

Mind and the World

Topics to discuss in *Meno*

Sept. 25, 2006

Search for judgments that are certain: what kinds of judgments get Socrates attention? What drives Socrates' search?

Definitions: Plato presents Socrates often to be in the quest for *definitions*. What is he after? What is he seeking when he looks for a *definition*?

Plato presents a contrast between those things we know for ourselves and what we hear others say or think about something. How shall we understand this contrast? Must each of us "start from scratch"?

One or Many: it seems there are many *good* things, but are they alike in some unifying respect, in some way that leads us to conclude that insofar as each is a good thing, it is like other good things? Is there some one thing that makes all these individual, good things *good*?

Realism Thesis: (thick, vague): There are matters of fact in the world, which in some sense are independent of our ideas and judgments: (1) our ideas and judgments are (often) about these matters of fact; (2) and these matters of fact serve (often) to make our ideas and judgments correct or incorrect.

- a. Let's call this a thesis of "minimal realism." It attempts to capture the notion that we can and do *think* about the Real World; and in part, we judge the quality of our thinking by whether or not we've gotten the Real World right, as – we say – it "in fact" is.
- b. As it stands, this thesis takes no position on *how* we can get the RW right. We might or we might not, for example, adhere to a further thesis of "minimal empiricism" (McDowell) – "...experience must constitute a tribunal, [something] mediating the way our thinking is answerable to how things are..."

"Meno's Paradox": How can we inquire into anything of which we are ignorant? Meno says [80d6, p. 100], "But how can you try to find out about something, Socrates, if you 'haven't got the faintest idea' what it is? I mean, how can you put before your mind a thing *that you have no knowledge of*, in order to try to find out about it? And even supposing you did come across it, how would you know that *that was it*, if you didn't know what it was to begin with?" How can you even *look* for Jones if you don't know who he is? And if you don't, then how will you know you've found him, should you come across him?

"Knowledge and 'remembering'": This is a resolution to Meno's paradox. We can be led to "remember" because we already, or have once, known what we seek to know actively or explicitly now. It's crucial for Socrates that he find a rationale for active inquiry; he's vigorously opposing any conclusion that we cannot know something and so need not take on the work of inquiry.