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## GREAT DIALOGUES

OF *Plato*

Translated by W. H. D. Rouse

EDITED BY ERIC H. WARMINGTON

AND PHILIP G. ROUSE



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## MENO (Menon)

*Menon, Socrates, A slave of Menon, Anytos*

## Introductory Note

*This dialogue is a discussion of the nature of virtue and particularly the question whether virtue can be taught.*

*Menon was a wealthy young Thessalian nobleman. He took part, probably not long afterwards, as a Thessalian general in the famous expedition of the Ten Thousand under Cyrus in 401 B.C. against the King of Persia; he was captured; and was put to death by the King. Xenophon considered him a treacherous, self-seeking character (The March Up Country, ii. 5.28, translated by W. H. D. Rouse).*

*Anytos appears later as one of the three accusers at Socrates' trial.*

MENON: Can you tell me, Socrates—can virtue be taught? Or if not, does it come by practice? Or does it come neither by practice nor by teaching, but do people get it by nature, or in some other way?

SOCRATES: My dear Menon, the Thessalians have always had a good name in our nation—they were always admired as good horsemen and men with full purses. Now, it seems to me, we must add brains to the list. Your friend Aristippos is a very good example, and his townsmen from Larissa. Gorgias<sup>1</sup> is the man who set it all going. As soon as he got there, all the Aleuadae<sup>2</sup> were at his feet—your own bosom friend Aristippos was one—not to mention the rest of Thessaly. Here's a custom he taught you, at least—to answer generously and without fear if anyone asked you a question; quite natural, of course, when one knows the answer. Just what he did himself; he was a willing victim of the civilised world of Hellas<sup>3</sup>—any Hellene might ask him anything he liked, and every mortal soul got his answer!

But here, my dear Menon, it is just the opposite. There is a regular famine of brains here, and your part of the world

<sup>1</sup> A celebrated Sophist from Leontini in Sicily; he taught rhetoric based upon impressive language. He visited Athens in 427 B. C., and travelled about Greece, lecturing. See also *Banquet*, p. 93, n. 5.

<sup>2</sup> As it were, the leaders of society in Thessaly.

<sup>3</sup> Greece. The ancient Greeks called themselves Hellenes, and their country Hellas; it was later called Graecia by the Romans.

seems to hold a monopoly in that article. At least, if you do ask anyone here a question like that, all you will get is a laugh and—"My good man, you must think I am inspired! Virtue? Can it be taught? Or how does it come? Do I know that? So far from knowing whether it can be taught or can't be taught, I don't know even the least little thing about virtue, I don't even know what virtue is!"

I'm in the same fix myself, Menon. I am as poor of the article as the rest of us, and I have to blame myself that I don't know the least little thing about virtue, and when I don't know what a thing is, how can I know its quality? Take Menon, for example: If someone doesn't know in the least who Menon is, how can he know whether Menon is handsome or rich or even a gentleman, or perhaps just the opposite? Do you think he can?

MENON: Not I. But look here, Socrates, don't you really know what virtue is? Are we to give that report of you in Larissa?

SOCRATES: Just so, my friend, and more—I never met anyone who did, so far as I know.

MENON: What! Did not you meet Gorgias when he was here?

SOCRATES: Oh, yes.

MENON: Didn't you think *he* knew?

SOCRATES: I have rather a poor memory, Menon, so I can't say at the moment whether I did think so. But perhaps he did know, or perhaps you know what he said; kindly remind me, then, what he did say. You say it yourself, if you like; for I suppose you think as he thought.

MENON: Oh, yes.

SOCRATES: Then let us leave him out of it, since he is not here; tell me yourself, in heaven's name, Menon, what do you say virtue is? Tell me, and don't grudge it; it will be the luckiest lie I ever told if it turns out that you know and Gorgias knew, and I went and said I never met anyone who did know.

MENON: That is nothing difficult, my dear Socrates. First, if you like, a man's virtue, that is easy; this is a man's virtue: to be able to manage public business, and in doing it to help friends and hurt enemies, and to take care to keep clear of such mischief himself. Or, if you like, a woman's virtue, there's no difficulty there: she must manage the house

well, and keep the stores all safe, and obey her husband. And a child's virtue is different for boy and girl, and an older man's, a freeman's, if you like, or a slave's, if you like. There are a very large number of other virtues, so there is no difficulty in saying what virtue is; for according to each of our activities and ages each of us has his virtue for doing each sort of work, and in the same way, Socrates, I think, his vice.

SOCRATES: I seem to have been lucky indeed, my dear Menon, if I have been looking for one virtue and found a whole swarm of virtues in your store. However, let us take up this image, Menon, the swarm. If I asked you what a bee really is, and you answered that there are many different kinds of bees, what would you answer me if I asked you then: "Do you say there are many different kinds of bees, differing from each other in being bees more or less? Or do they differ in some other respect, for example in size, or beauty, and so forth?" Tell me, how would you answer that question?

MENON: I should say that they are not different at all one from another in beehood.

SOCRATES: Suppose I went on to ask: "Tell me this, then—what do you say exactly is that in which they all are the same, and not different?" Could you answer anything to that?

MENON: Oh, yes.

SOCRATES: Very well, now then for virtues. Even if there are many different kinds of them, they all have one something, the same in all, which makes them virtues. So if one is asked, "What is virtue?" one must have this clear in his view before he can answer the question. Do you understand what I mean?

MENON: I think I understand; but I do not yet grasp your question as I could wish.

SOCRATES: Do you think that virtue alone is like that, Menon—I mean one thing in a man and another in a woman, and so forth, or do you also say the same of health and size and strength? Do you think health is one thing in a man, and another in a woman? Or is the essence the same everywhere if it be health, whether it be in a man or in anything else whatever?

MENON: I think health is the same thing in both man and woman.

SOCRATES: And what of size and strength? If a woman is strong, is it the same essence and the same strength which will make her strong? By the same strength I mean this: the strength is not different in itself whether it be in a man or a woman. Do you think there is any difference?

MENON: Why, no.

SOCRATES: Yet virtue will differ in itself in a boy and in an old man, in a woman and in a man?

MENON: I can't help thinking, Socrates, that this is not quite like those other things.

SOCRATES: Very well: Did you not say that man's virtue is to manage public affairs well, and woman's to manage a home?

MENON: Yes, I did.

SOCRATES: Then is it possible to manage a state or a house or anything well, without managing temperately<sup>1</sup> and justly?

MENON: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: If, then, they manage temperately and justly, they will manage with temperance and justice?

MENON: Necessarily.

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

MENON: So it seems.

SOCRATES: What of the boy and the old man? If they are reckless and unjust, could they ever be good?

MENON: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: But they must be temperate and just?

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then all men are good in the same way? For when they have the same things, they are good.

MENON: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Then I suppose if they had not the same virtue, they would not be good in the same way.

MENON: Certainly not.

<sup>1</sup>The Greek word translated "temperately" means rather "with soundness of mind."

SOCRATES: Since therefore the same virtue is in all, try to tell me, and try to remember, what Gorgias says it is, and what you say too.

MENON: What can it be but to be able to rule men? If you want something which is the same in all.

SOCRATES: That is just what I do want. But is it the same virtue in a boy, Menon, and a slave, for each of them to be able to rule his master? And do you think he that ruled would still be a slave?

MENON: No, Socrates, I certainly don't think that.

SOCRATES: For it isn't reasonable, my good fellow. But here is another thing to consider. You say, "able to rule": shall we not add to it justly, not unjustly?

MENON: I think so, yes; for justice is virtue, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Virtue, Menon, or a virtue?

MENON: What do you mean by that?

SOCRATES: The same as in anything else. For example, if you please, take roundness: this I would say is a figure, not simply thus—figure. I would say so because there are other figures.

MENON: What you said was quite right, since I agree that there are other virtues besides justice.

SOCRATES: What are they, tell me, just as I would tell you other figures if you ask; then you tell me some other virtues.

MENON: Very well. Courage, I think, is a virtue and temperance and wisdom and high-mindedness and plenty more.

SOCRATES: Here we are again, Menon: We looked for one virtue and found many, although that was in another way; but the one that is in all these things we cannot find!

MENON: I can't see my way yet, Socrates, to find the one virtue you seek in them all, as we did with the other things.

