

University of St Andrews



School of Philosophical, Anthropological & Film Studies

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

**Coursework 1, October 2021**

<b>MODULE CODE:</b>	<b>PY2011</b>
<b>MODULE TITLE:</b>	<b>Foundations of Western Philosophy</b>
<b>DURATION:</b>	<b>One Week (take-home assessment)</b>
<b>INSTRUCTIONS:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>(a) Explain and comment on ALL three passages, maximum 500 words per passage</li><li>(b) Do NOT exceed word limit</li><li>(c) All questions are equally weighted</li><li>(d) Submit answers via MMS (as explained in separate instructions)</li><li>(e) DO NOT repeat material between questions, or between different assessments</li></ul>

## PY2011 – FOUNDATIONS OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY: First Assignment

Explain and comment on these three passages (500 words max. per passage, 1500 words overall). State the immediate context of the passage, explain the philosophical point that is made, and offer some form of evaluation. Use Stephanus page numbers.

### 1. Plato, Meno, 80d

"Meno: How will you look for it [i.e. for the nature of virtue], Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? How will you search for something you do not know at all? If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing you did not know?"  
(Plato, Meno 80d).

### 2. Plato, Phaedo, 87b-c

"[T]his argument is much as if one said at the death of an old weaver that the man had not perished but was safe and sound somewhere, and offered as proof the fact that the cloak the old man had woven himself and was wearing was still sound and had not perished. If one was not convinced, he would be asked whether a man lasts longer than a cloak which is in use and being worn, and if the answer was that a man lasts much longer, this would be taken as proof that the man was definitely safe and sound, since the more temporary thing had not perished."

### 3. Plato, Republic, 367c-d

"You agree that justice is one of the greatest goods, the ones that are worth getting for the sake of what comes from them, but much more so for their own sake, such as seeing, hearing, knowing, being healthy, and all other goods that are fruitful by their own nature and not simply because of reputation. Therefore, praise justice as a good of that kind, explaining how—because of its very self—it benefits its possessors and how injustice harms them. Leave wages and reputations for others to praise."

**\*\*\*END OF PAPER\*\*\***

**University of St Andrews**

**Department of Philosophy**

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ID NUMBER:	<b>200007413</b>
MODULE NAME:	<b>Foundations of Western Philosophy</b>
MODULE CODE:	<b>PY2011</b>
TUTOR'S NAME:	<b>Lixiao Lin</b>
ESSAY TITLE:	<b>Assignment 1: Critical Analysis</b>
WORD COUNT:	<b>1492</b>

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1.

Plato's *Meno* touches on skepticism through questioning whether virtue can be taught. Here, Socrates has argued that some knowledge on the nature of what you are supposed to be learning is a necessary precursor to determining if it can indeed be learned, and so they are looking for the nature of virtue <sup>1</sup>. Socrates has rejected Meno's previous attempts at defining virtue as just examples of virtuous things such as justice and moderation, without explaining their commonality which makes them virtuous – their 'common essence' <sup>2</sup>.

Here we arrive at Meno's question of whether this unifying concept of the nature of virtue is even possible. His first proposition is that it's impossible to look for something when you don't actually know what it is. This because you can't know where it may be, and wouldn't know you've found it when you had. This would mean you can only learn things you already know - which is unnecessary. This challenges our intuitive experience of "learning". Either everything we "learn" is knowledge we somehow already already possess; or the argument is invalid through missing something allowing us to learn.

One key element the argument ignores is partial knowledge. On the nature of virtue, even if justice and moderation are just parts of virtue and don't tell us their common essence making them virtuous, we do have information on it's effect. At the very least, we have a guide on where to begin our inquiry into it's nature. If it's possible to build a complete description of what is and is not virtuous, we can determine when we have a wrong nature of virtue as we can check if our potential definition makes all parts of virtue virtuous, and nothing else.

Another potential solution is to question the concepts leading to this paradox. Meno relies upon an acceptance of the concept of virtue, implied in the search Socrates and Meno are in for it's nature. A concept such as walking clearly exists as something more than human construct. When learning to walk, despite potentially having no knowledge of the concept itself. We know we have found what we are seeking when we do so

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1 "I am so far from knowing whether virtue can be taught or not that I do not even have any knowledge of what virtue itself is." Plato: Meno (80d)

2 "[W]hen I begged you to tell me about virtue as a whole, you are far from telling me what it is. Rather, you say that every action is virtue if it is performed with a part of virtue, as if you had said what virtue is as a whole, so I would already know that, even if you fragmented it into parts." Plato: Meno (79b-c)

successfully. We may propose that virtue, as a human construct, doesn't truly exist - meaning it has no nature. Therefore, the paradox may not mean we cannot learn anything, but instead that we cannot learn things which don't exist.

