

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

1. What does Meno accuse Socrates of at the start of the reading?

Meno accuses Socrates of being a “torpedo-fish”, one who stuns others into a state of numbness. Essentially saying that Socrates asks too many questions and does not give any answers.

2. How does Socrates interpret this criticism?

Socrates responds to Meno by pointing out that Meno himself doesn't know that answers to the question that they are discussing. Socrates argues that his method of questioning is a way of uncovering the truth and discovering knowledge, rather than simply giving information. He believes that knowledge is innate in the human psyche and his asking questions helps to bring it to the surface.

3. 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.

They discuss the paradox of inquiry, which is the problem of how we can seek knowledge basically if we don't already know what we're looking for, because if we already know there is no need to seek it out. Contrary, if we don't know what we are looking for, then we won't know if we found it or not. This creates a dilemma where it seems impossible to learn or discover anything new.

4. 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 believed that knowledge is already present within the soul and it's waiting to be accessed through the process of recollection. In their conversation Socrates tries to show the servant boy the truth of his theory by asking him a series of questions to help him remember a geometric principle he hasn't been explicitly taught. Through using this process, the servant was able to arrive at the correct answer despite not being taught. In Socrates, mind this proves that knowledge was there already and through questioning the boy was able to recall the information. Proving that the role of education is simply to help us remember what we already know.

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 that we gain knowledge by using a method that is similar to solving a puzzle called deduction. Deduction is a way of using clues to come to a logical conclusion. You start with a big idea called a premise and then use smaller ideas called syllogisms to prove the premise is true.

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

We need to use empirical observation, which means looking at the world around us and gathering evidence to confirm that our deductions are correct and in this way we can understand the truth about the world around us.

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 through a process called induction which is making a generalization based on a few specific examples. It starts with observing things through our senses, we use our memory to compare those observations and find similarities and differences. Then we make generalizations or conclusions based on comparing the information obtained. Using this process we can gain knowledge about the world around us and use it to make predictions about things we have yet to observe.