

# Meno

70 MENO: Can you tell me, Socrates, can virtue<sup>1</sup> be taught? Or is it not teachable but the result of practice, or is it neither of these, but men possess it by nature or in some other way?

SOCRATES: Before now, Meno, Thessalians had a high reputation among the Greeks and were admired for their horsemanship and their wealth, but  
b now, it seems to me, they are also admired for their wisdom, not least the fellow citizens of your friend Aristippus of Larissa. The responsibility for this reputation of yours lies with Gorgias,<sup>2</sup> for when he came to your city he found that the leading Aleuadae, your lover Aristippus among them, loved him for his wisdom, and so did the other leading Thessalians. In particular, he accustomed you to give a bold and grand answer to any question you may be asked, as  
c experts are likely to do. Indeed, he himself was ready to answer any Greek who wished to question him,

Reprinted from Plato's *Meno*, translated by G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1976), by permission of the publisher. The translation follows Burnet's Oxford text. The only liberty taken is where the answers to Socrates' questions are very brief, merely indicating assent or the like. In such instances "he said," the so-frequent repetition of which reads awkwardly in English, has been replaced by a dash, to indicate a change of speaker.

1. [The Greek word is *aretē*. It can refer to specific virtues such as moderation, courage, etc., but it is also used for the virtue or conglomeration of virtues that makes a man virtuous or good. In this dialogue it is mostly used in this more general sense. Socrates himself at times (e.g., 93b ff.) uses "good" as equivalent to virtuous. — G.M.A.G.]

2. [Gorgias was perhaps the most famous of the earlier generation of Sophists, those traveling teachers who arose in the late fifth century to fill the need for higher education. They all taught rhetoric, or the art of speaking, but as Meno tells us, Gorgias concentrated on this more than the others and made fewer general claims for his teaching (95c). He visited Athens in 427 B.C., and his rhetorical devices gave him an immediate success. Plato named one of his dialogues after him. Fairly substantive fragments of his writings are extant.]

and every question was answered. But here in Athens, my dear Meno, the opposite is the case, as if there were a dearth of wisdom, and wisdom seems to have departed hence to go to you. If then you want to ask 71 one of us that sort of question, everyone will laugh and say: "Good stranger, you must think me happy indeed if you think I know whether virtue can be taught or how it comes to be; 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."

I myself, Meno, am as poor as my fellow citizens b in this matter, and I blame myself for my complete ignorance about virtue. If I do not know what something is, how could I know what qualities it possesses? Or do you think that someone who does not know at all who Meno is could know whether he is good-looking or rich or well-born, or the opposite of these? Do you think that is possible?

M: I do not; but, Socrates, do you really not know what virtue is? Are we to report this to the folk back c home about you?

S: Not only that, my friend, but also that, as I believe, I have never yet met anyone else who did know.

M: How so? Did you not meet Gorgias when he was here?

S: I did.

M: Did you then not think that he knew?

S: I do not altogether remember, Meno, so that I cannot tell you now what I thought then. Perhaps he does know; you know what he used to say, so you d remind me of what he said. You tell me yourself, if you are willing, for surely you share his views. — I do.

S: Let us leave Gorgias out of it, since he is not here. But Meno, by the gods, what do you yourself say that virtue is? Speak and do not begrudge us, so that I may have spoken a most unfortunate untruth when I said that I had never met anyone who knew, if you and Gorgias are shown to know.

M: It is not hard to tell you, Socrates. First, if e you want the virtue of a man, it is easy to say that a man's virtue consists of being able to manage public

affairs and in so doing to benefit his friends and harm his enemies and to be careful that no harm comes to himself; if you want the virtue of a woman, it is not difficult to describe: she must manage the home well, preserve its possessions, and be submissive to her husband; the virtue of a child, whether male or female, is different again, and so is that of an elderly man, if you want that, or if you want that of a free man or a slave. And there are very many other virtues, so that one is not at a loss to say what virtue is. There is virtue for every action and every age, for every task of ours and every one of us—and Socrates, the same is true for wickedness.

S: I seem to be in great luck, Meno; while I am looking for one virtue, I have found you to have a whole swarm of them. But, Meno, to follow up the image of swarms, if I were asking you what is the nature of bees, and you said that they are many and of all kinds, what would you answer if I asked you: "Do you mean that they are many and varied and different from one another in so far as they are bees? Or are they no different in that regard, but in some other respect, in their beauty, for example, or their size or in some other such way?" Tell me, what would you answer if thus questioned?

