

Plato's *Meno*

Meno's Definitions of Virtue (*Arête*)

- **D1**: The virtue of a man is of the ability to manage public affairs and in doing so benefit his friends and harm his enemies, carefully ensuring that no harm comes to himself; the virtue of a woman is the ability to manage the household, preserve its possessions, and be submissive to her husband; children, the elderly, and slaves have virtues for their position as well (71e-72a).
- **D2**: Virtue is the ability to rule over people (73d).
- **D3**: Virtue is justice (73d).
- **D4**: Virtue is to desire beautiful (*kalos*) things and have the power to get them (77b).
- **D5**: Virtue is to have the power to get beautiful things (78b).

Socrates' Six Lessons for Meno

- **Lesson 1**: The Metaphor of Bees
- **Lesson 2**: The Metaphor of Strength
- **Lesson 3**: The Metaphor of Temperance and Justice
- **Lesson 4**: The Metaphor of Shapes and Colors
- **Lesson 5**: Defining Shape
- **Lesson 6**: Contrast with Sophists (the “clever, disputatious, and quarrelsome”)

Paradoxes in the *Meno*¹

- **The Socratic Paradoxes**:
 - (a) No one desires evil; all who act to promote it do so involuntarily (77b-78b)
 - (b) Virtue is knowledge; those who promote evil do so involuntarily, acting out of ignorance (87c-96d).
- **The Partial Knowledge Paradox**: Does anyone know what a part of virtue is, without knowing the whole (e.g., 79c)?
- **Meno's Paradox**: Our stock of knowledge cannot increase, for we can learn only what we do not already know, by definition, and we cannot learn what we do not know because we will not recognize it when we encounter it (80d). This has four assumptions:
 - (a) **Discreteness**
 - (b) **Purchasing**
 - (c) **Merchandizing**

¹ From R.E. Walton 's “Some Important Paradoxes”, Professor of Philosophy, U. Montana.

(d) Hunting

Socrates' Three Confessions in the *Meno*

- C1: “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” (81d-e).
- C2: “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” (86b-c).
- C3: “I too speak as one who does not have knowledge but is guessing. However, I certainly do not think that I am guessing that right opinion is a different thing from knowledge. If I claim to know anything else—and I would make that claim about few things—I would put this down as one of the things I know” (98b).

Socrates' Method of Hypothesis in the *Meno*

- $K(x)$ – x is a matter of knowledge.
- $T(x)$ – x is teachable.
- $P(x)$ – x is taught by people.
- $L(x)$ – x is learned by students.
- $S(x)$ – x is taught by Sophists.
- $G(x)$ – x is taught by the “great men of Athens”.
- $\text{not-}K(x) \rightarrow \text{not-}T(x)$ (87b).
 - Or equivalently, $T(x) \rightarrow K(x)$.
- $K(x) \rightarrow T(x)$ (87c).
- $T(x) \rightarrow (P(x) \text{ and } L(x))$ (89d).
- $P(x) \rightarrow (S(x) \text{ or } G(x))$ (90c-91e).
- But if x is virtue, then $\text{not-}G(x)$ (93b-94e) and $\text{not-}S(x)$ (95c-96c).
- Therefore, $\text{not-}K(x)$.
- And hence, $\text{not-}T(x)$ (96c).