

PLATO'S *MENO*: CONTRETEMPS IN THE CLASSROOM*

I propose that the *Meno* represents a classroom session. That inference may be drawn from Socrates' use of the term "practice" (μελέτη) at *Men.* 75a8. Meno is told that learning the distinction between the genus and species of shape (σχῆμα) is good practice for addressing the topic that Socrates has imposed on the conversation, namely a search for the τί ἐστι [essence] of ἀρετή [human excellence].¹

What are Socrates' epistemological assumptions for undertaking such an inquiry? On the one hand, Socrates often asserts with great conviction that he knows nothing by negating the verb εἰδέναι [to know] to convey his meaning.² Taken literally that would imply that Socrates is ignorant of the way to the *agora* and does not know Greek. So Socrates obviously is thinking of notable philosophical questions: what is the essence of ἀρετή, how best to live one's life, etc. On the other hand, Socrates sometimes insists with great conviction that his findings about the big questions are true to the facts. For example, at *Resp.* 4.429e8–430b5, Socrates characterizes ἀνδρεία [courage] at length ending with these words: "this I name and set down (ἔγωγε καλῶ καὶ τίθεμαι) to be ἀνδρεία." Similarly, in the *Gorgias*, comparing the blessed state and happiness of the just man to that of his opposite, Socrates insists on the truth of his assertions (*Grg.* 507c7–8): "These things I thus set down and assert to be true" (Ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν ταῦτα οὕτω τίθεμαι καὶ φημι ταῦτα ἀληθῆ εἶναι). No convincing resolution of this contradiction has been advanced. It may be questioned whether one is needed.³

Who is Meno? He is portrayed in the *Meno* as a gentle, just, brave, quick-witted, prudent, healthy, strong, beautiful, wealthy, imperious aristocrat from Thessaly, who sees μεγαλοπρέπεια [aspiration to greatness] in his soul. I am not inferring these characteristics out

* I follow the text of J. Burnet (1901–06), *Platonis Opera*, Oxford. Translations of the text are mine unless otherwise indicated.

¹ Socrates' preoccupation with that puzzle is stated at the beginning (*Men.* 71b4–7), repeated frequently in the course of the dialogue and restated at the end (*Men.* 100b5–6).

² Cf. *Men.* 98b1, *Chrm.* 166c7–d4, *Apol.* 22d7, 29b5, *Gorg.* 506a3–4, 508e–509a, *Resp.* 1.337e5.

³ Cf. Walt Whitman, *Songs of Myself* §51: "Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes.)"

of thin air. Most of them are revealed at *Men.* 88a6–b1. Socrates: "Let us look (σκεψώμεθα) into the things in the soul! Do you name each one of them σωφροσύνη [prudence] and δικαιοσύνη [justice] and ἀνδρεία [courage] and εὐμαθία [quick-wittedness] and μνήμη [powerful memory] and μεγαλοπρέπεια [aspiration to greatness] and so forth?" Meno: "I do." Meno has looked at the things in his own soul, the only one available for him to look into. Consider also *Men.* 87e6–7. Socrates: "Let us examine what is useful to us taking them up one by one: ὑγίεια [health] and ἰσχὺς [physical strength] and κάλλος [beauty] and πλοῦτος [wealth]." Meno is known to be beautiful and wealthy. Plato often refers to disease. At *Chrm.* 155b4–5, Charmides is said to be suffering from headache upon arising; Theaetetus succumbed to dysentery and his wounds after the battle of Corinth; Socrates reports that when he is sick, wine tastes bitter to him (*Tht.* 159b3–4); illness is alleged to explain Plato's absence in the *Phaedo*. On the other hand, no one dramatically present in a Platonic dialogue is ever represented as suffering from disease. As Meno is beautiful, wealthy, and healthy—three of the four characteristics listed—it may be inferred that he is physically strong. For evidence of Meno's other characteristics stated in this paragraph, see Appendix A, 12–14.

The concatenation of the psychic dispositions listed at *Men.* 88a6–b1 also occurs at *Resp.* 6.494a4–e6 (see below Appendix A, 13) and in the *Laws*. At *Leg.* 4.709e6–8, the Athenian stranger speaking for the lawgiver says "Grant me a city with an ideal tyrannical constitution! Let the tyrant be young⁴ and have a strong memory and be an easy learner and with aspiration to greatness in his nature!"

Meno's hoards of gold and silver came by inheritance and/or his family's ties to the Persian Great King;⁵ he has won honors and offices on his own. Meno is present in Athens on official business to make a *démarche* to the city on behalf of the Thessalian confederacy. His official business concluded, he has informed Socrates on the previous day⁶ of his imminent departure. However, Meno is free to extend his stay at his own discretion, as he says at *Men.*

⁴ Meno is young.

⁵ Meno's grandfather Meno of Pharsalus medized circa 470 BCE. Cf. Wade-Gerry (1942) 62.

⁶ A conversation between Socrates and the same interlocutor spanning two or more days is unique in Plato.

77a1–2: "But I would stay on, Socrates, if you were to tell me (*sc.* more) λόγοι [speeches] such as these."

Meno's political ambition is unsatisfied. He harbors the intention to acquire the ἀρετή of the best men, plenipotentary rulers over humankind, setting straight the cities, in which they speak for and accomplish many and great things (*Men.* 99d4). Although Meno is unable to grasp the essence of ἀρετή, he recognizes the ἀρετή of the great men of Greek history that informed their accomplishments and aspires to that condition. Meno and the householder in the taxonomy of the ἀρεταί of the various human conditions in his first definition of ἀρετή belong to the same political caste: citizens with shared agency who participate with other burgers in managing the city's affairs. The ἀρετή of the citizen, which he already possesses and exercises, is an inferior *doppelgänger* of the ἀρετή that Meno means to acquire.

