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The Meno

**Introduction**

Philosophical fiction “The Meno” is based on characters living in the real world whose part is illustrated in a historical setting. The Meno was written around 385 B.C. and its events took place in 402 B.C. In its introductory portion, Platonic epistemology and Socratic ethics in the form of fictional dialogues set the significant cultural and political concerns that took place at the end of Socrates' life era. The "Meno" begins as a debater challenge by Meno to Socrates on whether virtue could be taught, and suddenly becomes an inconclusive and open discussion about the more proper description of “virtue”. Socratic Method known as *elenchus* is employed in this setting which presents classical criteria of Socratic Definition goal setting. This dialogue shows some important aspects of Socratic ignorance followed by Socratic irony while its mission to expose some common arrogant ostentation and attaining virtue philosophical explanation that anyone hardly ever has. When the conversation comes to the initial point of defining virtue and whether it can be taught, another method was introduced by the Socrates which we now know as "hypotheses". By using this method Socrates argues that maybe we can weigh virtue as some sort of knowledge that can be taught. But on the contrary, Socrates argues that virtue could not be knowledge because virtue could never be taught like knowledge.

Plato’s Meno confers important life aspects such as virtue and knowledge. The book includes the argumentative methods used by Plato for supporting his claims. His style has relevance with the Socratic methods because he considers logic as an important aspect of the argument. The central concern of Plato is that understanding is an essential part of nature. His ideology stresses on happiness and claims that pleasure is linked with one's satisfaction. Justice can be seen as a virtue because it eliminates disparity or unfairness. The definition of virtue is not limited to any one aspect. Plato relies on Socratic ideology for explaining the true meaning of virtue. Socrates claims that virtue is one's desire for attaining beautiful and good things.

**Dialogue Summary**

This dialogue between Meno and Socrates is divided into three stages that conclude the main theme revolving around virtue's acquisition.

**Stage 1**

 Initiation of dialogue takes place by debating challenge from Meno to Socrates about how to acquire virtue. Either virtue can be enquired through extensive training, taught or naturally possessed property. Socrates takes the discussion in some basic inquiry about what virtue basically is. Since Socrates shows his denial about virtue's nature, Meno who confidently claiming to know all about this topic get into argumentation by the Socrates to define it. Here in this part, we see the Socratic method of refuting claiming of knowledge by showing that other debaters have a contradiction in one of its claim. For example, By Meno's initial claim that different people possess different types of virtue, refutes by the Socrates that virtues have to of the same definition as they are virtues. In the first part, Socrates contradicted Meno's attempt to define virtue and contradicting his claim of possessing knowledge about what virtue truly is.

**Stage 2**

In the second stage initiation of dialogue, a twofold objection is raised that if someone does not know about what virtue is then how could one even look for it. Socrates reformulates his reply with the objection that it is basically a paradox which is based on a false dichotomy. First, the notion of learning in previous lives by the human souls is introduced and it is suggested that learning can be made by knowing what one forgets. He in his "theory of recollection" illustrates with geometric lesson make Meno's recognize that by implication of Meno's true belief, the correct answer can be answered.

**Stage 3**

In the third stage, Meno’s inquisition led him to question the same question that whether virtue is something that can be taught. By using the method of "hypotheses" Socrates make two opposing conclusions. His first argument was that if virtue is good then it may be a knowledge type thing and could be taught like knowledge. But if virtue cannot be taught by someone then it could not possibly be knowledge. Inconclusive arguments still dialogue gets stuck in Paradox dilemma.

**Plato’s Assertion**

Meno's paradox illustrates that knowledge is innate because either we know or don't know something, but if a human doesn't know what he wants, he would be unable to explore what he needs. Plato in his argument finds the answer to the existence of knowledge. The answers demonstrate the reality and truth of the knowledge. Does the knowledge lead to perfection or people are still unable to learn about entire information. Plato also finds the answers to the forms in which knowledge can exist. Plato mentions, “We do not learn, and that what we call learning is only a process of recollection” (Plato, Cooper, & Grube 2002). This proves that knowledge is innate because what human learns is a recollection.

Plato by answering the questions leads to the conclusion that recognizes knowledge as a rational belief and enduring truth. People possess the knowledge and it is existent in the form of humans. Plato relates knowledge with the other world and denies accepting the revelation of knowledge through people’s senses. The main conclusion that Plato draws from the questions is that humans lack complete knowledge. Though they possess some knowledge that knowledge is fallible and incomplete. If people would possess complete and authentic knowledge, they would also know about the other world. Plato claims, “if we indulged in the idle fancy that there was no knowing and no use in seeking to know what we do not know that is a theme upon which I am ready to fight, in word and deed, to the utmost of my power” (Plato, Cooper, & Grube 2002). Human already possesses some knowledge in their minds that allow them to explore further facts.

Plato uses the premises of the epistemological argument, metaphysical argument, and semantic argument to illustrate the reality of knowledge. The epistemological argument states that human senses lead to different realities regarding knowledge. Plato emphasizes on human behaviors. Plato mentions, “And that only these two things, true belief, and knowledge, guide correctly” (Plato, Cooper, & Grube 2002). He claims that human beings need to use their minds and remain a skeptic of philosophical findings. He rejects the mere acceptance of the philosophy without facts. (Grube, 1981). The knowledge according to this claim is innate. The slave boy demonstration is also used by Plato for claiming that learning is a recollection. This is because he lacks mathematical training or ability to solve a problem of geometry. When the boy is asked to double the areas of the circle he fails to do that. After practice, he improved by 50%. This reflects that only way of overcoming slave state is by learning. The situation of a boy has close relevance with Meno because he develops awareness about his feelings, ignorance, and beliefs.

**Plato’s Philosophy on Knowledge and Belief**

The philosophy of Plato finds answers to some basic questions that intrigue the human mind such as the difference between knowledge and beliefs. About virtue he mentions, “We have been right in how we investigated and what we said, virtue turns out to be neither innate nor earned” (Plato, Cooper, & Grube 2002). It is difficult to find who is right among humans. What is knowledge and why do people assume that they have knowledge? At what point knowledge varies from belief and which one is more firms? Do people with knowledge know everything? Is knowledge real or not? Plato’s answers to these questions help people to understand the concept of knowledge and how it exists in people. The answers explain the reality of knowledge and make them clear about the limitations that a person of knowledge encounters (Westacott, 2017).

**Conclusion**

The conclusion that Plato draws in regarding he argues that people with knowledge are known things, but their knowledge is based on assumptions and fallible. There are limitations to the knowledge that means people irrespective of their knowledge are not able to know everything. Plato’s theory of reality provides a solution to the problems. Using the premises of knowledge and opinion Plato explains the reality in them. The truth of knowledge lies in the midway as they are no one way. The reality gives an idea about the complex pattern of forms. Mathematics reveals the pattern of forms. The metaphysical argument emphasizes the similarity between nature and things. The semantic argument finds the reality of words that explains the claim. What people know is not complete and unreal in another form. People are also ignorant to the things when their knowledge fails to guide them. Completeness of knowledge also reflects from the virtues, but the human is also engaged in immoral acts that makes them less virtuous.

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