

state, and now I think you are bewitching and beguiling me, simply putting me under a spell, so that I am quite perplexed. Indeed, if a joke is in order, you seem, in appearance and in every other way, to be like the broad torpedo fish, for it too makes anyone who comes close and touches it feel numb, and you now seem to have had that kind of effect on me, for both my mind and my tongue are numb, and I have no answer to give you. Yet I have made many speeches about virtue before large audiences on a thousand occasions, very good speeches as I thought, but now I cannot even say what it is. I think you are wise not to sail away from Athens to go and stay elsewhere, for if you were to behave like this as a stranger in another city, you would be driven away for practicing sorcery.

SOCRATES: You are a rascal, Meno, and you nearly deceived me.

MENO: Why so particularly, Socrates?

SOCRATES: I know why you drew this image of me.

MENO: Why do you think I did?

SOCRATES: So that I should draw an image of you in return. I know that all handsome men rejoice in images of themselves; it is to their advantage, for I think that the images of beautiful people are also beautiful, but I will draw no image of you in turn. Now if the torpedo fish is itself numb and so makes others numb, then I resemble it, but not otherwise, for I myself do not have the answer when I perplex others, but I am more perplexed than anyone when I cause perplexity in others. So now I do not know what virtue is; perhaps you knew before you contacted me, but now you are certainly like one who does not know. Nevertheless, I want to examine and seek together with you what it may be.

MENO: How will you look for it, Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know?

SOCRATES: I know what you want to say, Meno. Do you realize what a debater's argument you are bringing up, that a man cannot search either for what he knows or for what he does not know? He cannot search for what he knows—since he knows it, there is no need to search—nor for what he does not know, for he does not know what to look for.

81 MENO: Does that argument not seem sound to you, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Not to me.

MENO: Can you tell me why?

SOCRATES: I can. I have heard wise men and women talk about divine matters . . .

MENO: What did they say?

SOCRATES: What was, I thought, both true and beautiful.

MENO: What was it, and who were they?

SOCRATES: The speakers were among the priests and priestesses whose care it is to be able to give an account of their practices. Pindar too says it, and many others of the divine among our poets. What they say is this; see whether you think they speak the truth: They say that the human soul is immortal; at times it comes to an end, which they call dying; at times it is reborn, but it is never destroyed, and one must therefore live one's life as piously as possible:

*Persephone will return to the sun above in the ninth year
the souls of those from whom
she will exact punishment for old miseries,
and from these come noble kings,
mighty in strength and greatest in wisdom,
and for the rest of time men will call them sacred heroes.*⁴

As the soul is immortal, has been born often, and has seen all things here and in the underworld, there is nothing which it has not learned; so it is in no way surprising that it can recollect the things it knew before, both about virtue and other things. As the whole of nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, nothing prevents a man, after recalling one thing only—a process men call learning—discovering everything else for himself, if he is brave and does not tire of the search, for searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection. We must, therefore, not believe that debater's argument, for it would make us idle, and fainthearted men like to hear it, whereas my argument makes them energetic and keen on the search. I trust that this is true, and I want to inquire along with you into the nature of virtue.

MENO: Yes, Socrates, but how do you mean that we do not learn, but that what we call learning is recollection? Can you teach me that this is so?

4. Frg. 133 (Snell).

82 SOCRATES: As I said just now, Meno, you are a rascal. You now ask me if I can teach you, when I say there is no teaching but recollection, in order to show me up at once as contradicting myself.

MENO: No, by Zeus, Socrates, that was not my intention when I spoke, but just a habit. If you can somehow show me that things are as you say, please do so.

b SOCRATES: It is not easy, but I am nevertheless willing to do my best for your sake. Call one of these many attendants of yours, whichever you like, that I may prove it to you in his case.

MENO: Certainly. You there come forward.

SOCRATES: Is he a Greek? Does he speak Greek?

MENO: Very much so. He was born in our household.

SOCRATES: Pay attention then whether you think he is recollecting or learning from me.

