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Intro to Philosophy

1/31/23

Plato, "Innate Knowledge" (*Meno*) – pp. 3-12

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

Meno accuses Socrates of being a sophist who claims to have knowledge but actually teaches ignorance. Socrates interprets this criticism as a misunderstanding of his method of inquiry, which aims to bring out knowledge already present through questioning. He believes that true knowledge comes from within, not from external sources.

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

Meno and Socrates refers to the paradox that in order to learn or acquire new knowledge, one must already have an understanding or knowledge of what they are trying to learn. At the same time, if one already has that knowledge, they do not need to learn it. This creates a paradox as it needs to be clarified how one can both have and not have the knowledge they are trying to acquire. The paradox is often used to argue that true knowledge cannot come from teaching or education, but must be innate.

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 of knowledge is that people possess knowledge prior to experience and that this knowledge is innate, meaning it is inborn and part of our nature. In his dialogue "Meno," Plato uses a conversation between Socrates and Meno's servant boy to demonstrate this theory. Through a series of questions, Socrates leads the servant boy to discover a geometrical theorem, even though the boy has no prior knowledge of geometry. This demonstration is meant to show that the boy's knowledge of the theorem was innate and that it was elicited through questioning, rather than being taught. The dialogue is an attempt to prove that true knowledge is innate and can be discovered through philosophy.

Aristotle, "Demonstrative Knowledge", pp. 18-21:

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?

Aristotle believed in subtracting knowledge through a process of syllogisms and demonstrations. A syllogism is a logical argument consisting of three parts: premises, conclusion, and inferential reasoning connecting the premises to the conclusion. In other words, the conclusion follows logically and necessarily from the premises in a demonstration. The purpose of a syllogism and demonstration is to gain certain knowledge based on premises that are already known or accepted to be true.

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

Aristotle argues that deduction alone does not guarantee truth about the world because it depends on the initial premises being true. If the premises are false, then even logically valid deductions can lead to false conclusions. Thus, he believed that knowledge of the world requires both deductive reasoning and induction, which is based on observing particular instances to arrive at general conclusions.

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

Aristotle believed that knowledge of the world was gained through a combination of reasoning and induction. Gaining knowledge involves using our senses to gather information, storing this information in our memory, and then using our memory to make generalizations about the world. Aristotle believed that our senses are the key to gaining information about the world and that we use our memories to store and organize this information. He also believed that generalization, or drawing conclusions based on repeated observations and experiences, is an important part of the inductive process. By using our senses, memory, and generalization, we can build a comprehensive understanding of the world that goes beyond what can be deduced initially.