Meno

Persons of the Dialogue
MENO
SOCRATES
A SLAVE OF MENO
ANYTUS

Meno. Can you tell me, Socrates, whether virtue is acquired by teaching or by practice; or if neither by teaching nor practice, then whether it comes to man by nature, or in what other way?

Soc. By the gods, Meno, be generous, and tell me what you say that virtue is; for I shall be truly delighted to find that I have been mistaken, and that you and Gorgias do really have this knowledge; although I have been just saying that I have never found anybody who had.

Men. There will be no difficulty, Socrates, in answering your question. Let us take first the virtue of a man—he should know how to administer the state, and in the administration of it to benefit his friends and harm his enemies; and he must also be careful not to suffer harm himself. A woman's virtue, if you wish to know about that, may also be easily described: her duty is to order her house, and keep what is indoors, and obey her husband. Every age, every condition of life, young or old, male or female, bond or free, has a different virtue: there are virtues numberless, and no lack of definitions of them; for virtue is relative to the actions and ages of each of us in all that we do. And the same may be said of vice, Socrates.

Soc. How fortunate I am, Meno! When I ask you for one virtue, you present me with a swarm of them, which are in your keeping. Suppose that I carry on the figure of the swarm, and ask of you, What is the nature of the bee? and you answer that there are many kinds of bees, and I reply: But do bees differ as bees, because there are many and different kinds of them; or are they not rather to be distinguished by some other quality, as for example beauty, size, or shape? How would you answer me?

Men. I should answer that bees do not differ from one another, as bees. Soc. And if I went on to say: That is what I desire to know, Meno; tell me what is the quality in which they do not differ, but are all alike;—would you be able to answer? Men. I should.

Soc. And so of the virtues, however many and different they may be, they have all a common nature which makes them virtues; and on this he who would answer the question, "What is virtue?" would do well to have his eye fixed: Do you understand?

Men. I am beginning to understand; but I do not as yet take hold of the question as I could wish.

Soc. When you say, Meno, that there is one virtue of a man, another of a woman, another of a child, and so on, does this apply only to virtue, or would you say the same of health, and size, and strength? Or is the nature of health always the same, whether in man or woman?

Men. I should say that health is the same, both in man and woman.

Soc. And is not this true of size and strength? If a woman is strong, she will be strong by reason of the same form and of the same strength subsisting in her which there is in the man. I mean to say that strength, as strength, whether of man or woman, is the same. Is there any difference?

Men. I think not.

Soc. And will not virtue, as virtue, be the same, whether in a child or in a grown-up person, in a woman or in a man?

Men. I cannot help feeling, Socrates, that this case is different from the others.

Soc. But why? Were you not saying that the virtue of a man was to order a state, and the virtue of a woman was to order a house?

Men. I did say so.

Soc. And can either house or state or anything be well ordered without temperance and without justice?

Men. Certainly not.

Soc. Then they who order a state or a house temperately or justly order them with temperance and justice?

Men. Certainly.

Soc. Then both men and women, if they are to be good men and women, must have the same virtues of temperance and justice?

Men. True.

Soc. And can either a young man or an elder one be good, if they are intemperate and unjust?

Men. They cannot.

Soc. They must be temperate and just?

Men. Yes.

Soc. Then all men are good in the same way, and by participation in the same virtues?

Men. Such is the inference.

Soc. And they surely would not have been good in the same way, unless their virtue had been the same?

Men. They would not.

Soc. Then now that the sameness of all virtue has been proven, try and remember what you and Gorgias say that virtue is.

Men. Will you have one definition of them all?

Soc. That is what I am seeking.

Men. What do you mean?

Soc. I mean as I might say about anything; that a round, for example, is "a figure" and not simply "figure," and I should adopt this mode of speaking, because there are other figures. Men. Yes, Socrates; I agree there; for justice is virtue.

Soc. Would you say "virtue," Meno, or "a virtue"?