SOCRATES: That is quite likely; but I will do my best to bring us a step forward, if I can. You understand, no doubt, that it is the same with everything: if someone should ask you what I mentioned just now: "What is figure, Menon?" and you said to him: "Roundness"; and if he asked you, as I would: "Is roundness figure or a figure?" I suppose you would say: "A figure."

MENON: Yes, to be sure.

SOCRATES: Because there are other figures, isn't that the reason?

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: And if he asked further: "What other figures?", you would tell him?

MENON: So I would.

SOCRATES: And again, if he asked you in the same way what colour is, and you said, "White," the man would ask next, "Is white colour, or a colour?" And you would say, "A colour," because there are others.

MENON: I should.

SOCRATES: And if he requested you to tell him other colours, you would tell him others that are no less colours than white?

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: If then he followed up the argument, like me, and said, "We always arrive at a multitude. I don't want that; but since you call these many by one name, and say they are all figures without exception, and that too even if they are opposite to each other, what is this which contains the round no less than the straight? You name it indeed figure, and say the round is no less figure than the straight." Is not that what you say?

MENON: It is.

SOCRATES: Well, when you say that, do you then mean that the round is no more round than the straight, or the straight no straighter than the round?

MENON: Not at all, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Yet you do say that the round is no more figure than the straight, or the straight than the round.

MENON: Quite true.

SOCRATES: Then what is this name, figure? Try to tell me. If someone asked you like that about colour or figure, and you said, "My good man, I don't understand what you want, and I don't know what you mean," perhaps he would have been surprised, and would have said, "Don't you understand that I am looking for the common element in these?" Or would you have nothing to say, if someone should ask, "What is there in the round and straight and so forth, all that you call figures, the same in all?" Try to say, that you may have a little practice for your reply about virtue.

MENON: No, no, Socrates, *you* say.

SOCRATES: Shall I grant you that favour?

MENON: Please do!

SOCRATES: And then will *you* do me the favour of telling me about virtue?

MENON: Yes, yes.

SOCRATES: Then I must do my best; it is worth while.

MENON: That it is.

SOCRATES: Come along, then, let me try to tell you what figure is. Just think a moment: Will you accept this for it—let us suppose that figure is the only thing in the world which is always found along with colour. Good enough, eh? Or do you want something else? If you give me an answer like that about virtue, I shall be quite content, I assure you.

MENON: But that's silly, my dear Socrates.

SOCRATES: How do you mean?

MENON: That figure, according to your statement, is what always goes with colour. Very well; but if someone said he didn't know what colour is, and if he were in the same difficulty as about figure, what do you think you should have answered them?

SOCRATES: Only the truth! And if my questioner were one of these clever fellows, who just chop logic and argue to win, I should answer him, "I have said my say; if I am wrong, it is your business to take up the argument and to refute it." But if we were friends, like you and me now, who wished to have a talk together, you see I must answer more gently and more like friends talking together; and perhaps it is more like friends talking together, not only to answer with truth, but to use only what the one who is questioned admits that he knows.

Then that is how I will try to talk with you. Tell me, if you please: Do you speak of an end of anything? I mean something like this, a boundary or a verge—these are all the same thing. Perhaps Prodicos<sup>1</sup> might not agree with us, but you at any rate say that a thing is bounded and ended; that's the sort of thing I mean, nothing elaborate.

MENON: Oh yes, I use those words, and I think I understand you.

<sup>1</sup> A noted Sophist of Ceos; see p. 49, n. 1.

SOCRATES: Very well; you speak of a surface, or a solid as it may be, like those things in geometry.

MENON: Yes, I use those words.

SOCRATES: There's enough then already for me to explain what I call figure. With every figure, I say that to which the solid extends is the figure; to put it shortly, I would say that figure is the boundary of a solid.

MENON: And what is colour, Socrates?

SOCRATES: You're a bully, Menon; you worry an old man to answer questions, and you won't trouble to remember what Gorgias says virtue is.

MENON: Oh, I'll tell you that as soon as you tell me this, my dear Socrates!

SOCRATES: Anyone could tell you're a handsome man and have lovers, by only hearing you talk, even if he were blindfolded!

MENON: Why, pray?

SOCRATES: Because in your talk you do nothing but lay commands on people, like young society beauties who are regular tyrants as long as they are young and good-looking. And perhaps you have found me out already; I can't resist the handsome! So I will do you the favour of answering.

MENON: Yes, do me that favour.

SOCRATES: Then do you wish me to answer in the style of Gorgias, so that you could most easily follow?

MENON: Of course I do.

SOCRATES (*imitating Gorgias*): Well, you people say that emanations, or films, are given off from things—that is the science of Empedocles.

MENON: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And there are pores, or passages, and the emanations go pouring into them and through them?

MENON: Quite so.

SOCRATES: And some of the films fit some of the pores, but some are too small or too large?

MENON: That is true.

SOCRATES: You speak of sight also?

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then from these things "Comprehend what I tell thee," as Pindar said: Colour is an emanation from figures, and is symmetrical with sight and perceptible by sense.

MENON (*laughing*): That is an excellent answer of yours, my dear Socrates.

SOCRATES: Perhaps because you are used to the way it is put. And at the same time, I think, you notice that you could define in this way what sound is, and smell, and many other such things?

MENON: Certainly, yes.

SOCRATES: Because the answer is in high poetic style, so you like it better than the one about figure.

MENON: I do, certainly.

SOCRATES: But it is not so good, my dear son of Alexidemus; I am convinced the other is better. And I think you would agree with me, if you were not obliged to go off before the Mysteries, as you said yesterday; you have only to stay and be initiated.

MENON: Oh, I would stay, my dear Socrates, if you would only go on talking like this!

SOCRATES: Indeed, my will shall not be wanting; I would go on talking like this for both our sakes, but I fear I shall not be able to go on talking like this for long. But now please try yourself to keep your promise to give me a general description of virtue—what it is; no more turning the singular into the plural, as witty people say whenever you smash something; just leave virtue sound and whole, and tell me what it is—I have shown you how to do it by my examples.

MENON: Then, my dear Socrates, virtue seems to me to be, as the poet says, "to rejoice in what is handsome and to be able"; I agree with the poet, and I say virtue is to desire handsome things and to be able to provide them.

SOCRATES: Do you say that the man who desires handsome things is desirous of good things?

MENON: By all means.

SOCRATES: Do you imply that there are some that desire bad things, and others good? Don't you think, my dear fellow, that all desire good things?

MENON: No, I don't.

SOCRATES: But some desire bad things?

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: Thinking the bad things to be good, you mean, or even recognising that they are bad, still they desire them?

MENON: Both, I think.

SOCRATES: Do you really think, my dear Menon, that anyone, knowing the bad things to be bad, still desires them?

MENON: Certainly.

SOCRATES: What does he desire, do you say—to have them?

MENON: To have them; what else?

SOCRATES: Thinking that the bad things benefit him that has them, or knowing that they injure whoever gets them?

MENON: Some thinking that the bad things benefit, some also knowing that they injure.

SOCRATES: Do those who think that the bad things benefit know that the bad things are bad?

MENON: I don't think that at all.

SOCRATES: Then it is plain that those who desire bad things are those who don't know what they are, but they desire what they thought were good whereas they really are bad; so those who do not know what they are, but think they are good, clearly desire the good. Is not that so?

MENON: It really seems like it.

SOCRATES: Very well. Those who desire the bad things, as you say, but yet think that bad things injure whoever gets them, know, I suppose, that they themselves will be injured by them?

MENON: They must.

SOCRATES: But do not these believe that those who are injured are miserable in so far as they are injured?

MENON: They must believe that too.

SOCRATES: Miserable means wretched?

MENON: So I think.

SOCRATES: Well, is there anyone who wishes to be miserable and wretched?

MENON: I think not, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then nobody desires bad things, my dear Menon, nobody, unless he wishes to be like that. For what is the depth of misery other than to desire bad things and to get them?

MENON: It really seems that is the truth, Socrates, and no one desires what is bad.

SOCRATES: You said just now, didn't you, that virtue is to desire good things and to be able to provide them.

MENON: Yes, I did.

