76   Further, you call something a plane, and something else a solid, as in geometry?—I do.

From this you may understand what I mean by shape, for I say this of every shape, that a shape is that which limits a solid; in a word, a shape is the limit of a solid.

And what do you say colour is, Socrates?

You are outrageous, Meno. You bother an old man to answer questions,
b but you yourself are not willing to recall and to tell me what Gorgias says that virtue is.

After you have answered this, Socrates, I will tell you.

Even someone who was blindfolded would know from your conversation that you are handsome and still have lovers.—Why so?

Because you are forever giving orders in a discussion, as spoiled people do, who behave like tyrants as long as they are young. And perhaps
c you have recognized that I am at a disadvantage with handsome people, so I will do you the favour of an answer.—By all means do me that favour.

Do you want me to answer after the manner of Gorgias, which you would most easily follow?—Of course I want that.

Do you both say there are effluvia of things, as Empedocles[2] does?—Certainly.

And that there are channels through which the effluvia make their way?—Definitely.
d   And some effluvia fit some of the channels, while others are too small or too big?—That is so.

And there is something which you call sight?—There is.

From this, "comprehend what I state," as Pindar said, for colour is an effluvium from a shape which fits the sight and is perceived.

That seems to me to be an excellent answer, Socrates.

Perhaps it was given in the manner to which you are accustomed. At the same time I think that you can deduce from this answer what sound is, and
e smell, and many such things.—Quite so.

It is a theatrical answer so it pleases you, Meno, more than that about shape.—It does.

It is not better, son of Alexidemus, but I am convinced that the other is, and I think you would agree, if you did not have to go away before the mysteries as you told me yesterday, but could remain and be initiated.

77   I would stay, Socrates, if you could tell me many things like these.

I shall certainly not be lacking in eagerness to tell you such things, both for your sake and my own, but I may not be able to tell you many. Come now, you too try to fulfill your promise to me and tell me the nature of virtue as a whole and stop making many out of one, as jokers say whenever

2. See Presocratics section pp. 47–58.

someone breaks something, but allow virtue to remain whole and sound, and tell me what it is, for I have given you examples.
b

I think, Socrates, that virtue is, as the poet says, "to find joy in beautiful things and have power." So I say that virtue is to desire beautiful things and have the power to acquire them.

Do you mean that the man who desires beautiful things desires good things?—Most certainly.

Do you assume that there are people who desire bad things, and others who desire good things? Do you not think, my good man, that all men desire good things?—I do not.

But some desire bad things?—Yes.

Do you mean that they believe the bad things to be good, or that they know they are bad and nevertheless desire them?—I think there are both kinds.

Do you think, Meno, that anyone, knowing that bad things are bad, nevertheless desires them?—I certainly do.

What do you mean by desiring? Is it to secure for oneself?—What else?

Does he think that the bad things benefit him who possesses them, or
d does he know they harm him?

There are some who believe that the bad things benefit them, others who know that the bad things harm them.

And do you think that those who believe that bad things benefit them know that they are bad?

No, that I cannot altogether believe.

It is clear then that those who do not know things to be bad do not desire what is bad, but they desire those things that they believe to be good but that are in fact bad. It follows that those who have knowledge of these
e things and believe them to be good clearly desire good things. Is that not so?—It is likely.

Well then, those whom you say desire bad things, believing that bad things harm their possessor, know that they will be harmed by them?—Necessarily.

And do they not think that those who are harmed are miserable to the
78 extent that they are harmed?—That too is inevitable.

And that those who are miserable are unhappy?—I think so.

Does anyone wish to be miserable and unhappy?—I do not think so, Socrates.

No one then wants what is bad, Meno, unless he wants to be such. For what else is being miserable but to desire bad things and secure them?

You are probably right, Socrates, and no one wants what is bad.
b

You said just now that virtue is to desire good things and have the power to secure them.—Yes, I did.

The desiring part of this statement is common to everybody, and one man is no better than another in this?—So it appears.