Were Meno to come to exercise plenipotentary rule over others, would he do so with the justice that he possesses at the present moment? Socrates' assertion that Meno lacks self-control suggests otherwise, that the Thessalian's present possession of justice would vanish in such circumstances. When he is finally manoeuvred into addressing Meno's initial query, Socrates complains that his classroom role as teacher has been abrogated (*Men.* 86d3–7):

If I ruled, Meno, not only over myself, but over you, we would not examine whether ἀρετή is teachable before we investigated what it is. For you do not wish to rule over yourself in that you are free (*sc.* and intend to remain so).

Socrates rules over himself in this way. After repeated philosophical inquiry, producing the same results, he has confirmed to his satisfaction that the true δόξαι [opinions] that justify the ethical prescriptions he obeys have been converted to settled ἐπιστήμαι [knowledge] by being bound and encompassed with a logic of cause (αἰτίας λογισμός). Aside Socrates' unique self-rule and lack of political ambition, a passage in the *Laws* reveals Plato's opinion regarding the invariable conduct of those who acquire plenipotentary rule (*Leg.* 9.875b1–c6):

And, secondly, even if a man fully grasps the truth of this (*sc.* that the benefit of the commonwealth supercedes private interest) as a principle of art, should he

afterwards get control of the State and become an irresponsible autocrat, he would never prove able to abide by this view and to continue always fostering the public interest in the State as the object of first importance, to which the private interest is but secondary; rather, his mortal nature (ἡ θνητὴ φύσις) will always urge him on to grasping and self-interested action, . . . Yet if ever there should arise a man *competent by nature* (my emphasis) and by a birthright of divine grace (θεία μοῖρα) to assume such an office, he would have no need of the laws to rule over him (νόμων οὐδὲν ἄν δέοιτο τῶν ἀρξόντων ἑαυτοῦ).⁷

Here the possession of a competence from nature is a necessary condition for the just ruler. That necessity stands in contradiction to Socrates' assertion, supported with the dubious counterfactual at *Men.* 89b1–7 (discussed below) that ἀρετή is *not* from φύσις.

The conversation between Socrates and Meno features a pair of affects commonly experienced by teachers in classrooms: anger at a student who resists one's teaching, and ἔρωσ [sexual desire] for a beautiful student. The former phenomenon is described at *Euthy.* 295d3–5: "I am reminded of Connus (*sc.* Socrates' cithera teacher), how he gets angry with me everytime I don't yield to him, and then he cares less about me as being stupid." Similarly Dionysodorus expresses anger at Socrates' stubborn resistance to the brothers' wisdom at *Euthy.* 295b6, 295c10–11, 296a8, 297b7–8 and 297d3–4. In the *Meno*, Socrates expresses anger when his initial definition of shape is convincingly refuted by his student by denouncing the refutation as eristic argument which it is not. Again, Socrates' response to Meno's paradox that criticizes Socrates' foundational statement at *Men.* 71b4–7 is to denounce it as eristic argument which it is not. Additional captious and arbitrary instances of pedagogical anger occur when Socrates calls Meno a scoundrel (πανούργος) at *Men.* 80b8 and again at *Men.*

⁷ Translation of Bury (1926) 2, 271, 273. "Laws" should be read in place of Bury's erroneous translation of νόμοι as "rulers."

81e6. To those in-your-face insults, Meno responds with gentle⁸ puzzlement: "How is that, Socrates?" (Τί μάλιστα, ὦ Σώκρατες; [Men. 81b9]). At Men. 76a9, Socrates calls Meno hybristic for simply asking to hear Socrates' theory of color. At Men. 79a7, Socrates scolds Meno for ignoring the stipulation that he not define ἀρετή by reference to its parts saying "Then, Meno, are you playing me?" (Εἶτα, ὦ Μένων, παίζεις πρὸς με;).

So much for teacher's anger. Socrates observes at Men. 76c1–2 that he is "overcome by the beauties" (εἰμι ἥττων τῶν καλῶν) of whom Meno is one. Meno is quite aware of his beauty and its allure. His third and final definition of ἀρετή is a light-hearted reference to the erotic dynamic between them. Meno: "Ἀρετή seems to me to be, as the poet says, 'delighting in beautiful things and having the power to do so'" (χαίρειν τε καλοῖσι καὶ δύνασθαι [Men. 77b2–5]).⁹ Both interlocutors are enjoying that condition. Socrates' repressed ἔρωσ delights in Meno's beauty. Socrates' δύναμις [power] to do so lies in enunciating καλοὶ λόγοι [beautiful speeches] that delight Meno in turn.

References to a beautiful argument (καλῶς λέγεσθαι) occur 25 times in Plato, six times in the *Meno*.¹⁰ (The approbative locution καλῶς λέγεις occurs over 40 times). The nominative expression καλὸς λόγος occurs at *Tht.* 210d10 where Socrates characterizes an argument that has proved to contradict itself as a καλὸς λόγος that has fled and run away. For ease of exposition, καλὸς λόγος in these pages expresses the sense of an argument that seems beautiful.

⁸ Meno's natural gentleness is highlighted by the difference in tone between the Thessalian expressing with sympathetic concern the insight that Socrates' *modus operandi* is placing him in mortal danger were he to travel abroad, and that the angry Anytus delivers with an air of menace.

⁹ Socrates' refutation of Meno's third definition of ἀρετή exhibits the logical fallacy of converting *beautiful* things into *good* things *simpliciter*. In fact, beautiful things may be useful or harmful, like Helen of Troy, or neither harmful nor useful.

