well, I for one can't believe you. For I know that Protagoras, one man alone, got more money from this branch of wisdom, than Pheidias who produced such outstandingly fine works, and ten other sculptors all combined. Besides, a man who works on old shoes or repairs clothes couldn't take people in for one month if he returned the clothes or shoes in a worse state than he'd received them in, but would soon go starving if he did such things. Surely it's incredible to suggest that Protagoras took in the whole of Greece for more than forty *years*, corrupting those in his company and sending them away in a worse state than he received them in – for I believe that when he died he had lived for nearly seventy years and practised his art for forty – and in all that time, and up to this very day, he has lost none of his good reputation – and not only Protagoras, but a great many others too, some who came before him and others even now still alive. Are we to say on your argument, then, that they defraud and make havoc of young men *knowingly*, or do they take themselves in too? Are we to judge them to be as crazy as that, these men whom some say are the wisest of people?

Any. *They're* far from being crazy, Socrates – no, it's much more the young men who give them the money, and even more than these it's their relatives who let them, but most of all by far it's the cities who allow these men entry and don't expel them, whether they be visitors or natives who start such activities.

Soc. Has one of the Sophists wronged you, Anytus, or why are you so angry with them?

Any. By Zeus, no; *I've* never yet been in any of their company, and I wouldn't allow anyone else in my family to be, either.

Soc. So you've had no experience at all of the men?

Any. And I hope I never shall have.

Soc. Then, my good sir, how could you know whether there's any good or bad in this business, if you've had no experience at all of it?

Any. Easily – after all, I know who these people are, whether I've had experience of them or not.

Soc. Perhaps you've got second sight, Anytus, for from what you yourself say I'd be puzzled how you know about them otherwise. However, we weren't enquiring whom Meno should join in order to acquire *vice* – let that be the Sophists if you wish – but tell us instead, and do this hereditary friend of yours a service by telling him – whom in our great city should he join to become distinguished in the *virtue* I just described?

Any. Why haven't *you* told him?

Soc. Well, I did mention the people I supposed were teachers of these things, but you say I was just talking nonsense and perhaps there's something in what you say. No, you take your turn and tell him which Athenians he should go to. Name whom you wish.

Any. But why need he hear one person's name? Anyone he meets from among the fine and good of the Athenians will make him better than the Sophists would, without exception, if he's ready to take advice.

Soc. And did these fine and good people come to be as they are by sheer chance – never having learnt from anyone but all the same able to teach others what they never learnt themselves?

Any. I expect they learnt in their turn from people who were fine and good in the past. Or do you not think there have been many good men in this city?

Soc. Yes, Anytus, I do think there are men here who are good at public affairs, and that there have been in the past, no less than there are. But have they really also been good *teachers* of their own

virtue? For that's what our discussion is actually about. What we've been considering all this time is not whether there are any good men here or not, nor whether there have been any in the past, but whether virtue comes from teaching. And in considering that, the question we're considering is whether the good men, either of nowadays or of the past, knew how to pass on the virtue they themselves possessed to other people as well, or whether this is something which people can't pass on or receive from one another. That is what Meno and I have been searching for all this time. So consider it like this, starting from what you yourself say. Wouldn't you say that Themistocles was a good man?

Any. Yes I would, more than anybody in fact.

Soc. Then if anyone were a teacher of his own virtue, wouldn't Themistocles have been a good teacher of his?

Any. Yes, I suppose so, if he'd wished to be.

Soc. But don't you suppose he *would* have wished other people to become fine and good, and especially his own son, presumably? Or do you suppose he begrudged him this and it was on purpose that he didn't pass on the virtue he himself possessed? Haven't you heard how Themistocles had his son taught to be a good horseman? He used to balance on a horse standing upright, and throw the javelin from on horseback in that position, and perform many other marvels which his father trained him to do, so as to make him wise in everything which depended on good teachers. Or haven't you heard this from older people?

Any. I have.

Soc. So no one could blame his son's *nature* for being bad.

Any. No, perhaps not.

Soc. But as to his being a good or wise man in the ways in which his father was – have you ever yet heard, from anyone either young or old, that Cleophantus son of Themistocles was *that*?

Any. No indeed.

Soc. Well, do we suppose Themistocles *wished* to train his son in these other ways but make him no better than his neighbours in the wisdom he possessed himself – if virtue comes by teaching, that is.

Any. By Zeus, perhaps not.