M: I would say that they do not differ from one another in being bees.

S: If I went on to say: "Tell me, what is this very thing, Meno, in which they are all the same and do not differ from one another?" Would you be able to tell me?

M: I would.

S: The same is true in the case of the virtues. Even if they are many and various, all of them have one and the same form<sup>3</sup> which makes them virtues, and it is right to look to this when one is asked to make clear what virtue is. Or do you not understand what I mean?

3. [The Greek term is *eidos*, which Plato was to use for his separately existing eternal Forms. Its common meaning is stature or appearance. Socrates felt that if we apply the same name or epithet to a number of different things or actions, they must surely have a common characteristic to justify the use of the same term. A definition is then a description of this "form" or appearance, which it presents to the mind's eye. In the earlier dialogues however, as here, this form is not thought of as having a separate existence, but as immanent.]

M: I think I understand, but I certainly do not grasp the meaning of the question as fully as I want to.

S: I am asking whether you think it is only in the case of virtue that there is one for man, another for woman and so on, or is the same true in the case of health and size and strength? Do you think that there is one health for man and another for woman? Or, if it is health, does it have the same form everywhere, whether in man or in anything else whatever?

M: The health of a man seems to me the same as that of a woman.

S: And so with size and strength? If a woman is strong, that strength will be the same and have the same form, for by "the same" I mean that strength is no different as far as being strength, whether in a man or a woman. Or do you think there is a difference?

M: I do not think so.

S: And will there be any difference in the case of virtue, as far as being virtue is concerned, whether it be in a child or an old man, in a woman or in a man?

M: I think, Socrates, that somehow this is no longer like those other cases.

S: How so? Did you not say that the virtue of a man consists of managing the city well,<sup>4</sup> and that of a woman of managing the household?—I did.

S: Is it possible to manage a city well, or a household, or anything else, while not managing it moderately and justly?—Certainly not.

S: Then if they manage justly and moderately, they must do so with justice and moderation?—Necessarily.

S: So both the man and the woman, if they are to be good, need the same things, justice and moderation.—So it seems.

S: What about a child and an old man? Can they possibly be good if they are intemperate and unjust?—Certainly not.

4. [When discussing goodness or morality, social and political virtues would be more immediately present to the Greek mind than they are to ours. In both Plato and Aristotle a good man is above all a good citizen, whereas the modern mind thinks of goodness mainly in more individual terms, such as sobriety or sexual morals. An extreme example of this occurred in a contemporary judge's summation to the jury in the case of a woman of loose sexual behavior who was accused of murdering her husband. He actually said: "This is a case of murder, not of morals. The morals of the accused have nothing to do with it."]

S: But if they are moderate and just?—Yes.

c S: So all human beings are good in the same way, for they become good by acquiring the same qualities.—It seems so.

S: And they would not be good in the same way if they did not have the same virtue.—They certainly would not be.

S: Since then the virtue of all is the same, try to tell me and to remember what Gorgias, and you with him, said that that same thing is.

d M: What else but to be able to rule over people, if you are seeking one description to fit them all.

S: That is indeed what I am seeking, but Meno, is virtue the same in the case of a child or a slave, namely, for them to be able to rule over a master, and do you think that he who rules is still a slave?—I do not think so at all, Socrates.

S: It is not likely, my good man. Consider this further point: you say that virtue is to be able to rule. Shall we not add to this *justly and not unjustly*?

M: I think so, Socrates, for justice is virtue.

e S: Is it virtue, Meno, or a virtue?—What do you mean?

S: As with anything else. For example, if you wish, take roundness, about which I would say that it is a shape, but not simply that it is shape. I would not so speak of it because there are other shapes.

M: You are quite right. So I too say that not only justice is a virtue but there are many other virtues.

74 S: What are they? Tell me, as I could mention other shapes to you if you bade me do so, so do you mention other virtues.

M: I think courage is a virtue, and moderation, wisdom, and munificence, and very many others.

S: We are having the same trouble again, Meno, though in another way; we have found many virtues while looking for one, but we cannot find the one which covers all the others.

b M: I cannot yet find, Socrates, what you are looking for, one virtue for them all, as in the other cases.

