Reflection Essay: the Meaning of *Meno*

In Plato's *Meno*, Socrates challenges us to think about knowledge—what it means to know something, how we gain it, and how we recognize that we've truly learned. These questions felt very relatable during my first semester in college, especially in my *Game Programming with Python* course. Coming into this class, I barely knew anything about programming, let alone Python, and I was nervous. But through this course, I took my first steps into the world of coding and learned that knowledge isn't something you just "get"—it's something you build and, with enough practice, learn over time.

In *Meno*, Socrates uses an interesting method to show that knowledge isn't something we are simply given—it's something we uncover through questioning and reasoning. He guides a slave boy through a geometry problem, showing that with the right questions and effort, the boy can figure out a solution on his own. This idea stuck with me as I worked on projects in my Python course. When I started this class, I barely knew what programming was. What little knowledge I had was of QBASIC and HTML from high school, and even that felt disconnected since I had forgotten most of the things over time. I had no idea how Python works or how games were made, and I felt a little like Meno when he admitted to Socrates, "*I don't know how to answer*".

One of the first projects in class that we did was creating a number-guessing game. Step by step, I learned about programming basics like loops, variables, and conditional statements. For example, I used an *if* statement to check if the guessed number matched the correct answer and a *while* loop to allow repeated guesses. When the game finally worked, I felt a sense of accomplishment I hadn't experienced before. What I did wasn't

anything huge but it was a big deal for a beginner like me. It was kind of like when Socrates helped the slave boy in *Meno* figure out a math problem he didn't think he could solve. This process showed me that learning isn't about knowing everything right away—it's about figuring things out step by step.

Of course, it wasn't all smooth sailing. I definitely had some "growing pains." Debugging errors gave me a hard time, especially when I couldn't find the problem right away. Sometimes, I'd get stuck on something simple, like an indentation error or forgetting a colon. It reminded me of Meno's frustration when Socrates kept challenging his assumptions, leaving him confused and even annoyed. But this frustration was part of the learning process. Just as Socrates believed confusion was the first step toward understanding, my mistakes taught me to be patient and persistent. My professor, Dr. Birkenkrahe, was a great help during these times as well. He taught us things step by step, which made the process less overwhelming.

Being a woman in a computer science-related course also added another layer to my experience. I sometimes felt out of place because most of my classmates were male. While no one said or did anything outright discouraging, I couldn't help but notice how few women were in the room. This reminded me of how, in *Meno*, Socrates repeatedly emphasizes the importance of questioning assumptions. It made me think about how society still holds unconscious assumptions about who "belongs" in tech fields. Overcoming these doubts and proving to myself that I could code was an empowering moment. It showed me that just like the slave boy in *Meno*, I could uncover knowledge that I didn't even know I was capable of achieving.

Socrates says in *Meno* that true knowledge begins when we admit our ignorance, and I've come to see how true that is. This class showed me how much I still don't know. Games are way more complicated than I thought. Behind even the simplest games are layers of code, and it takes so much time and effort to make everything work. What we did in class was just the basics—there's still so much more to learn about Python and game programming. Looking ahead, I know I need to explore more advanced topics like graphics, animations, and sound design. How do I know I still have more to learn? Every time I look at a more complicated game or read about advanced programming techniques, I realize how much I don't know yet. It's like what Plato shows in *Meno*—learning never really ends because there's always something new to discover.

Overall, this course wasn't just about programming; it was about learning how to approach challenges. It taught me that knowledge isn't something static—it's something we build over time with curiosity and persistence. Like Meno, I started out unsure and hesitant, but I've grown more confident in my ability to learn and problem-solve. Being a woman in this field has shown me the importance of challenging assumptions—not just in others, but in myself as well.

References:

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