Soc. So you see what kind of teacher of virtue *he* was – the man you yourself agree to be the very best of all those in the past. But let's consider someone else – Aristides son of Lysimachus. Or don't you agree that he was a good man?

Any. Yes I do – definitely.

Soc. And didn't he too give his son Lysimachus the finest training in Athens in everything which depended on good teachers? But do you think he made him better than anyone else *as a man*? I expect you've been in this man's company and can see for yourself what he's like. Or if you like, take that grandest of wise men Pericles. You know he brought up two sons, Paralus and Xanthippus?

Any. Yes, I do.

Soc. Well, as you yourself know, he taught those sons to be horsemen second to none in Athens, also he trained them till they were second to none in music and athletics and everything else which depends on skill – and did he really not *wish* to make them good men? I should think he wished it; what I suspect is that it doesn't come from teaching. Again, in case you were to suppose it's just a few and the least worthy of the Athenians who've turned out powerless in this matter, think how Thucydides also brought up two sons, Melesias and Stephanos. He trained those sons well in every way, while as wrestlers they were the finest in Athens – he gave one to Xanthias to teach and the other to Eudoros, these being thought the finest wrestlers of their time, I believe – or don't you remember?

Any. Yes, so I've heard.

Soc. Isn't it clear then, if Thucydides taught his sons everything in the cases where he had to spend money to teach them, that he would never have omitted to teach them in the case where he could have made them good men without having to pay a thing – *if* that subject came from teaching? Or was Thucydides not a worthy person perhaps, not someone with vast numbers of friends among Athenians and the allies? He belonged to a great family and held great power in Athens and in all Greece; so if virtue did come from teaching he could have found either someone in Athens or a guest-friend from somewhere else who would make his sons good men, if he hadn't got time himself because of his public duties. But in fact, Anytus my friend, I suspect virtue doesn't come from teaching.

Any. Socrates, I think you speak ill of people very easily. I'd advise you to be careful, if you're ready to take my advice. Maybe in other cities too it's easier to harm people than to do them good, but it certainly is here, as I suppose you know yourself.

Soc. Meno, I think Anytus is angry, and I'm not surprised – for

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in the first place he supposes I'm speaking ill of those people, secondly he believes he's one of them himself. Well, if he ever comes to know what kind of thing speaking ill is, he'll stop being angry, but he doesn't know at present. But you tell me, aren't there fine and good men in your city too?

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. Well then, are they ready to offer themselves as teachers b for young people, and do they agree that they're teachers and that virtue comes from teaching?

Meno No by Zeus, Socrates; on the contrary, you'd sometimes hear from them that it comes from teaching, but sometimes that it doesn't.

Soc. So are we to say that people for whom not even this is agreed can be teachers in the subject?

Meno I don't think so, Socrates.

Soc. What next then? These Sophists, the only people who announce themselves as such – do you think *they're* teachers of virtue?

Meno Well with Gorgias, Socrates, the thing I find most re- c markable is that you'd never hear him professing that, and in fact he laughs at the others whenever he hears them professing it. No, he thinks that what he has to do is make people clever speakers.

Soc. So *you* don't think the Sophists are teachers of virtue either?

Meno I can't say, Socrates. I'm in the same state as most people – sometimes I think they are, sometimes not.

Soc. Do you know, it's not only you and these other people in public life who sometimes think virtue comes from teaching and sometimes not. Do you know, the poet Theognis says the very d same thing.

Meno In which verses?

Soc. In the elegiacs, where he says:

> 'Take food and drink with men whose power is great,
> And sit by them, and on their pleasure wait:
> From noble men is learnt nobility
> And minds grow rotten through bad company.' e

You see how in *these* lines he speaks of virtue as something which comes from teaching?

Meno Apparently so, at least.

Soc. But elsewhere he shifts his ground a bit and says:

95e

> 'Could mind be formed and set in man by art,
> Many and great the fees men would impart.'

– to those who could do this, and –

> 'No good man's son would ever bad become,
> Hearkening to wise words. But never could 96a
> The best of teaching make a bad man good.'

Do you observe how he says opposite things himself about the same subject?

Meno Apparently.

Soc. Well, can you tell me any other subject where those claiming to be teachers, far from being agreed to be capable of teaching others, aren't even agreed to know the subject themselves, but instead are agreed to be poor at the very subject of which they say b they're teachers, while the people who *are* agreed to be fine and good themselves say one minute that this comes from teaching and the next that it doesn't? Would you say then that people who are so confused about a subject could properly count as teachers of it?