Clearly then, if one man is better than another, he must be better at securing them.—Quite so.

This then is virtue according to your argument, the power of securing good things.

I think, Socrates, that the case is altogether as you now understand it.

Let us see then whether what you say is true, for you may well be right. You say that the capacity to acquire good things is virtue?—I do.

And by good things you mean, for example, health and wealth?

Yes, and also to acquire gold and silver, also honours and offices in the city.

By good things you do not mean other goods than these?

No, but I mean all things of this kind.

d   Very well. According to Meno, the hereditary guest friend of the Great King, virtue is the acquisition of gold and silver. Do you add to this acquiring, Meno, the words justly and piously, or does it make no difference to you but even if one secures these things unjustly, you call it virtue none the less?—Certainly not, Socrates.

You would then call it wickedness?—Indeed I would.

It seems then that the acquisition must be accompanied by justice or moderation or piety or some other part of virtue; if it is not, it will not be virtue, even though it provides good things.

How could there be virtue without these?

Then failing to secure gold and silver, whenever it would not be just to do so, either for oneself or another, is not this failure to secure them also virtue?—So it seems.

79   Then to provide these goods would not be virtue any more than not to provide them, but whatever is done with justice will be virtue, and what is done without anything of the kind is wickedness?

I think it must necessarily be as you say.

We said a little while ago that each of these things was a part of virtue, namely justice and moderation and all such things?—Yes.

Then you are playing with me, Meno.—How so, Socrates?

b   Because I begged you just now not to break up or fragment virtue, and I gave examples of how you should answer. You paid no attention, but you tell me that virtue is to be able to secure good things with justice, and this, you say, is a part of virtue.—I do.

It follows then from what you agree to, that to act in whatever you do with a part of virtue is virtue, for you say that justice is a part of virtue, as are all such qualities. Why do I say this? Because when I begged you to tell me about virtue as a whole, you are far from telling me what it is. Rather, you say that every action is virtue if it is performed with

a part of virtue, as if you had told me what virtue as a whole is, and I   *c* would already know that, even if you fragment it into parts. I think you must have the same question from the beginning, my dear Meno, namely, what is virtue, if every action performed with justice is virtue? Do you not think you should have the same question again, or do you think one knows what a part of virtue is if one does not know virtue itself?—I do not think so.

If you remember, when I was answering you about shape, we rejected   *d* the kind of answer that tried to answer in terms still being the subject of inquiry and not yet agreed upon.—And we were right to reject them.

Then surely, my good sir, you must not think, while the nature of virtue as a whole is still under inquiry, that by answering in terms of the parts of virtue you can make its nature clear to anyone or make anything else clear by speaking in this way, but only that the same question must be put to you again—what do you take the nature of virtue to be when you say what   *e* you say? Or do you think there is no point in what I am saying?—I think what you say is right.

Answer me again then from the beginning: What do you and your friend say that virtue is?

Socrates, before I even met you I used to hear that you are always in a state of perplexity and that you bring others to the same state, and now I   *80* think you are bewitching and beguiling me, simply putting me under a spell, so that I am quite perplexed. Indeed, if a joke is in order, you seem, in appearance and in every other way, to be like the broad torpedo fish, for it too makes anyone who comes close and touches it feel numb, and you seem to have had that kind of effect on me, for both my mind and my   *b* tongue are numb, and I have no answer to give you. Yet I have made many speeches about virtue before large audiences on a thousand occasions, very good speeches as I thought, but now I cannot even say what it is. I think you are wise not to sail away from Athens to go and stay elsewhere, for if you were to behave like this as a stranger in another city, you would be driven away for practising sorcery.

You are a rascal, Meno, and you nearly deceived me.

Why so particularly, Socrates?

I know why you drew this image of me.

Why do you think I did?