2.

In this section of Phaedo, Cebes questions Socrates' view that the soul is immortal, thus removing the fear in death. Cebes accepts that the soul resembles the divine, whereas the body resembles the mortal – and so individual bodies are weaker<sup>3</sup>. They also agreed in the concept of death as just the separation of the soul and body<sup>4</sup>. The contention comes not from whether the soul may survive many bodies, but whether the soul is immortal. Socrates' argument for the soul's immortality is that when we die, our body takes time to perish, yet our soul appears to have gone. The body must perish much faster than the soul. Therefore, when we die and our soul and body are separated, the soul must go somewhere and live on<sup>5</sup>.

In this passage, Cebes argues Socrates' conclusion that the soul is immortal does not follow from the premises. He analogizes Socrates with someone arguing at the funeral of an old weaver that they couldn't have died because his cloak has not perished. The first premise is that the weaver's cloaks perish much faster than the weaver himself. The implied premise is that if the cloak has not perished, then the weaver must not have perished. The final premise is they still have the weaver's unperished cloak. The conclusion is the weaver must be alive. Cebes' argument shows the implied premise is false. His issue is with the idea of total lifespan of things compared with the time period of their existence. The weaver made and outlived many cloaks. From the final cloak's perspective, it appears to outlive the weaver, but in fact the total lifespan of the cloak is shorter than the old weaver.

This does show that we cannot determine the soul's immortality using the existence of the body after death, because the soul's total lifespan could have been long before our body and so it only appears as though the body lasted longer, but actually just was created later.

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3 *"The soul is most like the divine, deathless, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, always the same as itself, whereas the body is most like that which is human, mortal, multiform, unintelligible, soluble, and never consistently the same."* Plato: Phaedo, (80a-b)

4 *"Is it [(death)] anything else than the separation of the soul from the body?"* Plato: Phaedo (64c)

5 *"Is it not natural for the body to dissolve easily, and the soul to be altogether indissoluble, or nearly so?"* Plato: Phaedo (80b)

However, the analogy is not perfect as we could question what it would mean if the old weaver here perished with the cloak still on. This would imply that it would be possible for our soul to perish even before our death, not just before our body has perished.

However, the Greek perception of the soul at the time was that the soul is that which gives life, and so it does not make sense to question whether someone could not have a soul but still be alive.

3.

In this section of the Republic, Socrates is debating Glaucon on the class of good justice is. They have agreed that justice is a form of good, and that goods are divided into three classes: those which are good for their own sake (such as joy and pleasure); those which are good for their own sake as well along with the goods they lead to (such as intelligence, sight and health); and finally those goods which are good only as a means to an end for the goods they bring (such as medicine, and menial labor work)<sup>6</sup>. Glaucon has given the common view that justice is in the third class, as people seek it for rewards and popularity, but don't love justice for its own sake<sup>7</sup>. It leads into a wider conversation about what a good in itself is, and whether the motivations for our actions affect the morality of our actions.

In this passage, Socrates argues that justice is of the second class – those which are good for goods it leads to but also for the good in itself. He compares justice to seeing, hearing, knowing, and being healthy<sup>8</sup>. An issue that this brings up is what is a good in itself? We cannot use Socrates previous argument that justice is a good because it is required for virtue which is necessary for human happiness because justice would then be a means to an end of happiness.

We may question this argument by questioning what it means to be a good in itself. For each example Socrates gives for goods which are good in themselves and good for what they lead to, the innate good is never provable or measurable - except for pleasure itself which appears to be the foundation for all other goods. For example, "seeing" and "hearing" are good from the pleasure caused by seeing and hearing beautiful thing, and they help orientate us in the world to seek pleasure best; "Knowing" enables plans to be made for seeking long-term pleasure best; and being healthy enables us to carry out these plans, whilst not being pained by bad health, which is the antithesis of pleasure. Every human desires pleasure, and our other desires appear to be motivated by pleasure. However, pleasure doesn't appear to consistently lead to more pleasure. We see this with drug addicts, who limit overall pleasure because of the

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6 Plato: Republic (357b-c)

7 *"[Most people] say that justice belongs to the onerous kind, and is to be practiced for the sake of the rewards and popularity that come from a reputation for justice..."*  
Plato: Republic (358a)

8 *"You agree that justice is one of the greatest goods, the ones that are worth getting for the sake of what comes from them, but much more so for their own sake, such as seeing, hearing, knowing, being healthy, ..."* Plato: Republic (367c)



pleasure they receive. Therefore, pleasure is only good in itself, whereas justice and other goods are good only in the pleasure they lead to.