PLATO

Meno

EDITED BY
DAVID SEDLEY
University of Cambridge
ALEX LONG
University of St Andrews

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Meno

MENO:[1] Can you tell me, Socrates, whether virtue is teachable?[2] Or is 70a
it not teachable, but attainable by practice? Or is it attainable neither by practice nor by learning, and do people instead acquire it by nature, or in some other way?

SOCRATES:[3] In the past, Meno, the Thessalians were renowned among the Greeks and admired for both horsemanship and wealth, but now, I 70b
think, they are admired for wisdom as well, and particularly the fellow-citizens of your friend Aristippus, the men of Larisa. You have Gorgias[4] to thank for this, for since he came to that city he has made the leading Aleuadae,[5] of whom your lover Aristippus is one, court him for his wisdom, as well as the leading people among the other Thessalians. And besides he has given you this very habit of fearlessly and magnificently answering any question anyone asks, as is only reasonable for people who have knowledge, since he himself makes himself available for any Greek 70c
who wishes to pose him any question he likes, and answers absolutely everyone.

But the situation here, my dear Meno, is quite the opposite: there has been a drought of wisdom, as it were, and in all likelihood wisdom has 71a
vanished from these parts and migrated to your people. At any rate, if you want to put a question like that to one of the people here, any one of

Footnotes marked with an asterisk indicate departures from the Oxford Classical Text and do not discuss the translation or interpretation of the dialogues.

[1] On Meno, see p. xii. [2] On the word translated 'teachable', see p. xii n. 1.

[3] On Socrates, see p. ix.

[4] Gorgias of Leontini (*c.* 485–*c.* 380 BC), a leading sophist and rhetorician, featured extensively in the first part of Plato's *Gorgias*.

[5] The ruling family of Larisa, in Thessaly.

them will laugh and say: 'Stranger, you must think I am richly blessed, at least if you expect me to know whether virtue is teachable or how people come to have it. I am so far from knowing whether or not it's teachable that even the very question *what on earth virtue is* is one regarding which I don't in fact have any knowledge at all.'

71b Now that is true of me as well, Meno. I share my fellow-citizens' poverty in this matter, and reproach myself for knowing nothing at all about virtue. But how could I know what *sort* of thing something is, when I don't know *what* it is? Or do you think that, if someone doesn't know at all who Meno is, it is possible for him to know whether Meno is beautiful or rich or even of good birth, or, as it may be, the opposites of these? Do you think that possible?

71c MENO: No. But do you really not know even what virtue is, Socrates, and is that the news about you we are to take back home as well?

SOCRATES: Yes, and not only that, my friend, but also that I don't think I've yet even met anyone else who knows.

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

SOCRATES: I did.

MENO: And so you didn't think that he knew?

SOCRATES: My memory isn't great, Meno, so I can't say now how he struck me back then. Perhaps, however, he does know, and perhaps you

71d know what he said. So remind me what he said. Or, if you want, tell me yourself. For I presume you agree with him.

MENO: I do.

SOCRATES: Then let's forget about him, since he isn't here anyway. But as for you, by the gods, Meno, what do you say virtue is? Tell me and don't keep it to yourself, so that, if you and Gorgias prove to know, my mistake when I claimed never yet to have met someone who knew may turn out to be a most fortunate one.

71e MENO: Well, it isn't difficult to say, Socrates. First, if you want to take the virtue of a man, it is easy to state that the virtue of a man is to be competent at managing the affairs of his city, and in so doing to benefit friends and harm enemies, and to take care that nothing of the latter kind befalls him himself. Then if you want the virtue of a woman, it isn't hard to explain that she must run her household well, conserving its property and being obedient to her husband. And there is a different virtue for a child – one for a female child, one for a male – and one for an older man,

who may be a freeman if you like, or a slave if you like. There are also very many other virtues. And so there is no puzzle in saying what virtue is. For each of us, you see, and for each pursuit, there is the relevant virtue to match each activity and age. And I think the same is true of the relevant vice, Socrates. 72a

SOCRATES: I seem to have met with a great piece of good fortune, Meno, if in seeking one virtue I have discovered that you have a whole swarm of virtues at your disposal. But, Meno, with regard to this image of 'swarms', suppose I asked you about just what it is to be a bee,[6] and you said that there were many kinds of bees. What answer would you give me if I asked you: 'Do you say that it is their being bees that makes them of many different kinds? Or do they not differ at all because of this, but because of something else, such as beauty or largeness or something else of that kind?' Tell me, how would you answer if you were asked this question? 72b

MENO: Like this: in so far as they are bees, one bee doesn't differ at all from another.

SOCRATES: Now suppose I said to you next: 'Then tell me about precisely that, Meno: what do you say it is that makes them all no different, but the same?' You would have an answer for me, I take it? 72c

MENO: I would.

SOCRATES: Likewise then when it comes to the virtues too – even if they are of many kinds, they still all have one and the same form[7] because of which they are virtues. And when responding to questions it is right, presumably, to look to this form before explaining what virtue really is to the person who asked the question. Or do you not get my point? 72d

MENO: Well, I *think* I do. But I don't yet grasp what you're asking, at least as I would like to.

SOCRATES: Do you think that it is true only of virtue, Meno, that there is a different one for a man, a different one for a woman, and so on? Or do you regard health and largeness and strength in the same way? Do you believe that there is a different health for a man, a different one for

[6] 'what it is to be . . . ': the Greek word is *ousia*, 'being', the abstract noun from the verb 'be'. It can also be translated 'essence', and it comes to be associated especially with the transcendent Forms, cf. *Phaedo* 65d, 76d, etc.

[7] The Greek word *eidos* here comes to be one of Plato's favourites for his theory of transcendent 'Forms'.

a woman? Or is the form the same everywhere, provided that it is health,
72e whether in a man or in anyone else?

MENO: Health, at least, is I think the same both for a man and for a woman.

SOCRATES: Largeness and strength as well? If a woman is strong, will she be strong because of the same form and the same strength? What I mean by 'the same' is that strength does not differ at all with regard to its being strength depending on whether it is in a man or in a woman. Or do you believe that it does?

MENO: No, I don't.

73a SOCRATES: Whereas virtue *will* differ with regard to its being virtue depending on whether it is in a child or in an elderly person, in a woman or in a man?

MENO: Somehow I think, Socrates, that this case isn't like those other ones.

SOCRATES: Well, weren't you claiming that a man's virtue is to manage a city well, a woman's virtue to manage a house well?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now is it possible to manage a city, a house or anything else in a good way, if one doesn't do so in a temperate and just way?

MENO: No, surely not.

73b SOCRATES: If, then, they manage justly and temperately, they will do so because of justice and temperance?

MENO: Necessarily.

SOCRATES: Therefore both the woman and the man need the same things if they are to be good: justice and temperance.

MENO: Yes, they seem to.

SOCRATES: How about a child and an elderly person? Could they ever become good if they were intemperate and unjust?

MENO: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: But they could do so if they were temperate and just?

73c MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then all humans are good in the same way. For they become good by attaining the same things.

MENO: It looks that way.

SOCRATES: And they wouldn't be good in the same way, I presume, if their virtue were not the same.

MENO: Definitely not.

SOCRATES: So since they all have the same virtue, try to say and recall what Gorgias says it is – and you with him.

MENO: The ability to rule over people – what else? Assuming, that is, 73d
that you're seeking one thing covering all cases.

SOCRATES: I certainly am. But does a child also have the same virtue, Meno, and does a slave, namely the ability to rule their master? Do you think that one would still be a slave with such authority?

MENO: Not at all, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Right – it's implausible, my friend. Besides, consider this further point. You say that virtue is 'to be able to rule'. Won't we add to that 'justly, and not unjustly'?

MENO: I think so, because justice is virtue, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Virtue, Meno, or *a* virtue? 73e

MENO: What do you mean by that?

SOCRATES: Just what I would say about anything else. For example, if you like, I would say that roundness is a shape, not simply that it is shape.[8] And my reason for describing it like this would be that there are other shapes as well.

MENO: Yes, you'd be right to say that, since I myself say that justice isn't the only virtue, but that there are other virtues as well.

SOCRATES: What are they? Tell me. I would tell you other shapes too, 74a
if you asked – so you tell me other virtues.

MENO: Well then, courage seems to me to be a virtue,[9] as do temperance, wisdom, magnificence, and a great many others.

SOCRATES: The very same thing has happened to us again, Meno. Once more we have found many virtues when seeking one, though in a different way from just now. But we can't discover the one virtue which extends through all these.

MENO: That is because I can't yet find one virtue covering all cases in 74b
the way you're seeking, Socrates, as I can in the other examples.

