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Intro to Philosophy

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Reading Questions

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

1. Meno accuses Socrates of being a 'torpedo-fish' which attacks those around him's inconsistent beliefs. Socrates responds to this by clarifying that he too does not know the answer to the questions he poses and is also perplexed and seeks answers in others.

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.

2. Also known as the "Paradox of Inquiry" this paradox addresses the idea of knowledge and the way it is attained. This paradox can be separated into three essential ideas. Either you know what you're looking for or you don't. If you know what you are looking for, then learning is unnecessary. And If you don't know what you're looking for, then learning is impossible. This means that learning can either be one of two things unnecessary or impossible. This is a constructive dilemma because learning cannot only be separated by two categories; it's not a construct that can be separated.

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

3. By asking the boy the geometry problem at first he is able to answer his questions fairly easily based on knowledge but when he no longer knows the answers Socrates is able to guide him to the right answer by asking step by step specific questions. With these questions the boy is able to find the answer showing Socrates that he already had this knowledge within him that he must have already learned at some other time. Proving his theory of immortal souls and the knowledge they possess.

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?

1. Aristotle's deductive reasoning aspect shows that the only way to come to a conclusion is by basing it on completely logical premises. It cannot rely on making inferences, and then assuming those inferences are factual. Deductive reasoning can be used to make an inference with one or two pieces of information but they must be self-evidently true in order to gain deductive knowledge. A syllogism is a subtle, or crafty argument, one example in the reading being 'All planets are stars, all stars are square, therefore all planets are square'. A demonstration is a step-by-step deduction whose premises are known to be true and factual.

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

2. The premises in a deductive argument guarantee the truth of the conclusion: if the premises are true, the conclusion must be true. Aristotle points out that unless the starting points are true deductive knowledge does not exist. He also points out that these

premises should be self-evidently true and known in each of our minds as sense-perception which provides “raw materials of knowledge” instead of how Plato believed the mind carried innate knowledge through past life experiences.

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

3. Aristotle questions Plato’s view on innate knowledge and instead focuses on sense-perception. This focuses on knowledge as complete understanding of universal truths and naturally developed knowledge through sense-perception. This shows that the mind has the capacity to notice small similarities and sensory experiences. This is what Aristotle called Intuition and combined with scientific knowledge creates a deductive argument through starting points based on intuition and factual statements backed up by scientific knowledge.