Men. What do you mean?

Soc. I mean as I might say about anything; that a round, for example, is "a figure" and not simply "figure," and I should adopt this mode of speaking, because there are other figures.

Men. Quite right; and that is just what I am saying about virtue—that there are other virtues as well as justice.

Soc. What are they? tell me the names of them, as I would tell you the names of the other figures if you asked me.

Men. Courage and temperance and wisdom and magnanimity are virtues; and there are many others.

Soc. Yes, Meno; and again we are in the same case: in searching after one virtue we have found many, though not in the same way as before; but we have been unable to find the common virtue which runs through them all.

Men. Why, Socrates, even now I am not able to follow you in the attempt to get at one common notion of virtue as of other things.
Soc. No wonder; but I will try to get nearer if I can, for you know that all things have a common notion.

[Digression on figures, used to explain that virtue is that which unites all virtues]

Soc. Well then, for my own sake as well as for yours, I will do my very best; but I am afraid that I shall not be able to give you very many as good: and now, in your turn, you are to fulfil your promise, and tell me what virtue is in the universal; and do not make a singular into a plural, as the facetious say of those who break a thing, but deliver virtue to me whole and sound, and not broken into a number of pieces: I have given you the pattern.

Men. Well then, Socrates, virtue, as I take it, is when he, who desires the honourable, is able to provide it for himself; so the poet says, and I say too.-Virtue is the desire of things honourable and the power of attaining them.

Soc. And does he who desires the honourable also desire the good?

Men. Certainly.

Soc. Then are there some who desire the evil and others who desire the good? Do not all men, my dear sir, desire good?

Men. I think not.

Soc. There are some who desire evil?

Men. Yes.

Soc. Do you mean that they think the evils which they desire, to be good; or do they know that they are evil and yet desire them?

Men. Both, I think.

Soc. And do you really imagine, Meno, that a man knows evils to be evils and desires them notwithstanding?

Men. Certainly I do.

Soc. And desire is of possession?

Men. Yes, of possession.

Soc. And does he think that the evils will do good to him who possesses them, or does he know that they will do him harm?

Men. There are some who think that the evils will do them good, and others who know that they will do them harm.

Soc. And, in your opinion, do those who think that they will do them good know that they are evils?

Men. Certainly not.

Soc. Is it not obvious that those who are ignorant of their nature do not desire them; but they desire what they suppose to be goods although they are really evils; and if they are mistaken and suppose the evils to be good they really desire goods?

Men. Yes, in that case.

Soc. Well, and do those who, as you say, desire evils, and think that evils are hurtful to the possessor of them, know that they will be hurt by them?

Men. They must know it.

Soc. And must they not suppose that those who are hurt are miserable in proportion to the hurt which is inflicted upon them?

Men. How can it be otherwise?

Soc. But are not the miserable ill-fated?

Men. Yes, indeed.

Soc. And does any one desire to be miserable and ill-fated?

