

Writing Assignment One ~ Plato

The purpose of philosophy is to move beyond our daily assumption of reality, by using techniques of logic and conceptual clarification to accomplish true knowledge. Philosophy is designed to eliminate the uncertainty and replace it with something more reliable and coherent. Plato, an ancient Greek philosopher, believed that in order to find infallible knowledge, meaning the reality of a thing, one must first try to define it. “The definition of virtue is required in order to act virtuously” was at the core of Plato's theory of knowledge, and that it begins with the form of a thing, it is the universal essence of it. Plato believed that the external imparted knowing of a thing and the process of learning is actually an innate recollection due to the fact that our souls are immortal.

Plato argued that mere belief was not knowledge, and his theory of knowledge and the way it is acquired was illustrated in his “Innate Knowledge; Meno” extract. The theme throughout Meno is Plato’s theory as pointed out in the textbook is that “the mind that is correctly guided, can acquire an understanding of the truth within the search for the definition of it. We have within us true thoughts which only need to be awakened into knowledge by asking questions. This notion is graphically expressed in terms of the poetic idea of the soul's immortality: it 'remembers' or 'recollects' truths it knew in a previous existence.” (*Cunningham pg 38*) Plato uses his Meno dialogue to assert his innate recollection through a detailed mathematical example. Plato concluded Meno with the doctrine of recollection, and that true

conceptual knowledge is ultimately innate and that if we ask the right questions we can uncover what we have always known. Plato further discovered that education cannot teach knowledge, but rather it can aid in recalling what the soul eternally already knows.

According to Plato, there is a difference between knowing and believing, and he states a fundamental set of questions must be addressed in order to find out the difference. As stated in the textbook, the foundation of Plato's acquisition of knowledge is that "We have correct concepts within us which only need to be awakened into knowledge by putting questions." Plato narrates the dialogue between the pupil Meno and his teacher Socrates from "*Innate Knowledge*" to illustrate his position that truths are retained, and recalled by our eternal soul. Plato begins with a paradox of whether knowledge is taught or are some things *a priori*, independent of one's experience. Plato begins with the teacher's question to Meno about "what is virtue?" and if it can be taught. When Meno failed to answer correctly, Plato pointed out that Meno only attempted to define virtue with a description of its attributes and the qualities of virtue, therefore only providing a circular definition. Meno is left in a state of *aporia*, a type of confusion, which Plato proposed is better to be confused and frustrated than to think you know something when in fact you do not.

Meno declared himself in a state of confusion stating "I am simply getting bewitched and enchanted, and am at my wits' end." And if I may venture to make a jest upon you, you seem to me both in your appearance and in your power over others to be very like the flat torpedo fish, who torpifies those who come near him and touch him, as you have now torpified me, I think. For my soul and my tongue are really torpid, and I do not know how to answer you." (Page 38) Then Meno presents a paradox to the teacher, Socrates, "Either we know something or we don't. If we know it, we don't need to inquire any further. But if we don't know it, we can't inquire since

we don't know what we're looking for and won't recognize it if we found it". (Page 39) Plato's dialogue shows this paradox was answered with another question, which allowed a way for the teacher to demonstrate his view that innate knowledge comes from an eternal source that leads one past the uncertainty of a surface experience. Plato viewed comprehending mathematics as a credible source to display his doctrine of recollection, and he used a mathematical example including Meno's uneducated servant. When Meno's servant was in a state of confusion, realizing he did not know the correct answer, Plato states the servant was in the same position as Meno. They both had perceived they knew about something and realized they did not, however, Plato insisted that their awareness was actually an opportunity to learn.

Plato established that learning is not the discovery of something new, but rather the recall of knowledge that our souls already possess but that we have lost. Knowledge of abstract, immutable things is the only form of knowledge to which the theory that knowledge is recollection applies, for example mathematics. When Meno's servant is taught the right math solution, Plato's conclusion stated that attaining knowledge was similar to helping the servant learn mathematics, which was done with the theory of recollection. Meno goes back to the original question if virtue is teachable. Plato maintained that if you can not explain it, then you can not teach it.

Plato theory of knowledge states that our understanding of the reality of a thing is contingent on our discovery of it. Another philosopher, Aristotle, embraced Plato's concept that knowledge must be stable and immune to change or variation but challenged Plato's theory of knowledge. Aristotle argued that knowledge is more about building on general truths from our sensory experiences, and then using logic to apply our understanding to the reality or knowledge of truth. Whereas, philosopher Rene Descartes argues the way knowledge is acquired is by

doubting and displacing prior conceptions, disagreeing with Plato's definition of the meaning of knowing comes from an eternal state.

Plato's theory is saying that there are certain universal laws to the theory of knowledge, and that you do not have to experience something in order for it to be true. Plato uses mathematics as the key basis for his argument, which is that whether you experience one plus one it still equals two. I can identify with some of the doubts of Descartes, he understood the propositions with the certainty of mathematics but he questioned out of fear that he was adding the wrong facts. Faith can not demand certainty. If you look at the law of sowing and reaping, God promises that when you sow you will reap even more than you have sown. Now if you sow and something wipes out your crops, it doesn't mean the law of sowing and reaping does not exist just because you did not experience it.

The key aspect of Plato's philosophy that I accept is that humans possess innate knowledge that does not require experience or a doubt process. This idea is supported by the passage in the Bible where Peter responded to Jesus's question about His identity that he was Christ. Following Peter's response, Jesus makes it very apparent that Peter's understanding came from His heavenly Father. I think that Bible scripture is demonstrating the significance of the Holy Spirit as a powerful spiritual force that may impart knowledge within us without our effort.. Peter's assertion of the truth did not result from his own human abilities or from considerable thought. rather, His father gave divine knowledge to him.

Cottingham, John. *Western Philosophy: An Anthology*, Wiley/Blackwell, Hoboken, NJ, 2021, pp. 38,

Plato's "meno" - can virtue be taught? YouTube. (2019, July 23). Retrieved March 1, 2023, from <https://youtu.be/RTVKt3PR9bA>

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