¹⁰ *Euthyd.* 9e8, *Cri.* 46e2, *Chrm.* 156c7, *Grg.* 504d5–6, *Phd.* 69e7, 94a12, *Phdr.* 258d4, 259e1, 274d7, *Symp.* 210a8, 210d5, *Cra.* 423c, *Tht.* 202d4, *Men.* 81a1, 89a4, 89c7, 89c9, 89d5, 199b1, *Menex.* 247e6, *Resp.* 1.335b1, 3.389e4, *Leg.* 6.770c3, 12.959b2.

Which of Socrates' remarks may be construed as *καλοὶ λόγοι*? In the course of teaching Meno the distinction between genus and species, Socrates directs him to define the genus of shape as practice for the assigned classroom task of inquiry into ἀρετή in and of itself. Meno demurs, for his παιδεία [education] apparently does not enable him to compose a general definition. He imperiously orders the teacher to define shape himself. Meno is asked if he intends that Socrates delight him by so doing (Βούλει σοι χαρίσωμαι; [*Men.* 76b2]). Meno replies, "Yes, delight me!" Socrates announces his intention to delight Meno (χαριοῦμαι οὖν σοι [*Men.* 76c2–3]). He goes on to define shape twice and, borrowing Empedocles' theory of effluences, color, odor and sound. Meno asks to hear more λόγοι. The interlocutors are reciprocally delighting in Socrates' *καλοὶ λόγοι* and Meno's beauty. The dramatic details referenced above are an exact analogue of Meno's third definition of the man of ἀρετή who delights in beautiful things and has the power to do so.

The *problématique* of a *καλὸς λόγος* lies in validating or disconfirming it. Socrates describes the process of validation: a *καλὸς λόγος* must have seemed genuine in the past, seem genuine in the present, and in the future, if any of it is to be sound (*Men.* 89a8–10). At *Grg.* 509a4–5, the *καλὸς λόγος* that Socrates has propounded to Callicles has been re-examined frequently by its author and invariably confirmed: ὡς ἐγὼ νῦν λέγω καλῶς λέγειν: ἐπεὶ ἔμοιγε ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος ἐστὶν ἀεί.

Socrates complies with Meno's request that he define shape. Meno refutes Socrates' first definition of shape. Socrates accepts Meno's convincing refutation, that the definition utilizes an undefined term, with bad grace.

Socrates proposes a second definition of shape to which Meno makes no objection. However, seemingly unwittingly, Socrates himself later provides counterfactuals that disconfirm both of his definitions of shape. During the geometry demonstration with the slave-boy, Socrates draws figures in the dirt with a stick. In the case of those shapes, the color inside their borders is the same as outside. That dramatic fact disconfirms the first definition

of shape at *Men.* 75b9–11, that it "accompanies color."¹¹ According to the second definition, shape is the two dimension termination or edge of a solid. As Socrates has been teaching Meno the distinction between the genus shape and the different species of shape, and citing circles and rectangles as examples of the latter, the shapes in the pair of definitions would most likely be geometrical shapes. So according to Socrates' second definition of shape, a square maps onto a cube, a triangle onto a pyramid, a circle onto a sphere. That mapping is absent in the case of geometrical shapes drawn in the dirt. Earth considered as a three-dimension solid has no correspondance with two-dimension figures drawn on her. That negative fact disconfirms the second definition of shape. If those readings are sound, Plato represents Socrates delivering a pair of false *καλοὶ λόγοι unwittingly*. The corrolary of doing so would be delivering false *καλοὶ λόγοι intentionally*.¹²

So far, the *καλοὶ λόγοι* have all been provided by Socrates, with the exception of Meno's first definition at *Men.* 71e1–72a5. Asked to define ἀρετή without reference to any of its parts such as justice, piety, or courage, Meno declaims a *καλὸς λόγος* of his own device that he has often delivered to public applause, setting forth a taxonomy of the various human conditions whose exemplary behavior is informed by various ἀρεταί [excellences] of the slave, the free man, children male and female, the old, and the wife of the householder.¹³ The paradigm case

¹¹ So far as I know, the implications of drawing shapes in the dirt for validating or disconfirming Socrates' definitions of shape are not entertained by commentators. Karasmanis (2006) 139 writes that the first definition "does not cover all figures drawn on a blackboard, on the earth, or on a piece of paper." However, that observation plays no part in Karasmanis' reading of the first definition.

¹² Cf. *Soph. Phil.* 343–53. Neoptolemos did not know whether the *intentionally false* *λόγος καλός* of many-wiled Odysseus and Phoenix, that it would not be according to θέμις [justice] that anyone but he capture the citadel of Troy, was true or vain. Socrates' analogy at *Men.* 71b4–7, that it is impossible for someone who does not know Meno's identity to know that he is beautiful, wealthy and aristocratic is likewise an intentionally false *καλὸς λόγος* for which see Appendix B, 14–19.

¹³ The trope of a taxonomy of the various human conditions is reprised in the *Republic* at 4.433d2–4 and in the *Ion* at 540b3–5. Aristotle approbatively reprises Meno's taxonomy of the various ἀρεταί of the human conditions at *Pol.* 1260a21–24 and notes Socrates' rejection of it. Aristotle's approbation

of ἀρετή here is the householder who is competent (ἰκανόν) to manage the city's business (τὰ τῆς πόλεως πράττειν [*Men.* 71e1]) (sc. with the other burghers in the ἐκκλησία [city assembly]). That man benefits his circle of friends and family, and contrives to harm unfriendly neighbors without suffering retribution, as cities do. Socrates' request later at *Men.* 73c7 that Meno repeat what Gorgias said about ἀρετή indicates that Meno's first definition of ἀρετή is his own.

Socrates is not impressed. He dismisses the taxonomy out of hand for producing a swarm of ἀρεταί, not the single ἀρετή that Meno has been tasked to define.