Men. I should say not, Socrates.
Men. What of that?
Soc. What of that! Why, did not I ask you to tell me the nature of virtue as a whole? And you are very far from telling me this; but declare every action to be virtue which is done with a part of virtue; as though you had told me and I must already know the whole of virtue, and this too when frittered away into little pieces. And, therefore, my dear I fear that I must begin again and repeat the same question: What is virtue? for otherwise, I can only say, that every action done with a part of virtue is virtue; what else is the meaning of saying that every action done with justice is virtue? Ought I not to ask the question over again; for can any one who does not know virtue know a part of virtue?
Men. No; I do not say that he can.
Soc. Do you remember how, in the example of figure, we rejected any answer given in terms which were as yet unexplained or unadmitted?
Men. Yes, Socrates; and we were quite right in doing so.
Soc. But then, my friend, do not suppose that we can explain to any one the nature of virtue as a whole through some unexplained portion of virtue, or anything at all in that fashion; we should only have to ask over again the old question, What is virtue? Am I not right?
Men. I believe that you are.
Soc. Some of them were priests and priestesses, who had studied how they might be able to divine that-
Men. Yes, Socrates; and we were quite right in doing so.
Soc. They spoke of a glorious truth, as I conceive.
Men. What did they say?
Soc. They spoke of a glorious truth, as I conceive.
Men. What was it? and who were they?
Soc. Some of them were priests and priestesses, who had studied how they might be able to divine that-
Men. Yes, Socrates; but what do you mean by saying that we do not learn, and that what we call learning is only a process of recollection? Can you teach me how this is?
Men. I will tell you why: I have heard from certain wise men and women who spoke of things divine that-
Soc. Why not?
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Soc. But then, my friend, do not suppose that we can explain to any one the nature of virtue as a whole through some unexplained portion of virtue, or anything at all in that fashion; we should only have to ask over again the old question, What is virtue? Am I not right?
Men. I believe that you are.
Soc. Do you see, Meno, what advances he has made in his power of recollection? He did not know at first, and he does not now know, what is the side of a figure of eight feet: but then he thought that he knew, and answered confidently as if he knew, and had no difficulty; now he has a difficulty, and neither knows nor fancies that he knows.

Meno. True.

Soc. Is he not better off in knowing his ignorance?

Meno. I think that he is.

Soc. If we have made him doubt, and given him the "torpedo's shock," have we done him any harm?

Meno. I think not.

Soc. We have certainly, as would seem, assisted him in some degree to the discovery of the truth; and now he will wish to remedy his ignorance, but then he would have been ready to tell all the world against again and again that the double space should have a double side.

Meno. True.

Soc. But do you suppose that he would ever have enquired into or learned what he fancied that he knew, though he was really ignorant of it, until he had fallen into perplexity under the idea that he did not know, and had desired to know?

Meno. I think not, Socrates.

Soc. Then he was the better for the torpedo's touch?

Meno. Yes.

Soc. Mark now the farther development. I shall only ask him, and not teach him, and he shall share the enquiry with me: and do you watch and see if you find me telling or explaining anything to him, instead of eliciting his opinion. Tell me, boy, is not this a square of four feet which I have drawn?

[The boy responds correctly to Socrates’ questions about the relationship between the areas of triangles and squares with equal sides]

Boy. Certainly, Socrates.

Soc. What do you say of him, Meno? Were not all these answers given out of his own head?

Meno. Yes, they were all his own.

Soc. And yet, as we were just now saying, he did not know?

Meno. True.

Soc. But still he had in him those notions of his-had he not?

Meno. Yes.

Soc. Then he who does not know may still have true notions of that which he does not know?

Meno. He has.

Soc. And at present these notions have just been stirred up in him, as in a dream; but if he were frequently asked the same questions, in different forms, he would know as well as any one at last?

Meno. I dare say.

Soc. Without any one teaching him he will recover his knowledge for himself, if he is only asked questions?

Meno. Yes.

Soc. And this spontaneous recovery of knowledge in him is recollection?

Meno. True.

Soc. And this knowledge which he now has must he not either have acquired or always possessed?