Meno No I wouldn't, by Zeus.

Soc. Then if neither the Sophists, nor the people who are fine and good themselves, are teachers of the subject, clearly no one else could be?

Meno I don't think so.

Soc. And if there are no teachers, there are no learners either? c

Meno I think it is as you say.

Soc. And we did agree that where there are no teachers or learners of a subject, this subject doesn't come from teaching?[6]

Meno We did.

Soc. And there appear to be no teachers anywhere of virtue?

Meno That is so.

Soc. And if no teachers, no learners either.

Meno Apparently so.

Soc. So virtue can't be something which comes from teaching.

Meno It seems not, if we've considered the question rightly. d

And so I really do wonder, Socrates, whether there are any good men at all, or if some *do* become good, what their method of becoming it might be.

[6] 'doesn't come from teaching' translates Bluck's reading μὴ διδακτὸν εἶναι. OCT has μηδὲ . . ., 'doesn't come from teaching, either'.

96d

Soc. I'm afraid, Meno, that you and I are rather poor specimens – Gorgias has not trained you adequately nor Prodicus me. We must turn our attention more than ever to ourselves then, and search for someone who will somehow or other manage to make us better. I say this looking back at our search a moment ago and how e ridiculous it was that we didn't notice it's *not* only with knowledge as guide that men do things well and rightly. Perhaps that is the gap through which the understanding of how good men come into being is escaping us.

Meno What do you mean, Socrates?

Soc. This. We were right to agree that good men must be beneficial and that this could not be otherwise, weren't we? 97a

Meno Yes.

Soc. And presumably we were also doing fine when we agreed that they will be beneficial if they guide our affairs aright?

Meno Yes.

Soc. But as to not being able to guide aright without having wisdom, we don't look as though we've been right to agree to that point.

Meno So what do you mean?

Soc. I'll tell you. If someone who knew the road to Larisa, or wherever else you like, went there and guided others, he'd guide them rightly and well, wouldn't he?

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. And what if it were someone who had a *right opinion* as to b what the road was, but had never been there and didn't know it? Wouldn't he too guide aright?

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. And so long as he has right opinion about what the other person has knowledge of, presumably he will be no worse as a guide through having true opinion without being wise on the matter, than someone who *is* wise on it.

Meno No, not at all.

Soc. So true opinion is no worse a guide in acting rightly than wisdom, and this is the point we missed out just now in considering what sort of thing virtue is, when we said that only wisdom can c guide right action. In fact there is also true opinion.

Meno It does seem so.

Soc. So right opinion is no less beneficial than knowledge.

Meno Except, Socrates, that someone with knowledge would be successful all the time, while someone with right opinion would

97c

sometimes be successful and sometimes not.

Soc. What do you mean? Wouldn't someone who had right opinion all the time be successful all the time, so long as his opinion is right?

Meno It must be so, it appears to me. So in that case, Socrates, I wonder why on earth knowledge is so much more valuable than d right opinion, and what makes either of them different from the other.

Soc. Do you know what makes you wonder, or shall I tell you?

Meno Do tell me.

Soc. It's because you haven't paid attention to the statues of Daedalus – but perhaps you haven't got any in your parts.

Meno Why do you say that?

Soc. Because they too escape and run away if they are not tied down, but stay in place if they are.

Meno What about it? e

Soc. It's of no great value to own one of Daedalus' productions that's loose, any more than a runaway slave – for it won't stay – but to own one that's tied down is worth a lot; they are very fine works. So what am I thinking about in saying this? True opinions. True opinions too are a fine thing and altogether good in their effects so long as they stay with one, but they won't willingly stay long and 98a instead run away from a person's soul, so they're not worth much until one ties them down by reasoning out the explanation. And that is recollection, Meno my friend, as we agreed earlier. And when they've been tied down, then for one thing they become items of knowledge, and for another, permanent. And that's what makes knowledge more valuable than right opinion, and the way knowledge differs from right opinion is by being tied down.

Meno By Zeus, Socrates, it does seem likely to be something of that kind.

Soc. Well of course I'm only speaking myself from what looks b likely, not from knowledge. However, I don't at all think it merely looks likely that right opinion and knowledge are different kinds of things. No, if there's anything I would say I know – and few enough such things there are – this is one thing I *would* include among those I know.