S: That is likely, but I am eager, if I can, that we should make progress, for you understand that the same applies to everything. If someone asked you what I mentioned just now: “What is shape, Meno?” and you told him that it was roundness, and if then he said to you what I did: “Is roundness shape or a shape?” you would surely tell him that it is a shape?—I certainly would.

S: That would be because there are other shapes?—Yes.

S: And if he asked you further what they were, you would tell him?—I would.

S: So too, if he asked you what color is, and you said it is white, and your questioner interrupted you, “Is white color or a color?” you would say that it is a color, because there are also other colors?—I would.

S: And if he bade you mention other colors, you would mention others that are no less colors than white is?—Yes.

d S: Then if he pursued the argument as I did and said: “We always arrive at the many; do not talk to me in that way, but since you call all these many by one name, and say that no one of them is not a shape even though they are opposites, tell me what this is which applies as much to the round as to the straight and which you call shape, as you say the e round is as much a shape as the straight.” Do you not say that?—I do.

S: When you speak like that, do you assert that the round is no more round than it is straight, and that the straight is no more straight than it is round?

M: Certainly not, Socrates.

S: Yet you say that the round is no more a shape than the straight is, nor the one more than the other.—That is true.

S: What then is this to which the name shape applies? Try to tell me. If then you answered the man who was questioning about shape or color: “I do not understand what you want, my man, nor what you 75 mean,” he would probably wonder and say: “You do not understand that I am seeking that which is the same in all these cases?” Would you still have nothing to say, Meno, if one asked you: “What is this which applies to the round and the straight and the other things which you call shapes and which is the same in them all?” Try to say, that you may practice for your answer about virtue.

M: No, Socrates, but you tell me.

S: Do you want me to do you this favor?

M: I certainly do.

S: And you will then be willing to tell me about virtue?

M: I will.

S: We must certainly press on. The subject is worth it.

M: It surely is.

S: Come then, let us try to tell you what shape is. See whether you will accept that it is this: Let us say that shape is that which alone of existing things always follows color. Is that satisfactory to you, or do you look for it in some other way? I should be satisfied if you defined virtue in this way.

M: But that is foolish, Socrates.

S: How do you mean?

M: That shape, you say, always follows color. Well then, if someone were to say that he did not know what color is, but that he had the same difficulty as he had about shape, what do you think your answer would be?

S: A true one, surely, and if my questioner was one of those clever and disputatious debaters, I would say to him: "I have given my answer; if it is wrong, it is your job to refute it." Then, if they are friends

as you and I are, and want to discuss with each other, they must answer in a manner more gentle and more proper to discussion. By this I mean that the answers must not only be true, but in terms admittedly known to the questioner. I too will try to speak in these terms.

Do you call something "the end"? I mean such a thing as a limit or boundary, for all those are, I say, the same thing. Prodicus<sup>5</sup> might disagree with us, but you surely call something "finished" or "completed" — that is what I want to express, nothing elaborate.

M: I do, and I think I understand what you mean.

76 S: Further, you call something a plane, and something else a solid, as in geometry?

M: I do.

S: From this you may understand what I mean by shape, for I say this of every shape, that a shape is that which limits a solid; in a word, a shape is the limit of a solid.

M: And what do you say color is, Socrates?

S: You are outrageous, Meno. You bother an bold man to answer questions, but you yourself are

not willing to recall and to tell me what Gorgias says that virtue is.

M: After you have answered this, Socrates, I will tell you.

S: Even someone who was blindfolded would know from your conversation that you are handsome and still have lovers.

M: Why so?

S: Because you are forever giving orders in a discussion, as spoiled people do, who behave like tyrants as long as they are young. And perhaps you have recognized that I am at a disadvantage with handsome people, so I will do you the favor of an answer.

M: By all means do me that favor.

S: Do you want me to answer after the manner of Gorgias, which you would most easily follow?

M: Of course I want that.

S: Do you both say there are effluvia of things, as Empedocles<sup>6</sup> does? — Certainly.

S: And that there are channels through which the effluvia make their way? — Definitely.

S: And some effluvia fit some of the channels, d while others are too small or too big? — That is so.

S: And there is something which you call sight? — There is.

S: From this, "comprehend what I state," as Pindar said; for color is an effluvium from shapes which fits the sight and is perceived.

M: That seems to me to be an excellent answer, Socrates.