So that I should draw an image of you in return. I know that all hand-   *c* some men rejoice in images of themselves; it is to their advantage, for I think that the images of beautiful people are also beautiful, but I will draw no image of you in turn. Now if the torpedo fish is itself numb and so makes others numb, then I resemble it, but not otherwise, for I myself do not have the answer when I perplex others, but I am more perplexed than anyone when I cause perplexity in others. So now I do not know what virtue

d is; perhaps you knew before you contacted me, but now you are certainly like one who does not know. Nevertheless, I want to examine and seek together with you what it may be.

How will you look for it, 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?

e I know what you want to say, Meno. Do you realize what a debater's argument you are bringing up, that a man cannot search either for what he knows or for what he does not know? He cannot search for what he knows—since he knows it, there is no need to search—nor for what he does not know, for he does not know what to look for.

Does that argument not seem sound to you, Socrates?

81 Not to me.

Can you tell my why?

I can. I have heard wise men and women talk about divine matters . . .

What did they say?

What was, I thought, both true and beautiful.

What was it, and who were they?

The speakers were among the priests and priestesses whose care it is to

b be able to give an account of their practices. Pindar too says it, and many others of the divine among our poets. What they say is this; see whether you think they speak the truth: They say that the human soul is immortal; at times it comes to an end, which they call dying, at times it is reborn, but it is never destroyed, and one must therefore live one's life as piously as possible:

Persephone will return to the sun above in the ninth year the souls of those from whom she will exact punishment for old miseries, and from

c these come noble kings, mighty in strength and greatest in wisdom, and for the rest of time men will call them sacred heroes.

As the soul is immortal, has been born 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 the things it knew before, both about

d 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. We must, therefore, not believe that debater's argument, for it would make us idle, and fainthearted men like to hear it,

e whereas my argument makes them energetic and keen on the search. I trust that this is true, and I want to inquire along with you into the nature of virtue.

Yes, Socrates, but how do you mean that we do not learn, but that what we call learning is recollection? Can you teach me that this is so?

As I said just now, Meno, you are a rascal. You now ask me if I can teach you, when I say there is no teaching but recollection, in order to show me 82 up at once as contradicting myself.

No, by Zeus, Socrates, that was not my intention when I spoke, but just a habit. If you can somehow show me that things are as you say, please do so.

It is not easy, but I am nevertheless willing to do my best for your sake. Call one of these many attendants of yours, whichever you like, that I may b prove it to you in his case.

Certainly. You there, come forward.

Is he a Greek? Does he speak Greek?

Very much so. He was born in my household.

Pay attention then whether you think he is recollecting or learning from me.—I will pay attention.

Tell me now, boy, you know that a square figure is like this?—I do.

A square then is a figure in which all these four sides are equal? c —Yes indeed.

And it also has these lines through the middle equal?—Yes.

And such a figure could be larger or smaller?—Certainly.

If then this side were two feet, and this other side two feet, how many feet would the whole be? Consider it this way: if it were two feet this way, and only one foot that way, the figure would be once two feet? —Yes.

But if it is two feet also that way, it would surely be twice two feet? d —Yes.

How many feet is twice two feet? Work it out and tell me.—Four, Socrates.

Now we could have another figure twice the size of this one, with the four sides equal like this one.—Yes.

How many feet will that be?—Eight.

Come now, try to tell me how long each side of this will be. The side of this is two feet. What about each side of the one which is its double? e —Obviously, Socrates, it will be twice the length.

You see, Meno, that I am not teaching the boy anything, but all I do is question him. And now he thinks he knows the length of the line on which an eight-foot figure is based. Do you agree?—I do.

And does he know?—Certainly not.

He thinks it is a line twice the length?—Yes.

Watch him now recollecting things in order, as one must recollect. Tell me, boy, do you say that a figure double the size is based on a line double the length? Now I mean such a figure as this, not long on one side and 83 short on the other, but equal in every direction like this one, and double the

size, that is, eight feet. See whether you still believe that it will be based on a line double the length.—I do.

Now the line becomes double its length if we add another of the same length here?—Yes indeed.