Meno. Yes.
that virtue is or is not knowledge, in that case will it be taught or not? or, as we were just
now saying, remembered? For there is no use in disputing about the name. But is virtue
taught or not? or rather, does not everyone see that knowledge alone is taught?
Men. I agree.
Soc. Then if virtue is knowledge, virtue will be taught?
Men. Certainly.
Soc. Then now we have made a quick end of this question: if virtue is of such a nature, it will
be taught; and if not, not?
Men. Certainly.
Soc. The next question is, whether virtue is knowledge or of another species?
Men. Yes, that appears to be the -question which comes next in order.
Soc. Do we not say that virtue is a good? This is a hypothesis which is not set aside.
Men. Certainly.
Soc. Now, if there be any sort-of good which is distinct from knowledge, virtue may be that
good; but if knowledge embraces all good, then we shall be right in think in that virtue is
knowledge?
Men. True.
Soc. And virtue makes us good?
Men. Yes.
Soc. And if we are good, then we are profitable; for all good things are profitable?
Men. Yes.
Soc. Then virtue is profitable?
Men. That is the only inference.
Soc. Then now let us see what are the things which severally profit us. Health and strength,
and beauty and wealth-these, and the like of these, we call profitable?
Men. True.
Soc. And yet these things may also sometimes do us harm: would you not think so?
Men. Yes.
Soc. And what is the guiding principle which makes them profitable or the reverse? Are they
not profitable when they are rightly used, and hurtful when they are not rightly used?
Men. Certainly.
Soc. Next, let us consider the goods of the soul: they are temperance, justice, courage,
quickness of apprehension, memory, magnanimity, and the like?
Men. Surely.
Soc. And such of these as are not knowledge, but of another sort, are sometimes profitable
and sometimes hurtful; as, for example, courage wanting prudence, which is only a sort of
confidence? When a man has no sense he is harmed by courage, but when he has sense he is
profited?
Men. True.
Soc. And the same may be said of temperance and quickness of apprehension; whatever
things are learned or done with sense are profitable, but when done without sense they are
hurtful?
Men. Very true.
Soc. And in general, all that the attempts or endures, when under the guidance of wisdom,
ends in happiness; but when she is under the guidance of folly, in the opposite?
Men. That appears to be true.
Soc. If then virtue is a quality of the soul, and is admitted to be profitable, it must be wisdom
or prudence, since none of the things of the soul are either profitable or hurtful in themselves,
but they are all made profitable or hurtful by the addition of wisdom or of folly; and therefore
and therefore if virtue is profitable, virtue must be a sort of wisdom or prudence?
Men. I quite agree.
Soc. And the other goods, such as wealth and the like, of which we were just now saying that
they are sometimes good and sometimes evil, do not they also become profitable or hurtful,
accordingly as the soul guides and uses them rightly or wrongly; just as the things of the soul
herself are benefitted when under the guidance of wisdom and harmed by folly?
Men. True.
Soc. And the wise soul guides them rightly, and the foolish soul wrongly.
Men. Yes.
Soc. And is not this universally true of human nature? All other things hang upon the soul,
and the things of the soul herself hang upon wisdom, if they are to be good; and so wisdom is
inferred to be that which profits-and virtue, as we say, is profitable?
Men. Certainly.
Soc. And thus we arrive at the conclusion that virtue is either wholly or partly wisdom?
Men. I think that what you are saying, Socrates, is very true.
Soc. But if this is true, then the good are not by nature good?
Men. I think not.
Soc. If they had been, there would assuredly have been discerners of characters among us
who would have known our future great men; and on their showing we should have adopted
them, and when we had got them, we should have kept them in the citadel out of the way of
harm, and set a stamp upon them far rather than upon a piece of gold, in order that no one
might tamper with them; and when they grew up they would have been useful to the state?
Men. Yes, Socrates, that would have been the right way.
Soc. But if the good are not by nature good, are they made good by instruction?
Men. There appears to be no other alternative, Socrates. On the supposition that virtue is
