

# Plato's Meno, the "Eristic Paradox," and the Epicurean Response

Post by "Cassius" of March 8, 2023 at 9:01 AM

In our review of the work of David Glidden on Epicurean "anticipations," we see a topic that Dr. Glidden has mentioned that goes by the name of the "eristic paradox."

Quote from Author Unknown, From "Educheer"

The eristic paradox, which stems from this view of knowledge, states that if you know what it is you are inquiring about, you need not inquire, for you already know. If, however, you do not know what it is you are inquiring about, you are unable to inquire, for you do not know what it is into which you are inquiring.

Below is a brief description of the issue from a website called "Educheer." (probably not the best source but the first I can find that seems relatively clear). It would seem almost certain that Epicurus was aware of this argument and fashioned his own philosophy of knowledge (especially "anticipations") in a way as to show how Plato/Socrates were wrong. Therefore in this thread let's discuss what Epicurus would have seen as wrong with Plato's assertions and how Epicurus responded. (The eristic paradox, and Epicurus' likely position in response, are discussed in Dr. Glidden's articles.)

The Eristic Paradox and The Slave Boy

Quote

Throughout history, philosophers have sought to understand the nature of true knowledge and how to achieve it. Most believe that true knowledge is acquired empirically, and not latent in our minds from birth. In Plato's Meno, Socrates argues in favor of the pre-natal existence of knowledge, the opposite of this proposal: that knowledge is essentially latent, and is brought to light through questioning.

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One consequence of this view is Plato's rejection of empiricism, the claim that knowledge is derived from sense experience. However, when one examines the scene in the Meno between Socrates and the slave boy in greater depth, one can see the

flaws in this paradox. Plato uses Socrates' experiment, in which he draws one of Meno's slaves out from the gathered crowd and proceeds to demonstrate the theory of recollection using geometry; however, this experiment's purpose tests the credulity of the reader; and in some cases Socrates' questions are blatantly leading. Socrates merely places obvious propositions in front of the boy that can be immediately recognized.

<>Also, contrary to what Plato asserts, knowledge can be obtained by other means, and not exclusively through intellectual inquiry and questioning. It is far too difficult to dismiss, as Plato does, any and all claims or assertions about the physical or visible world, including both common-sense observations and the propositions of science, as mere opinions. Furthermore, the interpretation of the experiment with the slave boy can be expanded to suggest yet another position: that Plato is demonstrating the flawed nature of sophistry by showing that what on the surface appears to be Socratic dialectic is really Sophistic practice. In light of all of these factors, it becomes clear that the eristic paradox is, in fact, flawed. In the experiment, Socrates guides a slave through a series of geometric proofs in an effort to illustrate that the slave already possessed this knowledge and, therefore, that learning is not acquisition but recollection. Plato maintains that the slave is simply recalling knowledge learned in a former incarnation.

Source: <https://educheer.com/essays/platos-...ristic-paradox/>