

# A review of plato's meno essay sample



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Plato presents in his dialogue, titled Meno, the distinction between genuine knowledge and true opinion. In the text, he refers to knowledge as the form and definition of something that is changeless, where as true opinion can be altered and is not restricted in the way knowledge is by having standards of a form. Plato includes the characters of Socrates and Meno, a pupil of Gorgias, to discuss the nature of virtue and knowledge. The dialogue is provoked by Meno posing the question: How will you look for [virtue], Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is?

How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know? (Meno 80d). Socrates begins his discussion with Meno by comparing himself to a torpedo fish, which has the ability to numb other creatures. By using the method of elenchus, in which Socrates uses an opponents claim to contradict and confuse them. In this comparison, Socrates uses in terms of to perplex, and admits that just as the torpedo fish numbs itself upon impact, Socrates is also left perplexed thereafter.

Socrates applies to the concept of knowledge, to the concept of what one knows and does not know, yet according to him there is no unknown knowledge. Meno asks Socrates how is it possible to search for what is unknown if one does not know the unknown, and thus does not know what one is searching for, which Socrates declares as an unsound argument. Socrates then presents each premise of his deductive argument, in order to provide grounds for his conclusion. Notably, Socrates carefully avoids explaining what is unknown to Meno with other unknowns.

His definitions are lexical, in that Socrates presents the definitions to eliminate what is ambiguous to Meno. To begin, Socrates gives the premise that the soul is immortal. Much like the Pythagorean idea of metempsychosis, Socrates suggests that the soul has already gained knowledge from the past lives it has lived. A slave may be unaware of his knowledge, as one would easily forget a dream. However, should the ignorant slave should be questioned, instead of taught, he will recollect on the basis of the knowledge of his soul.

Socrates reasons that what one may not know at present, one simply has not yet recollected. Therefore, what many people refer to as learning, searching and discovering are all simply recollection. As Plato suggests: As the soul is immortal, has been often and has seen all things here and in the underworld, there is nothing which it has not learned; so it is in no way surprising that it can recollect things it knew before, both about virtue and other things.

As the whole of nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, nothing prevents a man, after recalling one thing only - a process men call learning - - discovering everything else for himself, if he is brave and does not tire of the search, for searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection. (Meno 81c-d) Meno, beginning as the debater in this argument, responds faintheartedly as predicted by Socrates, for he is humbled by the idea that there is no learning of new information.

Socrates uses this definition to prove his next premise, where he requests a subject of a young boy whom he asks the boy his opinion about geometry, instead of teaching him. As proof to Meno, Socrates states facts regarding

the geometry to the boy and asks the boy for his agreement or disagreement, either of which shows his innate knowledge, or recollection, of geometry, for Meno knows that the boy has never yet been taught geometry. Socrates then asks Meno whether or not Meno believes that the opinions of the boy were all his own. Meno replies in agreement with Socrates that indeed the opinions expressed by the boy were entirely his own.

Socrates then gives a third definition to affirm his proposition, by stating that the man whom himself believes that he does not know, surely knows, but has not yet had his true opinions stirred up. Meno agrees with the premise that therein the immortal soul of man exists true opinions, relevant both to the awakened and un-awakened knowledge. Socrates restates that one will find knowledge within oneself through recollection. To learn and to discover is a fallacy, for not learning but questioning brings about the recollection of the truth and knowledge known by one's soul.

To provide further emphasis, Socrates asks Meno if finding knowledge within oneself is indeed recollection. Meno agrees, and together with Socrates they examine another example using the boy. Because Meno knows that the boy had not yet acquired the knowledge stirred up by Socrates, he is too in agreement with the premise that the boy had always possessed this knowledge. Meno says the fact that the boy had never been taught or exposed to geometry was indisputable, thus Meno accepts as fact that these opinions existed within the boy.

Furthermore, when such opinions are stirred they become knowledge, a process shown through the questioning of the boy, which Socrates refers to

as the process of recollection. Socrates then reverts to his first premise of the soul's immortality, reaffirming that pure knowledge of reality exists within us. He argues that because of this immortality, we should seek out knowledge of things we are unaware of, for it will lead to a remembrance of that knowledge. For, what we think we do not know at present, we actually do, we simply have yet to recollect.

Again, Meno is in agreement with Socrates, and both men view themselves as more virtuous, upon the recollection that all knowledge is already known. Time will cease to be wasted by man if he recollects the knowledge that all his unknowns are simply his unstirred opinions, his un-recollected knowledge. The question of whether true opinion is even useful, as compared to knowledge, is of course brought to the discussion. The men discuss if someone had an opinion that was right, but did not know it was right, would it still be good?

Socrates answers as long as he has the right opinion about that of which the other has knowledge, he will not be a worse guide than the one who knows. So true opinion is in no way a worse guide to correct action than knowledge. But the man who has knowledge will always succeed whereas he who has true opinion will only succeed at times. (Meno 97 b-d) Throughout their argument, Socrates and Meno discover that knowledge is not something that can be truly taught, it is rather a recollection that brings knowledge.

Provoking an ignorant person with questions will awaken the dormant opinions and raise the consciousness of one's innate knowledge. The use of

another human, the slave boy, as the subject within the process of recollection aided in showing Meno the validity as well as making Meno himself an example of the process. Conclusively, knowledge is not a process discovered because discovery is a fallacy, but a process reintroduced, for there is no new understanding of matters, that which is unknown is simply yet to be recollected.