Ordered back to the task of defining ἀρετή, with some irritation Meno reproduces, not Gorgias' definition, but this conventional view of human excellence (*Men.* 73c8–d1): “What other than to be able to rule over human beings—in that you are seeking some one thing in regard to all (sc. of the ἀρεταί).” The man of ἀρετή in Meno's initial definition, who is competent to participate in managing the city's business, shares collectively with other citizens the plenipotentiary agency exercised by rulers over humankind referenced in the second definition. As stated, Meno's ambition is unsatisfied; he apparently harbors the intention to become a single ruler exercising plenipotentiary power over others.

At *Men.* 80d5–8, Meno poses his famous paradox:

And how, Socrates, will you seek an existing thing of which you know nothing?¹⁴ Of (sc. the set of) things of which you know nothing, what sort of thing are you proposing that you will seek?¹⁵ And even at best if you should chance upon it, how would you know

provides a real life example of the conceit that the perpetuation over time of a καλὸς λόγος is epistemologically significant.

¹⁴ The first limb of Meno's paradox addresses Socrates' words at *Men.* 71b3: “For I know nothing whatsoever about ἀρετή.”

¹⁵ The second limb addresses the epistemological implications of Socrates' foundational statement at *Men.* 71b4–5, where Socrates' ignorance regarding the sort of thing ἀρετή is is generalized to cover the set of all possible objects of inquiry: “(sc. If) I do not know the τί ἐστίν [essence] (sc. of any object

that that thing is the thing you did not know?¹⁶

Meno has realized belatedly that Socrates' avowal at *Men.* 71b3–4, that he knows none of the characteristics of unknowns that he seeks to know, renders inquiry into them impossible.

Socrates paraphrases Meno's paradox, first dismissing it out of hand by characterizing it as a bad faith eristic quibble, which it is not, using the same rhetoric as when he grudgingly accepted Meno's convincing refutation of his first definition of shape. The paraphrase of the paradox is elaborated with the amusing corollary that *per impossibile* those who are all-knowing would be reduced to idleness.¹⁷ That amendment to Meno's thesis does not refute it. Meno asks if what he originally said, and has just heard, not refuted, but paraphrased and amended, seems to Socrates to be a genuine καλὸς λόγος (Οὐκοῦν καλῶς σοι δοκεῖ

of inquiry), how would I know what sort of thing it is?" That opinion militates abandonment of inquiry as pointless.

¹⁶ The third limb states that a successful search for what one was seeking to know would not be known to be successful to the searcher who had found it. As noted by Fine (2014) 7, n. 4, that notion reprises the epistemic pessimism expressed in lines 3–4 of Xenophanes' lapidary fragment DK B34:

καὶ τὸ μὲν οὖν σαφὲς οὐτις ἀνήρ ἴδεν, οὐδέ τις ἔσται
εἰδὼς ἀμφὶ θεῶν τε καὶ ἄσσα λέγω περὶ πάντων·
εἰ γὰρ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα τύχοι τετελεσμένον εἰπών,
αὐτὸς ὅμως οὐκ οἶδε· δόκος δ' ἐπὶ πᾶσι τέτυκται.

"There never was nor will be a man who has certain knowledge about the gods and about all the things I speak of. *Even if he should chance to say the complete truth, yet he himself knows not that it is so.* But all may have their fancy" (translation of Burnet [1892] 81).

¹⁷ The amendment to Meno's paradox is reprised in the *Lysis*: "Consequently we may say that those who are already wise would no longer philosophize, whether (*sc.* they be) gods or men" (*Lys.* 218a2–3).

λέγεσθαι ὁ λόγος οὗτος, ὦ Σώκρατες;). His self-approbation as its author indicates that Meno hears in Socrates' paraphrase simply a more complete expression of *his* καλὸς λόγος. Asked whether the paradox seems to be a καλὸς λόγος, Socrates replies "Not to me." Asked further to explain why, Socrates does not answer. Instead, he propounds a theory that knowledge in souls of reincarnated individuals, acquired by virtue of having learned everything in previous existences, and during their times in the afterlife, may be recollected with the help of a skilled teacher. Socrates inserts into the exposition of the theory the tenet that all of nature is interrelated (ἅτε γὰρ τῆς φύσεως ἀπάσης συγγενοῦς οὔσης [Men. 81c8–d1]). That tenet if applied to it, dissolves the epistemological impasse of Men. 71b1–4, often termed the Priority of Definition theorem.

In order to validate the theory of recollection, Socrates poses a problem in geometry to an uneducated slave-boy. Through Socrates' skillful questioning of him, the slave-boy seems to solve the problem on his own. Aside its putative confirmation of the theory of the recollection of "all the things," the slave-boy's success in solving a problem in geometry under skillful questioning reproduces a notable phenomenon: the easiness that many, apparently Plato among them, experience in the course of being taught and learning geometry in the classroom. The notion that humans possess innate geometrical intuition is advanced by Kant¹⁸ and other philosophers, and is supported by recent findings in cognitive science.¹⁹ Evidence for innate geometrical intuition is provided by demonstrations of that gift inside and outside the classroom. On the other hand, there is no real world evidence that the soul contains specific knowledge of all things—aside the mental capacity that enables an infant to acquire and produce language and to possess innate geometrical intuition—and overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

The objections of Meno's paradox having been disposed of by the tenet embedded in the recollection theory that all of nature is interrelated, Socrates extolls energetic inquiry and

¹⁸ Cf. Kant (1929) A711/B739 "Nor (*sc.* is a critique of reason) needed in mathematics, where the concepts of reason must be forthwith exhibited *in concreto* in pure intuition, so that everything unfounded and arbitrary in them is at once exposed."