SOCRATES: Yes, understandably. But I'll strive to bring us closer,*[10] if I can. You appreciate, I presume, that the following is true in every case. Suppose that someone were to ask you what I just asked, 'What is shape, Meno?', and you replied 'Roundness'. Then suppose that he said

[8] For the translation of *schēma* as 'shape', see p. xiv n. 3.

[9] Meno's reply could be translated 'virtue' or 'a virtue'.

*[10] Reading προσβιβάσαι at 74b3.

to you what I said: 'Is roundness shape, or *a* shape?'. Presumably you would reply that it's a shape.

MENO: Certainly.

74c SOCRATES: Your reason being that there are other shapes as well?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Right, and if he proceeded to ask you what other sorts of shape there are, you would tell him?

MENO: I would.

SOCRATES: Again, suppose that, along the same lines, he asked you what colour is, you replied 'White', and your questioner then retorted: 'Is white colour, or a colour?'. You would say that it's a colour, because there are others too?

MENO: I would.

SOCRATES: Yes, and if he asked you to mention other colours, you
74d would tell him others which are no less colours than white is?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now imagine that, like me, he pursued the argument and said: 'We keep ending up with a multitude. Don't give me that sort of reply, but since you call this multitude by a certain single name, and say that none of them isn't a shape, despite the fact that they're actually opposite to one another, tell me what this thing is which encompasses the
74e round no less than the straight, the thing you name shape, saying that the round is no more a shape than the straight is?' Or don't you claim that?

MENO: I do.

SOCRATES: Then when you make such a claim, do you mean to say that the round is no more round than straight, and the straight no more straight than round?

MENO: Certainly not, Socrates.

SOCRATES: And yet you do say that the round is no more shape, at least, than the straight is, nor vice versa.

MENO: True.

75a SOCRATES: So what on earth is this thing named 'shape'? Try to tell me. Now imagine that you said to the person who was questioning you in this way, either about shape or about colour: 'Look here – I don't even understand what you want, and I don't know what you mean either.' Perhaps he would be taken aback and say: 'Don't you understand that I'm seeking what is the same in all these cases?' Or would you have no

answer even in the case of these things, Meno, if someone were to ask you: 'What is the same in the case of all these things, the round and the straight and the other things you call shapes?' Try to say, so that you may then get some practice for your answer about virtue.

MENO: No – you say, Socrates. 75b

SOCRATES: You want me to indulge you?

MENO: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: So will you likewise be willing to tell me about virtue?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then I must do my best – because it's worth my while.

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Right then, let's try to tell you what shape is. Now consider whether you accept this account of what it is: let us take shape to be that which, alone of all things, always accompanies colour. Do you find that sufficient, or do you ask for a different kind of answer? For my part, you see, I would be satisfied even if the account of virtue you gave me were 75c of this kind.

MENO: But that's simple-minded, Socrates.

SOCRATES: What do you mean?

MENO: I mean that on your account, as I understand it, shape is what always accompanies colour. Maybe so, but if someone were to say that he didn't know colour, and was puzzled about it in the same way as about shape, what do you think your answer would be?

SOCRATES: The truth. And if the questioner were one of the experts in eristic and competitive debate I would tell him: 'That's what I have to 75d say. But if what I'm saying is incorrect, it's your job to hold me to account and refute it.' If, however, like you and me now, they were friends and wished to have a genuine dialogue with one another, they should find a gentler and more dialectical way to answer. And I suggest that the more dialectical manner is to reply not only with the truth, but in addition through things which the person questioned[11] also admits he knows. So I too will endeavour to speak to you in that way. Tell me: do you use the 75e term 'end' of something? In the sense of limit and extremity, that is – I mean the same thing by all of these. Perhaps Prodicus would disagree with

[11] This is often emended so as to read 'the questioner'. But as the present passage illustrates, in dialectic the respective roles of questioner and answerer can switch at any time. What matters is that either party, if asked, will admit to knowing the thing in question.

us, but I would guess that you, at any rate, describe something as being limited *and* ended.[12] That is what I mean to say, nothing complicated.

MENO: But of course I use those descriptions, and I think I understand your point.

76a SOCRATES: Very well. Do you describe something as 'surface', and something else as 'solid', such as the ones in geometrical studies?

MENO: I do.

SOCRATES: Now already with these you might understand what I say shape is. For all shape, I say that shape is that at which the solid is limited. Drawing that together I would say that shape is the limit of a solid.

MENO: But what do you say colour is, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Outrageous behaviour, Meno! You set problems for an
76b old man to answer, but you're not willing yourself to recollect and tell me what on earth Gorgias says virtue is.

MENO: Well, when you answer that question of mine, Socrates, I'll answer you.

SOCRATES: Even if someone had his head covered, Meno, he could tell from your conversation that you're beautiful and still have lovers.

MENO: How?

SOCRATES: Because you do nothing but give orders in the discussion, precisely what fêted boys do, for they play the tyrant as long as they have
76c the attractions of youth. And at the same time you've probably realised that I'm at the mercy of beauties. So I'll indulge you and answer.

MENO: Yes, indulge me you must.

SOCRATES: Now do you want me to answer you in the style of Gorgias, in the way you would follow best?

MENO: I do, naturally.

SOCRATES: Then do you and he say that things have certain effluences, as Empedocles[13] claims?

MENO: Quite so.

SOCRATES: And that there are channels into which and through which the effluences are conveyed?

MENO: Absolutely.

[12] In Plato's dialogues the sophist Prodicus' trademark is to deny that any two words are exact synonyms.

[13] Mid-fifth-century Sicilian philosopher-poet, for whose physical analyses of perception cf. Theophrastus, *On the Senses* 7–11.

SOCRATES: And that some of the effluences fit some of the channels, 76d
but others are too small or large?

MENO: That's true.

SOCRATES: Is there also something you describe as 'sight'?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then from this 'mark what I tell thee', as Pindar put it: colour is effluence of shapes, commensurate with sight and thus perceptible.

MENO: I think that is a superb answer, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Quite, for perhaps such an answer is familiar to you. And at the same time you realize, I think, that from it you could also say what sound is, and smell and many other such things. 76e

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Yes, the answer belongs in a tragedy, Meno. That is why it pleases you more than the one about shape.

MENO: It does.

SOCRATES: But the better answer isn't this one, son of Alexidemus, or so I have convinced myself, but the other one. And I imagine that you wouldn't think so either, if you didn't need, as you said yesterday, to leave before the mysteries, but were to stay and be initiated.

MENO: But I would stay, Socrates, if you were to tell me many things 77a
of that kind.

SOCRATES: Well, if I do I won't be at all lacking in eagerness, both for your sake and for mine, although I suspect that I won't be able to tell you many things like that. But come on, *you* try to keep your promise to *me*: say what virtue is as a whole and stop making many from one, as jokers are always saying when people smash something. But leave virtue whole and intact, and say what it is. I've given you the models, after all. 77b

MENO: Very well, Socrates, I think virtue is, as the poet says, 'to rejoice in the noble and be proficient'. And I say that this is virtue: to desire noble things and be proficient at securing them.

SOCRATES: Would you say that the person who desires noble things desires good things?

MENO: Very much so.

SOCRATES: On the assumption that there are some people who desire bad things, others who desire good things? Do you not think, my friend, 77c
that everyone desires good things?

MENO: No, I don't.

SOCRATES: But that some people desire bad things?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Thinking that the bad things are good, do you mean? Or do they actually know that the things are bad, but nonetheless desire them?

MENO: Both happen, I think.

SOCRATES: Do you really think, Meno, that there is anyone who knows that the bad things are bad but nonetheless desires them?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: What do you mean that he desires? To acquire them?

MENO: Yes, what else?

77d SOCRATES: In the belief that bad things benefit whoever acquires them, or in the knowledge that bad things harm whoever possesses them?

MENO: There are some who do so in the belief that bad things benefit, but others as well who do so in the knowledge that they harm.

SOCRATES: And do you think that those who believe that bad things benefit know that the bad things are bad?

MENO: That I *don't* believe.

SOCRATES: Then it is clear that these people, at least, don't desire bad
77e things, ignorant as they are about them, but desire things they thought were good, but in fact are bad. And so the people who are ignorant about these things and think they are good clearly desire good things. Or don't they?

MENO: These people, at any rate, probably do.

SOCRATES: Very well. The people who desire bad things, according to you, but think that bad things harm whoever acquires them, presumably know that they will be harmed by them?

78a MENO: They must.

SOCRATES: But don't these people believe that those who are harmed are pitiful to the extent that they are harmed?