SOCRATES: Well, one part of what you said, the desiring, is in all, and in this respect one man is no better than another.

MENON: It seems so.

SOCRATES: It is clear, then that if one is better than another, he must be better in the ability.

MENON: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Then according to your argument virtue is the power to get good things.

MENON: My dear Socrates, the whole thing, I must admit, seems to be exactly as you take it.

SOCRATES: Now let us see whether your last is true—perhaps you might be right. You say virtue is to be able to provide the good?

MENON: Quite so.

SOCRATES: Don't you call good such things as health and wealth?

MENON: Yes, and to possess gold and silver and public honour and appointments.

SOCRATES: Don't you say some other things are good besides these?

MENON: No, at least, I mean all such things as those.

SOCRATES: Very well; to provide gold and silver is virtue, according to Menon, the family friend of the Great King.<sup>1</sup> Do you add to your providing, my dear Menon, the qualification "fairly and justly"? Or does that make no difference to you, and if a man provides them unjustly, you call it virtue all the same?

<sup>1</sup> The King of Persia, the owner of fabulous riches.

MENON: Oh dear me no, Socrates.

SOCRATES: It is vice then.

MENON: Dear me, yes, of course.

SOCRATES: It is necessary then, as it seems, to add to this getting, justice or temperance or piety or some other bit of virtue; or else it will not be virtue, although it provides good things.

MENON: Why, how could it be virtue without these?

SOCRATES: And not to get gold and silver when that is not just, neither for yourself nor anyone, is not this not-getting also virtue?

MENON: It looks like it.

SOCRATES: Then the getting of such good things would not be virtue any more than the not-getting; but as it seems, getting with justice would be virtue, and getting without such qualifications, vice.

MENON: I think it must be as you put it.

SOCRATES: Now we said a little while ago that each of them is a bit of virtue, justice and temperance and all things like that.

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then are you making fun of me, Menon?

MENON: How so, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Because I begged you just now not to break virtue into bits, or give me virtue as a handful of small change, and I gave you specimens to show how you ought to answer; and you simply paid no attention—now you tell me virtue is to be able to get good things with justice, and justice, you say, is a bit of virtue!

MENON: Yes, that is what I say.

SOCRATES: It follows, then, from what you agree, that to do whatever we do along with a bit of virtue is virtue; for you say justice is a bit of virtue, and so with each of those bits. Well, why do I say this? Because when I begged you to tell me what whole virtue is, instead of telling me that (far from it!) you say that every action is virtue if it be done with a bit of virtue, just as if you had explained what virtue is as a whole and I should know it at once even if you chopped your coin up into farthings. Then I must put the very same question from the

beginning, as it seems: My dear friend Menon, what is virtue, if a little bit of virtue would make any action virtue? For that is as much as saying, whenever anyone says it, that all action with justice is virtue. Don't you think yourself that I must put the same question again, or do you believe that we can know what a bit of virtue is, when we do not know virtue itself?

MENON: I don't believe that.

SOCRATES: Perhaps you remember that when I answered you about figure a while ago, we excluded such an answer as might try to explain things by using what was not yet agreed between us but what we were seeking still.

MENON: We did right to exclude that.

SOCRATES: Then don't *you* do it now, my dear fellow! We are still trying to find out what virtue is as a whole, and pray do not believe you will make that clear to anyone by using bits of virtue in your answer. You will never explain anything to anyone by this same manner of speaking, but you will again come up against the same question, what this virtue is which you bring into your explanation. Do you think there's something in what I say?

MENON: I think you are quite right.

SOCRATES: Then begin again and answer: What is virtue, according to you and your friend?

MENON: Well now, my dear Socrates, you are just like what I always heard before I met you: always puzzled yourself and puzzling everybody else. And now you seem to me to be a regular wizard, you dose me with drugs and bewitch me with charms and spells, and drown me in puzzlement. I'll tell you just what you are like, if you will forgive a little jest: your looks and the rest of you are exactly like a flatfish and you sting like this stingray—only go near and touch one of those fish and you go numb, and that is the sort of thing you seem to have done to me. Really and truly, my soul is numb and my mouth is numb, and what to answer you I do not know. Yet I have a thousand times made long speeches about virtue, before many a large audience, and good speeches, too, as I was convinced; but now I have not a word to say at all as to what it is. I must say you are wise not to sail away or travel abroad; for if you did this as a foreigner in a foreign city, you would probably be run in for a wizard.

SOCRATES: You are a young rogue, Menon, and you almost took me in.

MENON: How, Socrates?

SOCRATES: I know why you made that comparison of me.

MENON: Why, do you think?

SOCRATES: That I might make another of *you*.<sup>1</sup> I know this—that all the famous beauties love being put into comparisons; it pays them, you see, for comparisons of the beautiful are beautiful, I think; but I will not do it with you in return. Well, if this stingray is numb itself as well as making others numb, I am like it; if not, I am not. For I am not clear-headed myself when I make others puzzled, but I am as puzzled as puzzled can be, and thus I make others puzzled too. So now, what virtue is I do not know; but you knew, perhaps, before you touched me, although now you resemble one who does not know. All the same, I wish to investigate, with your help, that we may both try to find out what it is.

MENON: And how will you try to find out something, Socrates, when you have no notion at all what it is? Will you lay out before us a thing you don't know, and then try to find it? Or, if at best you meet it by chance, how will you know this is that which you did not know?

SOCRATES: I understand what you wish to say, Menon. You look on this as a piece of chop-logic, don't you see, as if a man cannot try to find either what he knows or what he does not know. Of course he would never try to find what he knows, because he knows it, and in that case he needs no trying to find; or what he does not know, because he does not know what he will try to find.

MENON: Then you don't think that is a good argument, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Not I.

MENON: Can you tell me why?

SOCRATES: Oh yes. I have heard wise men and women on the subject of things divine—

MENON: And what did they say?

SOCRATES: True things and fine things, to my thinking.

MENON: What things, and who were the speakers?

SOCRATES: The speakers were some priests and priestesses who have paid careful attention to the things of their ministry, so as to be able to give a reasoned explanation of them; also

<sup>1</sup> A favourite game in society.

inspired poets have something to say, Pindar and many others. What they say I will tell you; pray consider, if they seem to you to be speaking truth. They say that the soul of man is immortal, and sometimes it comes to an end—which they call death—and sometimes it is born again, but it is never destroyed; therefore we must live our lives as much as we can in holiness: for from whomsoever

Persephone shall accept payment for ancient wrong,  
She gives up again their souls to the upper sun in the ninth year;

From these grow lordly kings, and men of power and might,  
And those who are chief in wisdom; these for time to come  
Are known among men for holy heroes.<sup>1</sup>

Then, since the soul is immortal and often born, having seen what is on earth and what is in the house of Hades, and everything, there is nothing it has not learnt; so there is no wonder it can remember about virtue and other things, because it knew about these before. For since all nature is akin, and the soul has learnt everything, there is nothing to hinder a man, remembering one thing only—which men call learning<sup>2</sup>—from himself finding out all else, if he is brave and does not weary in seeking; for seeking and learning is all remembrance. Then we must not be guided by this chop-logic argument; for this would make us idle, and it is pleasant for soft people to hear, but our way makes them active and enquiring. I have faith that this is true, and I wish with your help to try to find out what virtue is.

MENON: Yes, Socrates. But what do you mean by saying that we do not learn, but what we call learning is remembering? Can you teach me how this is?

SOCRATES: You are a young rogue, as I said a moment ago, Menon, and now you ask me if I can teach you, when I tell you there is no such thing as teaching, only remembering. I see you want to show me up at once as contradicting myself.

MENON: I swear that isn't true, my dear Socrates; I never thought of that, it was just habit. But if you know any way to show me how this can be as you say, show away!

SOCRATES: That is not easy, but still I want to do my best for your sake. Here, just call up one of your own men from all this crowd of servants, any one you like, and I'll prove my case in him.

MENON: All right. (*To a boy*) Come here.

<sup>1</sup> From Pindar. Persephone was Pluto's consort in Hades.

<sup>2</sup> I.e., the one thing needed to remember is how to learn; also remembering is learning. Both statements are covered here.

SOCRATES: Is he Greek, can he speak our language?

MENON: Rather! Born in my house.