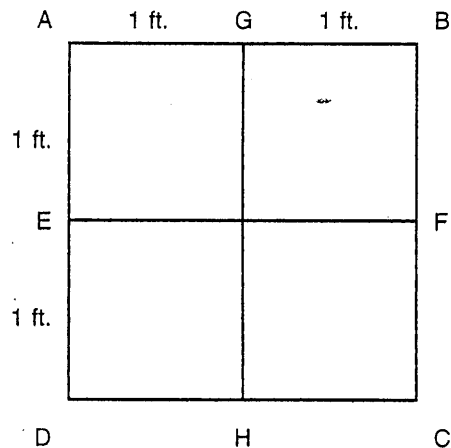
MENO: I will pay attention.

SOCRATES: Tell me now, boy, you know that a square figure is like this? — I do.

c SOCRATES: A square then is a figure in which all these four sides are equal? — Yes indeed.

SOCRATES: And it also has these lines through the middle equal?⁵ — Yes.

5. Socrates draws a square ABCD. The "lines through the middle" are the lines joining the middle of these sides, which also go through the center of the square, namely EF and GH.



SOCRATES: And such a figure could be larger or smaller? — Certainly.

SOCRATES: If then this side were two feet, and this other side two feet, how many feet would the whole be? Consider it this way: If it were two feet this way, and only one foot that way, the figure would be once two feet? — Yes.

SOCRATES: But if it is two feet also that way, it would surely be twice two feet? — Yes. d

SOCRATES: How many feet is twice two feet? Work it out and tell me. — Four, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Now we could have another figure twice the size of this one, with the four sides equal like this one. — Yes.

SOCRATES: How many feet will that be? — Eight.

SOCRATES: Come now, try to tell me how long each side of this will be. The side of this is two feet. What about each side of the one which is its double? — Obviously, Socrates, it will be twice the length. e

SOCRATES: You see, Meno, that I am not teaching the boy anything, but all I do is question him. And now he thinks he knows the length of the line on which an eight-foot figure is based. Do you agree?

MENO: I do.

SOCRATES: And does he know?

MENO: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: He thinks it is a line twice the length?

MENO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Watch him now recollecting things in order, as one must recollect. Tell me, boy, do you say that a figure double the size is based on a line double the length? Now I mean such a figure as this, not long on one side and short on the other, but equal in every direction like this one, and double the size, that is, eight feet. See whether you still believe that it will be based on a line double the length. — I do. 83

SOCRATES: Now the line becomes double its length if we add another of the same length here? — Yes indeed.

SOCRATES: And the eight-foot square will be based on it, if there are four lines of that length? — Yes.

SOCRATES: Well, let us draw from it four equal lines, and surely that is what you say is the eight-foot square? — Certainly. b

SOCRATES: And within this figure are four squares, each of which is equal to the four-foot square? — Yes.

SOCRATES: How big is it then? Is it not four times as big? — Of course.

SOCRATES: Is this square then, which is four times as big, its double? — No, by Zeus.

SOCRATES: How many times bigger is it? — Four times.

c SOCRATES: Then, my boy, the figure based on a line twice the length is not double but four times as big? — You are right.

SOCRATES: And four times four is sixteen, is it not? — Yes.

SOCRATES: On how long a line should the eight-foot square be based? On *this* line we have a square that is four times bigger, do we not? — Yes.

SOCRATES: Now this four-foot square is based on this line here, half the length? — Yes.

SOCRATES: Very well. Is the eight-foot square not double this one and half that one?⁶ — Yes.

d SOCRATES: Will it not be based on a line longer than this one and shorter than that one? Is that not so? — I think so.

SOCRATES: Good, you answer what you think. And tell me, was this one not two-feet long, and that one four feet? — Yes.

SOCRATES: The line on which the eight-foot square is based must then be longer than this one of two feet, and shorter than that one of four feet? — It must be.

e SOCRATES: Try to tell me then how long a line you say it is. — Three feet.

SOCRATES: Then if it is three feet, let us add the half of this one, and it will be three feet? For these are two feet, and the other is one. And here, similarly, these are two feet and that one is one foot, and so the figure you mention comes to be? — Yes.

SOCRATES: Now if it is three feet this way and three feet that way, will the whole figure be three times three feet? — So it seems.

SOCRATES: How much is three times three feet? — Nine feet.

SOCRATES: And the double square was to be how many feet? — Eight.

SOCRATES: So the eight-foot figure cannot be based on the three-foot line? — Clearly not.

6. I.e., the eight-foot square is double the four-foot square and half the sixteen-foot square—double the square based on a line two feet long and half the square based on a four-foot side.

