

Prolepsis / Anticipations As Epicurus' Answer to the MENO Problem

Post by “Cassius” of October 31, 2024 at 3:54 PM

Some background on [Meno's Paradox](#)

A Puzzle about Definitions

- Socrates has told us he knows how to **reject** faulty definitions. But how does he know when he has **succeeded** in finding the right definition? Meno raises an objection to the entire definitional search in the form of (what has been called) “Meno’s Paradox,” or “The Paradox of Inquiry” (*Meno* 80d-e).

The argument can be shown to be sophistical, but Plato took it very seriously. This is obvious, since his response to it is to grant its central claim: that you can’t come to know something that you didn’t already know. That is, that inquiry never produces new knowledge, but only recapitulates things already known. This leads to the famous Doctrine of Recollection.

An Objection to Inquiry

The argument known as “Meno’s Paradox” can be reformulated as follows:

1. If you know what you’re looking for, inquiry is unnecessary.
2. If you don’t know what you’re looking for, inquiry is impossible.
3. Therefore, inquiry is either unnecessary or impossible.

An implicit premise: **Either you know what you’re looking for or you don’t know what you’re looking for.**

And this is a logical truth. Or is it? Only if “you know what you’re looking for” is used unambiguously in both disjuncts.