knowledge, there can be no doubt that virtue is taught.
Soc. Yes, indeed; but what if the supposition is erroneous?
Men. I certainly thought just now that we were right.
Soc. Yes, Meno; but a principle which has any soundness should stand firm not only just
now, but always.
Men. Well; and why are you so slow of heart to believe that knowledge is virtue?
Soc. I will try and tell you why, Meno. I do not retract the assertion that if virtue is
knowledge it may be taught; but I fear that I have some reason in doubting whether virtue is
knowledge: for consider now: and say whether virtue, and not only virtue but anything that is
taught, must not have teachers and disciples?
Men. Surely.
Soc. And conversely, may not the art of which neither teachers nor disciples exist be
assumed to be incapable of being taught?
Men. True; but do you think that there are no teachers of virtue?
Soc. I have certainly often enquired whether there were any, and taken great pains to find
them, and have never succeeded; and many have assisted me in the search, and they were the
persons whom I thought the most likely to know. Here at the moment when he is wanted we
fortunately have sitting by us Anytus, the very person of whom we should make enquiry; to
him then let us repair. In the first place, he is the son of a wealthy and wise father,
Anthemion, who acquired his wealth, not by accident or gift, like Ismenias the Theban (who
has recently made himself as rich as Polycrates), but by his own skill and industry, and who
is a well-conditioned, modest man, not insolent, or over-bearing, or annoying; moreover, this
son of his has received a good education, as the Athenian people certainly appear to think, for
they choose him to fill the highest offices. And these are the sort of men from whom you are likely to learn whether there are any teachers of virtue, and who they are. Please, Anytus, to help me and your friend Meno in answering our question, Who are the teachers? Consider the matter thus: If we wanted Meno to be a good physician, to whom should we send him? Should we not send him to the physicians?
Any. Certainly.
Soc. Or if we wanted him to be a good cobbler, should we not send him to the cobblers?
Any. Yes.
Soc. And so forth?
Any. Yes.
Soc. Let me trouble you with one more question. When we say that we should be right in sending him to the physicians if we wanted him to be a physician, do we mean that we should be right in sending him to those who profess the art, rather than to those who do not, and to those who demand payment for teaching the art, and profess to teach it to any one who will come and learn? And if these were our reasons, should we not be right in sending him?
Any. Yes.
Soc. And might not the same be said of flute-playing, and of the other arts? Would a man who wanted to make another a flute-player refuse to send him to those who profess to teach the art for money, and be plaguing other persons to give him instruction, who are not professed teachers and who never had a single disciple in that branch of knowledge which he wishes him to acquire—would not such conduct be the height of folly?
Any. Yes, by Zeus, and of ignorance too.
Soc. Very good. And now you are in a position to advise with me about my friend Meno. He has been telling me, Anytus, that he desires to attain that kind of wisdom and virtue by which men order the state or the house, and honour their parents, and know when to receive and when to send away citizens and strangers, as a good man should. Now, to whom should he go in order that he may learn this virtue? Does not the previous argument imply clearly that we should send him to those who profess and avouch that they are the common teachers of all Hellas, and are ready to impart instruction to any one who likes, at a fixed price?
Any. Whom do you mean, Socrates?
Soc. You surely know, do you not, Anytus, that these are the people whom mankind call Sophists?
Any. By Heracles, Socrates, forbear! I only hope that no friend or kinsman or acquaintance of mine, whether citizen or stranger, will ever be so mad as to allow himself to be corrupted by them; for they are a manifest pest and corrupting influences to those who have to do with them.
