

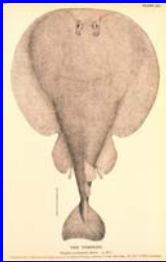
Plato's "Meno"--continued



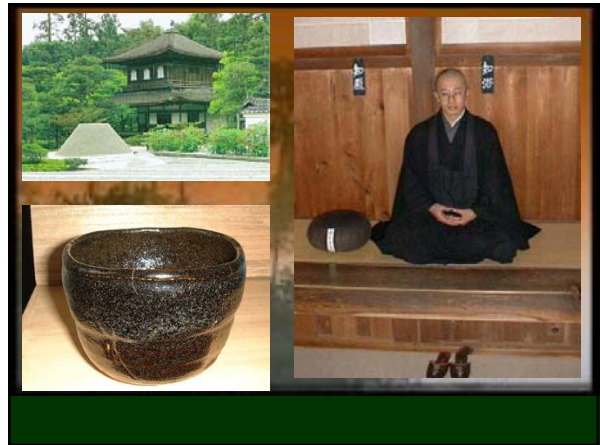
Meno's attempts (78b-79e):

- Virtue is the power to acquire good things.
- Virtue is the power to acquire good things *justly* or *virtuously*.
- When Meno's second try doesn't work out, how does he react?

Meno's Ready to Give Up (80 a-c)



- **Dogmatism: Unwillingness to examine one's own views carefully.**



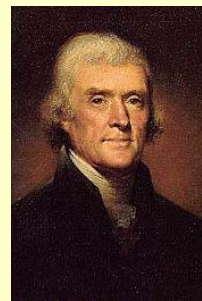
Psychological studies on (in)competence

David Dunning--*Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, Dec. 2000.

- **Most incompetent people don't know that they are incompetent.**
- **People who do things badly are usually quite confident--more confident than people who do things well.**
- **Some college students who do badly on a test will spend hours in the professor's office explaining why the professor's answers are wrong.**

Thomas Jefferson:

"He who knows best knows how little he knows."



Remaining questions:

- Will Meno admit his ignorance?
- Does Socrates know what virtue is, and whether it can be taught?

Meno's State of Mind:

He blames Socrates for confusion.

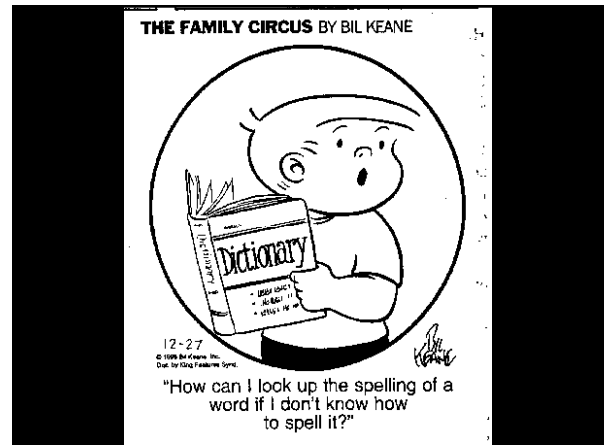
He won't admit his own ignorance.

He claims that we can't search for what we don't already know.

Meno's Paradox (80d)

Cynical thesis about the search for knowledge:

"How will you look for it, Socrates, when you do not know *at all* what it is? ... If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know?"



When we are looking for something, do we "**not know *at all* what it is?**"

Find me a widget.

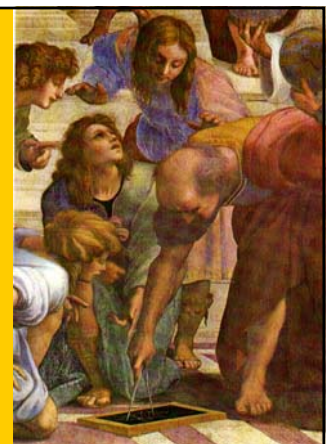
Looking up the spelling of a word?

Looking for a cure for cancer?

Trying to define "virtue"?

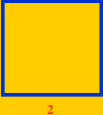


Demonstration with the slave boy (82b-85b)



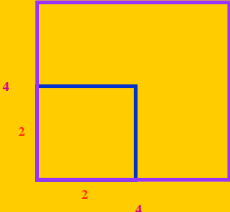
Slave-Boy Demonstration (82b-85b)

How do we create a square that has double the area of this square?



Slave-Boy Demonstration (82b-85b)

Double the length of each side?

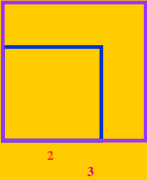


But $2 \times 2 = 4$
and $4 \times 4 = 16$.

Too big!

Slave-Boy Demonstration (82b-85b)

Increase each side by half?




But $2 \times 2 = 4$
and $3 \times 3 = 9$.

Still too big!