S: Perhaps it was given in the manner to which you are accustomed. At the same time I think that you can deduce from this answer what sound is, and smell, and many such things. — Quite so. e

S: It is a theatrical answer<sup>7</sup> so it pleases you, Meno, more than that about shape. — It does.

S: It is not better, son of Alexidemus, but I am convinced that the other is, and I think you would agree, if you did not have to go away before the

5. [Prodicus was a well-known Sophist who was especially keen on the exact meaning of words, and he was fond of making the proper distinctions between words of similar but not identical meanings. We see him in action in the *Protagoras* of Plato (especially 337a–c) where he appears with two other distinguished Sophists, Protagoras and Hippias. His insistence on the proper definition of words would naturally endear him to Socrates who, in Plato, always treats him with more sympathy than he does the other Sophists. The point here is that Prodicus would object to "end," "limit," and "boundary" being treated as "all the same thing."]

6. [Empedocles (c. 493–433 B.C.) of Acragas in Sicily was a famous physical philosopher. For him there were four eternal elements (earth, water, air, and fire), the intermingling and separation of which produced the physical phenomena. The reference here is to his theories of sense perception.]

7. [Theatrical because it brings in the philosophical theories of Empedocles and a quotation from Pindar, instead of being in simple terms such as Socrates' definition of shape.]

mysteries as you told me yesterday, but could remain and be initiated.

M: I would stay, Socrates, if you could tell me 77 many things like these.

S: I shall certainly not be lacking in eagerness to tell you such things, both for your sake and my own, but I may not be able to tell you many. Come now, you too try to fulfill your promise to me and tell me the nature of virtue as a whole and stop making many out of one, as jokers say whenever someone breaks something; but allow virtue to remain whole b and sound, and tell me what it is, for I have given you examples.

M: I think, Socrates, that virtue is, as the poet says, "to find joy in beautiful things and have power." So I say that virtue is to desire beautiful things and have the power to acquire them.

S: Do you mean that the man who desires beautiful things desires good things?—Most certainly.

S: Do you assume that there are people who c desire bad things, and others who desire good things? Do you not think, my good man, that all men desire good things?

M: I do not.

S: But some desire bad things?—Yes.

S: Do you mean that they believe the bad things to be good, or that they know they are bad and nevertheless desire them?—I think there are both kinds.

S: Do you think, Meno, that anyone, knowing that bad things are bad, nevertheless desires them?—I certainly do.

S: What do you mean by desiring? Is it to secure for oneself?—What else?

d S: Does he think that the bad things benefit him who possesses them, or does he know they harm him?

M: There are some who believe that the bad things benefit them, others who know that the bad things harm them.

S: And do you think that those who believe that bad things benefit them know that they are bad?

M: No, that I cannot altogether believe.

S: It is clear then that those who do not know e things to be bad do not desire what is bad, but they desire those things that they believe to be good but that are in fact bad. It follows that those who have no knowledge of these things and believe them to be good clearly desire good things. Is that not so?—It is likely.

S: Well then, those who you say desire bad things, believing that bad things harm their possessor, know that they will be harmed by them?—Necessarily.

S: And do they not think that those who are 78 harmed are miserable to the extent that they are harmed?—That too is inevitable.

S: And that those who are miserable are unhappy?—I think so.

S: Does anyone wish to be miserable and unhappy?—I do not think so, Socrates.

S: No one then wants what is bad, Meno, unless he wants to be such. For what else is being miserable but to desire bad things and secure them?

M: You are probably right, Socrates, and no one b wants what is bad.

S: Were you not saying just now that virtue is to desire good things and have the power to secure them?—Yes, I was.

S: The desiring part of this statement is common to everybody, and one man is no better than another in this?—So it appears.

S: Clearly then, if one man is better than another, he must be better at securing them.—Quite so.

S: This then is virtue according to your argument, the power of securing good things. c

M: I think, Socrates, that the case is altogether as you now understand it.

S: Let us see then whether what you say is true, for you may well be right. You say that the capacity to acquire good things is virtue?—I do.

S: And by good things you mean, for example, health and wealth?

M: Yes, and also to acquire gold and silver, also honors and offices in the city.

S: By good things you do not mean other goods than these?

M: No, but I mean all things of this kind.

S: Very well. According to Meno, the hereditary d guest friend of the Great King, virtue is the acquisition of gold and silver. Do you add to this acquiring, Meno, the words justly and piously, or does it make no difference to you but even if one secures these things unjustly, you call it virtue none the less?