Soc. What, Anytus? Of all the people who profess that they know how to do men good, do you mean to say that these are the only ones who not only do them no good, but positively corrupt those who are entrusted to them, and in return for this disservice have the face to demand money? Indeed, I cannot believe you; for I know of a single man, Protagoras, who made more out of his craft than the illustrious Pheidias, who created such noble works, or any ten other statuaries. How could that mend the shoes or clothes worse than he received them, could not have remained thirty days undetected, and would very soon have starved; whereas during more than forty years, Protagoras was corrupting all Hellas, and sending his disciples from him worse than he received them, and he was never found out. For, if I am not mistaken—he was about seventy years old at his death, forty of which were spent in the practice of his profession; and during all that time he had a good reputation, which to this day he retains: and not only Protagoras, but many others are well spoken of; some who lived before him, and others who are still living. Now, when you say that they deceived and corrupted the youth, are they to be supposed to have corrupted them consciously or unconsciously? Can those who were deamed by many to be the wisest men of Hellas have been out of their minds?
Any. Out of their minds! No, Socrates; the young men who gave their money to them, were out of their minds, and their relations and guardians who entrusted their youth to the care of these men were still more out of their minds, and most of all, the cities who allowed them to come in, and did not drive them out, citizen and stranger alike.
Soc. Has any of the Sophists wronged you, Anytus? What makes you so angry with them?
Any. No, indeed, neither I nor any of my belongings has ever had, nor would I suffer them to have, anything to do with them.
Soc. Then you are entirely unacquainted with them?
Any. And I have no wish to be acquainted.
Soc. Then, my dear friend, how can you know whether a thing is good or bad of which you are wholly ignorant?
Any. Quite well; I am sure that I know what manner of men these are, whether I am acquainted with them or not.
Soc. You must be a diviner, Anytus, for I really cannot make out, judging from your own words, how, if you are not acquainted with them, you know about them. But I am not enquiring of you who are the teachers who will corrupt Meno (let them be, if you please, the Sophists); I only ask you to tell him who there is in this great city who will teach him how to become eminent in the virtues which I was just, now describing. He is the friend of your family, and you will oblige him.
Any. Why do you not tell him yourself?
Soc. I have told him whom I supposed to be the teachers of these things; but I learn from you that I am utterly at fault, and I dare say that you are right. And now I wish that you, on your part, would tell me to whom among the Athenians he should go. Whom would you name?
Any. Why single out individuals? Any Athenian gentleman, taken at random, if he will mind him, will do far more, good to him than the Sophists.
Soc. And did those gentlemen grow of themselves; and without having been taught by any one, were they nevertheless able to teach others that which they had never learned themselves?
Any. I imagine that they learned of the previous generation of gentlemen. Have there not been many good men in this city?
Soc. Yes, certainly, Anytus; and many good statesmen also there always have been and there are still, in the city of Athens. But the question is whether they were also good teachers of their own virtue;—not whether there are, or have been, good men in this part of the world, but whether virtue can be taught, is the question which we have been discussing. Now, do we mean to say that the good men our own and of other times knew how to impart to others that virtue which they had themselves; or is virtue a thing incapable of being communicated or imparted by one man to another? That is the question which I and Meno have been arguing. Look at the matter in your own way: Would you not admit that Themistocles was a good man?
Any. Certainly; no man better.
Soc. And must not he then have been a good teacher, if any man ever was a good teacher, of his own virtue?
Any. Yes certainly,—if he wanted to be so.
Soc. But would he not have wanted? He would, at any rate, have desired to make his own son a good man and a gentleman; he could not have been jealous of him, or have intentionally abstained from imparting to him his own virtue. Did you never hear that he made his son
defamation, and if he ever does, he will forgive me. Meanwhile I will return to you, Meno; for I suppose that there are gentlemen in your region too?

