

Plato, *Meno*

### 1.) Can virtue be taught? (70a–80a)

Socrates: confession of complete ignorance about virtue.

‘If I do not know what  $x$  is, how will I know the qualities or attributes of  $x$ ?’

Socrates: further, I have never met a person who does know what virtue is.

Socrates: tell me, Meno, what you think virtue is?

**FIRST ANSWER:** being able to manage public affairs, and in doing so to help one’s friends and harm enemies [i.e., the virtue of a man]

But there are other virtues: there is a virtue for every action and every age (72a)

Socrates: Meno, you have found a whole swam of virtues!

Digression on health, etc., where Socrates introduces the notions of justice and moderation (72e)

**‘SECRET’ ACCOUNT OF VIRTUE (73C):** *acquired qualities by which humans become good*

**SECOND ANSWER (73D):** to be able to rule over people (justly?!)

Justice: is justice a virtue, or is it virtue? [how are these different?]

Other virtues: courage, moderation, wisdom, munificence (generosity)

Socrates: do not speak to me of the many

Excursus on shape in order to answer Meno—in order to then allow Meno to answer concerning virtue

[Shape: that which limits a solid; i.e., a shape is the limit of a solid]

[Color: an effluvium from shapes which fits the sight and is perceived]

### Return to Virtue (77A)

**THIRD ANSWER (77B):** virtue is to desire beautiful things and have the power to acquire them

Anticipation of Aristotle’s *Ethics*: “do you not think that all men desire good things?”

People desire things that they *believe* to be good but are in fact bad (77e)

Socrates’ inference based on Menor’s earlier claim:

**FOURTH ANSWER (78C):** virtue is the power of securing good things (viz., health, wealth, honor)

Socrates: this acquisition must be accompanied by justice, moderation, piety?(78e) (i.e., must be accompanied by virtue???)

**Start over: what is virtue? (80A)**

80a: State of Perplexity and the Torpedo Fish

80c: SOCRATIC IGNORANCE

Key turning point in the dialogue: How can you look for something when you don't know what it is?

Socrates: there would be no learning, no discovery if one cannot search for what one doesn't know.

Either you know something (and then you cannot learn it), or you do not know something (and then you cannot search for it).

**\*\* Introduction of what the priests and priestesses have said about true & beautiful things:**

81b: the human soul is immortal

Apparent geometrical interlude

Question for reflection: is Socrates accurate when he professes that he does not teach the slave boy anything?

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**Key themes in Second Part of *Meno***

- 86b/c:**
- *Truth about reality as something eternal*
  - *The soul is immortal*
  - *Knowledge is recollection*

After geometrical interlude, knowledge is taken possibly to be a kind of knowledge (86d–89e)

The arrival of Anytus & the problem of the sophist (90a–95b)

The distinction between correct opinion & knowledge (95b–99c)

Virtue as a gift from the gods (99d–100b)