Well now, are they willing to offer themselves to the young as teachers? Do they agree they are teachers, and that virtue can be taught?

No, by Zeus, Socrates, but sometimes you would hear them say that it can be taught, at other times, that it cannot.

Should we say that they are teachers of this subject, when they do not even agree on this point?—I do not think so, Socrates.

Further, do you think that these sophists, who alone profess to be so, are teachers of virtue?

I admire this most in Gorgias, Socrates, that you would never hear him promising this. Indeed, he ridicules the others when he hears them making this claim. He thinks one should make people clever speakers.

You do not think then that the sophists are teachers?

I cannot tell, Socrates; like most people, at times I think they are, at other times I think that they are not.

Do you know that not only you and the other public men at times think that it can be taught, at other times that it cannot, but that the poet Theognis[5] says the same thing?—Where?

In his elegiacs: "Eat and drink with these men, and keep their company. Please those whose power is great, for you will learn goodness from the good. If you mingle with bad men you will lose even what wit you possess." You see that here he speaks as if virtue can be taught?—So it appears.

Elsewhere, he changes somewhat: "If this could be done," he says, "and intelligence could be instilled," somehow those who could do this "would collect large and numerous fees," and further: "Never would a bad son be born of a good father, for he would be persuaded by wise words, but you will never make a bad man good by teaching." You realize that the poet is contradicting himself on the same subject?—He seems to be.

Can you mention any other subject of which those who claim to be teachers are not, such as the teachers of other subjects, recognized as such, but not to have knowledge of it themselves, and are thought to be poor in the very matter which they profess to teach, or any other subject of which those who are recognized as worthy men at one time say it can be taught and at other times that it cannot? Would you say that people who are so confused about a subject can be effective teachers of it?—No, by Zeus, I would not.

If then neither the sophists nor the worthy people themselves are teachers of this subject, clearly there would be no others?—I do not think there are.

If there are no teachers, neither are there pupils?—As you say.

And we agreed that a subject that has neither teachers nor pupils is not teachable?—We have so agreed.

5. Theognis was a poet of mid-sixth century B.C.

Now there seem to be no teachers of virtue anywhere?—That is so.

If there are no teachers, there are no learners?—That seems so.

Then virtue cannot be taught?

Apparently not, if we have investigated this correctly. I certainly wonder, Socrates, whether there are no good men either, or in what way good men come to be.

We are probably poor specimens, you and I, Meno. Gorgias has not adequately educated you, nor Prodicus me. We must then at all costs turn our attention to ourselves and find someone who will in some way make us better. I say this in view of our recent investigation, for it is ridiculous that we failed to see that it is not only under the guidance of knowledge that men succeed in their affairs, and that is perhaps why the knowledge of how good men come to be escapes us.

How do you mean, Socrates?

I mean this: we were right to agree that good men must be beneficent, and that this could not be otherwise. Is that not so?—Yes.

And that they will be beneficent and useful if they give us correct guidance in our affairs. To this too we were right to agree?—Yes.

But that one cannot guide correctly if one does not have knowledge, to this our agreement is likely to be incorrect.—How do you mean?

I will tell you. A man who knew the way to Larissa, or anywhere else you like, and went there and guided others would surely lead them well and correctly?—Certainly.

What if someone had had a correct opinion as to which was the way but had not gone there nor indeed had knowledge of it, would he not also lead correctly?—Certainly.

And 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, as he has a true opinion, though not knowledge?—In no way worse.

So true opinion is in no way a worse guide to correct action than knowledge? It is this that we omitted in our investigation of the nature of virtue, when we said that only knowledge can lead to correct action, for true opinion can do so also?—So it seems.

So correct opinion is no less useful than knowledge?

Yes, to this extent, Socrates. But the man who has knowledge will always succeed, whereas he who has true opinion will only succeed at times.

How do you mean? Will he who has the right opinion not always succeed, as long as his opinion is right?

That appears to be so of necessity, and it makes me wonder, Socrates, this being the case, why knowledge is prized far more highly than right opinion, and why they are different.

Do you know why you wonder, or shall I tell you?—By all means tell me.

It is because you have paid no attention to the statues of Daedalus, but perhaps there are none in Thessaly.

What do you have in mind when you say this?

That they too run away and escape if one does not tie them down but
e remain in place if tied down.—So what?

To acquire an untied work of Daedalus is not worth much, like acquiring a runaway slave, for it does not remain, but it is worth much if tied down, for his works are very beautiful. What am I thinking of when I say this? True beliefs. For true beliefs, as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all
98 they do is good, but they are not willing to remain long, and they escape from a man's mind, so that they are not worth much until one ties them down by (giving) an account of the reason why. And that, Meno my friend, is recollection, as we previously agreed. After they are tied down, in the first place they become knowledge, and then they remain in place. That is why knowledge is prized higher than correct opinion, and knowledge differs from correct opinion in being tied down.

Yes, by Zeus, Socrates, it seems to be something like that.

b Indeed, I too speak as one who does not have knowledge but is guessing. However, I certainly do not think I am guessing that right opinion is a different thing than knowledge. If I claim to know anything else—and I would make that claim about few things—I would put this down as one of the things I know.—Rightly so, Socrates.

Well then, is it not correct that when true opinion guides the course of every action, it does no worse than knowledge?—I think you are right in this too.

c Correct opinion is then neither inferior to knowledge nor less useful in directing actions, nor is the man who has it less so than he who has knowledge.—That is so.