MENO: Again, they must.

SOCRATES: And that the pitiful are unhappy?

MENO: I think so.

SOCRATES: So is there anyone who wants to be pitiful and unhappy?

MENO: No, I don't believe so, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Therefore nobody wants bad things, Meno, assuming he doesn't want to be like that. For what else is being pitiful, if not desiring bad things and acquiring them?

MENO: It may be that what you're saying is true, Socrates, and that 78b
nobody wants bad things.

SOCRATES: Now weren't you just saying that virtue is both to want good things and to be proficient?

MENO: Yes, I did.

SOCRATES: Isn't the part of your claim about 'wanting' true of everyone, so that in this respect at least one person is no better than another?

MENO: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Clearly, rather, if someone is better than another, he would be better in respect of his proficiency.

MENO: Quite so.

SOCRATES: It seems then that what virtue is, according to your account, is proficiency at securing good things for oneself. 78c

MENO: I believe, Socrates, that it is exactly as you now understand it.

SOCRATES: Then let's now see whether this claim of yours is true. For you could perhaps be right. You say that virtue is being able to secure good things?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: And isn't it things such as health and wealth that you describe as good?

MENO: Yes, and acquiring gold and silver, and political honours and offices.

SOCRATES: By 'good things' you don't mean any things other than those of this sort?

MENO: No, just everything of this sort. 78d

SOCRATES: Very well. So securing gold and silver is virtue, according to Meno, family guest-friend of the Great King.[14] Do you add 'justly and piously' to this securing, Meno? Or does it make no difference to you, and even if someone secures them unjustly do you call it*[15] virtue all the same?

MENO: No, surely not, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Rather you call it vice.

MENO: Quite so.

SOCRATES: Then it is necessary, it seems, to supplement this securing with justice or temperance or piety, or with some other part of virtue. 78e
Otherwise it will not be virtue, even if it provides good things.

[14] The King of Persia. *[15] Reading αὐτό at 78d6.

MENO: Right, for how could it come to be virtue without these?

SOCRATES: But what about *not* providing gold and silver, whenever it isn't just, either for oneself or for another? Isn't it virtue too, this failure to provide?[16]

MENO: It seems so.

SOCRATES: Therefore providing such goods wouldn't be virtue any more than the failure to provide them is. Instead, it seems, whatever is
79a done with justice will be virtue, but whatever is done without all such things will be vice.

MENO: I think it must be as you say.

SOCRATES: Now didn't we say a short while ago that each of these – justice and temperance and everything of that kind – was a part of virtue?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: In that case, Meno, are you making fun of me?

MENO: How, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Because just now I asked you not to fragment virtue or chop it up, and provided models for you to follow in your reply. Yet you
79b have disregarded that and are telling me that virtue is the ability to secure good things with justice. And you say that justice is a part of virtue?

MENO: I do.

SOCRATES: Then from the points you admit it follows that virtue is doing whatever one does with a part of virtue. For you say that justice is a part of virtue, and that so is each of the others too. So why am I saying this? Because although I asked for an account of virtue as a whole, far from saying what it is itself, you claim that every action is virtue, provided that
79c it is done with a part of virtue, as if you had said what virtue is as a whole and I could already be expected to understand it, even if you chop it up into parts. So in my opinion, my dear Meno, you need to answer the same question again from the beginning: what is virtue, if every action would be virtue when done with a part of virtue? For that is what it means when someone says that every action done with justice is virtue. Or do you not believe that the same question needs to be tackled again, but instead think that someone knows what a part of virtue is, when he doesn't know what virtue itself is?

MENO: No, I don't think that.

[16] The Greek noun (*aporia*) translated as 'failure to provide' is translated as 'puzzlement' in 80a4.

SOCRATES: Right, and if you remember, when I gave you an answer 79d
about shape just now, I think we started discarding this sort of answer, the sort that tries to respond through things which are still being searched for and on which agreement has not yet been reached.

MENO: And we were right to do so, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then you also, my friend, must not imagine that, when the search is still under way for what virtue is as a whole, you will elucidate virtue to anyone by giving your answer through its parts, or elucidate anything else by speaking in this same way. Instead you must realise that 79e
the same question will again be required: what is the virtue about which you make your claim? Or do you think there is nothing in what I say?

MENO: No, I think what you're saying is correct.

SOCRATES: So answer again from the beginning. What do you say virtue is, both you and your associate?

MENO: Socrates, before I even met you I used to hear that all you do 80a
is get puzzled yourself and make others puzzled. And now, it seems to me, you are bewitching me, drugging me and simply overwhelming me with enchantment, so that I have been filled with puzzlement. If a little humour is in order, what you comprehensively remind me of, both in appearance and in other respects, is that marine creature, the electric ray. For it makes anyone who approaches and touches it grow numb, and I think you have now done something like that to me: my soul and mouth 80b
truly are numb, and I have no answer to give you. And yet I have made lots of statements about virtue on countless occasions to many people, and extremely well too, or so I thought. But now I don't have anything at all to say even about what it is. And I think you are well advised in not going away on voyages or spending time abroad, because if you were to behave like this as a foreigner in another city, you would soon be arrested as a magician.

SOCRATES: You have no scruples, Meno, and you nearly fooled me.

MENO: What exactly do you mean, Socrates?

SOCRATES: I know why you made that comparison about me. 80c

MENO: Why then, do you think?

SOCRATES: So that I would make one about you in return. I know this about all beautiful people, that they enjoy being the subject of comparisons: it's to their advantage, because comparisons of beauties are also beautiful, I think. But I won't reciprocate with a comparison of you. As for me, if the ray itself is numb and that is how it makes others grow

numb as well, then I resemble it. If not, I don't. For I'm not well supplied with answers when I make other people puzzled. On the contrary, I am myself more puzzled than anybody, and that is how I make other people
80d puzzled as well. Regarding the present topic of what virtue is, I don't know the answer, and as for you, perhaps you did know it before you came into contact with me, but now you seem as if you didn't know it. All the same, I am ready to consider it with you and to share a search into what on earth it is.

MENO: And how will you search for something, Socrates, if you don't know at all what it is? What sort of thing from among those you don't know will you make the target of your search? Or even if you were to hit upon it with complete success, how will you know that *this* is the thing you didn't know?

80e SOCRATES: I understand what you mean to say, Meno. Do you see what an eristic argument you're spinning, that a person turns out not to be able to search either for what he knows or for what he doesn't know? For he wouldn't be searching for what he knows, since he knows it, and someone like that, at least, has no need to search; nor would he be searching for what he doesn't know, since in that case he doesn't even know what to search for.

81a MENO: Don't*[17] you think this argument a good one, Socrates?

SOCRATES: No, I don't.

MENO: Can you say in what way?

SOCRATES: Yes. I have heard both men and women who are wise about divine matters . . .

MENO: Saying what?

SOCRATES: A true statement, I think, and a noble one.

MENO: What is it, and who are the people who say it?

SOCRATES: Those who say it are all the priests and priestesses who
81b have taken care to be able to give an account of their practices. Pindar also says it, as do many other poets, all those that are divine. And what they say is this – consider whether you think it is true. They say that a person's soul is immortal, and at one time it meets its end – the thing they call dying – and at another time it is born again, but it never perishes. They say that, because of this, one should live one's whole life in the most holy

*[17] Reading οὔκουν at 81a1.

way possible. For from whoever

> Persephone accepts the atonement for ancient grief,
> in the ninth year she sends their soul*[18]
> up again to the sun above,
> and from them arise august kings 81c
> and men swift in might and matchless in wisdom;
> henceforth people call them holy heroes.

So since the soul both is immortal and has been born many times, and has seen both what is here and what is in Hades, and in fact all things, there is nothing it has not learned. And so it is no matter for wonder that it is possible for the soul to recollect both about virtue and about other things, given that it knew them previously. For since all nature is akin 81d and the soul has learned everything, there is no reason why someone who has recollected only one thing – which is what people call 'learning' – should not discover everything else, as long as one is brave and does not give up on the search. For seeking and learning turn out to be wholly recollection. Hence we must not be persuaded by that eristic argument, as it would make us lazy and is pleasant news to feeble people, whereas the present argument encourages us to search energetically. Because I 81e have confidence that it is true, I wish to join you in searching for what virtue is.

MENO: Yes, Socrates. But what do you mean by this claim that we don't learn, and that what we call 'learning' is recollection? Can you teach me that this is the case?

SOCRATES: I just said, Meno, that you're unscrupulous, and now 82a you're asking if I can 'teach' you – when I say that there is no teaching, only recollection. You're trying to make me be seen contradicting myself at the outset.