84 SOCRATES: But on how long a line? Try to tell us exactly, and if you do not want to work it out, show me from what line. — By Zeus, Socrates, I do not know.

SOCRATES: You realize, Meno, what point he has reached in his recollection. At first he did not know what the basic line of the eight-foot square was; even now he does not yet know, but then he thought he knew, and answered confidently as if he did know, and he did not think himself at a loss, but now he does think himself at a loss, and as he does not know, neither does he think he knows. b

MENO: That is true.

SOCRATES: So he is now in a better position with regard to the matter he does not know?

MENO: I agree with that too.

SOCRATES: Have we done him any harm by making him perplexed and numb as the torpedo fish does?

MENO: I do not think so.

SOCRATES: Indeed, we have probably achieved something relevant to finding out how matters stand, for now, as he does not know, he would be glad to find out, whereas before he thought he could easily make many fine speeches to large audiences about the square of double size and said that it must have a base twice as long. c

MENO: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Do you think that before he would have tried to find out that which he thought he knew though he did not, before he fell into perplexity and realized he did not know and longed to know?

MENO: I do not think so, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Has he then benefited from being numbed?

MENO: I think so.

SOCRATES: Look then how he will come out of his perplexity while searching along with me. I shall do nothing more than ask questions and not teach him. Watch whether you find me teaching and explaining things to him instead of asking for his opinion. d

SOCRATES: You tell me, is this not a four-foot figure? You understand? — I do.

SOCRATES: We add to it this figure which is equal to it? — Yes.

SOCRATES: And we add this third figure equal to each of them? — Yes.

SOCRATES: Could we then fill in the space in the corner? — Certainly.⁷

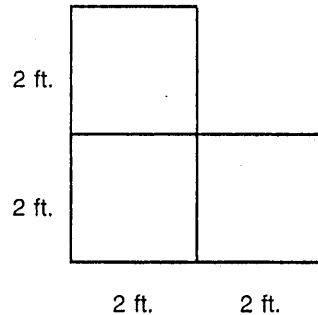
SOCRATES: So we have these four equal figures? — Yes.

c SOCRATES: Well then, how many times is the whole figure larger than this one?⁸ — Four times.

SOCRATES: But we should have had one that was twice as large, or do you not remember? — I certainly do.

85 SOCRATES: Does not this line from one corner to the other cut each of these figures in two?⁹ — Yes.

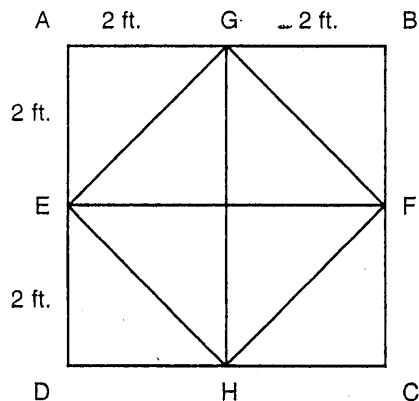
7. Socrates now builds up his sixteen-foot square by joining two four-foot squares, then a third, like this:



Filling "the space in the corner" will give another four-foot square, which completes the sixteen-foot square containing four four-foot squares.

8. "This one" is any one of the inside squares of four feet.

9. Socrates now draws the diagonals of the four inside squares, namely, FH, HE, EG, and GF, which together form the square GFHE.



SOCRATES: So these are four equal lines which enclose this figure?¹⁰ — They are.

SOCRATES: Consider now: How large is the figure? — I do not understand.

SOCRATES: Within these four figures, each line cuts off half of each, does it not? — Yes.

SOCRATES: How many of this size are there in this figure?¹¹ — Four.

SOCRATES: How many in this?¹² — Two.

SOCRATES: What is the relation of four to two? — Double. b

SOCRATES: How many feet in this?¹³ — Eight.

SOCRATES: Based on what line? — This one.

SOCRATES: That is, on the line that stretches from corner to corner of the four-foot figure? — Yes. — Clever men call this the diagonal, so that if diagonal is its name, you say that the double figure would be that based on the diagonal? — Most certainly, Socrates.

SOCRATES: What do you think, Meno? Has he, in his answers, expressed any opinion that was not his own? c

MENO: No, they were all his own.

SOCRATES: And yet, as we said a short time ago, he did not know? — That is true.

SOCRATES: So these opinions were in him, were they not? — Yes.