¹⁹ Cf. Dehene (2006) 381–84.

once again urges a collaborative search for the essence of ἀρετή. Meno demurs insisting that Socrates address the puzzle of how ἀρετή is acquired. Socrates complains that his role as teacher is being abrogated but grudgingly complies. From *Men.* 87b2 to 90a1, over three Stephanus pages, Socrates re-examines what he had presumably already inquired into many times before: the parts of ἀρετή, their relationships *inter se*, and their several αἰτίαι [sources]. He explains how σωφροσύνη, ἀνδρεία and εὐμαθία [ease in learning] are liable to turn to harm without φρόνησις [practical wisdom] to guide them. That demonstration omits δικαιοσύνη and ὁσιότης from consideration because those parts of ἀρετή cannot in any conceivable situation turn to harm, thus do not require φρόνησις to guide them, an opinion reprised by Protagoras at *Prt.* 329e5–6. Socrates has apparently often investigated the parts of ἀρετή and formed firm opinions about them, despite avowing the contrary at *Men.* 71b4–7. His re-examination of the parts of ἀρετή is the great καλὸς λόγος of the dialogue and is recognized as such by Meno himself.²⁰

At *Men.* 89b1–7, Socrates offers this counterfactual in support of his assertion that ἀρετή cannot come from φύσις [nature]:

If by nature (φύσει) excellent men (οἱ ἀγαθοὶ) came to be (ἐγίγνοντο), we would have those who would recognize who of the young were excellent in regard to their natures. . .

Thompson (1901), Bluck (1961), Canto-Sperber (1993) and Fine (2014) pass over *Men.* 89b1–7 in silence. Scott (2006) 158 observes that "The argument is easily challenged." The counterfactual denies the existence of such experts as Theodorus in the *Theaetetus*. Theodorus, a professional teacher of young men, points out Theaetetus' innate high intelligence and equitable temperament *inherited* from his father Euphronius—"a man such as the one you have been describing" (ἀνδρὸς οἷον καὶ σὺ τοῦτον διηγῆ [Th. 144e6]), as Socrates says—that makes the young man a paragon of ἀρετή as to his nature.

²⁰ At *Men.* 89a4–5, Meno remarks that the things Socrates is saying seem καλῶς λέγεσθαι and, at *Men.* 89c7, that what has just been said seems καλῶς λέγεσθαι.

Socrates argues convincingly that the lack of recognized teachers of ἀρετή shows that it is not taught. Socrates has "proved" that ἀρετή is not from φύσις with a dubious counterfactual. As ἀρετή must come from somewhere, Socrates surmises that the φρόνησις-governed ἀρετή of the very small number of the best statesmen²¹ would need to come from a divine gift (θεία μοῖρα), bestowed *intentionally* on such men by a god, unlike other parts of ἀρετή such as bravery²² or a quick wit or σωφροσύνη²³ whose steady state distribution among human beings suggests that their αἰτίαι are simply automatic, mindless regularities of Nature. If Meno were to acquire the φρόνησις-governed ἀρετή of the best men, and exercise plenipotentary rule over others, he would do well to consider himself a vehicle of divine intention.

Having gratified Meno by delivering a καλὸς λόγος about the parts of ἀρετή that he denied knowing anything about at *Men.* 71b4, Socrates regretfully terminates the class,

²¹ Socrates singles out Aristides as the only genuine statesman at *Grg.* 526b2.

²² Protagoras' assertion at *Prt.* 351b2–3, that ἀνδρεία is from φύσις, is reprised by Socrates at *Resp.* 4.429e8–430a4. Cf. this author's "Definitions of ἀνδρεία in Plato's Socratic dialogues" (2019), 5–6 https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3512468

²³ How is σωφροσύνη in Plato to be translated? When Socrates is inquiring into what Protagoras actually teaches those of his students who intend to acquire wealth and rule over others, at *Prt.* 333c1–3 the sophist falsely denies his private belief that ἀδικία and σωφροσύνη are compatible. See this author's "The storyline of Plato's *Protagoras*" (2019), 8–10.

https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3579453

In that passage, σωφροσύνη apparently refers to the disciplined cunning required to preserve one's personal safety while practicing injustice. That meaning is consistent with the antonym for σωφροσύνη that Plato (*Grg.* 504e1), Thucydides (3.37.3), Aristotle (*Eth. Nic.* 1118a23–25) and other authors employ: ἀκολασία (lack of discipline). At *Leg.* 4.710a5–b2, the Athenian stranger speaking as the lawgiver observes that "Ordinary σωφροσύνη—not the σωφροσύνη that is said in elevated discourse to be of necessity the same as φρόνησις—springs forth naturally in children and animals some of which (*sc.* children) strikingly reject the allure of pleasures whereas others do not. But, as we said, (*sc.* σωφροσύνη), when isolated from many good things, is not worth much."

asserting one final time that he and Meno should be searching for the essence of ἀρετή before investigating in what way it is acquired.

Appendix A: a biography of Meno

The characteristics of Meno are the same as those Socrates ascribes to a politically ambitious young man of exceptional natural gifts at *Resp.* 6.494a4–e6. The latter is wealthy, of aristocrat status and, as well, comely and tall (πλούσιος . . . γενναῖος . . . εὐειδής . . . μέγας). Meno is beautiful, wealthy and of aristocratic status (καλὸς . . . πλούσιος . . . γενναῖος [*Men.* 71b6–7]).²⁴ Like those externally visible goods, the psychic goods of the young man in the *Republic* and those of Meno are identical. Like Meno, the young man in the *Republic* possesses a quick wit (εὐμάθεια), a strong memory (μνήμη), bravery (ἀνδρεία), and aspiration to greatness (μεγαλοπρέπεια).