SOCRATES: Now, kindly attend and see whether he seems to be learning from me, or remembering.

MENON: All right, I will attend.

SOCRATES: Now my boy, tell me: Do you know that a four-cornered space is like this? [*Diagram I*]

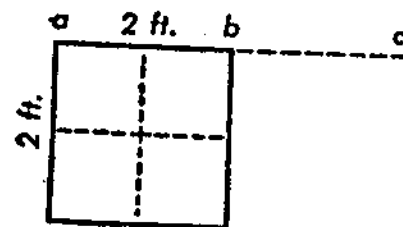


Diagram I

BOY: I do.

SOCRATES: Is this a four-cornered space having all these lines<sup>3</sup> equal, all four?

BOY: Surely.

SOCRATES: And these across the middle, are they not equal too?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Such a space might be larger or smaller?

BOY: Oh yes.

SOCRATES: Then if this side is two feet long and this two, how many feet would the whole be? Or look at it this way: if it were two feet this way, and only one the other, would not the space<sup>4</sup> be once two feet?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: But as it is two feet this way also, isn't it twice two feet?

BOY: Yes, so it is.

<sup>3</sup> There are no diagrams in the Greek text; they and the lettering have been added to assist the reader.

<sup>4</sup> I.e., sides.

<sup>5</sup> I.e., area.

SOCRATES: So the space is twice two feet?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then how many are twice two feet? Count and tell me.

BOY: Four, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Well, could there be another such space, twice as big, but of the same shape, with all the lines equal like this one?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: How many feet will there be in that, then?

BOY: Eight.

SOCRATES: Very well, now try to tell me how long will be each line of that one. The line of this one is two feet; how long would the line of the double one be?

BOY: The line would be double, Socrates, that is clear.

SOCRATES: (*aside to MENON*): You see, Menon, that I am not teaching this boy anything: I ask him everything; and now he thinks he knows what the line is from which the eight-[square] foot space is to be made. Don't you agree?

MENON: Yes, I agree.

SOCRATES: Does he know then?

MENON: Not at all.

SOCRATES: He *thinks* he knows, from the double size which is wanted?

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well, observe him while he remembers bit by bit, as he ought to remember.

Now, boy, answer me. You say the double space is made from the double line. You know what I mean; not long this way and short this way, it must be equal every way like this, but double this—eight [square] feet. Just look and see if you think it will be made from the double line.

BOY: Yes, I do.

SOCRATES: Then this line [ac]<sup>1</sup> is double this [ab], if we add as much [bc] to it on this side.

<sup>1</sup> In Diagram 1.

BOY: Of course!

SOCRATES: Then if we put four like this [ac], you say we shall get the eight-foot space.

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then let us draw these four equal lines [ac, cd, de, ea].<sup>1</sup> Is that the space which you say will be eight feet?

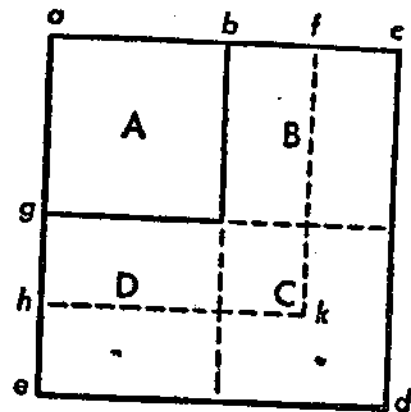


Diagram 2

BOY: Of course.

SOCRATES: Can't you see in it these four spaces here [A, B, C, D] each of them equal to the one we began with, the four-foot space?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well, how big is the new one? Is it not four times the old one?

BOY: Surely it is!

SOCRATES: Is four times the old one, double?

BOY: Why no, upon my word!

SOCRATES: How big, then?

BOY: Four times as big!

SOCRATES: Then, my boy, from a double line we get a space four times as big, not double.

BOY: That's true.

<sup>1</sup> In Diagram 2.

SOCRATES: Four times four is sixteen, isn't it?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: But what line will make an eight-foot space? This line makes one four times as big, sixteen, doesn't it?

BOY: That's what I say.

SOCRATES: And this four-foot space [A] comes from this line [ab], half the length of the long one?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Good. The eight-foot space will be double this [double A] and half this [half A, B, C, D].

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then its line must be longer than this [ab], and shorter than this [ac]. What do you think?

BOY: That's what I think.

SOCRATES: That's right, just answer what you think. Tell me also: Was not this line [ab] two feet, and this [ac] four?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then the line of the eight-foot space must be longer than this line of two feet, and shorter than the line of four feet.

BOY: Yes, it must.

SOCRATES: Try to tell me, then, how long you say it must be.

BOY: Three feet.

SOCRATES: Three feet, very well: If we take half this bit [half of bc] and add it on, that makes three feet [af], doesn't it? For here we have two [ab], and here one [bf], the added bit; and, on the other side, in the same way, here are two [ag], here one [gh]; and that makes the space you say [afkh].

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then if the space is three feet this way and three feet that way, the whole space will be three times three feet?

BOY: It looks like it.

SOCRATES: How much is three times three feet?

BOY: Nine.

SOCRATES: How many feet was the double to be?

BOY: Eight.

SOCRATES: So we have not got the eight-foot space from the three-foot line after all.

BOY: No, we haven't.

SOCRATES: Then how long ought the line to be? Try to tell us exactly, or if you don't want to give it in numbers, show it if you can.

BOY: Indeed, Socrates, on my word I don't know.

SOCRATES: Now, Menon, do you notice how this boy is getting on in his remembering? At first he did not know what line made the eight-foot space, and he does not know yet; but he thought he knew then, and boldly answered as if he did know, and did not think there was any doubt; now he thinks there is a doubt, and as he does not know, so he does not think he does know.

MENON: Quite true.

SOCRATES: Then he is better off as regards the matter he did not know?

MENON: Yes, I think so too.

SOCRATES: So now we have put him into a difficulty, and like the stingray we have made him numb, have we done him any harm?

MENON: I don't think so.

SOCRATES: At least we have brought him a step onwards, as it seems, to find out how he stands. For now he would go on contentedly seeking, since he does not know; but then he could easily have thought he would be talking well about the double space, even before any number of people again and again, saying how it must have a line of double length.

MENON: It seems so.

SOCRATES: Then do you think he would have tried to find out or to learn what he thought he knew, not knowing, until he tumbled into a difficulty by thinking he did not know, and longed to know?

MENON: I do not think he would, Socrates.

SOCRATES: So he gained by being numbed?

MENON: I think so.

SOCRATES: Just notice now that after this difficulty he will find out by seeking along with me, while I do nothing but ask questions and give no instruction. Look out if you find me teaching and explaining to him, instead of asking for his opinions.

Now, boy, answer me. Is not this our four-foot space [A]?<sup>1</sup> Do you understand?

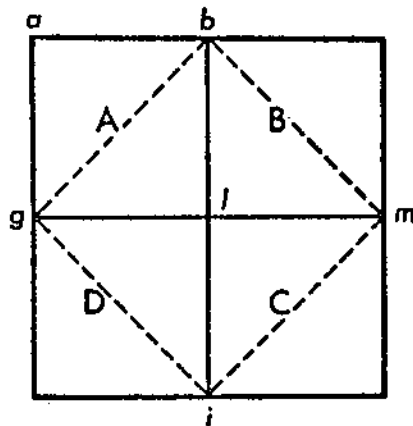


Diagram 3

BOY: I do.

SOCRATES: Shall we add another equal to it, thus [B]?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: And a third equal to either of them, thus [C]?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now shall we not also fill in this space in the corner [D]?

BOY: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Won't these be four equal spaces?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Very well. How many times the small one is this whole space?

BOY: Four times.

SOCRATES: But we wanted a double space; don't you remember?

<sup>1</sup> In Diagram 3.

BOY: Oh yes, I remember.

SOCRATES: Then here is a line running from corner to corner, cutting each of these spaces in two parts [draws lines *bm*, *mi*, *ig*, *gb*].

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: Are not these four lines equal, and don't they contain this space within them [*bmig*]?

BOY: Yes, that is right.

SOCRATES: Just consider: How big is the space?

BOY: I don't understand.