And we agreed that the good man is useful?—Yes.

Since then it is not only through knowledge but also through right opin-
d ion that men are good, and beneficial to their cities when they are, and neither knowledge nor true opinion come to men by nature but are acquired—or do you think either of these comes by nature?—I do not think so.

Then if they do not come by nature, men are not so by nature either.—Surely not.

As goodness does not come by nature, we inquired next whether it could be taught?—Yes.

We thought it could be taught, if it was knowledge?—Yes.

And that it was knowledge if it could be taught?—Quite so.

e And that if there were teachers of it, it could be taught, but if there were not, it was not teachable?—That is so.

And then we agreed that there were no teachers of it?—We did.

So we agreed that it was neither teachable nor knowledge?—Quite so.

But we certainly agree that virtue is a good thing?—Yes.

And that which guides correctly is both useful and good?—Certainly.

And that only these two things, true belief and knowledge, guide cor- 99
rectly, and that if a man possesses these he gives correct guidance? The things that turn out right by some chance are not due to human guidance, but where there is correct human guidance it is due to two things, true belief or knowledge?—I think that is so.

Now because it cannot be taught, virtue no longer seems to be knowledge?—It seems not.

So one of the two good and useful things has been excluded, and knowl- b
edge is not the guide in public affairs?—I do not think so.

So it is not by some kind of wisdom, or by being wise, that such men lead their cities, those such as Themistocles and those mentioned by Anytus just now? That is the reason why they cannot make others be like themselves, because it is not knowledge which makes them what they are?

It is likely to be as you say, Socrates.

Therefore, if it is not through knowledge, the only alternative is that it is through right opinion that statesmen follow the right course for their cities. c
As regards knowledge, they are no different from soothsayers and prophets. They too say many true things when inspired, but they have no knowledge of what they are saying.—That is probably so.

And so, Meno, is it right to call divine these men who, without any understanding, are right in much that is of importance in what they say and do?—Certainly.

We should be right to call divine also those soothsayers and prophets whom we just mentioned, and all the poets, and we should call no less d
divine and inspired those public men who are no less under the gods' influence and possession, as their speeches lead to success in many important matters, though they have no knowledge of what they are saying?—Quite so.

Women too, Meno, call good men divine, and the Spartans, when they eulogize someone, say, "This man is divine."

And they appear to be right, Socrates, though perhaps Anytus here will e
be annoyed with you for saying so.

I do not mind that; we shall talk to him again, but if we were right in the way in which we spoke and investigated in this whole discussion, virtue would be neither an inborn quality nor taught, but come to those who possess it as a gift from the gods which is not accompanied by understanding, unless there is someone among our statesmen who can make another 100
into a statesman. If there were one, he could be said to be among the living as Homer said Teiresias was among the dead, namely, that he alone retained his wits while the others flitted about like shadows. In the same

manner such a man would, as far as virtue is concerned, here also be the only true reality compared, as it were, with shadows.

b I think that is an excellent way to put it, Socrates.

It follows from this reasoning, Meno, that virtue appears to be present in those of us who may possess it as a gift from the gods. We shall have clear knowledge of this when, before we investigate how it comes to be present in men, we first try to find out what virtue in itself is. But now the time has come for me to go. You convince your guest friend Anytus here of these very things of which you have yourself been convinced, in order that he may be more amenable. If you succeed, you will also confer a benefit upon the Athenians.

PHAEDO

ECHECRATES: Were you with Socrates yourself, Phaedo, on the day when *57* he drank the poison in prison, or did someone else tell you about it?

PHAEDO: I was there myself, Echecrates.

ECHECRATES: What are the things he said before he died? And how did he die? I should be glad to hear this. Hardly anyone from Phlius visits Athens nowadays, nor has any stranger come from Athens for some time *b* who could give us a clear account of what happened, except that he drank the poison and died, but nothing more.

PHAEDO: Did you not even hear how the trial went? *58*

ECHECRATES: Yes, someone did tell us about that, and we wondered that he seems to have died a long time after the trial took place. Why was that, Phaedo?

PHAEDO: That was by chance, Echecrates. The day before the trial, as it happened, the prow of the ship that the Athenians send to Delos had been crowned with garlands.

ECHECRATES: What ship is that?

PHAEDO: It is the ship in which, the Athenians say, Theseus once sailed to Crete, taking with him the two lots of seven victims.[1] He saved them and was himself saved. The Athenians vowed then to Apollo, so the story *b* goes, that if they were saved they would send a mission to Delos every year. And from that time to this they send such an annual mission to the god. They have a law to keep the city pure while it lasts, and no execution may take place once the mission has begun until the ship has made its journey to Delos and returned to Athens, and this can sometimes take a long time if the winds delay it. The mission begins when the priest of *c* Apollo crowns the prow of the ship, and this happened, as I say, the day before Socrates' trial. That is why Socrates was in prison a long time between his trial and his execution.

ECHECRATES: What about his actual death, Phaedo? What did he say? What did he do? Who of his friends were with him? Or did the authorities not allow them to be present and he died with no friends present?

Translated by G.M.A. Grube.

1. Legend says that Minos, king of Crete, compelled the Athenians to send seven youths and seven maidens every year to be sacrificed to the Minotaur until Theseus saved them and killed the monster.