M: Certainly not, Socrates.

S: You would then call it wickedness?—Indeed I would.

S: It seems then that the acquisition must be accompanied by justice or moderation or piety or e

some other part of virtue; if it is not, it will not be virtue, even though it provides good things.

M: How could there be virtue without these?

S: Then failing to secure gold and silver, whenever it would not be just to do so, either for oneself or another, is not this failure to secure them also virtue?

M: So it seems.

S: Then to provide these goods would not be virtue any more than not to provide them, but apparently whatever is done with justice will be virtue, and what is done without anything of the kind is wickedness?

M: I think it must necessarily be as you say.

S: We said a little while ago that each of these things was a part of virtue, namely, justice and moderation and all such things?—Yes.

S: Then you are playing with me, Meno.—How so, Socrates?

S: Because I begged you just now not to break up or fragment virtue, and I gave examples of how you should answer. You paid no attention, but you tell me that virtue is to be able to secure good things with justice, and this, you say, is a part of virtue.

M: I do.

S: It follows then from what you agree to, that to act in whatever you do with a part of virtue is virtue, for you say that justice is a part of virtue, as are all such qualities. Why do I say this? Because when 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 told me what virtue as a whole is, and I would already know that, even if you fragment it into parts.<sup>8</sup> I think you must face the same question from the beginning, my dear Meno, namely, what is virtue, if every action performed with a part of virtue is virtue? For that is what one is saying when he says that every action performed with justice is virtue. Do you not think you should face the same question again, or do you think one knows what a part of virtue is if one does not know virtue itself?—I do not think so.

S: If you remember, when I was answering you about shape, we rejected the kind of answer that tried to answer in terms still being the subject of inquiry and not yet agreed upon.—And we were right to reject them.

8. [That is, Meno is including the term to be defined in the definition.]

S: Then surely, my good sir, you must not think, while the nature of virtue as a whole is still under inquiry, that by answering in terms of the parts of virtue you can make its nature clear to anyone or make anything else clear by speaking in this way, but only that the same question must be put to you again—what do you take the nature of virtue to be when you say what you say? Or do you think there is no point in what I am saying?—I think what you say is right.

S: Answer me again then from the beginning: What do you and your friend say that virtue is?

M: Socrates, before I even met you I used to hear that you are always in a state of perplexity and that you bring others to the same state, and now I think you are bewitching and beguiling me, simply putting me under a spell, so that I am quite perplexed. Indeed, if a joke is in order, you seem, in appearance and in every other way, to be like the broad torpedo fish, for it too makes anyone who comes close and touches it feel numb, and you now seem to have had that kind of effect on me, for both my mind and my tongue are numb, and I have no answer to give you. Yet I have made many speeches about virtue before large audiences on a thousand occasions, very good speeches as I thought, but now I cannot even say what it is. I think you are wise not to sail away from Athens to go and stay elsewhere, for if you were to behave like this as a stranger in another city, you would be driven away for practising sorcery.

S: You are a rascal, Meno, and you nearly deceived me.

M: Why so particularly, Socrates?

S: I know why you drew this image of me.

M: Why do you think I did?

S: So that I should draw an image of you in return. I know that all handsome men rejoice in images of themselves; it is to their advantage, for I think that the images of beautiful people are also beautiful, but I will draw no image of you in turn. Now if the torpedo fish is itself numb and so makes others numb, then I resemble it, but not otherwise, for I myself do not have the answer when I perplex others, but I am more perplexed than anyone when I cause perplexity in others. So now I do not know what virtue is; perhaps you knew before you contacted me, but now you are certainly like one who does not know. Nevertheless, I want to examine and seek together with you what it may be.



M: How will you look for it, Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know?

S: I know what you want to say, Meno. Do you realize what a debater's argument you are bringing up; that a man cannot search either for what he knows or for what he does not know? He cannot search for what he knows—since he knows it, there is no need to search—nor for what he does not know, for he does not know what to look for.

M: Does that argument not seem sound to  
81 you, Socrates?

S: Not to me.

M: Can you tell me why?

S: I can. I have heard wise men and women talk about divine matters. . . .

M: What did they say?

S: What was, I thought, both true and beautiful.

M: What was it, and who were they?