The adolescent Theaetetus is brave (ἀνδρεῖος), quick-witted (εὐμαθής) and gentle (πρᾶος). Meno and Theaetetus share those psychic attributes.²⁵ Theaetetus fought bravely at Corinth. Meno presumably fought bravely in the military adventures recounted in Xenophon's *Anabasis*. Theaetetus displays quick-wittedness throughout the *Theaetetus*. Meno claims title to a quick wit, and occasionally displays it. In a rapid fire series of questions about geometry requiring yes or no answers, Meno effortlessly spots the fallacious proposition that round is no more round than it is rectangular (*Men.* 74e7). And his instant refutation of Socrates' first definition of shape, that it relies on an undefined term, is the exercise of a quick wit. His paradox that belatedly recognizes the epistemological dead-end of Socrates' foundational statement at *Men.* 71b4–7 displays an impressive analytic ability. On the other hand, unlike his analogues at *Resp.* 6.494a4–e6 and *Prt.* 119c1–4, who are undifferentiated unnamed stereotypes, Plato represents this young, would-be ruler over

²⁴ This concatenation of adjectives characterizing Meno and the young ambitious unnamed aristocrat in the *Republic* also occurs at *Chrm.* 157b7–8 and *Prt.* 119c1–4.

²⁵ In externalities, they are diametrical opposites. Meno the beautiful wealthy foreigner is taught by an Athenian. The extremely ugly Athenian Theaetetus, impoverished by his guardians, is taught by a foreigner.

others in the round. The evidence cited above suggests that Meno is an A+ student, yet he stumbles in learning Socrates' imposed terminology. He commits a howler in drawing this inference (*Men.* 97c6–8):

Socrates: Then right opinion (ὀρθὴ δόξα) is just as useful as ἐπιστήμη.

Meno: With this difference, Socrates, that he who has knowledge will always hit the mark, whereas he who has right opinion will sometimes do so, sometimes not.

Several indices point to Meno possessing a gentle disposition. On the one hand, he indulges in the behavior of an aristocrat and a beauty at *Men.* 71b9–c2 and 76b1–2, enjoying a license not available to the very ugly Theaetetus. On the other hand, his responses to Socrates' rank insults are invariably mild: he simply asks Socrates to explain why he is saying them. He tempers his refutation of Socrates' first definition of shape by calling the definition silly (τοῦτό γε εὐήθεος), not Socrates himself for saying it. Reminiscent of Socrates' odd prediction at the end of the *Theaetetus* (210c2–4), that the gentle (πρᾶον) Theaetetus' future philosophical inquiries will make him less harsh (ἥττον . . . βαρύς) towards his comrades and more mild (ἡμερώτερος), Socrates urges Meno to behave more gently (πρᾶότερον) when refuting another's definition. And at the end of the dialogue (*Men.* 100b8–c1), Socrates bids Meno strive to make Anytus more gentle (ἵνα πρᾶότερος ᾦ), a senseless injunction unless Meno himself possesses a gentle disposition.

Appendix B - Socrates' intentionally false καλὸς λόγος

Meno's paradox pointed out that according to what Socrates says at *Men.* 71b4–7 inquiry is impossible:

I blame myself for not knowing about ἀρετή at all. If I do not know the essence of a thing, how would I know what sort of thing it is? Or does it seem to you (*sc.* Meno) to be possible that someone not knowing at all who Meno is, for her to know whether he is beautiful or wealthy or an aristocrat or the opposite of those conditions?

With the exception of Verdenius and Fine,²⁶ commentators provide various ways of reading the failure to recognize Meno analogy so as to make it true to the the facts.²⁷ I argue that the analogy, like the part of Socrates' foundation statement that avows ignorance of what sort of

²⁶ Cf. Fine (1992) 225, n. 42 "But Plato speaks here, not of knowing Meno, but of knowing who Meno is; and it is not at all clear that I need to be acquainted with Meno to know who he is—I know who he is from having read Plato's dialogues." Fine is reporting her second-order knowledge of Meno's identity derived from reading about him, whereas in the analogy the hypothesized person's state of ignorance of Meno's identity is an unmediated first-order failure to recognize the man *she is looking at*. Fine (2014) 32, n. 4 again conflates first- and second-order knowledge of Meno's identify. For that distinction, see n. 27 below. The observation of Verdenius (1957) 289 that "[i]t is not necessary to know the essential nature of Meno in order to know his qualities" seems a matter of common sense. I am unable to parse Verdenius' following remark: "The discussion still moves on a popular level and the question simply is whether we can imagine any thing when hearing the word ἀρετή or the word Μένων."

²⁷ Cf. Thompson (1901) 65 "The difference in the mode of existence of the *individual* (original emphasis) Meno on the one hand and the *class* Virtue on the other is not here for Plato's purpose important"; Bluck (1961) 214 "So far as the analogy with 'knowing Meno' is concerned, the point here is simply that some kind of acquaintance with a person or thing is necessary before one can be certain about any attributes"; Klein (1965) 42 ". . . it (*sc.* the analogy) plays with the diversity of words which convey the meaning of 'knowing' and with the range that this meaning itself encompasses"; White (1974) 293–294 "Why could we not know on good authority (e.g., on Plato's) that Meno is wealthy without in any plausible sense knowing 'who he is'? The answer is that Plato believes that to know that Meno is wealthy we have to find and examine him, so as to see that he is; for otherwise we are simply relying on hearsay, and thus on less than fully 'direct' evidence;" Thomas (1980) 75 "The example, though simple is deceptive because of an ambiguity in the word 'acquaintance.' How extensive does this acquaintance need to be?"; Canto-Sperber (1993) 215–16 "Socrate [. . .] énumère les qualités dont Ménon s'engorgeillit le plus tout on montrant qu'on ne peut les lui attribuer avant le connaître et que, privé de cette connaissance, on peut tout aussi bien lui attribuer les qualités contraires"; Nehamas (1999) 6 "His (*sc.* Socrates') point is simple and intuitive: if he (*sc.* the hypothesized person) has *no* (original emphasis) idea who Meno is, how can he answer any questions

thing ἀρετή is, is false to the facts. The core truth claim of the analogy is that an individual who doesn't know who a person is, would not know any of his qualities. Socrates hypothesizes someone who in no way at all knows who Meno is, in which case she would not know whether Meno is beautiful, or rich, or even an aristocrat, or the reverse. The analogy refutes itself specifically in this regard: someone who does not know at all who Meno is, would in fact know that he is beautiful, wealthy, and of aristocratic status by virtue of seeing and hearing him, and inferring those attributes from what is seen and heard.