Meno And you're quite right in saying that, Socrates.

Soc. Well, am I not also right in saying that when true opinion is the guide it is no worse than knowledge at carrying out the activity of every field of practice?

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Meno I think what you're saying is true there too.

Soc. So right opinion will be no worse and no less beneficial c than knowledge, for practical purposes, nor will a man who *has* right opinion be any worse or less beneficial than one with knowledge.

Meno That is so.

Soc. Now we've agreed that a good man is a beneficial one?

Meno Yes.

Soc. Well then, since it's not only through knowledge that there can be men who are good and beneficial to their cities, given that there are such, but also through right opinion, and since people don't have either of these by nature – neither knowledge nor true opinion[7] – or do you think people do have either of them by d nature?

Meno No I don't.

Soc. Then since it's not by nature, people can't be good by nature, either.

Meno No indeed.

Soc. And since it's not by nature, the next thing we were considering was whether it came from teaching.

Meno Yes.

Soc. And it seemed, didn't it, that virtue *would* come from teaching if it were wisdom?

Meno Yes.

Soc. And indeed that it must be wisdom if it *did* come from teaching?

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. And that if there were teachers it would come from teach- e ing, but otherwise not?

Meno Just so.

Soc. But in fact we agreed there aren't any teachers of it?

Meno That is so.

Soc. Thus we have agreed that it does *not* come from teaching and is *not* wisdom?

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. But we do agree that it's something *good*?

Meno Yes.

Soc. And that a thing is beneficial and good if it guides aright?

[7] I have followed Bluck in omitting the obelized οὔτ ἐπίκτητα recorded in OCT at this point.

98e

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. And that there are only the two things – true opinion and 99a knowledge – which guide aright so that by having them a human being could guide aright – for things which come out right by mere chance don't come about through human guidance – but where a *human being* guides anything in the right course, the two things involved are true opinion and knowledge.

Meno I think so.

Soc. And since virtue doesn't come from teaching it can no longer be knowledge either, can it?

Meno Apparently not.

Soc. So of the two things which are good and beneficial we b have dismissed one, and it can't be knowledge that is the guide in public life.

Meno I don't think so.

Soc. So it isn't by any sort of wisdom, or by being wise, that men like Themistocles or the others that Anytus here mentioned a moment ago guide their cities. And that's why they can't make other people like they are themselves – because it's not through knowledge that they are as they are.

Meno It seems to be as you say, Socrates.

Soc. If it's not by knowledge, then, it only remains for it to come about by good opinion. That's what statesmen employ in c setting their cities to rights, and as far as wisdom is concerned they are no different from soothsayers or seers – for these too say many true things in their trances without knowing what they are talking about.

Meno Perhaps it *is* like that.

Soc. And don't men deserve to be called divine, Meno, when they have many great successes in what they do and say, all without thought?

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. So we'd be right both to apply the word 'divine' to the soothsayers and seers we were just speaking of, along with all the d poets, and also to say that statesmen are not the least among these in being divinely entranced, inspired and possessed by the god as they must be when they speak successfully on many great issues without knowing what they are talking about.

Meno Yes indeed.

Soc. And you know, Meno, women do call good men 'divine', and the Spartans, whenever they pay tribute to a good man, say,

'He's a divine man'. 99d

Meno And apparently they speak rightly, Socrates – though e
Anytus here may not like you saying it.

Soc. That's not my concern. I'll be discussing with him again later, Meno, but as to us now, if we've done finely in our search and in what we've been saying in this whole discussion, then virtue can't come either by nature or from teaching, but comes to people, when it does, by divine dispensation without thought – unless there 100a were to be a statesman such that he could make someone else a statesman too. If there were, he could be described as being, among the living, rather like Homer describes Teiresias as being among the dead, when he says of him:

> He alone [of those in Hades] had life and mind;
> the rest were shadows.

That is just what such a man would be like in this world – something real among shadows in terms of virtue.

Meno I think that is most finely said, Socrates. b

Soc. Well then, Meno, on the basis of this reasoning we find that virtue apparently comes to people, when it does, by divine dispensation. But we shan't have clear knowledge about it, until before searching for how virtue comes to people we first try to search out what it is in itself. But just now, it's time for me to go somewhere, and you please try and convince your guest-friend Anytus here of everything you've been convinced of yourself, so as to soften him down – for if you convince *him*, you will be doing the c Athenians a service too.