SOCRATES: Does not each of these lines cut each of the spaces, four spaces, in half? Is that right?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: How many spaces as big as that [*blg*] are in this middle space?

BOY: Four.

SOCRATES: How many in this one [A]?

BOY: Two.

SOCRATES: How many times two is four?

BOY: Twice.

SOCRATES: Then how many [square] feet big is this middle space?

BOY: Eight [square] feet.

SOCRATES: Made from what line?

BOY: This one [*gb*].

SOCRATES: From the line drawn from corner to corner of the four-foot space?

BOY: Yes.

SOCRATES: The professors<sup>1</sup> call this a diameter [diagonal]: so if this is a diagonal, the double space would be made from the diagonal, as you say, Menon's boy!

BOY: Certainly, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Now then, Menon, what do you think? Was there one single opinion which the boy did not give as his own?

MENON: No, they were all his own opinions.

<sup>1</sup> Sophists, experts in some subject who gave lessons for a fee.

SOCRATES: Yet he did not know, as we agreed shortly before.

MENON: Quite true, indeed.

SOCRATES: Were these opinions in him, or not?

MENON: They were.

SOCRATES: Then in one who does not know, about things he does not know, there are true opinions about the things which he does not know?

MENON: So it appears.

SOCRATES: And now these opinions have been stirred up in him as in a dream; and if someone will keep asking him these same questions often and in various forms, you can be sure that in the end he will know about them as accurately as anybody.

MENON: It seems so.

SOCRATES: And no one having taught him, only asked questions, yet he will know, having got the knowledge out of himself?

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: But to get knowledge out of yourself is to remember, isn't it?

MENON: Certainly it is.

SOCRATES: Well then: This knowledge which he now has—he either got it sometime, or he had it always?

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then if he had it always, he was also always one who knew; but if he got it sometime, he could not have got it in this present life. Or has someone taught him geometry? For he will do just these same things in all matters of geometry, and so with all other sciences. Then is there anyone who has taught him everything? You are sure to know that, I suppose, especially since he was born and brought up in your house.

MENON: Well, I indeed know that no one has ever taught him.

SOCRATES: Has he all these opinions, or not?

MENON: He has, Socrates, it must be so.

SOCRATES: Then if he did not get them in this life, is it not clear now that he had them and had learnt at some other time?

MENON: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Is not that the time when he was not a man?

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then if both in the time when he is a man and when he isn't there are to be true opinions in him, which are awakened by questioning and become knowledge, will not his soul have understood them for all time? For it is clear that through all time he either is or is not a man.

MENON: That's clear.

SOCRATES: Then if the truth of things is always in our soul, the soul must be immortal; so that what you do not know now by any chance—that is, what you do not remember—you must boldly try and find out and remember?

MENON: You seem to me to argue well, Socrates. I don't know how you do it.

SOCRATES: Yes, I think that I argue well, Menon. I would not be confident in everything I say about the argument; but one thing I would fight for to the end, both in word and deed if I were able—that if we believed that we must try to find out what is not known, we should be better and braver and less idle than if we believed that what we do not know it is impossible to find out and that we need not even try.

MENON: I think you argue well there too, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Very well. Since we agree that we must try to find out about what we do not know, shall we do our best to find out together what is virtue?

MENON: By all means. However, my dear friend, I should very much like to consider and to hear what I began by asking, whether we ought to tackle what virtue is as being something which can be taught, or as if men get it by nature or in some other way.

SOCRATES: But if I were your master, Menon, as well as master of myself, we should not consider beforehand whether virtue can be taught or not until we had tried to find out first what virtue really is. But since you make no attempt to master yourself—I suppose you want to be a free man—but you do attempt to master me, and you do master me! I will give way to you—for what else am I to do?—and it seems we must consider what qualities a thing has when we don't know yet what it is. Please relax at least one little tittle of your mastery, and give way so far that we may use a hypothesis to work from, in considering whether it can come by teaching or in some

other way. I mean by hypothesis what the geometers often envisage, a standing ground to start from; when they are asked, for instance, about a space, "Is it possible to inscribe this triangular space in this circle?" They will say, "I don't know yet whether it can be done, but I think I have, one may say, a useful hypothesis to start from, such as this: If the space is such that when you apply it to the given line<sup>1</sup> of the circle, it is deficient by a space of the same size as that which has been applied, one thing appears to follow, and if this be impossible, another." I wish, then, to make a hypothesis before telling you what will happen about the inscribing of it in the circle, whether that be possible or not."

There now, let us take virtue in that way. Since we don't know what it is or what it is like, let us make our hypothesis or ground to stand on, and then consider whether it can be taught or not. We proceed as follows: If virtue is a quality among the things which are about the soul, would virtue be teachable, or not? First, if it is like or unlike knowledge, can it be taught or not, or as we said just now, can it be remembered—we need not worry which name we use—but can it be taught? Or is it plain to everyone that only one thing is taught to men, and that is knowledge?

MENON: So it seems to me at least.

SOCRATES: Then if virtue is a knowledge, it is plain that it could be taught.

MENON: Of course.

SOCRATES: We have soon done with that—if it is such, it can be taught, if not such, not.

MENON: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Now we have to consider, as it seems, whether virtue is a knowledge or something distinct from knowledge.

MENON: Agreed, that must be considered next.

SOCRATES: Very well. Don't we say that virtue is a good thing? This hypothesis holds for us, that it is good?

MENON: We do say so.

SOCRATES: Then if there is something good, and yet separate from knowledge, possibly virtue would not be a knowledge, but if there is no good which knowledge does not contain, it would be a right notion to suspect that it is a knowledge.

<sup>1</sup> Diameter.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Ivor Thomas is thanked for help here. The matter is explained by him in his *Greek Mathematical Works*, vol. 1, p. 395 ff. (Loeb Classical Library).

MENON: That is true.

SOCRATES: Further, by virtue we are good?

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: And if good, helpful; for all good things are helpful. Are they not?

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: And virtue, therefore, is helpful?

MENON: That must follow from what we have agreed.

SOCRATES: Let us consider then, taking up one by one, what sorts of things are helpful to us. Health, we say, and strength, and good looks, and wealth, of course; these and things like these we say are helpful, eh?

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: And these same things we say do harm sometimes also; do you agree with that?

MENON: I do.

SOCRATES: Consider then what leads each of these when it is helpful to us, and what leads each when it does harm. Are they not helpful when led by right use, and harmful when they are not?

MENON: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Let us pass on then, and consider the things that concern the soul. You speak of temperance and justice and courage and cleverness at learning and memory and high-mindedness, and all such things?

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: Look now; such of these as seem to you to be not knowledge but different from knowledge, are they not sometimes harmful and sometimes helpful? For example courage, if courage is not intelligence but something like boldness; is it not true that when a man is bold without sense, he is harmed, but when with sense, he is helped?

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: Is it not the same with temperance and cleverness at learning? When things learnt are accompanied by sense and are fitted in their proper places they are helpful; without sense, harmful?

MENON: Very much so.

SOCRATES: Then, in short, all the stirrings and endurings of the soul, when wisdom leads, come to happiness in the end, but when senselessness leads, to the opposite?

MENON: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Then if virtue is one of the things in the soul, and if it must necessarily be helpful, it must be wisdom: since quite by themselves all the things about the soul are neither helpful nor harmful, but they become helpful or harmful by the addition of wisdom or senselessness.

According to this argument, virtue, since it is helpful, must be some kind of wisdom.

MENON: I think so.

SOCRATES: Very well then, come now to the other things we mentioned a while since, wealth and so forth, and said they were sometimes good and sometimes harmful. When wisdom led any soul it made the things of the soul helpful, didn't it, and senselessness made them harmful: so also with these, the soul makes them helpful when it uses them rightly and leads them rightly, but harmful when not rightly?

MENON: Certainly.

SOCRATES: The sensible soul leads them rightly, the senseless wrongly?

MENON: That is true.

SOCRATES: Then cannot we say this as a general rule: In man everything else depends on the soul; but the things of the soul itself depend on wisdom, if it is to be good; and so by this argument the helpful would be wisdom—and we say virtue is helpful.

MENON: We do.

SOCRATES: Then we say virtue is wisdom, either in whole or in part?