There is no contemporary testimony regarding the original mode of performance of Plato's writings. As the *Meno* is a performed dialogue, the original audiences may have watched and listened to it being enacted by *dramatis personae* impersonating Socrates, Meno, the slave-boy and Anytus. Whether reading the *Meno* out loud, or listening to and watching its enactment, the audience is imaginatively present at the proceedings, like a modern reader immersed in the *mise en scène* of a good novel. Where is Socrates' hypothesized "someone who does not recognize Meno" hypothetically located? Like the *dramatis personae*, and the audience hearing or reading the text out loud, she might also be imaginatively present at the proceedings, beholding Meno whom she does not recognize. Or she might be imagined to be located elsewhere, off-stage and out of sight of the proceedings (White, Scott), or even disappear entirely, replaced by decontextualized conceptual problems (Verdenius, Klein, Thomas). I argue for the former, because the specific properties (beauty, wealth, aristocratic status), which Socrates selects from the many other attributes of the foreigner from Thessaly, are visible in his person, thus would be known by virtue of being seen by the hypothesized

about him? That this is so is shown by the fact that Meno immediately accepts Socrates' general view [. . .]"; Weiss (2001) 23 "If one does not know at all who Meno is, one certainly should not comment on whether he is handsome, well-born, or wealthy. Indeed, on what grounds do people presume to make pronouncements about the features of things they know not at all?"; Karasmanis (2006) 131 "So if we do not have an acquaintance or familiarity with Meno we cannot say if he is handsome or rich etc."; Scott (2006) 19 "Presumably he (*sc.* Socrates) is thinking of a scenario in which someone who has never heard of Meno is asked whether he is rich etc. Although the person can infer, just by being asked the question, that Meno is a human being, they are otherwise in a complete blank about him."

person, were she present at the proceedings. Indeed, if she is to fail to recognize Meno, she *must* be present, for according to Plato's epistemology of personal recognition,²⁸ one must see or hear a person in order to recognize someone one knows, or to realize that one doesn't know who she is.

To see a beautiful man unknown to one is to know in a flash that he is beautiful. Also, one may infer, from seeing the many servants who attend him,²⁹ that the unknown man is wealthy. As for the unknown man's aristocratic status, that may be seen in the magnificence of his carriage typical of his caste, in the way he holds his face, and by the figure he affects, in sum by his haughty projection of privileged self. At *Resp.* 4.425b3–4, Socrates calls the ensemble of elements that make up a particular stance "in general the department of the

²⁸ In Plato, the cognitive act of recognizing someone's identity is based on perception, in seeing the person, or hearing her voice if in the dark. At *Tht.* 144c5, Theodorus points out Theaetetus entering with two companions, and bids Socrates "See if you recognize him!" (ἀλλὰ σκόπει εἰ γινώσκεις αὐτόν). Socrates replies "I recognize him!" (Γινώσκω). Cf. also *Prt.* 110b3–5: "Socrates," said Hippocrates, "Are you awake or sleeping?" And recognizing his voice (Καὶ ἐγὼ τὴν φωνὴν γνοῦς αὐτοῦ), I said "That is Hippocrates!" Cf. Eur. *El.* 766–768. Messenger: "Seeing me (μ' εἰσορῶσα), the servant of your brother, did you not know (οὐκ οἶσθ') (sc. who I was)?" Electra: "It was from fear that I failed to recognize your face (δυσγνωσίαν εἶχον προσώπου). Now indeed I recognize you (γινώσκω σε)." Plato names the canonical markers of identity at *Soph.* 267a6–7, where an impersonator is said to make his voice (φωνή) and appearance (σχῆμα) nearly like the voice and appearance of the one impersonated. At *Tht.* 193b9–d2, in the context of a discussion of false belief, recognition of someone is said to occur when the appearance of a person is in accord with the imprint in the soul, antecedently acquired, of that person's identifying characteristics. Plato distinguishes between unmediated first-order knowledge of identity (recognizing a person upon seeing her or hearing her voice) and second-order derived knowledge of identity, as in the case of never having laid eyes on someone whose identity one knows. For the latter, cf. *Men.* 94c5–6, where Socrates asks Anytus "Are you not mindful (sc. of the identity of Xanthias and Eudorus, the famous wrestling trainers)?" (ἢ οὐ μέμνησαι;). Anytus replies "Yes, by hearsay" (Ἐγωγε, ἀκοῆ).

²⁹ Cf. *Men.* 82a8–b1: ἀλλὰ μοι προσκάλεσον τῶν πολλῶν ἀκολούθων τουτωνὶ τῶν σαυτοῦ ἕνα.

body"³⁰ (καὶ ὅλον τὸν τοῦ σώματος σχηματισμόν). A promising young man in the *Republic*, who, like Meno, is rich, handsome, and of aristocratic status, is rebuked by a philosopher for "imagining himself prepared to rule over Greeks and barbarians, and elevating himself in the thought of it, puffed up in magnificent stance (σχηματισμοῦ . . . ἐμπιμπλάμενον [*Resp.* 6.494d1–2]), with a vacant mind full of senseless fancies." Those passages in the *Republic* permit the inference that Meno's σχηματισμός is visible, as is his beauty, and his entourage of servants, and would be seen and recognized as signifying aristocratic status by someone who does not know that she is beholding the son of Alexidemus. And if she fails to grasp the significance of Meno's σχηματισμός, the next remark out of his mouth confirms his aristocratic status. Meno offhandedly agrees that it is impossible for someone who does not know who he is, to know that he is beautiful, and of aristocratic status. Surprised by Socrates' avowal of ignorance regarding ἀρετή, he asks (*Men.* 71c1–2): "if *we*³¹ may announce back home [*sc.* your eccentric opinions about ἀρετή]?"