S: The speakers were among the priests and priestesses whose care it is to be able to give an  
b account of their practices. Pindar too says it, and many others of the divine among our poets. What they say is this; see whether you think they speak the truth: They say that the human soul is immortal; at times it comes to an end, which they call dying, at times it is reborn, but it is never destroyed, and one must therefore live one's life as piously as possible:

c Persephone will return to the sun above in the ninth year the souls of those from whom she will exact punishment for old miseries, and from these come noble kings, mighty in strength and greatest in wisdom, and for the rest of time men will call them sacred heroes.

d As the soul is immortal, has been born often and has seen all things here and in the underworld, there is nothing which it has not learned; so it is in no way surprising that it can recollect the things it knew before, both about virtue and other things. As the whole of nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, nothing prevents a man, after recalling one thing only—a process men call learning—discovering everything else for himself, if he is brave and does not tire of the search, for searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection. We must, therefore, not believe that debater's argument, for it would

make us idle, and fainthearted men like to hear it, whereas my argument makes them energetic and keen on the search. I trust that this is true, and I want to inquire along with you into the nature of virtue.

M: Yes, Socrates, but how do you mean that we do not learn, but that what we call learning is recollection? Can you teach me that this is so?

S: As I said just now, Meno, you are a rascal. You now ask me if I can teach you, when I say there  
82 is no teaching but recollection, in order to show me up at once as contradicting myself.

M: No, by Zeus, Socrates, that was not my intention when I spoke, but just a habit. If you can somehow show me that things are as you say, please do so.

S: It is not easy, but I am nevertheless willing to do my best for your sake. Call one of these many  
b attendants of yours, whichever you like, that I may prove it to you in his case.

M: Certainly. You there, come forward.

S: Is he a Greek? Does he speak Greek?

M: Very much so. He was born in my household.

S: Pay attention then whether you think he is recollecting or learning from me.

M: I will pay attention.

S: Tell me now, boy, you know that a square figure is like this?—I do.

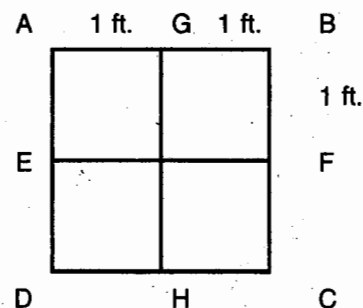
S: A square then is a figure in which all these  
c four sides are equal?—Yes indeed.

S: And it also has these lines through the middle equal?<sup>9</sup>—Yes.

S: And such a figure could be larger or smaller?—Certainly.

S: If then this side were two feet, and this other

9. [Socrates draws a square ABCD. The sides are of course equal, and the "lines through the middle" are the lines joining the middle points of these sides, which also go through the center of the square, namely EF and GH. He then assumes the sides to be two feet.]



side two feet, how many feet would the whole be? Consider it this way: if it were two feet this way, and only one foot that way, the figure<sup>10</sup> would be once two feet?—Yes.

d S: But if it is two feet also that way, it would surely be twice two feet?—Yes.

S: How many feet is twice two feet? Work it out and tell me.—Four, Socrates.

S: Now we could have another figure twice the size of this one, with the four sides equal like this one.—Yes.

S: How many feet will that be?—Eight.

e S: Come now, try to tell me how long each side of this will be. The side of this is two feet. What about each side of the one which is its double?—Obviously, Socrates, it will be twice the length.

S: You see, Meno, that I am not teaching the boy anything, but all I do is question him. And now he thinks he knows the length of the line on which an eight-foot figure is based. Do you agree?

M: I do.

S: And does he know?

M: Certainly not.

S: He thinks it is a line twice the length?

M: Yes.

S: Watch him now recollecting things in order, as one must recollect. Tell me, boy, do you say that 83 a figure double the size is based on a line double the length? Now I mean such a figure as this, not long on one side and short on the other, but equal in every direction like this one, and double the size, that is, eight feet. See whether you still believe that it will be based on a line double the length.—I do.

S: Now the line becomes double its length if we add another of the same length here?—Yes indeed.

S: And the eight-foot square will be based on it, if there are four lines of that length?—Yes.

b S: Well, let us draw from it four equal lines, and surely that is what you say is the eight-foot square?—Certainly.

S: And within this figure are four squares, each of which is equal to the four-foot square?—Yes.

S: How big is it then? Is it not four times as big?—Of course.

S: Is this square then, which is four times as big, its double?—No, by Zeus.