MENO: No, indeed, Socrates, I didn't say it with that in mind, but out of habit. Still, if there is some way you can demonstrate to me that it is as you say, then please do so.

SOCRATES: Well, it isn't an easy matter, but all the same I'm willing to make the effort for your sake. Please call over one of your many attendants 82b here, whichever one you like, so that I can display it for you in him.

MENO: Of course. Come here.

*[18] Reading ψυχάν at 81b10.

SOCRATES: Is he Greek and does he speak Greek?

MENO: Certainly – he was born in my house.

SOCRATES: Then pay attention and see which of these he seems to you to be doing: recollecting or learning from me.

MENO: I will.

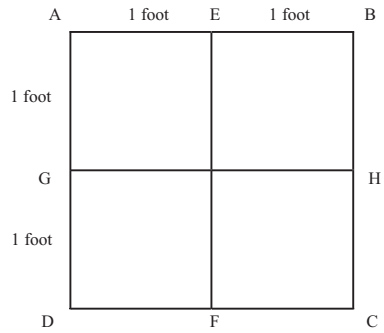
SOCRATES: Tell me, boy, do you recognize that a square area is like this [ABCD]?

SLAVE: Yes.

82c SOCRATES: So a square area is one with all these lines equal, all four of them?

SLAVE: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And doesn't it also have these equal lines across the middle [EF, GH]?



SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now an area of this shape might come in different sizes?

SLAVE: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Well, suppose this side were two feet long and this side two feet, how many square feet would the whole area be? Consider it like this. If it were two feet in this direction, but only one foot in this direction, wouldn't the area be one times two square feet?

SLAVE: Yes.

82d SOCRATES: But since it's two feet in this direction as well, doesn't it become two times two?

SLAVE: Yes, it does.

SOCRATES: So it becomes two times two square feet?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then how many are two times two square feet? Work it out and tell me.

SLAVE: Four, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Now might there be another area double this one, but of the same shape, with all its lines equal, just like this one?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: So how many square feet will it be?

SLAVE: Eight.

SOCRATES: Come on then, try to tell me how long each of its lines will 82e
be. For *this* one's lines were two feet. What about the line of that double area?

SLAVE: Obviously double, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Do you see, Meno, how I'm teaching him nothing, but asking him everything? And now he thinks he knows the sort of line that will produce the area of eight square feet. Or don't you think so?

MENO: I do.

SOCRATES: Well, does he know?

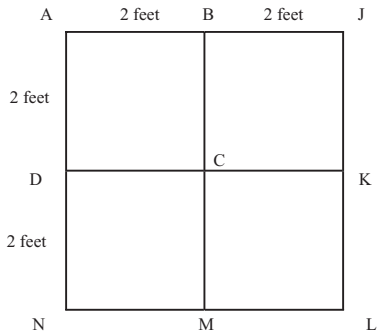
MENO: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: And he thinks it will be produced by the double line?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then watch him recollecting in order, just as one should recollect. But you, slave, answer me. Do you say that double the line produces double the area? I don't mean an area long in this direction but 83a
short in that one – it must be equal in every direction, just like this area [ABCD], but double its size, eight square feet. Well, see whether you still believe that it will result from double the line.

SLAVE: Yes, I do.



SOCRATES: Now does this line [AJ] become double the length of that one [AB] if we add another line of this length [BJ] from here [B]?

SLAVE: Certainly.

SOCRATES: So this line [AJ], you say, will produce the area of eight square feet, if there are four lines of this length?

83b SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then let's draw four equal lines by extending it. Presumably this [AJLN] would be what you say is the area of eight square feet.

SLAVE: Of course.

SOCRATES: Now in it there are these four areas [ABCD, BJKC, CKLM, DCMN], each of which is equal to this area of four square feet [ABCD]?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: So how large is it [AJLN]? Isn't it four times as large?

SLAVE: It must be.

SOCRATES: Well, is four times as large double?

SLAVE: Definitely not.

SOCRATES: But what multiple is it?

SLAVE: Quadruple.

83c SOCRATES: Therefore, boy, the double line produces not a double area but a quadruple one.

SLAVE: Yes, true.

SOCRATES: Because an area of four times four square feet has sixteen square feet. Right?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: But what sort of line produces an area of eight square feet? Doesn't this line [AJ] produce a quadruple area?

SLAVE: I agree.

SOCRATES: And is this quarter*[19] area here [ABCD] produced by this half line here [AB]?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: Very well. And isn't the area of eight square feet double this area [ABCD], but half this one [AJLN]?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: Won't it be produced by a line longer than one of that

83d length [AB], but shorter than one of this length [AJ]? No?

*[19] Reading τέταρτον instead of τετράπουν at 83c5.

SLAVE: I believe so.

SOCRATES: Excellent – always reply by saying what you believe. Now tell me: wasn't this line [AB] two feet long, this one [AJ] four?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: Therefore the line for the area of eight square feet must be greater than this two-foot line, but smaller than the four-foot.

SLAVE: It must.

SOCRATES: Try then to tell me how long you would say it is. 83e

SLAVE: Three feet.

SOCRATES: Now if it's to be three feet, shall we add on half of this line [AB] and make it three feet? For there are two feet here, one here. And from this point in the same way there are two feet here and one here. And so here we get the area you are speaking of.

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then if it were three feet in this direction and three in that one, does the whole area become three times three square feet?

SLAVE: So it seems.

SOCRATES: And three times three square feet is how many?

SLAVE: Nine.

SOCRATES: But the double area needed to be how many square feet?

SLAVE: Eight.

SOCRATES: So we still haven't got the area of eight square feet, not even from the line of three feet.

SLAVE: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: But what sort of line does produce it? Try to give us an accurate answer. And if you don't want to calculate its number, at any 84a rate show us the right sort of line.

SLAVE: Honestly, Socrates, I don't know.

SOCRATES: Do you realise, Meno, what point he has by now reached in his recollection? At first he didn't know which is the line that bounds the area of eight square feet – just as he still doesn't know even now. But he nevertheless *thought* then that he knew it, and was answering confidently as if he knew, and didn't think he was puzzled. But by now he 84b thinks that he is puzzled, and just as he doesn't know, so too he doesn't think he knows either.

MENO: Yes, true.

SOCRATES: Then is he now in a better state concerning the subject he didn't know?

MENO: Yes, that also seems the case to me.

SOCRATES: So when we made him puzzled and numb, as the ray does, we didn't do him any harm, did we?

MENO: I don't think so.

SOCRATES: In fact we've done him a service, it seems, in relation to the goal of discovering the truth about it. Now, that is, he really would be glad to search for it, as he doesn't know it, whereas then he would have thought that he could easily speak well both to many people and on many
84c occasions about the double area, claiming that its side must be double in length.

MENO: So it seems.

SOCRATES: So do you suppose that he would have attempted to search for or learn about what he believed he knew, though in fact he didn't know it, before the thought that he didn't know it made him plummet into puzzlement and crave the knowledge?

MENO: No, I don't think so, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then the numbing benefited him?

MENO: I believe so.

SOCRATES: Watch then what he will actually discover as a result of this puzzlement, by searching with me, while I merely ask questions and
84d don't teach him. But be on your guard to see whether you can catch me at any stage teaching him and expounding it to him, rather than asking for his opinions.

Now, tell me. Isn't this our area of four square feet?[20] Do you understand?

SLAVE: I do.

SOCRATES: And could we add this second one, equal to it?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: And this third one, equal to either of them?

SLAVE: Yes.

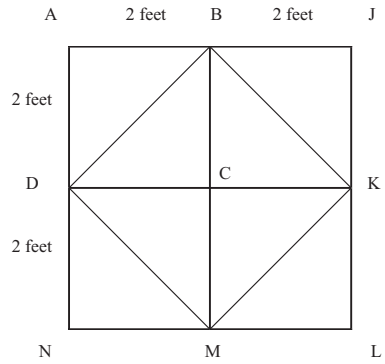
SOCRATES: Then might we add this one in the corner to complete our space?

SLAVE: Certainly.

SOCRATES: So presumably the result would be these four equal areas?

84e SLAVE: Yes.

[20] Socrates now starts to draw four four-foot squares (ABCD, BJKC, CKLM and DCMN).



SOCRATES: Very well. What multiple is this total area [AJLN] of that one [ABCD]?

SLAVE: Quadruple.

SOCRATES: Yes, but we needed to get a double area. Or don't you remember?

SLAVE: Quite right.

SOCRATES: Now is there a line like this from corner to corner, cutting in two each of these areas?[21] 85a

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: So we get these four equal lines, surrounding this area here [BKMD]?