Slave boy admits ignorance (84a):

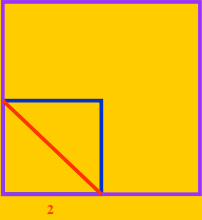
“By Zeus, Socrates, I do not know.”



Slave-Boy Demonstration (82b-85b)

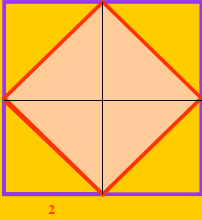
Consider this line (85a).

“Clever men call this the diagonal.”



Slave-Boy Demonstration (82b-85b)

What if we build a square on the diagonal?



The diamond square is 8 units in area.

Got it!



**Now the slave boy knows,
but he didn't know before.**

- This shows it is possible to successfully search for knowledge. Don't be lazy!
- What kind of knowledge did the slave boy gain?

Types of Knowledge:

- *A Posteriori* Knowledge: Empirical knowledge, based on experience.
- *A Priori* Knowledge: Conceptual Knowledge, based on thought.
- "Prior" (before) or "Posterior" to (after) experience.

**Now the slave boy knows,
but he didn't know before.**

- This shows it is possible to successfully search for knowledge. Don't be lazy!
- What kind of knowledge did the slave boy gain?
- How was the slave boy able to gain the knowledge?


How did the slave boy gain the knowledge?

- Socrates' Account (81d-e & 85c-86c):
The Theory of Recollection
- Socrates' questions stirred up buried memories the slave boy's soul had acquired in a previous existence.
- The knowledge was innate.
- Socrates' didn't tell him the answer.


Did he? "Leading" questions?

Traditional Conception:

"Teach" means
"Tell the student the answer."



"Learn" means
"Hear the answer from the teacher."



Socratic Method of Teaching

- No lecturing: Can't hand someone knowledge on a silver platter.
- Law School?
- Philosophy classes?
- Students learn best by figuring it out for themselves.



Socrates' Account (85c-86b):

- Slave-boy expressed only *his own* opinions.
- So these opinions were *in him*.
- So they must have been there already--They were simply recollected.
- No one taught him in this lifetime.
- So he must have gained them in a *previous life*.
- Our souls must exist before this life.

Wow!

Is this a good argument?

- Slave-boy expressed only *his own* opinions.
- **I.e., they weren't forced upon him.**
- So these opinions were *in him*.
- **In the sense that he *does* believe them**
- So they must have been there already--They were simply recollected.
- **No, he could have just now adopted them as his own.**
- **So, it's not a good argument.**

Is this a good argument?

- Suppose the slave-boy *had* recollected this knowledge--would that explain how he *gained* it?
- We'd still need an explanation how it was gained previously.
- So the Theory of Recollection only pushes back the problem one step, it doesn't solve the problem!

Did Socrates believe the Theory of Recollection?

86b: "I do not insist my argument is right in all...respects"

Then why did he give it?

Counter Meno's Cynical thesis.

Get us to think for ourselves:

Can we find any flaws?

Can we think of a better account?

An alternate account?

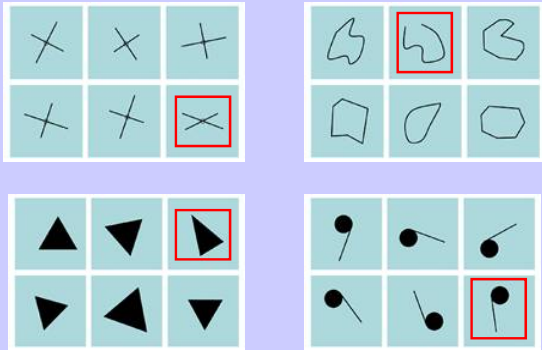
- The slave-boy figured it out for himself.
- Even if you think Socrates asked him leading questions, still, at some point, *someone* must have figured it out for himself.
- We can gain conceptual knowledge by *critical reflection*.
- Socrates *taught* him without *telling* him the answer.
- Sudden understanding *feels* like recollection.

From the journal *Science*, published by AAAS, Friday, January 19, 2006:

WASHINGTON - Even if you never learned the difference between a triangle, a rectangle and a trapezoid, and you never used a ruler, a compass or a map, you would still do well on some basic geometry tests, according to a new study.

Using a series of nonverbal tests, scientists claim to have uncovered core knowledge of geometry in villagers from a remote region of the Amazon who have little schooling or experience with maps and speak a language without the mathematical language of geometry.

Which one doesn't belong?



First Paper Assignment posted on-line at

www.phil.vt.edu/Jklagge/coursepage.htm

- State and briefly explain the requirements on a good definition.
- Illustrate their importance by giving bad definitions that fail each requirement.
- Then give a good definition that satisfies all the requirements.
- Contact the Writing Center for help writing.
- Due in discussion section on **February 8**.