Men. Certainly there are.

Soc. And are they willing to teach the young? and do they profess to be teachers? and do they agree that virtue is taught?

Men. No indeed, Socrates, they are anything but agreed; you may hear them saying at one time that virtue can be taught, and then again the reverse.

Soc. Can we call those teachers who do not acknowledge the possibility of their own vocation?

Men. I think not, Socrates.

Soc. And what do you think of these Sophists, who are the only professors? Do they seem to you to be teachers of virtue?

Men. I often wonder, Socrates, that Gorgias is never heard promising to teach virtue: and when he hears others promising he only laughs at them; but he thinks that men should be taught to speak.

Soc. Then do you not think that the Sophists are teachers?

Men. I cannot tell you, Socrates; like the rest of the world, I am in doubt, and sometimes I think that they are teachers and sometimes not.

Soc. And are you aware that not you only and other politicians have doubts whether virtue can be taught or not, but that Theognis the poet says the very same thing?

Men. Where does he say so?

Soc. In these elegiac verses:

Eat and drink and sit with the mighty, and make yourself agreeable to them; for from the good you will learn what is good, but if you mix with the bad you will lose the intelligence which you already have. Do you observe that here he seems to imply that virtue can be taught?

Men. Clearly.

Soc. But in some other verses he shifts about and says:

If understanding could be created and put into a man, then they [who were able to perform this feat] would have obtained great rewards. And again:-

Never would a bad son have sprung from a good sire, for he would have heard the voice of instruction; but not by teaching will you ever make a bad man into a good one. And this, as you may remark, is a contradiction of the other.

Men. I should say, certainly not.

Soc. But in other respects, I am defaming these gentlemen; and in the second place, he is of opinion that virtue can be taught, and then again the reverse.

Any. I have certainly never heard any one say so.

Soc. And if virtue could have been taught, would his father Themistocles have sought to train him in these minor accomplishments, and allowed him who, as you must remember, was his own son, to be no better than his neighbours in those qualities in which he himself excelled?

Any. Indeed, indeed, I think not.

Soc. Here was a teacher of virtue whom you admit to be among the best men of the past. Let us take another,-Aristides, the son of Lysimachus: would you not acknowledge that he was a good man?

Any. To be sure I should.

Soc. And did not he train his son Lysimachus better than any other Athenian in all that could be done for him by the help of masters? But what has been the result? Is he a bit better than any other mortal? He is an acquaintance of yours, and you see what he is like. There is Pericles, again, magnificent in his wisdom; and he, as you are aware, had two sons, Paralus and Xanthippus.

Any. I know.

Soc. And you know, also, that he taught them to be unrivalled horsemen, and had them trained in music and gymnastics and all sorts of arts in these respects they were on a level with the best and had he no wish to make good men of them? Nay, he must have wished it. But virtue, as I suspect, could not be taught. And that you may not suppose the incompetent teachers to be only the meaner sort of Athenians and few in number, remember again that Thucydides had two sons, Melesias and Stephanus, whom, besides giving them a good education in other things, he trained in wrestling, and they were the best wrestlers in Athens: one of them he committed to the care of Xanthias, and the other of Eudorus, who had the reputation of being the most celebrated wrestlers of that day. Do you remember them?

Any. I have heard of them.

Soc. Now, can there be a doubt that Thucydides, whose children were taught things for which he had to spend money, would have taught them to be good men, which would have cost him nothing, if virtue could have been taught? Will you reply that he was a mean man, and had not many friends among the Athenians and allies? Nay, but he was of a great family, and a man of influence at Athens and in all Hellas, and, if virtue could have been taught, he would have found out some Athenian or foreigner who would have made good men of his sons, if he could not himself spare the time from cares of state. Once more, I suspect, friend Anytus, that virtue is not a thing which can be taught?

Any. Socrates, I think that you are too ready to speak evil of men: and, if you will take my advice, I would recommend you to be careful. Perhaps there is no city in which it is not easier to do men harm than to do them good, and this is certainly the case at Athens, as I believe that you know.

