

Prolepsis / Anticipations As Epicurus' Answer to the MENO Problem

Post by “Don” of November 2, 2024 at 7:39 AM

I freely confess I haven't read Plato's Meno, but glancing at the ol' Wikipedia article, this made me LOL:

Quote from Meno article on WP

Meno's theme is also dealt with in the dialogue Protagoras, where Plato ultimately has *Socrates arrive at the opposite conclusion*: virtue can be taught. Likewise, while in Protagoras knowledge is uncompromisingly this-worldly, in Meno the theory of recollection points to a link between knowledge and eternal truths.

So can Plato be taken seriously if he comes to opposite opinions? I'm all for reconsidering opinions and beliefs in light of new evidence, but how can there be a "Meno problem" if even its author provides multiple answers?

Quote

Socrates rephrases the question, which has come to be the canonical statement of the paradox:

[A] man cannot enquire either about that which he knows, or about that which he does not know; for if he knows, he has no need to enquire; and if not, he cannot; for he does not know the very subject about which he is to enquire.

— translated by Benjamin Jowett, 1871

There's the old, I believe, Weinberger quote about:

- Known knowns
- Known unknowns
- Unknown unknowns

We can investigate "known unknowns" through prior experience. Unknown unknowns can eventually come to light as we experience more. We can investigate unfamiliar phenomena, test, observe, etc. via knowledge we have. "Meno" isn't really a problem unless one defines terms in such a way as to create a problem. Or so it seems to me.

PS. And when we "learn" something, we're not recollecting from a past life. We build on experience and knowledge that we've acquired or that we have a genetic predisposition for.

Take language. Babies have an innate ability to make sounds, then to imitate sounds or communicative gestures (I always remember video of the baby with deaf parents inserting their hand, open close open close, "babbling" in sign language), then we learn how to formally put sounds and words and sentences together. That's just one example, but I believe at least an illustrative one.