SLAVE: Yes, we do.

SOCRATES: Examine it, then. What size is this area?

SLAVE: I don't follow.

SOCRATES: Each line has cut off the inside half of each of these four areas, hasn't it?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then how many areas of this size [BCD] does it [BKMD] contain?

SLAVE: Four.

SOCRATES: But how many are there in this one [ABCD]?

SLAVE: Two.

SOCRATES: And four is what in relation to two?

SLAVE: Double.

SOCRATES: So how many square feet does this [BKMD] come out as? 85b

[21] Socrates now adds the diagonals forming the square BKMD.

SLAVE: Eight square feet.

SOCRATES: Produced by what sort of line?

SLAVE: By this one [BD].

SOCRATES: By the line extending from corner to corner in the area of four square feet?

SLAVE: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now the experts call this line a 'diagonal'. So if its name is 'diagonal', it is the diagonal according to you, Meno's slave, that would produce double the area.

SLAVE: Certainly, Socrates.

SOCRATES: What do you think, Meno? Is there any opinion he gave in reply which wasn't his own?

85c MENO: No, they were his own.

SOCRATES: And yet he didn't know the answer, as we were saying a little earlier.

MENO: True.

SOCRATES: Right, but these opinions were inside him, weren't they?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Someone who doesn't have knowledge, then, whatever the things may be which he doesn't know, has in him true opinions about the very things he doesn't know?

MENO: It appears so.

SOCRATES: Yes, and now these opinions have only just been stirred up for him as if in a dream. But if someone goes on to question him about these things on many occasions and in many ways, you know that

85d eventually he will have knowledge about them as precise as anyone's.

MENO: So it seems.

SOCRATES: So even though nobody has taught him but he has only been asked questions, will he possess knowledge, having himself retrieved the knowledge from himself?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: And for him himself to retrieve knowledge in himself, isn't that recollecting?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: As for the knowledge which he now has, didn't he either acquire it at some time or have it always?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now if he always had it, then he was always knowledgeable too. But if he acquired it at some time, he couldn't have done so in his present life, at any rate. Or has someone taught him to do geometry? For 85e
he will accomplish these same results in every branch of geometry, and in all the other disciplines.[22] So is there someone who has taught him everything? You're in a position to know, I suppose, especially since he was born and brought up in your house.

MENO: I know that nobody ever taught him.

SOCRATES: Yet he has these opinions, doesn't he?

MENO: It seems he must have, Socrates.

SOCRATES: But if he didn't acquire them in his present life, isn't it 86a
immediately obvious that there was some other time at which he possessed them and had learned them?

MENO: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Namely the time when he wasn't a human being?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: So if there are going to be true opinions in him both for the time when he is a human being and for the time when he isn't, opinions which become knowledge when awoken by questioning, then for time everlasting won't his soul be in a state of having learned? Because obviously for the whole of time he either is or isn't a human being.

MENO: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Then if we always have in our soul the truth of things, 86b
wouldn't the soul be immortal, with the consequence that you should confidently try to search for and recollect what you don't know now – that is, what you don't remember?

MENO: Somehow or other I think your point is a good one, Socrates.

SOCRATES: I think so too, Meno. In defence of the argument I would not affirm the other points very strongly, but that we would be better, more manly and less lazy by believing that one should search for what one doesn't know than if we believed that we cannot discover what we 86c
do not know and should not even search for it – that *is* something over which I would fiercely contend, if I were able, in both word and deed.

MENO: Well, that also seems to me a good point, Socrates.

[22] The Greek word *mathēmata*, 'disciplines', is often used with special reference to the mathematical sciences.

SOCRATES: Now, given that we agree that one should search for what one doesn't know, do you want us to try to search together for what on earth virtue is?

MENO: Very much so. Actually, no, Socrates, what I would most enjoy considering and hearing about is what I asked at the start, whether
86d in trying this we should assume that virtue is teachable, or that people come to have it by nature, or that they acquire it in *what* way?

SOCRATES: If I controlled not only myself but you as well, Meno, we wouldn't have considered whether virtue is teachable or not teachable before we had first searched for what it is itself. But since you aren't even trying to control yourself – no doubt so that you may be 'free' – but are trying to control me, and actually *are* controlling me, I will give
86e in to you. What else can I do? So it seems we must consider what *sort* of thing something is, when we don't yet know *what* it is. If nothing else, at least release me a little from your control and agree to consider on a hypothesis whether it is teachable or whatever. By 'on a hypothesis' I mean the following. Take the way in which geometers often consider a question someone asks them, for example, whether it is possible for this
87a area to be inscribed as a triangle in this circle. One of them might say: 'I don't know yet whether the area is like that, but I think I have a sort of hypothesis, so to speak, which will be serviceable for our task. It is the following. If this area is such that, when someone has placed it alongside its given line, it falls short by the same sort of area as the very one that has been placed alongside, I think one result follows, and a different one if it is impossible for it to do this. So I want first to make this hypothesis,
87b and only then to tell you the result regarding its inscription in the circle, namely whether it is impossible or not.'[23] So too regarding virtue, since we don't know either what it is or what sort of thing it is, let us first make a hypothesis about it and then consider whether or not virtue is teachable, putting it like this: what sort of thing from among those connected with the soul must virtue be, if it is to be teachable or not teachable? First of all, if it is of a different kind from the sort of thing knowledge is, is it or isn't it teachable (or rather, as we were just saying, recollectable: let it
87c make no difference to us which of the two names we use). The question is: is it teachable? Or is this much obvious to everyone, that a person is taught nothing other than knowledge?

[23] See Dominic Scott, *Plato's Meno* (Cambridge, 2006), 135 for a suggested diagram.

MENO: I for one think so.

SOCRATES: And if virtue is a sort of knowledge, clearly it would be teachable.

MENO: Of course.

SOCRATES: Then we've quickly dealt with this point, that virtue is teachable if it's this kind of thing, but not if it's of the other kind.

MENO: Quite so.

SOCRATES: So next, it seems, we must consider whether virtue is knowledge or something different in kind from knowledge.

MENO: Yes, I think we should consider that next. 87d

SOCRATES: Well then, surely we say that virtue itself is good? And does this hypothesis hold for us, that it is good?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Now if there is something else, distinct from knowledge, which also is good, then perhaps virtue might not be a sort of knowledge. But if there is nothing good that isn't included in knowledge, then we'd be right to suspect that virtue is a sort of knowledge.

MENO: True.

SOCRATES: And is it because of virtue that we are good? 87e

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: But if good, then beneficial. For all good things are beneficial, aren't they?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then is virtue also something beneficial?

MENO: Necessarily, given what we have agreed.

SOCRATES: Let's consider, then, what sort of things benefit us, taking them one by one. Health, strength, beauty, and of course wealth: we say that these things and those like them are beneficial, don't we?

MENO: Yes. 88a

SOCRATES: Yet we speak of these same things as sometimes causing harm as well. Or do you speak otherwise?

MENO: No, I speak that way.

SOCRATES: Consider, then, what is that thing under whose guidance each of these things benefits us, and what is that thing under whose guidance each of them harms us? Isn't it under the guidance of right use that they benefit us, and without it that they harm us?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Now next let's consider attributes of the soul as well. Are there things that you call temperance, justice, courage, speed of learning, memory, magnificence, and so on?

88b MENO: There are.

SOCRATES: Consider this, then: out of these things, take those which you think aren't knowledge, but something other than knowledge – don't they sometimes harm, and sometimes benefit? Take courage, for example, if the courage in question isn't wisdom but some sort of boldness. Surely whenever a person is bold without understanding he is harmed, but when he is bold with understanding he is benefited?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Isn't it the same with both temperance and speed of learning? If learned and cultivated with understanding, they are beneficial, but if without understanding, harmful?

MENO: Very much so.

88c SOCRATES: Then, in short, all the soul's acts of enterprise and endurance end in happiness when guided by wisdom, but in its opposite when guided by folly?

MENO: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Then if virtue is one of the things in the soul and if it is necessarily beneficial, then it must be wisdom, given that all the attributes of the soul are in themselves neither beneficial nor harmful, and that it is

88d when wisdom or folly is added that they become harmful and beneficial. According to this argument, then, since virtue is beneficial it must be a sort of wisdom.

MENO: Yes, I think so.

SOCRATES: And besides, take those other things – wealth and the like – that we were just saying are sometimes good but sometimes harmful. Just as when wisdom guides the rest of the soul we said that it makes the things that belong to the soul beneficial, but that folly makes them harmful, so

88e too in the case of these doesn't the soul make them beneficial when it uses and guides them correctly, but harmful when incorrectly?