Soc. O Meno, think that Anytus is in a rage. And he may well be in a rage, for he thinks, in the first place, that I am defaming these gentlemen; and in the second place, he is of opinion that he is one of them himself. But some day he will know what is the meaning of
Soc. And there are no teachers of virtue to be found anywhere?
Men. There are not.
Soc. And if there are no teachers, neither are there scholars?
Men. That, I think, is true.
Soc. Then virtue cannot be taught?
Men. Not if we are right in our view. But I cannot believe, Socrates, that there are no good
men: And if there are, how did they come into existence?
Soc. I am afraid, Meno, that you and I are not good for much, and that Gorgias has been as
poor an educator of you as Prodicus has been of me. Certainly we shall have to look to
ourselves, and try to find some one who will help in some way or other to improve us. This I
say, because I observe that in the previous discussion none of us remarked that right and
good action is possible to man under other guidance than that of knowledge (episteme); and
indeed if this be denied, there is no seeing how there can be any good men at all.
Men. How do you mean, Socrates?
Soc. I mean that good men are necessarily useful or profitable. Were we not right in
admitting this? It must be so.
Men. Yes.
Soc. And in supposing that they will be useful only if they are true guides to us of action-
there we were also right?
Men. Yes.
Soc. But when we said that a man cannot be a good guide unless he have knowledge
(phronesis), this we were wrong.
Men. What do you mean by the word "right"?
Soc. I will explain. If a man knew the way to Larisa, or anywhere else, and went to the place
and led others thither, would he not be a right and good guide?
Men. Certainly.
Soc. And while he has true opinion about the way, but had never been and did not
know, might be a good guide also, might he not?
Men. Certainly.
Soc. And while he has true opinion about that which the other knows, he will be just as good
a guide if he thinks the truth, as he who knows the truth?
Men. Exactly.
Soc. Then true opinion is as good a guide to correct action as knowledge; and that was the
point which we omitted in our speculation about the nature of virtue, when we said that
knowledge only is the guide of right action; whereas there is also right opinion.
Men. True.
Soc. Then right opinion is not less useful than knowledge?
Men. The difference, Socrates, is only that he who has knowledge will always be right; but
he who has right opinion will sometimes be right, and sometimes not.
Soc. What do you mean? Can he be wrong who has right opinion, so long as he has right
opinion?
Men. I admit the cogency of your argument, and therefore, Socrates, I wonder that
knowledge should be preferred to right opinion—or why they should ever differ.
Soc. And shall I explain this wonder to you?
Men. Do tell me.
Soc. You would not wonder if you had ever observed the images of Daedalus; but perhaps
you have not yet found them in your country?
Men. What have they to do with the question?
Soc. Because they require to be fastened in order to keep them, and if they are not fastened
they will play truant and run away.
Men. Well, what of that?
Soc. I mean to say that they are not very valuable possessions if they are at liberty, for they
will walk off like runaway slaves; but when fastened, they are of great value, for they are
really beautiful works of art. Now this is an illustration of the nature of true opinions: while
they abide with us they are beautiful and fruitful, but they run away out of the human soul,
and do not remain long, and therefore they are not of much value until they are fastened by
the tie of the cause; and this fastening of them, friend Meno, is recollection, as you and I
have agreed to call it. But when they are bound, in the first place, they have the nature of
knowledge; and, in the second place, they are abiding. And this is why knowledge is more
honourable and excellent than true opinion, because fastened by a chain.
Men. What you are saying, Socrates, seems to be very like the truth.
Soc. I too speak rather in ignorance; I only conjecture. And yet that knowledge differs from
true opinion is no matter of conjecture with me. There are not many things which I profess to
know, but this is most certainly one of them.
Men. Yes, Socrates; and you are quite right in saying so.
Soc. And am I not also right in saying that true opinion leading the way perfects action quite
as well as knowledge?
Men. There again, Socrates, I think you are right.
Soc. Then right opinion is not a whit inferior to knowledge, or less useful in action; nor is the
man who has right opinion inferior to him who has knowledge?
Men. True.
Soc. And surely the good man has been acknowledged by us to be useful?
Men. Yes.
Soc. Seeing then that men become good and useful to states, not only because they have
knowledge, but because they have right opinion, and that neither knowledge nor right
opinion is given to man by nature or acquired by him—if they are not given by nature, neither
are the good by nature good?
Men. Certainly.
Soc. And while he has true opinion about that which the other knows, he will be just as good
a guide if he thinks the truth, as he who knows the truth?
Men. Certainly not.
Soc. I will explain. If a man knew the way to Larisa, or anywhere else, and went to the place
and led others thither, would he not be a right and good guide?
Men. True.
Soc. But surely we acknowledged that there were no teachers of virtue?
Men. Yes.
Soc. Then we acknowledged that it was not taught, and was not wisdom?
Men. Certainly.
Soc. And yet we admitted that it was a good?