S: How many times bigger is it?—Four times.

S: Then, my boy, the figure based on a line twice the length is not double but four times as big?—You are right.

S: And four times four is sixteen, is it not?—Yes.

S: On how long a line should the eight-foot square be based? On *this* line we have a square that is four times bigger, do we not?—Yes.

S: Now this four-foot square is based on this line here, half the length?—Yes.

S: Very well. Is the eight-foot square not double this one and half that one?<sup>11</sup>—Yes.

S: Will it not be based on a line longer than this one and shorter than that one? Is that not so?—I think so.

S: Good, you answer what you think. And tell me, was this one not two feet long, and that one four feet?—Yes.

S: The line on which the eight-foot square is based must then be longer than this one of two feet, and shorter than that one of four feet?—It must be.

S: Try to tell me then how long a line you say e it is.—Three feet.

S: Then if it is three feet, let us add the half of this one, and it will be three feet? For these are two feet, and the other is one. And here, similarly, these are two feet and that one is one foot, and so the figure you mention comes to be?—Yes.

S: Now if it is three feet this way and three feet that way, will the whole figure be three times three feet?—So it seems.

S: How much is three times three feet?—Nine feet.

S: And the double square was to be how many feet?—Eight.

S: So the eight-foot figure cannot be based on the three-foot line?—Clearly not.

S: But on how long a line? Try to tell us exactly, 84 and if you do not want to work it out, show me from what line.—By Zeus, Socrates, I do not know.

S: You realize, Meno, what point he has reached

10. [That is, the rectangle ABFE, which is obviously two square feet.]

11. [That is, the eight-foot square is double the four-foot square and half the sixteen-foot square, double the square based on a line two feet long, and half the square based on a four-foot side, so it must be based on a line between two and four feet in length. The slave naturally suggests three feet, but that gives a nine-foot square, and is still wrong (83e).]



in his recollection. At first he did not know what the basic line of the eight-foot square was; even now he does not yet know, but then he thought he knew, and answered confidently as if he did know, and he did not think himself at a loss, but now he does think himself at a loss, and as he does not know, neither does he think he knows.

M: That is true.

S: So he is now in a better position with regard to the matter he does not know?

M: I agree with that too.

S: Have we done him any harm by making him perplexed and numb as the torpedo fish does?

M: I do not think so.

S: Indeed, we have probably achieved something relevant to finding out how matters stand, for now, as he does not know, he would be glad to find out, whereas before he thought he could easily make many fine speeches to large audiences about the square of double size, and said that it must have a base twice as long.

M: So it seems.

S: Do you think that before he would have tried to find out that which he thought he knew though he did not, before he fell into perplexity and realized he did not know and longed to know?

M: I do not think so, Socrates.

S: Has he then benefitted from being numbed?

M: I think so.

S: Look then how he will come out of his perplexity while searching along with me. I shall do nothing more than ask questions and not teach him. Watch whether you find me teaching and explaining things to him instead of asking for his opinion.

S: You tell me, is this not a four-foot figure? You understand?—I do.

S: We add to it this figure which is equal to it?—Yes.

S: And we add this third figure equal to each of them?—Yes.

S: Could we then fill in the space in the corner?—Certainly.<sup>12</sup>

S: So we have these four equal figures?—Yes.

12. [Socrates now builds up his sixteen-foot square by joining three four-foot squares. Filling "the space in the corner" will give another four-foot square, which completes the sixteen-foot square containing four four-foot squares.]

S: Well then, how many times is the whole figure larger than this one?<sup>13</sup>—Four times.

S: But we should have had one that was twice as large, or do you not remember?—I certainly do.

S: Does not this line from one corner to the other cut each of these figures in two?<sup>14</sup>—Yes.

S: So these are four equal lines which enclose this figure?—They are.

S: Consider now: how large is the figure?—I do not understand.

S: Within these four figures, each line cuts off half of each, does it not?—Yes.

S: How many of this size are there in this figure?—Four.

S: How many in this?—Two.

S: What is the relation of four to two?—Double.

S: How many feet in this?—Eight.

S: Based on what line?—This one.

S: That is, on the line that stretches from corner to corner of the four-foot figure?—Yes.—Clever men call this the diagonal, so that if diagonal is its name, you say that the double figure would be that based on the diagonal?—Most certainly, Socrates.