MENO: Quite so.

SOCRATES: But it's the wise soul that guides correctly, and the foolish soul that guides mistakenly?

MENO: That's true.

SOCRATES: So we can make the following claim without exception: for a human being everything else depends on the soul, but the things

that belong to the soul itself depend on wisdom, if they are going to be good. And by this argument the beneficial would be wisdom. But do we say that virtue is beneficial? 89a

MENO: Yes, certainly.

SOCRATES: Then do we say that virtue is wisdom, either the whole of wisdom or some part of it?

MENO: A good assertion, I think, Socrates.

SOCRATES: So if this is the case, good people wouldn't be good by nature.

MENO: No, I don't think so.

SOCRATES: Yes, for if they were the following would also happen, I suppose. If the good became good by nature, presumably we would have people who recognized youngsters with good natures, and on their say-so we would take those youngsters in charge and guard them in the acropolis, sealing them up much more securely than our gold, to prevent anyone corrupting them, and to ensure that they became useful to cities when they came of age. 89b

MENO: We probably would, Socrates.

SOCRATES: So since the good don't become good by nature, do they do so by learning? 89c

MENO: Yes, by now it's looking as if they must. And according to your hypothesis, Socrates, if virtue is knowledge, it is clear that virtue is teachable.

SOCRATES: Indeed it may be. But what if we were wrong to agree to that?

MENO: Well, it certainly seemed right just now.

SOCRATES: But I'm afraid that it must seem right not only 'just now', but also in the present and in the future, if there is to be anything sound about it.

MENO: Then just what is it? What do you have in mind that makes you hesitate about it and suspect that virtue may not be knowledge? 89d

SOCRATES: I'll tell you, Meno. Now I don't take back as incorrect the claim that it is teachable if it is knowledge. But whether it really *is* knowledge – just consider whether my misgivings about that seem reasonable to you. Tell me: if anything at all – not just virtue – is teachable, isn't it necessary that there be teachers and students of it?

MENO: Yes, I think so.

89e SOCRATES: So, conversely, should something have neither teachers nor students, we'd be right to conjecture that it isn't teachable?

MENO: True. But don't you think there are teachers of virtue?

SOCRATES: Well, I've often searched to see whether there are any teachers of it, but in spite of all my efforts I can't discover them. Yet I've conducted the search together with many collaborators, and particularly with whichever people I think have most experience of the matter. And in fact right now, Meno, as luck would have it, Anytus[24] here has sat
90a down with us. Let's invite him to take part in our search. It would only be reasonable for us to do so, since, first of all, Anytus here has a father, Anthemion, both rich and wise, who became rich not fortuitously or thanks to someone's gift (as happened to Ismenias of Thebes, who just recently acquired Polycrates' fortune) but because he won it with his own wisdom and diligence. Besides, he didn't seem conceited in his public life, or full of himself and offensive, but a decent and well-mannered
90b man. Next, he brought up and educated Anytus well, to judge from the vote of the Athenian assembly – at any rate, they elect him to the highest offices. It's only right, then, to have collaborators like this in our search as to whether or not there are teachers of virtue, and who the teachers are. So, Anytus, do join in our search, together with both me and your guest Meno here, about who the teachers of this thing might be. Consider it
90c in this way. If we wanted Meno here to become a good doctor, to whom would we send him for lessons? Wouldn't it be to the doctors?

ANYTUS: Yes, certainly.

SOCRATES: But what if we wanted him to become a good cobbler? Wouldn't we send him to the cobblers?

ANYTUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And so on for the rest?

ANYTUS: Quite so.

SOCRATES: Then tell me again about the same cases but in the following way. In sending him to the doctors we say that we would be doing the right thing, if we wanted him to become a doctor. Now when we say
90d this, do we mean that it would be sensible for us to send him to those who profess the craft rather than to those who don't, and to those who charge payment for this very thing, publicizing themselves as teachers of

[24] Anytus, a democratic politician, was to become three years later one of Socrates' two accusers in the trial which led to his execution. In what follows there are a number of veiled hints at his looming antagonism and its causes.

anyone who wants to come and learn? Aren't these the criteria we'd have to observe if we were going to school him correctly?

ANYTUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Isn't the same true also of playing the reed-pipe and the like? If we want to make someone able to play the reed-pipe, it's extremely 90e
unintelligent to refuse to send him to those who undertake to teach the craft and who charge payment, but instead to bother other people,*[25] who neither claim to be teachers nor have any student in the subject which we expect whoever we send to learn from them. Doesn't that seem very irrational to you?

ANYTUS: Indeed it does, and ignorant to boot.

SOCRATES: Quite right. Well then, now you can join me in making plans about your guest, Meno here. You see, Anytus, he's long been 91a
telling me that he wants the wisdom and virtue that make people run both households and cities well, look after their own parents, and know both how to welcome citizens and foreign guests and how to send them on their way in a manner worthy of a good man. Concerning this virtue, 91b
then, consider to whom we'd be right to send him. Or is it in fact quite obvious, according to the argument we've just used, that it would be to those who claim to be teachers of virtue and publicize themselves as available to any Greek who wants to learn, charging an agreed price for the service?

ANYTUS: And just who do you mean by these, Socrates?

SOCRATES: You know as well as I do that they are those whom people call 'sophists'.

ANYTUS: Heavens, don't speak of them, Socrates! May no relative or 91c
friend of mine, from either this city or abroad, fall prey to such madness as to go to see those men and be ruined, because it's as plain as daylight that they are the ruin and corruption of those who associate with them.

SOCRATES: What do you mean, Anytus? Out of all those who claim to know how to provide some beneficial service, are they alone so different from the rest that they not only don't improve whatever anyone entrusts to them, as the rest do, but actually, on the contrary, corrupt it? And in 91d
return for this do they openly assert the right to charge money? No, I don't see how I can believe you. For I know that one man, Protagoras,[26]

*[25] Deleting ζητοῦντα μανθάνειν παρὰ τούτων at 90e4.

[26] Protagoras of Abdera, a leading sophist, died *c.* 415 BC.

acquired more money from this wisdom than Pheidias,[27] who used to make artefacts of such conspicuous beauty, and ten other sculptors put together. And what you're saying is quite bizarre: those who work on
91e old shoes and mend clothes couldn't get away with it for a month if they returned the clothes and shoes in a worse condition than when they received them, but would soon starve to death if they behaved like this; and yet the whole of Greece didn't realize that for more than forty years Protagoras was corrupting those who associated with him and sending them on their way in a worse condition than when he took them in his charge (I think, you see, that he died when he was nearly seventy, and spent forty years in this profession) and in all that time and still to the present day he hasn't failed to be held in high regard. And that applies
92a not just to Protagoras, but to very many others as well, some who lived before him, others still alive even now. So according to you should we say that they knowingly deceive and ruin the young, or that they have taken themselves in as well? And will we reckon them to be as mad as that, when some say that they are the wisest of all people?

ANYTUS: They are far from being mad, Socrates. The mad ones are,
92b far rather, the young men who give them money, and, even more than these, those who entrust others to them[28] – their families, in other words. But maddest of all by far are the cities, for letting them enter and not expelling anyone, whether foreigner or citizen, who tries to behave in such a way.

SOCRATES: Has a sophist wronged you, Anytus? If not, why are you so angry with them?

ANYTUS: No, I assure you I've never yet even associated with any of them, and I wouldn't let anyone else connected with me do so either.

SOCRATES: Then you're completely without experience of these men?

ANYTUS: Yes, and I hope to stay that way.

92c SOCRATES: You astonish me – how could you know whether this creature contains any good or bad, if you were completely without experience of it?

ANYTUS: Easily. Whether or not I am without experience of them, I do at least know who they are.

[27] The most celebrated Athenian sculptor.

[28] The Greek could also be translated 'those who allow them', that is, those who allow the young to pay to see sophists.

SOCRATES: Perhaps you're a clairvoyant, Anytus. For, given what you yourself say, I'd wonder how else you know about them. But in any case, we're not trying to find out who the people are who would put Meno in 92d
a poor condition if he went to see them – let these be the sophists, if you want. Tell us rather about the other ones, and assist your family friend here by explaining to him who in this enormous city would, if he went to see them, make him outstanding in the virtue I was just describing.

ANYTUS: Why don't *you* explain it to him?

SOCRATES: Well, I have said who I thought were teachers of these things, but it turns out that there isn't anything in what I'm saying, according to you. And perhaps there is something in what you're saying. But then you, in your turn, please tell him to which Athenians he should 92e
go. Tell him the name of whoever you want.