And the eight-foot square will be based on it, if there are four lines of that length?—Yes.

b Well, let us draw from it four equal lines, and surely that is what you say is the eight-foot square?—Certainly.

And within this figure are four squares, each of which is equal to the four-foot square?—Yes.

How big is it then? Is it not four times as big?—Of course.

Is this square then, which is four times as big, its double?—No, by Zeus.

How many times bigger is it?—Four times.

c Then, my boy, the figure based on a line twice the length is not double but four times as big?—You are right.

And four times four is sixteen, is it not?—Yes.

On how long a line then should the eight-foot square be based? On *this* line we have a square that is four times bigger, do we not? Now this four-foot square is based on this line here, half the length?—Yes.

Very well. Is the eight-foot square not double this one and half that one?—Yes.

Will it not be based on a line longer than this one and shorter than that one? Is that not so?—I think so.

d Good, you answer what you think. And tell me, was this one not two feet long, and that one four feet?—Yes.

The line on which the eight-foot square is based must then be longer than this one of two feet, and shorter than that one of four feet?—It must be.

e Try to tell me then how long a line you say it is.—Three feet.

Then if it is three feet, let us add the half of this one, and it will be three feet? For these are two feet, and the other is one. And here, similarly, these are two feet and that one is one foot, and so the figure you mention comes to be?—Yes.

Now if it is three feet this way and three feet that way, will the whole figure be three times three feet?—So it seems.

How much is three times three feet?—Nine feet.

And the double square was to be how many feet?—Eight.

So the eight-foot figure cannot be based on the three-foot line?—Clearly not.

But on how long a line? Try to tell us exactly, and if you do not want to work it out, show me from what line.—By Zeus, Socrates, I do not know.

You realize, Meno, what point he has reached in his recollection. At first he did not know what the basic line of the eight-foot square was; even now

he does not yet know, but then he thought he knew, and answered confidently as if he did know, and he did not think himself at a loss, but now he does think himself at a loss, and as he does not know, neither does he b think he knows.—That is true.

So he is now in a better position with regard to the matter he does not know.—I agree with that too.

Have we done him any harm by making him perplexed and numb as the torpedo fish does?—I do not think so.

Indeed, we have probably achieved something relevant to finding out how matters stand, for now, as he does not know, he would be glad to find out, whereas before he thought he could easily make many fine speeches to large audiences about the square of double size and said that it must have a c base twice as long.—So it seems.

Do you think that before he would have tried to find out that which he thought he knew though he did not, before he fell into perplexity and realized he did not know and longed to know?—I do not think so, Socrates.

Has he then benefitted from being numbed?—I think so.

Look then how he will come out of his perplexity while searching along with me. I shall do nothing more than ask questions and not teach him. Watch whether you find me teaching and explaining things to him instead d of asking for his opinion.

You tell me, is this not a four-foot figure? You understand?—I do.

We add to it this figure which is equal to it?—Yes.

And we add this third figure equal to each of them?—Yes.

Could we then fill in the space in the corner?—Certainly.

So we have these four equal figures?—Yes.

Well then, how many times is the whole figure larger than this one? e —Four times.

But we should have had one that was twice as large, or do you not remember?—I certainly do.

Does not this line from one corner to the other cut each of these figures 85 in two?—Yes.

So these are four equal lines which enclose this figure?—They are.

Consider now: how large is the figure?—I do not understand.

Within these four figures, each of these lines cuts off half of each, does it not?—Yes.

How many of this size are there in this figure?—Four.

How many in this?—Two.

What is the relation of four to two?—Double. b

How many feet in this?—Eight.

Based on what line?—This one.

That is, on the line that stretches from corner to corner of the four-foot figure?—Yes.

Clever men call this the diagonal, so that if diagonal is its name, you say

that the double figure would be that based on the diagonal?—Most certainly, Socrates.

What do you think, Meno? Has he, in his answers, expressed any opinion that was not his own?

c

No, they were all his own.

And yet, as we said a short time ago, he did not know?—That is true.