MENON: I think what we say is well said, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then if this is right, nature would not make men good.

MENON: I think not.

SOCRATES: Here is another thing, surely: If good men were good by nature, we should have persons who could distinguish those young ones who were good in their nature, and we might take them over as they were indicated and keep them safe in the acropolis, and hallmark them more care-

fully than fine gold, that no one might corrupt them, but that when they grew up they should be useful to their cities.

MENON: Quite likely that, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then since the good are not good by nature, is it by learning?

MENON: I really think that must be so; and it is plain, my dear Socrates, according to the hypothesis, that if virtue is knowledge, it can be taught.

SOCRATES: Yes, by Zeus, perhaps, but what if we were wrong in admitting that?

MENON: Well, it did seem just then to be a right conclusion.

SOCRATES: But what if we ought not to have agreed that it was right enough for then only, but for now also and all future time, if it is to be sound?

MENON: Why, what now? What makes you dissatisfied and distrustful? Do you think virtue is not knowledge?

SOCRATES: I will tell you Menon. It can be taught if it is knowledge; I do not wish to dispute the truth of that statement. But I have my doubts whether it is knowledge; pray consider if there is any reason in that. Just look here: If a thing can be taught—anything, not virtue only—must there not be both teachers and learners of it?

MENON: Yes, I think so.

SOCRATES: On the contrary, again, if there are neither teachers nor learners, we might fairly assume the thing cannot be taught?

MENON: That is true; but don't you think there are teachers of virtue?

SOCRATES: I have in truth often tried to find if there were teachers of it, but, do what I will, I can find none. Yet there are many on the same search, and especially those whom I believe to be best skilled in the matter. (*Enter ANYTOS*) Why look here, my dear Menon, in the nick of time here is Anytos, he has taken a seat beside us. Let us ask him to share in our search; it would be reasonable to give him a share. For in the first place, Anytos has a wealthy father, the wise Anthemion, who became rich not by a stroke of luck or by a gift, like Ismenias the Theban who got "the fortune of a

Polycrates" the other day,<sup>1</sup> but he got his by his own wisdom and care. In the next place, his father has a good name generally in the city; he is by no means overbearing and pompous and disagreeable, but a decent and mannerly man; and then he brought up our Anytos well, and educated him well, as the public opinion is—at least, they choose him for the highest offices. It is right to ask the help of such men when we are looking for teachers of virtue, if there are any or not, and who they are. Now then, Anytos, please help us, help me and your family friend Menon here, to find out who should be teachers of this subject. Consider it thus: If we wished Menon here to be a good physician, to whom should we send him to be his teachers? To the physicians, I suppose?

ANYTOS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And what if we wanted him to be a good shoemaker, we should send him to the shoemakers?

ANYTOS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And so with everything else?

ANYTOS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Something else, again, I ask you to tell me about these same things. We should be right in sending him to the physicians, we say, if we wanted him to be a physician. When we say this, do we mean that we should be sensible, if we sent him to those who profess the art, rather than to those who do not, and who also exact a fee for this very thing and declare themselves teachers, for anyone who wants to come and learn? If we looked to such things and sent him accordingly, should we not be doing right?

ANYTOS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then the same about pipe-playing<sup>2</sup> and the rest. If we want to make anyone a piper, it is great folly to be unwilling to send him to men who undertake to teach the art, and exact a fee for it; and instead to make trouble for others by letting him seek to learn from people who neither pretend to be teachers nor have a single pupil in the art which we want the person we send to learn from them. Don't you think that is plain unreason?

ANYTOS: Yes, by Zeus. I do, even stupidity.

<sup>1</sup> A proverb from the life of Polycrates, tyrant of Samos. This Theban had helped Anytos and the other banished Athenians the year before the supposed date of this dialogue.

<sup>2</sup> The pipe was a wind instrument, blown at the end like an oboe; see also *Republic*, p. 198, n. 2, 3.

SOCRATES: You are right. Now you can join me in consulting together about our friend Menon here. The fact is, Anytos, he has been telling me this long time that he desires the wisdom and virtue by which men manage houses and cities well and honour their parents, and know how to entertain fellow-citizens and strangers and to speed them on their way, as a good man ought to do. Then consider whom we should properly send him to for this virtue. Is it not clear from what has just been said that we should send him to those who profess to be teachers of virtue, and declare themselves to be public teachers for any of the Hellenes who wish to learn, with a proper fee fixed to be paid for this?

ANYTOS: And who are these, my dear Socrates?

SOCRATES: *You* too know, I suppose, that these are the men who are called Sophists.

ANYTOS: O Heracles! Hush, my dear Socrates! May none of my relations or friends, here or abroad, fall into such madness as to go to these persons and be tainted! These men are the manifest canker and destruction of those they have to do with.

SOCRATES: What's that, Anytos? These are the only men professing to know how to do us good, yet they differ so much from the rest that they not only do not help us as the others do, when one puts oneself into their hands, but on the contrary corrupt us? And for this they actually ask pay, and make no secret of it? I, for one, cannot believe you. For I know one man, Protagoras, who has earned more money from this wisdom than Pheidias did for all those magnificent works of his, or any ten other statue-makers. This is a miracle! Those who cobble old shoes or patch up old clothes could not hide it for thirty days if they gave back shoes and clothes worse than they got them, for if they did that they would soon starve to death: but Protagoras, it seems, hid it from all Hellas, and corrupted those who had to do with him, and sent them away worse than he got them, for more than forty years!—for I think he was nearly seventy when he died, after forty years in his art—and in all that time to this day his great name has lasted! And not only Protagoras, but very many others, some born before his time and others living still. Are we to suppose, according to what you say, that they knew they were deceiving and tainting the young, or did they deceive themselves? And shall we claim that these were madmen, when some call them wisest of all mankind?

ANYTOS: Anything but madmen, Socrates; the young men are much madder who pay them money; and madder still those, their relations, who entrust young people to them; maddest of all, the cities which allow them to come in and do not kick them out—whether he is a foreigner or native who attempts to do such a thing.

SOCRATES: Why, Anytos, have you ever been wronged at all by Sophists? What makes you so hard on them?

ANYTOS: Good God, I have never had anything to do with one, and I would never allow anyone else of my family to have to do with them.

SOCRATES: Then you are quite without experience of these men?

ANYTOS: And I hope I may remain so.

SOCRATES: Astonishing! Then how could you know anything about this matter, whether there is anything good or bad in it, if you are quite without experience of it?

ANYTOS: Easily. At least I know who these are; whether I have experience of them or not.

SOCRATES: Perhaps you are a prophet, Anytos; since how indeed otherwise you could know about them, from what you say yourself, I should wonder. But we were not trying to find out who those are that Menon might go to and become a scoundrel—let them be Sophists if you like—but those others, please tell us and do good to this, your family friend, by showing him some to whom he should go in all this great city, who could make him of some account in that virtue which I described just now.

ANYTOS: Why didn't you show him?

SOCRATES: Well, I did say whom I thought to be teachers of these things, but it turns out I made a mess of it, so you say; and perhaps there is something in what you maintain. Now pray take your turn, and tell him which of the Athenians he should try. Tell us a name, of anyone you like.

ANYTOS: Why ask for<sup>1</sup> the name of one man? Any well-bred gentleman<sup>2</sup> of Athens he might meet will make him better than Sophists can, every single one of them, if he will do as he is told.

<sup>1</sup> Literally, "Why must you hear."

<sup>2</sup> Literally, Any of "the beautiful and good"; a usual term for "gentleman."

SOCRATES: Did these well-bred gentlemen become like that by luck? Did they learn from no one, and can they nevertheless teach other people what they themselves never learnt?

ANYTOS: I suppose they learnt from their fathers, who were also gentlemen before them; or do not you think there have been plenty of fine men in our city?

SOCRATES: I think, Anytos, that there are plenty of men here good at politics, and that there have been plenty before no less than now; but have they been also good teachers of their virtue? For this is what our discussion is really about—not if there are or have been good men here, but if virtue can be taught—that is what we have been considering for so long. And the point we are considering is just this: whether the good men of these times and of former times knew how to hand on to another that virtue in which they were good, or whether it cannot be handed on from one man to another, or received by one man from another—that is what we have been all this while trying to find out, I and Menon. Well then, consider it thus, in your own way of discussing: Would you not say Themistocles<sup>1</sup> was a good man?