ANYTUS: Why need he be told the name of an individual? Whichever Athenian of noble character he meets, none will fail to make him better than the sophists would, provided that he's willing to do as they say.

SOCRATES: Did these men of noble character become like this fortuitously, and although they haven't learned from anyone, can they none the less teach others what they themselves haven't learned? 93a

ANYTUS: These too, I reckon, learned from the previous generation, who were themselves of good character. Or don't you think there have been many good men in this city?

SOCRATES: I think, Anytus, that there are men here who are good at running the city, and, what's more, that there have been such men in the past just as much as there are now. But have they really been good *teachers* of their own virtue as well? This, you see, is what our discussion is about. Not whether there are good men here or not, nor if there have been before, but whether virtue is teachable – that is what we have long been 93b
considering. And in doing so we're considering the following: whether the good men, both of this generation and of the previous one, also knew how to pass on to someone else this virtue in which they themselves were good, or whether it is something that cannot be passed on by a human being[29] nor received by one from another. That is what Meno and I have long been seeking. So on the basis of what you yourself say, consider it as follows. Wouldn't you say that Themistocles[30] was a good man? 93c

[29] The mention of 'human beings' may anticipate the suggestion of *divine* allocation in 99c–100b.
[30] Athenian statesman, *c.* 524–459 BC.

ANYTUS: I certainly would, he most of all.

SOCRATES: And would you say that he was a good teacher as well – that if anyone else was a teacher of his own virtue, then Themistocles certainly was one?

ANYTUS: Yes, I think so, if he actually wanted to be.

SOCRATES: But do you suppose that he wouldn't have wanted others to become of noble character, especially his own son? Or do you think he
93d was grudging towards his son and deliberately didn't pass on the virtue in which he himself was good? Haven't you heard that Themistocles had his son, Cleophantus, taught to be a good horseman? At any rate, Cleophantus used to stand upright on horseback and keep his balance, and throw the javelin from horseback when standing upright, and perform many other amazing things. Themistocles had had him taught those things, and made him wise in everything that depended on good teachers. Haven't you heard that from your seniors?

ANYTUS: I have.

SOCRATES: Then nobody would have criticized his son's nature as no good.

93e ANYTUS: Probably not.

SOCRATES: But what about this? To this day have you ever heard from anyone, younger or older, that Cleophantus, the son of Themistocles, was a good and wise man in the things in which his father was?

ANYTUS: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: So do we suppose that while he wanted to educate his own son in those other things, he didn't want to make him any better than his neighbours in the sort of wisdom in which he himself was wise – if virtue really is, as we were saying,[31] teachable?

ANYTUS: Quite probably he didn't.

SOCRATES: Then you can see the sort of teacher of virtue *he* made, and you yourself agree that he was the best of those of previous generations.
94a But now let's consider someone else – Aristides,[32] the son of Lysimachus. Don't you agree that he was good?

ANYTUS: Yes, absolutely.

SOCRATES: Didn't he too educate his own son, Lysimachus, best of all the Athenians in everything that depended on teachers? But do you think he has made him a better man than anyone else? For you've actually

[31] At 89c. [32] Athenian statesman, died *c.* 467 BC; known as 'Aristides the Just'.

associated with him, I believe, and can observe what sort of man he is. Or, if you like, take Pericles,[33] a man of such magnificent wisdom – do 94b
you know that he brought up two sons, Paralus and Xanthippus?

ANYTUS: I do.

SOCRATES: Well you know as well as I do that he taught them to equal any Athenian as horsemen, and educated them to equal anyone in music, athletics, and everything else that depends on expertise. But in spite of that did he have no wish to make them good men? He did, I think, but I suspect that that isn't teachable. And to stop you thinking that only a few Athenians and the worst of them were unable to do this, note that 94c
Thucydides[34] also brought up two sons, Melesias and Stephanus, and educated them well in everything, and in particular made them the finest wrestlers in Athens, because he sent one to Xanthias and the other to Eudorus. They were thought to be the finest wrestlers of their day – don't you remember?

ANYTUS: I do, from hearsay.

SOCRATES: Then isn't it obvious that he would never have taught his sons that for which he had to pay for their teaching, yet failed to teach 94d
them that on which he didn't have to spend anything, namely making them good men, if it were teachable? But maybe Thucydides was a bad sort, and didn't have a huge number of friends among the Athenians and the allies? Well, he came from a great family and had great influence in this city and among the other Greeks, so that if this were teachable, he would have discovered someone, local or foreign, who could be expected to make his sons good, supposing he himself lacked the time because of 94e
his public commitments. But anyhow, Anytus, my friend, I suspect that virtue isn't teachable.

ANYTUS: Socrates, you seem to me to find it an easy matter to speak ill of people. So I'd advise you to be cautious, if you're willing to take my advice. There may be other cities too where it is easier to do ill to people than good, but in this city it certainly is. And I believe you yourself know 95a
that as well.

SOCRATES: Meno, I think Anytus is angry, and I'm not at all surprised. For first he thinks that I'm casting a slur on these men, and second he considers himself to be one of them. If he ever realises what it's really

[33] Leading Athenian statesman, *c.* 495–429 BC.

[34] Not the historian of that name, but Thucydides son of Melesias, *c.* 508–425 BC, Athenian statesman.

like to 'speak ill', he'll stop being angry, but at the moment he doesn't know. As for you, tell me, aren't there men of noble character among your people as well?

MENO: Certainly.

95b SOCRATES: Well then, are they willing to present themselves as teachers for the young, and to agree that they are teachers, or*[35] that virtue is teachable?

MENO: Indeed not, Socrates – sometimes you'd hear from them that it's teachable, sometimes than it's not.

SOCRATES: So should we say that they are teachers of this subject, if they don't agree even about this?

MENO: No, I don't think so, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Very well. Do you think that those sophists, the only people who profess it, are teachers of virtue?

95c MENO: That's just what I admire most about Gorgias, Socrates, that you'd never hear him promising this. He even laughs at the other sophists when he hears them promising it. Instead it's at speaking that he thinks he should make people clever.

SOCRATES: So you don't think that the sophists are teachers either?

MENO: I can't say, Socrates. You see, I myself have the same experience as most people: sometimes I think so, sometimes I don't.

SOCRATES: But are you aware that it's not only you and other members of the public who sometimes think that it's teachable, sometimes that it's

95d not, but do you know that the poet Theognis[36] also says the very same?

MENO: In which verses?

SOCRATES: In his elegiacs, where he says:

> Drink and eat beside them, sit among them,
> Amuse them – if their power is great.
> From good men you will be taught good things. But if you keep
95e Bad company, you will lose even what sense you have.

Do you notice that in these verses he talks as if virtue were teachable?

MENO: He does seem to.

SOCRATES: But in other verses his position changes slightly:

*[35] Reading ἤ instead of the second καί at 95b2.

[36] Sixth-century BC elegiac poet from Megara. At 95d–e Socrates quotes lines 33–6 in the modern collection of Theognis' surviving poetry; in 95e–96a, lines 434–8.

> If understanding (he says) could be created and inserted into a man,

He claims, I think, that those who could do this

> Would earn many large rewards,

And that

> No bad son would ever issue from a good father,
> If he obeys sound-minded advice. But with teaching 96a
> You will never make the bad man good.

Do you realize that he contradicts himself on the same subject?

MENO: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Can you then name any other subject whose professed teachers are not only not agreed to be teachers of other people, but aren't even agreed to know it themselves, but are thought to be worthless in the 96b very subject whose teachers they claim to be, while those who are agreed to be of noble character themselves sometimes say that it is teachable, sometimes that it isn't? When people are so confused about something, would you say that they are genuinely its teachers?

MENO: No, indeed.

SOCRATES: Then if neither the sophists nor those who are themselves of noble character are teachers of the subject, isn't it clear that others wouldn't be?

MENO: I don't think they would.

SOCRATES: Right, and if there are no teachers, there are no students 96c either?

MENO: I think it is as you say.

SOCRATES: And we've agreed that if a subject has neither teachers nor students, then it isn't*[37] teachable?

MENO: We have.

SOCRATES: Now there appear to be no teachers of virtue anywhere?

MENO: That's true.

SOCRATES: Right, and if there are no teachers, there are no students either?

MENO: It appears that way.

SOCRATES: Then virtue can't be teachable?

*[37] Reading μή instead of μηδέ in 96c4.

96d MENO: It seems not, if our investigation has been correct. As a result, Socrates, I actually wonder whether good men may even be non-existent, or what the process could be by which people come to be good.