S: What do you think, Meno? Has he, in his answers, expressed any opinion that was not his own?

M: No, they were all his own.

S: And yet, as we said a short time ago, he did not know?—That is true.

S: So these opinions were in him, were they not?—Yes.

S: So the man who does not know has within himself true opinions about the things that he does not know?—So it appears.

S: These opinions have now just been stirred up like a dream, but if he were repeatedly asked these same questions in various ways, you know that in the end his knowledge about these things would be as accurate as anyone's.—It is likely.

S: And he will know it without having been

13. ["This one" is any one of the inside squares of four feet.]

14. [Socrates now draws the diagonals of the four inside squares, namely FH, HE, EG, and GF, which together form the square GFHEG. We should note that Socrates here introduces a new element, which is not the result of a question but of his own knowledge, though the answer to the problem follows from questions. The new square contains four halves of a four-foot square, and is therefore eight feet.]

taught but only questioned, and find the knowledge within himself?—Yes.

S: And is not finding knowledge within oneself recollection?—Certainly.

S: Must he not either have at some time acquired the knowledge he now possesses, or else have always possessed it?—Yes.

S: If he always had it, he would always have known. If he acquired it, he cannot have done so in his present life. Or has someone taught him geometry? For he will perform in the same way about all geometry, and all other knowledge. Has someone taught him everything? You should know, especially as he has been born and brought up in your house.

M: But I know that no one has taught him.

S: Yet he has these opinions, or doesn't he?

M: That seems indisputable, Socrates.

86 S: If he has not acquired them in his present life, is it not clear that he had them and had learned them at some other time?—It seems so.

S: Then that was the time when he was not a human being?—Yes.

S: If then, during the time he exists and is not a human being he will have true opinions which, when stirred by questioning, become knowledge, will not his soul have learned during all time? For it is clear that during all time he exists, either as a man or not.—So it seems.

b S: Then if the truth about reality is always in our soul, the soul would be immortal so that you should always confidently try to seek out and recollect what you do not know at present—that is, what you do not recollect?<sup>15</sup>

M: Somehow, Socrates, I think that what you say is right.

c S: I think so too, Meno. I do not insist that my argument is right in all other respects, but I would contend at all costs both in word and deed as far as I could that we will be better men, braver and less idle, if we believe that one must search for the things one does not know, rather than if we believe that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it.

15. [This is what the whole passage on recollection with the slave is intended to prove, namely, that the sophism introduced by Meno—that one cannot find out what one does not know—is false.]

M: In this too I think you are right, Socrates.

S: Since we are of one mind that one should seek to find out what one does not know, shall we try to find out together what virtue is?

M: Certainly. But Socrates, I should be most pleased to investigate and hear your answer to my original question, whether we should try on the assumption that virtue is something teachable, or is a natural gift, or in whatever way it comes to men.

S: If I were directing you, Meno, and not only myself, we would not have investigated whether virtue is teachable or not before we had investigated what virtue itself is. But because you do not even attempt to rule yourself, in order that you may be free, but you try to rule me and do so, I will agree with you—for what can I do? So we must, it appears, inquire into the qualities of something the nature of which we do not yet know. However, please relax your rule a little bit for me and agree to investigate whether it is teachable or not by means of a hypothesis. I mean the way geometers often carry on their investigations.

For example, if they are asked whether a specific area can be inscribed in the form of a triangle within a given circle, one of them might say: "I do not yet know whether that area has that property, but I think I have, as it were, a hypothesis that is of use for the problem, namely this: If that area is such that when one has applied it as a rectangle to the given straight line in the circle it is deficient by a figure similar to the very figure which is applied, then I think one alternative results, whereas another results if it is impossible for this to happen. So, by using this hypothesis, I am willing to tell you what results with regard to inscribing it in the circle—that is, whether it is impossible or not." So let us speak about virtue also, since we do not know either what it is or what qualities it possesses, and let us investigate whether it is teachable or not by means of a hypothesis, and say this: Among the things existing in the soul, of what sort is virtue, that it should be teachable or not? First, if it is another sort than knowledge, is it teachable or not, or, as we were just saying, recollectable? Let it make no difference to us which term we use: Is it teachable? Or is it plain to anyone that men cannot be taught anything but knowledge?—I think so.

S: But, if virtue is a kind of knowledge, it is clear that it could be taught.—Of course.

S: We have dealt with that question quickly, that