ANYTOS: Indeed I should, none better.

SOCRATES: And also a good teacher of his own virtue, if ever anyone was?

ANYTOS: That is what I think, of course if he wished.

SOCRATES: But don't you think he would have wished others to be fine gentlemen, especially, I take it, his own son? Or do you think he grudged it to him, and on purpose did not pass on the virtue in which he was good? I suppose you have heard that Themistocles had his son Cleophantos taught to be a good horseman. At least, he could remain standing upright on horseback, and cast a javelin upright on horseback, and do many other wonderful feats which the great man had him taught, and he made him clever in all that could be got from good teachers. Haven't you heard this from older men?

ANYTOS: Oh yes, I have heard that.

SOCRATES: Then no one could have blamed his son for lack of good natural gifts.

ANYTOS: Perhaps not.

SOCRATES: What do you say to this, then: that Cleophantos became a good and wise man in the same things as

<sup>1</sup> Who during the wars with Persia laid the foundations of the navy—and of the greatness—of Athens.

his father Themistocles, did you ever hear that from young or old?

ANYTOS: No, indeed.

SOCRATES: Are we to believe, then, that he wished to educate his son in these things, but not to make the boy better than his neighbours in that wisdom in which he was himself wise—are we to believe this, if virtue can really be taught?

ANYTOS: Well, upon my word, perhaps not.

SOCRATES: There you have a grand teacher of virtue, whom you admit yourself to be one of the best men of the past! Let us consider another, Aristeides,<sup>1</sup> Lysimachos' son. Do not you admit that he was a good man?

ANYTOS: I do, most assuredly.

SOCRATES: Then this one educated his own son Lysimachos, as far as teachers went, in the best that the Athenians could provide; but did he make him better than anyone else—what do you think? I take it you have met him yourself and you see what he is. Or Pericles<sup>2</sup>, if you like, a man magnificently wise—you know he brought up two sons, Paralos and Xanthippos?

ANYTOS: Oh yes.

SOCRATES: Well, he taught them (you know that, as I do) to be horsemen as good as any in Athens; he educated them in the fine arts and gymnastics and all the rest, to be as good as any as far as education goes; yet he did not wish to make them good men? Oh yes, he wished, as I think, but I take it the thing can't be taught. You must not suppose only a few of our people, or the meanest of them, could not do it: remember Thucydides<sup>3</sup> again—he brought up two sons, Mellesias and Stephanos, and gave them a proper education; in particular they were the best wrestlers in Athens—Xanthias was trainer for one, Eudoros for the other—and these had the name of being the best wrestlers. Don't you remember?

ANYTOS: Oh yes, I have heard of them.

SOCRATES: Is it not clear then, that, if virtuous things could be taught, this father would never have had his own children taught these other things, for which fees had to be paid for teaching, and moreover he would never have failed to teach them these virtuous things, by which he could make them

<sup>1</sup> Another Athenian statesman, renowned for nobility of character; a contemporary of Themistocles.

<sup>2</sup> Famous leader of Athens and her empire for thirty years.

<sup>3</sup> Not the famous historian, but an honourable opponent of Pericles in imperial policy.

good men, without needing to spend anything? But perhaps Thucydides was a mean creature, perhaps he had not crowds of friends in Athens and among our allies!<sup>1</sup> And he came of a great house, he had great power in the city and all through the nation of Hellenes: so if this could be taught, he would have found the man who could make his sons good, some foreigner or native, in case he himself had no leisure because of his care of the state. The truth is, my dear friend Anytos, I fear virtue cannot be taught.

ANYTOS: My dear Socrates, you seem to speak ill of men easily. I would advise you to be careful, if you will listen to me. Perhaps it is easier to do people harm than good in other cities, but it is very easy in this. I think you yourself knew that perfectly well. (*Exit ANYTOS.*)

SOCRATES: Menon, I am afraid Anytos is angry, and I don't wonder, for he thinks firstly that I am defaming these men, and secondly he believes he is one of them, himself. But if he ever learns what it is to speak ill, he will no longer be angry; he does not know now. Answer me, please, are there not well-bred, fine gentlemen in your part of the country also?

MENON: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Well then, are they ready to offer themselves to young men as teachers? Do they agree that they are teachers themselves and virtue can be taught?

MENON: No, upon my word, Socrates! but sometimes you might hear them say that it can be taught, sometimes that it cannot.

SOCRATES: Are we to say, then, that they are teachers of virtue, when not even this point is agreed on by them?

MENON: I don't think so, Socrates.

SOCRATES: What next, then: these Sophists of yours who alone make the claim—do you think they are teachers of virtue?

MENON: Gorgias in particular always makes me surprised, Socrates, because you will never hear such a promise from him; indeed he laughs at the others when he hears them promising; making men clever at speaking is what he thinks their job is.

<sup>1</sup> Thucydides protested against Pericles' use of tribute, paid by Athens' subject allies, towards paying the cost of public buildings in Athens.

SOCRATES: Then do you not think the Sophists are such teachers either?

MENON: I really can't say, Socrates. I have felt about it much the same as most people; sometimes I think they are, sometimes I don't.

SOCRATES: Well, do you know this: You are not alone, nor are the others who are public men, in thinking sometimes that it can be taught, sometimes not? Theognis the poet says the same, do you know that?

MENON: In what passage?

SOCRATES: In the elegiacs, where he says,

Eat and drink with those that have great power,  
Sit with those, give them a pleasant hour.  
You'll learn good from the good; those who are not,  
If you mix with them, spoil the sense you've got.

Do you know that he speaks there as if virtue can be taught?

MENON: It looks like it.

SOCRATES: Elsewhere he says, changing a little,

Could sense be made and put into a man,  
then he goes on something like this,

Many a handsome fee would people earn.

—those who could do it, he means: and again,

A good man's son, obeying wisdom's words,  
You'd scarcely find grown bad. But yet you would  
Never by *teaching* make the bad man good.

You see he contradicts himself about the same things!

MENON: It looks like it.

SOCRATES: Then can you tell me of any other subject whatever where those who profess to be teachers are, like these, not accepted as teachers of others, and not only that, but they are believed not to understand it themselves but to be rotten in the very subject which they profess to teach! And, moreover, where those who are accepted for well-bred, fine gentlemen say sometimes it can be taught and sometimes it cannot! When people are so confused about anything, could you properly call them teachers of that thing?

MENON: No indeed, by God.

SOCRATES: Then if neither the Sophists, nor those who are themselves well-bred, fine gentlemen, are teachers of the subject, it is clear that there are no others?

MENON: Quite clear, I think.

SOCRATES: And if there are no teachers, there are no learners?

MENON: I think so too.

SOCRATES: But we have agreed that if there are neither teachers nor learners of any given thing, this cannot be taught.

MENON: We have.

SOCRATES: No teachers of virtue appear, then?

MENON: No.

SOCRATES: And if no teachers, no learners?

MENON: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Then virtue could not be taught?

MENON: It looks like it, if our enquiry has been right. So I am wondering now, Socrates, whether there are no good men at all, or what could be the way in which the good men who exist come into being.

SOCRATES: We are really a paltry pair, you and I, Menon; Gorgias has not educated you enough, nor Prodicos me. Then the best thing is to turn our minds on ourselves, and try to find out someone to make us better by hook or by crook. In saying this I have my eye on our recent enquiry, where we were fools enough to miss something; it is not only when knowledge guides mankind that things are done rightly and well; and perhaps that is why we failed to understand in what way the good men come into being.

MENON: What do you mean by that, Socrates?

SOCRATES: This: That the good men must be useful; we admitted, and rightly, that this could not be otherwise.

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: Yes, and that they will be useful if they guide our business rightly, we admitted also: was that correct?

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: But that it is not possible to guide rightly unless one knows, to have admitted that looks like a blunder.

MENON: What do you mean?

SOCRATES: I will tell you. If someone knows the way to Larissa, or where you will, and goes there and guides others, will he not guide rightly and well?

MENON: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Well, what of one who has never been there, and does not know the way; but if he has a right opinion as to the way, won't he also guide rightly?