So these opinions were in him, were they not?—Yes.

So the man who does not know has within himself true opinions about the things that he does not know?—So it appears.

These opinions have now just been stirred up like a dream, but if he were repeatedly asked these same questions in various ways, you know that in the end his knowledge about these things would be as accurate as anyone's.—It is likely.

d

And he will know it without having been taught but only questioned, and find the knowledge within himself?—Yes.

And is not finding knowledge within oneself recollection?—Certainly.

Must he not either have at some time acquired the knowledge he now possesses, or else have always possessed it?—Yes.

If he always had it, he would always have known. If he acquired it, he cannot have done so in his present life. Or has someone taught him geometry? For he will perform in the same way about all geometry, and all other knowledge. Has someone taught him everything? You should know, especially as he has been born and brought up in your house.

e

But I know that no one has taught him.

Yet he has these opinions, or doesn't he?

That seems indisputable, Socrates.

If he has not acquired them in his present life, is it not clear that he had them and had learned them at some other time?—It seems so.

86

Then that was the time when he was not a human being?—Yes.

If then, during the time he exists and is not a human being he will have true opinions which, when stirred by questioning, become knowledge, will not his soul have learned during all time? For it is clear that during all time he exists, either as a man or not.—So it seems.

Then if the truth about reality is always in our soul, the soul would be immortal so that you should always confidently try to seek out and recollect what you do not know at present—that is, what you do not recollect?

b

Somehow, Socrates, I think that what you say is right.

I think so too, Meno. I do not insist that my argument is right in all other respects, but I would contend at all costs both in word and deed as far as I could that we will be better men, braver and less idle, if we believe that one must search for the things one does not know, rather than if we believe that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it.

c

In this too I think you are right, Socrates.

Since we are of one mind that one should seek to find out what one does not know, shall we try to find out together what virtue is?

Certainly. But Socrates, I should be most pleased to investigate and hear your answer to my original question, whether we should attack virtue as something teachable, or as a natural gift, or in whatever way it comes to men.

d

If I were directing you, Meno, and not only myself, we would not have investigated whether virtue is teachable or not before we had investigated what virtue itself is. But because you do not even attempt to rule yourself, in order that you may be free, but you try to rule me and do so, I will agree with you—for what can I do? So we must, it appears, inquire into the qualities of something the nature of which we do not yet know. However, please relax your rule a little bit for me and agree to investigate whether it is teachable or not by means of a hypothesis. I mean the way geometers often carry on their investigations. For example, if they are asked whether a specific area can be inscribed in the form of a triangle within a given circle, one of them might say: "I do not yet know whether that area has that property, but I think I have, as it were, a hypothesis that is of use for the problem, namely this: If that area is such that when one has applied it as a rectangle to the given straight line in the circle it is deficient by a figure similar to the very figure which is applied, then I think one alternative results, whereas another results if it is impossible for this to happen. So, by using this hypothesis, I am willing to tell you what results with regard to inscribing it in the circle—that is, whether it is impossible or not." So we can say about virtue also, since we do not know either what it is or what qualities it possesses, let us investigate whether it is teachable by means of a hypothesis, and say this: If among the things existing in the soul virtue has a certain quality, would it be teachable or not? Or, as we were saying just now, can it be recollected? First then, if it is other than knowledge—for let it make no difference to us whichever term we use—but can it be taught? Or is it plain to anyone that men cannot be taught anything but knowledge?

e

87

b

c

I think so.

But, if virtue is a kind of knowledge, it can clearly be taught?—Of course.

We have dealt with that question quickly, that if it is of one kind it can be taught, if it is of a different kind, it cannot.—We have indeed.

The next point to consider seems to be whether virtue is knowledge or something else.—That does seem to be the next point to consider.

d

Well now, do we say that virtue is itself something good, and will this hypothesis stand firm for us, that it is something good?—Of course.

If then there is anything else good that is different and separate from knowledge, virtue might well not be a kind of knowledge, but if there is