³⁰ Translation of Shorey (1935) 1, 135.

³¹ Cf. Thompson (1901) 68 "The plural is used because Meno is speaking for himself and his party"; Klein (1965) 42 "Does Socrates really not know what human excellence is, he asks. And he adds, with a sweeping gesture—as we imagine—over the heads of the people who form his retinue and are witnessing the conversation on the spot: 'shall we spread *that* (original emphasis) news about you [which must be known here, in Athens] back home, *too*?' " That Socrates and Meno are engaged in a private conversation, aside Socrates' brief encounter with Anytus in Meno's presence, is indicated by Socrates' insults and scoldings of Meno that would transcend propriety if others were listening. Socrates is quite unpleasant to Protagoras throughout the *Protagoras*, but the insults there are wrapped in irony as is required by the presence of an audience. Plato takes great care in distinguishing private conversations (for example, that of Socrates with Euthyphro on the road to the law court or with Crito in the prison cell) from those with an audience (for example, the attendees at Kallias' house, assembled and seated to hear Socrates converse with Protagoras [*Prt.* 317d5–e3], or the scum pushing and shoving to sit on the bench on which Charmides is about to sit down [*Chrm.* 155c1–4]). Meno's entourage are menials who keep their distance unless summoned, and do not eavesdrop on their master's conversations. In contrast to that conventional social arrangement, Agathon in the *Symposium* at 175b7–c1, as an innovation, bids his house-slaves consider themselves to be the hosts who have invited him and the other guests to the feast. Alcibiades who arrives late notices that the house-slaves are listening to the guests' conversations, and instructs them to clap heavy doors on their ears that they not hear what he is about to say (*Smp.* 218b5–7).

The contemporary audience of the dialogue listening to those words would recognize Meno's aristocratic status by hearing him use the *pluralis majestatis*, a mode of speech that employs the first person plural to signal privileged status.³²

The considerations above demonstrate that Socrates' analogy in support of the foundation statement is intentionally false to the facts. The denial that someone observing Meno, whose identity she does not know, would realize in seeing and hearing him that he is beautiful, wealthy and of aristocratic status, seems to be an intentionally false *καλὸς λόγος*. In exculpation of Socrates' flagrant deception of Meno in denying that he knows what sort of thing ἀρετή is, and advancing an analogy false to the facts, the foundation statement identifies Socrates' apparently sincere intention to know what ἀρετή is in and of itself. Indeed he means to inquire into that conundrum and bids Meno collaborate with him in that assignment throughout their classroom session. Plato's theory of the Ideas—passed over in silence in the *Meno*—would provide the toolkit for that inquiry. Socrates is reluctant to re-examine and reconfirm what he knows about ἀρετή, namely its parts, their relationships *inter se* and their several αἰτίαι, and only does so at Meno's insistence.

Michael Eisenstadt
eisenstadt0@gmail.com

Austin

Works Cited

- Bluck, R. S. (1961). *Plato's "Meno."* Cambridge.
- Burnet, J. (1892). *Early Greek Philosophy.* London.
- Bury, R. G. (1926). *Plato "The Laws."* Cambridge, MA.
- Canto-Sperber, M. (1993). *Platon "Ménon."* Paris.
- Dehene, S., Izard, V., Pica, P., and Spelke, E. (2006). "Core Knowledge of Geometry in an

³² The use of the *pluralis majestatis* survives in modern Western languages. Another instance of the *pluralis majestatis* occurs at *Chrm.* 155a7. Socrates proposes a conversation with Charmides, and asks Critias, an Athenian grandee holding court in the gymnasium, to summon the young man. Critias is amenable to that proposal. He replies "We shall summon him."

- Amazonian Indigene Group." *Science* NS 311, No. 5759 (Jan. 20): 381–84.
- Fine, G. (1992). "Inquiry in the *Meno*." 200–26. In *Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. R. Kraut. Cambridge.
- (2014). *The Possibility of Inquiry: Meno's Paradox from Socrates to Sextus*. Oxford.
- Kant, I. (1929). *Critique of Pure Reason*. trans. Smith, N. K. London.
- Karasmanis, V. (2006). "Definition in Plato's *Meno*." In *Remembering Socrates*, eds. L. Judson and Karasmanis V. 129–41. Oxford.
- Klein, J. (1965). *A Commentary on Plato's "Meno"*. Chapel Hill.
- Nehamas, A. (1999). *Virtues of Authenticity: Essays on Plato and Socrates*. Princeton.
- Scott, D. (2006). *Plato's "Meno"*. Cambridge.
- Shorey, P. (c1933). *What Plato Said*. Chicago.
- (1935). *Plato: The "Republic"*. Cambridge MA.
- Thomas, J. E. (1980). *Musings on the "Meno"*. The Hague.
- Thompson, E. S. (1901). *The "Meno" of Plato*. London.
- Verdenius, W. J. (1947). "Notes on Plato's *Meno*." *Mnemosyne* 10: 289–99.
- Wade-Gerry, H. T. and J. S. Morrison (1942). "Meno of Pharsalus, Polycrates, and Ismenias." *CQ* 36: 57–78.
- Weiss, R. (2001). *Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato's "Meno"*. Oxford.
- White, N. P. (1974). "Inquiry." *Rev. Met.* 28: 289–310.
- Wilamowitz, U. v. (1920). *Platon*. Berlin.