MENON: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And so long as he has a right opinion about that of which the other has knowledge, he will be quite as good a guide as the one who knows, although he does not know, but only thinks, what is true.

MENON: Quite as good.

SOCRATES: Then true opinion is no worse guide than wisdom, for rightness of action; and this is what we failed to see just now while we were enquiring what sort of a thing virtue is. We said then that wisdom alone guides to right action; but, really, true opinion does the same.

MENON: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Then right opinion is no less useful than knowledge.

MENON: Yes, it is less useful; for he who has knowledge would always be right, he who has right opinion, only sometimes.

SOCRATES: What! Would not he that has right opinion always be right so long as he had right opinion?

MENON: Oh yes, necessarily, I think. This being so, I am surprised, Socrates, why knowledge is ever more valued than right opinion, and why they are two different things.

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

MENON: Oh, tell me, please.

SOCRATES: Because you have not observed the statues of Daidalos.<sup>1</sup> But perhaps you have none in your part of the world.

MENON: What are you driving at?

<sup>1</sup> Daidalos (*Daedalus*), the mythical sculptor and craftsman; the ancient Greeks attributed to him the masterpieces whose origins they did not know.

SOCRATES: They must be fastened up, if you want to keep them; or else they are off and away.<sup>1</sup>

MENON: What of that?

SOCRATES: If left loose there is not much value in owning one of his works—like a runaway slave; it doesn't stay; but chained up it is worth a great deal; for they are fine works of art. What am I driving at? Why, at the true opinions. For the true opinions, as long as they stay, are splendid and do all the good in the world; but they will not stay long—off and away they run out of the soul of mankind; so they are not worth much until you fasten them up with the reasoning of cause and effect. But this, my dear Menon, is remembering, as we agreed before. When they are fastened up, first they become knowledge, secondly they remain; and that is why knowledge is valued more than right opinion, and differs from right opinion by this bond.<sup>2</sup>

MENON: I do declare, Socrates, you have a good comparison there.

SOCRATES: Well, I speak by conjecture, not as one who knows; but to say that right opinion is different from knowledge, that, I believe, is no conjecture in me at all. That I would say I know; there are few things I would say that of, but this I would certainly put down as one of those I know.

MENON: You are quite right in saying this, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Now then, is this not right: True opinion guiding achieves the work of each action no less than knowledge?

MENON: Yes, I think that also is true.

SOCRATES: Then right opinion is nothing inferior to knowledge, and will be no less useful for actions; and the man who has right opinion is not inferior to the man who has knowledge.

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: Again, the good man we have agreed to be useful.

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: Since, then, not only by knowledge would men be good and useful to their cities (if they were so) but also by right opinion, and since neither knowledge nor true opinion comes to mankind by nature, being acquired<sup>3</sup>—or do you think that either of them does come by nature, perhaps?

<sup>1</sup> A common saying.

<sup>2</sup> "Opinion in good men is knowledge in the making."—Milton, *Areopagitica*.

<sup>3</sup> The text of Plato is uncertain here.

MENON: No, not I.

SOCRATES: Therefore they come not by nature, neither could the good be so by nature.

MENON: Not at all.

SOCRATES: Since not by nature, we enquired next whether it could be taught.

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well, it seemed that it could be taught if virtue was wisdom.

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: And if it could be taught, it would be wisdom.

MENON: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And if there were teachers, it could be taught, if no teachers, it could not?

MENON: Just so.

SOCRATES: Further, we agreed that there were no teachers of it?

MENON: That is true.

SOCRATES: We agreed, then, that it could not be taught, and that it was not wisdom?

MENON: Certainly.

SOCRATES: But, however, we agree that it is good?

MENON: Yes.

SOCRATES: And that which guides rightly is useful and good?

MENON: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Again, only these two things guide rightly, right opinion and knowledge; and if a man has these, he guides rightly—for things which happen rightly from some chance do not come about by human guidance: but in all things in which a man is a guide towards what is right, these two do it, true opinion and knowledge.

MENON: I think so.

SOCRATES: Well, since it cannot be taught, no longer is virtue knowledge.

MENON: It seems not.

SOCRATES: Then of two good and useful things one has been thrown away, and knowledge would not be guide in political action.

MENON: I think not.

SOCRATES: Then it was not by wisdom, or because they are wise, that such men guided the cities, men such as Themistocles and those whom Anytos told us of; for which reason, you see, they could not make others like themselves, because not knowledge made them what they were.

MENON: It seems likely to be as you say, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then if it were not knowledge, right opinion is left, you see. This is what politicians use when they keep a state upright; they have no more to do with understanding than oracle-chanters and diviners, for these in ecstasy tell the truth often enough, but they know nothing of what they say.

MENON: That is how things really are.

SOCRATES: Then it is fair, Menon, to call those men divine, who are often right in what they say and do, even in grand matters, but have no sense while they do it.

MENON: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Then we should be right in calling these we just mentioned divine, oracle-chanters and prophets and the poets or creative artists, all of them; most of all, the politicians, we should say they are divine and ecstatic, being inspired and possessed by the god when they are often right while they say grand things although they know nothing of what they say.

MENON: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And the women, too, Menon, call good men divine; and the Laconians<sup>1</sup> when they praise a good man say, "A divine man that!"

MENON: Yes, and they appear to be quite right, my dear Socrates, although our friend Anytos may perhaps be angry with you for saying it.

SOCRATES: I don't care. We will have a talk with him<sup>2</sup> by and by, Menon. But if we have ordered all our enquiry well and argued well, virtue is seen as coming neither by nature nor by teaching; but by divine allotment incomprehensibly<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Spartans.

<sup>2</sup> Anytos was one of the accusers in his trial for life. See the *Defence of Socrates*.

<sup>3</sup> Literally, "without mind."

to those to whom it comes—unless there were some politician so outstanding as to be able to make another man a politician. And if there were one, he might almost be said to be among the living such as Homer says of Teiresias among the dead, for Homer says of him that he alone of those in Hades has his mind, the others are flitting shades.<sup>1</sup> In the same way also here on earth such a man would be, in respect of virtue, as something real amongst shadows.

MENON: Excellently said, I think, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then from this our reasoning, Menon, virtue is shown as coming to us, whenever it comes, by divine dispensation; but we shall only know the truth about this clearly when, before enquiring in what way virtue comes to mankind, we first try to search out what virtue is in itself.

But now it is time for me to go; and your part is to persuade your friend Anytos to believe just what you believe about it, that he may be more gentle; for if you can persuade him, you will do a service to the people of Athens also.

<sup>1</sup> *Odyssey*, x. 494.

## SYMPOSIUM (The Banquet)

*Apollodoros and Friend*

*Aristodemos, Socrates, Agathon, Pausanias, Aristophanes,  
Eryximachos, Phaidros, Alcibiades*

### Introductory Note

*The banquet took place in Agathon's house in 416 B.C.; a few days previously Agathon, the handsome young tragic poet then aged about thirty-one, had won the prize, his first "victory," when one of his tragedies was first performed at a dramatic festival in the Theatre of Dionysos, the theatre at the foot of the Acropolis at Athens, which accommodated about 30,000 spectators; on page 89 Socrates refers to Agathon's courage in facing such a huge audience. Agathon appears to have been the first to insert into his tragedies choral odes unconnected with the plot of the drama. He gave this banquet to his friends on the next evening after he and his chorus had offered their sacrifice of thanksgiving for his victory.*

*Of his guests:*

*SOCRATES was then aged fifty-three.*

*PHAIDROS (Phaedrus), who was invited to preside, was a friend of Plato. The famous dialogue The Phaedrus, not included in this volume, on the subject of love, was named after him.*

*PAUSANIAS was a disciple of Prodicos, the Sophist, of Ceos.*

*ARISTOPHANES, the famous comic poet, was then about thirty-two. In his comedy The Clouds, first performed five years previously, he had made fun of Socrates.*

*ALCIBIADES, the eminent statesman then about thirty-five, a man of remarkable beauty and talent, but unscrupulous and dissolute, was a great admirer of Socrates, as his speech at the banquet shows. Socrates saved his life in battle when Alcibiades was about twenty.*

*The story of the banquet, as told by Aristodemos, who attended it with Socrates, is here retold by Apollodoros to a*