SOCRATES: So the man who does not know has within himself true opinions about the things that he does not know? — So it appears.

SOCRATES: These opinions have now just been stirred up like a dream, but if he were repeatedly asked these same questions in various ways, you know that in the end his knowledge about these things would be as accurate as anyone's. — It is likely. d

SOCRATES: And he will know it without having been taught but only questioned, and find the knowledge within himself? — Yes.

SOCRATES: And is not finding knowledge within oneself recollection? — Certainly.

10. I.e., GFHE.

11. Again, GFHE: Socrates is asking how many of the triangles "cut off from inside" there are inside GFHE.

12. I.e., any of the interior squares.

13. GFHE again.

SOCRATES: Must he not either have at some time acquired the knowledge he now possesses, or else have always possessed it? — Yes.

SOCRATES: If he always had it, he would always have known. If he acquired it, he cannot have done so in his present life. Or has someone taught him geometry? For he will perform in the same way about all geometry, and all other knowledge. Has someone taught him everything? You should know, especially as he has been born and brought up in your house.

MENO: But I know that no one has taught him.

SOCRATES: Yet he has these opinions, or doesn't he?

MENO: That seems indisputable, Socrates.

86 SOCRATES: If he has not acquired them in his present life, is it not clear that he had them and had learned them at some other time? — It seems so.

SOCRATES: Then that was the time when he was not a human being? — Yes.

SOCRATES: If then, during the time he exists and is not a human being he will have true opinions which, when stirred by questioning, become knowledge, will not his soul have learned during all time? For it is clear that during all time he exists, either as a man or not. — So it seems.

b SOCRATES: Then if the truth about reality is always in our soul, the soul would be immortal so that you should always confidently try to seek out and recollect what you do not know at present—that is, what you do not recollect?

MENO: Somehow, Socrates, I think that what you say is right.

SOCRATES: I think so too, Meno. I do not insist that my argument is right in all other respects, but I would contend at all costs in both word and deed as far as I could that we will be better men, braver and less idle, if we believe that one must search for the things one does not know, rather than if we believe that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it.

MENO: In this too I think you are right, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Since we are of one mind that one should seek to find out what one does not know, shall we try to find out together what virtue is?

MENO: Certainly. But Socrates, I should be most pleased to investigate and hear your answer to my original question, whether we should

try to find out on the assumption that virtue is something teachable, or is a natural gift, or in whatever way it comes to men.

SOCRATES: If I were directing you, Meno, and not only myself, we would not investigate whether virtue is teachable or not before we investigated what virtue itself is. But because you do not even attempt to rule yourself, in order that you may be free, but you try to rule me and do so, I will agree with you—for what can I do? So we must, it appears, inquire into the qualities of something the nature of which we do not yet know. However, please relax your rule a little bit for me and agree to investigate whether it is teachable or not by means of a hypothesis. I mean the way geometers often carry on their investigations. For example, if they are asked whether a specific area can be inscribed in the form of a triangle within a given circle, one of them might say: "I do not yet know whether that area has that property, but I think I have, as it were, a hypothesis that is of use for the problem, namely this: If that area is such that when one has applied it as a rectangle to the given straight line in the circle, it is deficient by a figure similar to the very figure which is applied, then I think one alternative results, whereas another results if it is impossible for this to happen. So, by using this hypothesis, I am willing to tell you what results with regard to inscribing it in the circle—that is, whether it is impossible or not."¹⁴ So let us speak about virtue also, since we do not know either what it is or what qualities it possesses, and let us investigate whether it is teachable or not by means of a hypothesis, and say this: Among the things existing in the soul, of what sort is virtue, that it should be teachable or not? First, if it is another sort than knowledge, is it teachable or not, or, as we were just saying, recollectable? Let it make no difference to us which term we use: Is it teachable? Or is it plain to anyone that men cannot be taught anything but knowledge? — I think so.

SOCRATES: But, if virtue is a kind of knowledge, it is clear that it could be taught. — Of course.

SOCRATES: We have dealt with that question quickly, that if it is of one kind it can be taught; if it is of a different kind, it cannot. — We have indeed.

SOCRATES: The next point to consider seems to be whether virtue is knowledge or something else. — That does seem to be the next point to consider.

14. The translation here follows the interpretation of T. L. Heath, *A History of Greek Mathematics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), vol. I, pp. 298 ff.

