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Philosophy 101
Professor Dueck
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Reading Questions-Week 1

Innate Knowledge

1. What does Meno accuse Socrates of at the start of the reading? How does Socrates interpret this criticism?

Meno accuses Socrates of bewitching him into confusion since he's grown tired of the layered thinking. Instead he flips things back on Plato, saying that before he knew him, people said Plato always doubted himself and brought others with him. This is maybe suggesting that Plato does not even know much of what he teaches. Plato recognizes his critique as a deflective debative tactic and accepts the challenge to teach him further.

2. Explain the paradox/problem (the "Learner's Paradox") that Meno and Socrates talk about on the second page, concerning enquiry and learning and interpreting what we know.

Meno's paradox is the understanding that if we know something than we do and since we do there's no need to learn anymore about it. And if we don't know something, we can't seek anything about it since we won't know what to ask and even if we found it, we wouldn't know that that's what it was.

3. Explain Plato's theory of innate knowledge, and how Socrates's conversation with Meno's servant boy is an attempt to demonstrate its truth.

Plato's theory is explained through his encounters with religious leaders describing how the soul is immortal, causing them to leave one body to another. Thus what we understand as learning is really a process of recollecting what we already know. Meno then asks Socrates to prove it and Socrates begins to ask a slave boy geometry questions besides the boys lack of education.

Question after question shows the boy to fail in getting the correct one but Socrates says that his awareness of his ignorance is progress nonetheless. Further, he guides the boy to the right answer

with leading questions showing that as people we have some kind of obvious knowledge within us, we just need to set in the right direction to make recollection easier. The boy was able to release the truth of the answers and the logic of the steps needed to get there rather than it being taught to him.

Demonstrative Knowledge

1. In your own words, explain the deductive aspect of Aristotle's view of how we gain knowledge. What is a syllogism? What is a demonstration?

According to Aristotle, we gain knowledge by syllogistic demonstration which is reaching a conclusion based on two minor and major assumptions coming together to reach a conclusion. An example of this is saying something like “I like guys with brown hair, you have brown hair, therefore I like you.” A demonstration to Aristotle is the ongoing discussion of a dispute starting with assumptions known to be true and having a flow of reasoning showing logically evident steps that the conclusion is a consequence of its assumption. These demonstrations usually reveal a truth that was unknown before.

2. What point does Aristotle make about how deduction by itself doesn't lead to truth about the world?

Aristotle clarifies that as much as our conclusions give us said truths there arises a point of memory and experience. These two things shape how we universally look at situations and our perceptions of a truth compared to others. This enables everyone to look at the world from a different point of view.

3. Present in your own words the inductive process of gaining knowledge according to Aristotle, including the role of the senses, memory and generalization.

Knowledge first begins with an initial thought or assumption coming together to form a conclusion. This conclusion is then tested by demonstration, this discussion disputes known truths by having logical steps show the consequence of the assumption. In addition our senses and memories shape how we view our universal understanding of subjects way before we

dispute, this all together helps us reach a truth we did not know before.