SOCRATES: In all likelihood, Meno, you and I are inferior sorts, Gorgias having educated you inadequately, and Prodicus[38] me. Above all, then, let's turn our attention to ourselves and seek someone who will
96e make us better in some way or other. I say this with our recent search in mind, thinking how we ridiculously failed to notice that it is not only when knowledge guides them that people run their affairs correctly and well. Doubtless it is in this way that knowledge is eluding us of how good men ever come to be.

MENO: What do you mean by this, Socrates?

SOCRATES: The following. 'Good men must be beneficial' – that is
97a something about which we are correct to have agreed that it could not be otherwise. Or isn't it?

MENO: Yes, it is.

SOCRATES: And also 'they will be beneficial, if they guide us correctly in our affairs' – to this too, I take it, we were right to agree?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: But 'it is impossible to guide correctly unless one is wise' – on that it looks as if we haven't agreed correctly.

MENO: Just what do you mean?

SOCRATES: I'll tell you. If someone knew the way to Larisa or to wherever else you like, and walked there and guided others, wouldn't he guide them correctly and well?

MENO: Certainly.

97b SOCRATES: But what if someone had the correct opinion about which way it is, but hadn't gone there and didn't have knowledge about it – wouldn't he also guide people correctly?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And, I suppose, as long as he has correct opinion about the things of which the other has knowledge, he'll have true beliefs, albeit without wisdom, and be no worse a guide than the one who is wise on the matter.

[38] Cf. n. 12 above. In the *Cratylus* (384b) Socrates says that he attended Prodicus' class on the 'correctness of names', but only the cut-price version.

MENO: Yes, no worse.

SOCRATES: True opinion is therefore no worse a guide than wisdom for correctness of action. And it is this that we were overlooking just now in our consideration of what sort of thing virtue is, when we said that wisdom alone guides correct action. It turns out that there was true 97c
opinion as well.

MENO: It does seem that way.

SOCRATES: Then correct opinion isn't any less beneficial than knowledge.

MENO: Well, there's at least this much difference, Socrates – someone with knowledge would succeed all the time, whereas someone with correct opinion would sometimes succeed, sometimes not.

SOCRATES: What do you mean? If someone had correct opinion all the time, wouldn't he succeed all the time, for as long as his opinions were correct?

MENO: That does seem necessary to me. It makes me wonder, Socrates, why on earth, if so, knowledge is much more precious than correct 97d
opinion, and what makes the two of them different.

SOCRATES: Do you know the reason why you wonder this, or shall I tell you?

MENO: Do by all means tell me.

SOCRATES: It is because you haven't paid attention to the statues of Daedalus.[39] Perhaps they don't even exist in your part of the world.

MENO: What is your point?

SOCRATES: That they too run away and escape if they haven't been tied down, but stay with one if they have been.

MENO: And what of that? 97e

SOCRATES: Owning one of his products isn't of much value if it's untied, like a runaway, because it doesn't stay with one. But it is worth a lot if it is tied down. For his works are very beautiful. So what is my point? It's about true opinions. For true opinions are also a thing of beauty, as long as they stay with one, and all their consequences are 98a
good. But they're not prepared to stay with one for long. Instead they run away from the person's soul. As a result, they are not worth very much until someone ties them down by reasoning out the cause. And

[39] Legendary craftsman and inventor, whom Socrates elsewhere claims as an ancestor.

this, Meno, my friend, is recollection, as we have earlier agreed. When they've been tied down, they become, first of all, instances of knowledge, and, secondly, settled. It's precisely for this reason that knowledge is something more precious than correct opinion, and it's being tied down that makes knowledge different from correct opinion.

MENO: Yes, Socrates, it does indeed look that way.

98b SOCRATES: And yet I myself don't say this in the belief that I know it, but rather as a conjecture. But as for the claim that correct opinion and knowledge are different in kind, about that I certainly don't think I'm making a conjecture, but if I'd claim to know anything – and there are few things of which I would claim this – I'd at all events include this among the things I know.

MENO: Yes, and you're correct to say this.

SOCRATES: Very well. Isn't it also correct to say that when true opinion is our guide it makes the result of each action no worse than knowledge does?

MENO: Here too what you say seems true to me.

98c SOCRATES: So correct opinion will be in no way worse than knowledge and no less beneficial for actions, nor will the man with correct opinions be any worse or less beneficial than the one with knowledge.

MENO: That's true.

SOCRATES: And it's the good man whom we've agreed to be beneficial.

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then since it's not only because of knowledge that men would be good and beneficial to their cities, if they were, but also because

98d of correct opinion, and since people have neither knowledge nor true opinion*[40] by nature . . . Or does it seem to you that they have either of them by nature?

MENO: No, it doesn't.

SOCRATES: Since, then, people don't have them by nature, the good couldn't be good by nature either.

MENO: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: Right, and it is because they aren't so by nature that we were considering the next option, namely whether it's teachable.

MENO: Yes.

*[40] Deleting οὔτ' ἐπίκτητα at 98d1.

SOCRATES: Didn't we think that if virtue is wisdom it is teachable?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Yes, and that if it were teachable, it would be wisdom?

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Right, and that if there were teachers of it, it would be 98e
teachable, but if not, it wouldn't be teachable?

MENO: Quite so.

SOCRATES: But we've agreed that there are no teachers of it?

MENO: That's right.

SOCRATES: So we've agreed that it is neither teachable nor wisdom?

MENO: Yes, absolutely.

SOCRATES: And yet we agree that it's good, at any rate?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: And that that which guides correctly is beneficial and good?

MENO: Yes, certainly.

SOCRATES: Right, and that there are only these two things which guide 99a
correctly, true opinion and knowledge, and that with them a human being guides correctly. What happens correctly because of some kind of luck doesn't do so by human guidance. But in cases where humankind guides matters to the correct outcome, it is these two things, true opinion and knowledge, that do it.

MENO: I think so.

SOCRATES: So since it isn't teachable, it no longer looks as if virtue is knowledge?

MENO: No, it doesn't seem to.

SOCRATES: And so out of the two things that are good and beneficial 99b
one has been eliminated, and knowledge can't be our guide in political action.

MENO: I don't think so.

SOCRATES: And therefore it was not by some sort of wisdom nor because they were wise that men such as Themistocles and his circle, and those Anytus here just mentioned, guided their cities. And it is for this very reason that they are unable to make others the sort of men that they themselves are, in that it is not because of knowledge that they are like this.

MENO: It seems to be as you say, Socrates.

SOCRATES: So if this doesn't happen by knowledge, the remaining
99c alternative is that it happens by good opinion. Politicians use this when they make their cities run correctly, and, as far as wisdom goes, they're no different from oracles and prophets. For these latter also say many true things when inspired, but they know none of the things they say.

MENO: Probably so.

SOCRATES: So, Meno, should we call 'divine' these men who, without understanding, act and speak correctly in many important matters?

MENO: Definitely.

99d SOCRATES: Then we'd be correct to call 'divine' the oracles and prophets we just mentioned, and all the poetic types as well. And we'd say that the politicians are not the least divine and inspired of these, inspirited and possessed as they are by god, when they speak correctly in many important matters, despite knowing nothing of what they're saying.

MENO: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Yes, Meno, and of course women call good men 'divine'. And whenever the Spartans extol someone as a good man, they say 'A divine man, that one'.

99e MENO: Right, Socrates, and they do seem to be correct in what they say. But perhaps Anytus here is annoyed by what you're saying.

SOCRATES: I'm not at all concerned about that. We'll have a conversation with him on a later occasion, Meno. But if on the present occasion we have both searched and spoken well throughout our discussion, the result would be that virtue neither comes by nature nor is teachable, but that whoever acquires it would do so by divine allocation without under-
100a standing, unless there were a politician capable of making another man a politician as well. If there were, he could more or less be described as the same sort of person among the living as Homer said Teiresias is among the dead, when he said: 'He alone' (of all those in Hades) 'retains his understanding, but the others scurry about as shades.'[41] Likewise here as well a man like that would be, so to speak, the real thing compared with shades as regards virtue.

100b MENO: I think you make an excellent point, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then on the basis of this reasoning, Meno, it seems to us that whoever acquires virtue does so by divine allocation. But the time when we'll know the plain truth about it will be when, before considering

[41] *Odyssey* 10.495. Teiresias, a Theban, was a mythical blind seer.

in what way people acquire virtue, we first attempt to search for what on earth virtue is, in and of itself. But now the time has come for me to go somewhere. As for you, please persuade your host Anytus here of the same things of which you yourself have been persuaded, so that he may be a gentler person. For if you persuade him, you'll be doing the 100c
Athenians a service as well.